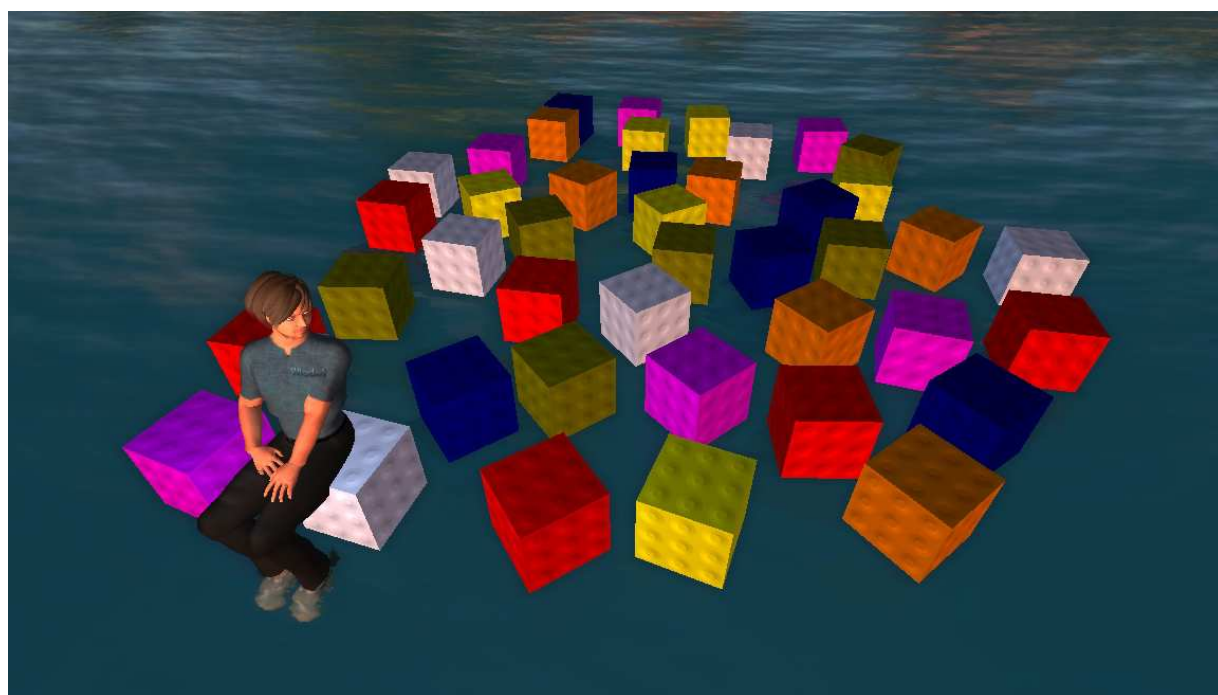


*Five years in Second Life, or:  
Phonetically Augmented Virtuality  
in Second Life English as a Foreign Language*

**Włodzimierz Sobkowiak in FL  
Włodek Barbosa in SL**



**Poznań, September 2012**

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## Table of contents

Abstract .....	3
Index of acronyms .....	4
Index of snapshots .....	5
Index of avatars .....	7
Preface .....	8
1. Introduction .....	13
1.1. What is Second Life? .....	14
1.2. Wlodek Barbosa in SL .....	20
2. SL as a MUVLE .....	35
2.1. Key SL skills – for educators .....	36
2.2. Educational affordances of SL .....	44
2.3. Educational showcases in SL .....	54
3. EFL in SL (SLEFL).....	61
3.1. SLEFL organizations, communities and schools .....	61
3.2. SLEFL at Virlantis .....	65
3.3. SLEFL affordances .....	69
3.4. SLEFL pronunciation.....	75
4. PAVing SLEFL .....	83
4.1. LanguageLab rezzable-object teacher training project .....	84
4.2. EVO VWLL 2009 added value debate .....	91
4.3. Reification of abstract concepts in SLEFL .....	104
4.4. Phonetically Augmented Virtuality (PAV) in SLEFL .....	113
4.5. PAVing Virlantis.....	119
5. Conclusions .....	134
Bibliography.....	136
Appendices .....	143

## Abstract

In this book I narrate some of my personal and professional experience of Second Life (SL), one of the few hundred Virtual Worlds now in existence. I mostly talk about my teaching of English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) pronunciation in an educational community called Virlantis. This pro-bono community service lasted four (school) years, from September 2008 to June 2012. I conducted 163 weekly meetings of *Pronunciation with Wlodek Barbosa*, with students from all over the (physical) world. In the book I report in detail on these meetings, as well as append thirty actual activity notecards used during the lessons. In those activities I used Phonetically Augmented Virtual objects (PAVed objects), i.e. interactive objects constructed in SL which contain some phonetic content in them, such as sound files, phonetic transcription, test questions about pronouncing problems, etc.

My main argument in the book is that such PAVed objects, modeled on Augmented Reality found in the physical world, could provide some genuine added value in SL (language) teaching and learning. Learning with such objects could leverage situational/embodied teaching methods and techniques, which have been found to be especially effective in SL. It could help reify some abstract linguistic concepts, such as stress, syllable or juncture, into virtual ‘tangibles’ of especial appeal to kinesthetic and visually minded learners. Theoretically, this augmentation could be extended to all objects created in SL, so that the entire world would function as a linguistically augmented Multi-User Virtual Learning Environment (MUVLE). This kind of augmentation appears to add educational value to SL over and above what is possible in face-to-face classroom language teaching/learning in the physical world on the one hand, and on online e-learning platforms, such as Blackboard or Moodle, on the other.

Other issues discussed somewhat less in-depth in my book include: SL educational affordances (especially learner immersion/presence), the key SL skills necessary for language teachers, EFL teaching and learning in SL (with particular emphasis on pronunciation) and my own life story in SL. The thirty lesson scripts available in the Appendix are of direct use to EFL pronunciation teachers and learners, whether in a virtual or physical world. Interested readers may go into SL for their own copies of my games and activities with PAVed objects. The book is illustrated with fifty snapshots taken in SL and showing various aspects of my life and work there: from private life, through PAVed teaching, to teachers’ workshops and language education conferences. The principal message of the whole text is: Second Life is a wonderful virtual environment for foreign language teachers and students. With or without linguistic augmentation, it offers many unique educational affordances for fully immersed, situated, exploratory and collaborative learning.

## Index of acronyms

AO – Animation Override, Activity Organizer  
AR – Augmented Reality  
AV – Augmented Virtuality  
BTW – By The Way  
EVO – Electronic Village Online  
F2F – Face-To-Face  
FL – First Life (also called Real Life or Actual Life)  
FLT/L – Foreign Language Teaching/Learning  
(G)UI – (Graphical) User Interface  
HUD – Heads-Up Display  
ICT – Information and Communications Technology  
IM – Instant Message  
IPA – International Phonetic Association/Alphabet  
LL – Linden Lab, LanguageLab  
LMS – Learning Management System  
LSL – Linden Scripting Language  
MMORPG – Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game  
(MU)(V)(L)E – (Multi-User) (Virtual) (Learning) Environment  
P/LAV – Phonetically/Linguistically Augmented Virtuality  
RL – Real Life (also called First Life or Actual Life)  
SIM or sim – SIMulator  
SL – Second Life  
SLED – Second Life Educators Discussion List  
(SL)EFL – (Second Life) English as a Foreign Language  
SLRL – Second Life Research Listserv  
(SL)URL – (Second Life) Universal Resource Locator  
TESOL – Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages  
TLVW – Teaching Languages in Virtual Worlds  
TP – TelePort  
TY – Thank You  
VW – Virtual World  
VWBPE – Virtual Worlds Best Practices in Education  
VWLL – Virtual Worlds in Language Learning

## Index of snapshots

Snapshot 1. Barbosa with Wankel and Kingsley's <i>Higher education in Virtual Worlds</i> .....	9
Snapshot 2. Kip Yellowjacket .....	11
Snapshot 3. Virlantis friends and students – a wordle .....	11
Snapshot 4. EVO TLVW 2010 mentors.....	12
Snapshot 5. Wlodek Barbosa with Danka Aichi .....	12
Snapshot 6. I build – therefore I am .....	15
Snapshot 7. Second Krakow.....	18
Snapshot 8. Second Poznan.....	18
Snapshot 9. Wlodek Barbosa (3 days old) with a stranger.....	21
Snapshot 10. Wlodek Barbosa' SL profile (web2 view).....	24
Snapshot 11. Barbosa and Aichi dancing at Dolce Vita .....	25
Snapshot 12. A gallery of Barbosa's non-humanoid students .....	27
Snapshot 13. Barbosa at <i>Coffee with Dudeney Ge</i> , October 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2008 .....	27
Snapshot 14. An early SLEnglish pronunciation meeting .....	28
Snapshot 15. <i>Pronunciation help with Wlodek Barbosa</i> billboard .....	28
Snapshot 16. Barbosa interviewed by Daffodil Fargis, June 30th, 2009 .....	30
Snapshot 17. Barbosa in his (her?) Neytiri avatar.....	37
Snapshot 18. Multitasking with the SL GUI: inventory, chat, notecard and more .....	40
Snapshot 19. Willow Shenlin (FL=Sabine Lawless-Reljic) at her PhD defence in SL .....	42
Snapshot 20. Katie Melua's <i>Secret Symphony</i> trailer on the screen in-world.....	43
Snapshot 21. SL wiki – Second Life education .....	47
Snapshot 22. Barbosa transgendering as his (her?) alt avatar .....	55
Snapshot 23. EVO TLVW 2010 <i>Kristallnacht</i> tour, January 21 <sup>st</sup> 2010.....	58
Snapshot 24. EVO TLVW 2010 <i>Virtual Macbeth</i> tour, January 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2010.....	59
Snapshot 25. SLanguages 2010 conference, October 15-16 <sup>th</sup> 2010.....	62
Snapshot 26. English Village in October 2007 .....	66
Snapshot 27. SLEnglish/Virlantis launchrooms .....	68
Snapshot 28. EVO VWLL 2009 <i>Wonderful Denmark</i> tour, January 28 <sup>th</sup> 2009.....	74
Snapshot 29. EVO TLVW 2010 <i>Second Barcelona</i> tour, January 31 <sup>st</sup> 2010.....	75
Snapshot 30. Pronunciation with Wlodek Barbosa – most common theme keywords.....	82
Snapshot 31. LanguageLab 2007 rezzable-object teacher training project.....	85
Snapshot 32. Interactive 'rezzable' SLEFL dictionary: textures and objects .....	90

Snapshot 33. EVO VWLL 2009 added value debate on Ning.....	92
Snapshot 34. Educational added value of SL as a conjunction of two sets.....	93
Snapshot 35. Virlantis Madurodam-like holodeck scene.....	104
Snapshot 36. Reified Bloom's taxonomy.....	108
Snapshot 37. Reified mindmapping in SL .....	109
Snapshot 38. Reified IPA transcription chart from LanguageLab.....	110
Snapshot 39. Barbosa's PAVed games in his Virlantis launchroom .....	112
Snapshot 40. Early terraformation of Virlantis.....	114
Snapshot 41. PAVed domino game in Barbosa's launchroom .....	121
Snapshot 42. PAVed synesthesia game in Barbosa's launchroom .....	122
Snapshot 43. PAVed proverbs game in Barbosa's launchroom.....	122
Snapshot 44. PAVed word stress game in Barbosa's launchroom .....	123
Snapshot 45. Phonetic dice game in Barbosa's launchroom.....	124
Snapshot 46. PAVed treasure hunt in Barbosa's launchroom .....	125
Snapshot 47. PAVed walk-through grid in Barbosa's launchroom .....	126
Snapshot 48. Phonetic <i>Finder</i> in Barbosa's launchroom .....	127
Snapshot 49. PAVed cocktails in Barbosa's launchroom.....	128
Snapshot 50. Wlodek Barbosa as of July 22 <sup>nd</sup> 2012 .....	135
Snapshot 51. Barbosa with Cindy, the robot.....	156
Snapshot 52. Barbosa with phrase-stress blocks.....	160

## Index of avatars

Abraxas McAndrews (FL=Martina Zeiner)  
AJ Brooks (FL=AJ Kelton)  
Alf Septimus (FL=Alfred Happel)  
Angel Tophat (FL=Angelika Stobinski)  
Anya Ixchel (FL=Angela Thomas)  
Babbage Linden (FL=Jim Purbrick)  
Baldric Commons (FL=Graham Stanley)  
Bees Despres (FL= Beatrice Hochart Alves)  
Calisto Encinal (FL=James T. Abraham)  
Carolrb Roux (FL=Carol Rainbow)  
Daffodil Fargis (FL=Nergiz Kern)  
Desideria Stockton (FL=Beth Ritter-Guth)  
Downtown Bloch (FL=Paula Christopher)  
Dudeney Ge (FL=Gavin Dudeney)  
Fire Centaur (FL= Paul Preibisch)  
Gwen Gwasi (FL=Heike Philp)  
Hamlet Au (FL=Wagner James Au)  
Head Teacher (FL=Paul Sweeney)  
Heimlaga Svenska (FL=Ingemar Eriksson)  
Iffaf Ling (FL=Iffaf Khan)  
Jackie Rexen (FL=Jackie Gerstein)  
Jordyn Peccable (FL=Jennifer Kraft)  
Kim Anubis (FL=Kimberly Rufer-Bach)  
Kip Yellowjacket (FL=Charles Tally Boahn)  
Lynn Carlucci (FL= Barb Sakamoto)  
Mary Roussel (FL=María Auxiliadora Pinto Fuentes)  
Misy Ferraris (FL=Carmen Dell'Aria)  
Nahiram Vaniva (FL=Nahir Aparicio)  
Nash Baldwin (FL=James Cook)  
Osnacantab Nesterov (FL=Dennis Newson)  
Pathfinder Linden (FL=John Lester)  
Pawlus Twine (FL=Paweł Topol)  
Pedro McMillan (FL=Peter Bloomfield)  
Professor Merryman (FL= Mike McKay)  
Robin Linden (FL=Robin Harper)  
Stefi Kohime (FL=Štěpánka Jůnová)  
Willow Shenlin (FL=Sabine Lawless-Reljic)

## Preface

How does one begin a book on foreign language pedagogy in a virtual world? In a historical-overview approach one would start with the onset of virtual worlds, or maybe with the beginnings of e-learning, or perhaps – for an even longer perspective – with Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), going back some half-century in time. This would be one possible line of attack, along the technological front. Alternatively, one could take the wetware route and make an overview of FLT methodology to see how it gradually accommodated ICT for teaching and learning. There are other possible opening vistas, for example starting from a detailed description and history of one virtual world, such as Second Life, and then showing how education, and language teaching germinated and developed there. All these decisions would have profound ramifications for the entirety of the treatise, of course, and should not be taken lightly.

After quite a long period of deliberation I decided to begin this book from a very personal perspective: my own Second Life. This is because, as will become clear in the following pages and chapters, SL is so much more to me than only a useful pedagogical tool. Or a venue to meet my students and friends. Or a place to build and test some didactic resources. To me Second Life is... well... life. And to talk about one's life one must necessarily take a thoroughly personal perspective. Does this unashamedly personal, subjective approach to SL language pedagogy jeopardize the academic value of this book? This is the question which I am asking myself as I am writing these words. After all, I keep telling myself, I am not writing a diary or some loose recollections or impressions. This is not supposed to be an SL blog (and there are many fine SL blogs on the web), not even an academic blog. Neither is it supposed to be a teacher's guide to SL use in foreign language teaching, even if I do offer many ready-to-use materials and resources in the Appendix of this volume, and even though an FL teacher can benefit from reading about my own successes and failures in SL.

I mean this thesis to be a research piece as well as a deeply personal story. Is this fusion at all possible? My deep conviction is that indeed it is, and I could immediately point at books of such excellent authors as Tom Boellstorff or Shirley Turkle. Part of my dare and inspiration to finally put pen to paper to write about SL is gratefully acknowledged to come from their writing and that of many other great authors who were not afraid to admit that they both research virtual worlds and live in them. So, while the fusion of academic research and personal narrative appears to be quite possible, the question remains if I managed to perform this rather difficult balancing act myself in this book in such a way that the result is both scientifically viable and personally revealing. Have I weaved the two threads in such a way that the complement each other naturally? Does my private Second Life, as narrated here, throw some light on my teaching and research in-world? Does the account of my professional activities in SL help understand why and how SL is life for me, rather than only a tool, a resource or a place? And, with respect to style of narration/exposition, is it appropriate in both threads: the professional/academic and the private? Naturally, these are questions which I need to leave to the reader.

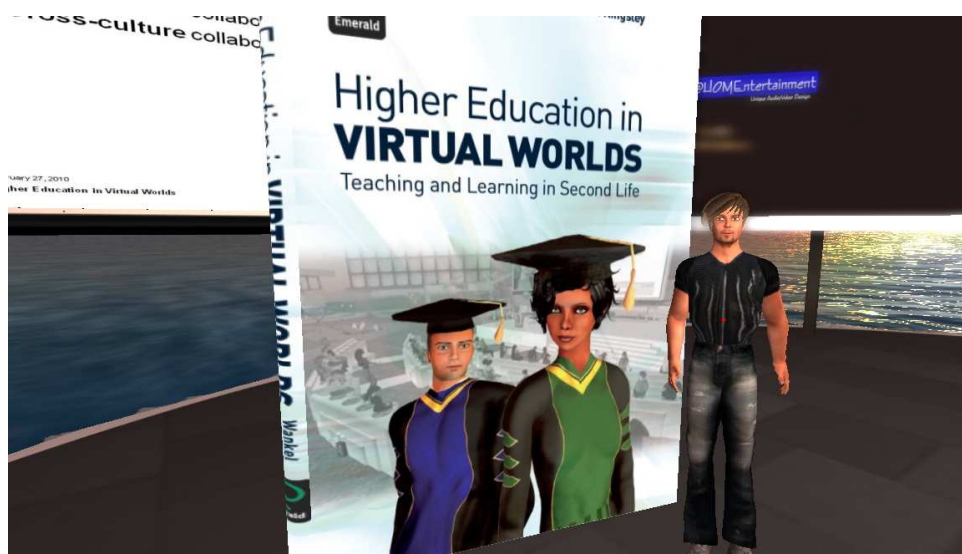
So, who can hope to benefit from reading this text? My sincere hope is that there are potentially many such readers. As mentioned above, FL teachers can find some useful materials and methodological remarks. This includes both teachers who are already in SL or plan to extend their FL teaching to this new world, as well as those who are not particularly fond of virtual worlds and have no intention of entering them. Indeed, the latter category may even feel supported in their resolve by my reports of pitfalls, hardships and fallacies of my SL



pedagogical activities. Yet, whether or not a teacher is planning to get Second Life for professional purposes, s/he may like the thirty notecards to be found in the Appendix; they contain ideas and lesson plans which can be exploited in FL teaching as well as in-world. It is only fair, however, to issue a proviso at this point: as will become very clear later on in this book, the ideas and the plans did not follow any well thought-over pedagogical scenario or project. After all, “one of the delights of using Second Life in higher education is that much of what has been undertaken has been instinctive, unplanned and innovative” (Savin-Baden 2010:33). As will become clear from the report of my early days in SL, the onset of my teaching was indeed quite instinctive and unplanned.

Educational researchers venturing into virtual worlds may find it worth while to read what I have to say about the added value of Second Life, compared to two-dimensional LMSs or VLEs on the one hand, and to FL pedagogy on the other. It is my hope and ambition to be able to contribute to the ongoing academic debate about the pros and cons of VW in education, and in EFL teaching and learning in particular. This is a very new field of study, of course, in urgent search of both theoretical scaffolding and empirical analysis. While this book probably adds little to the latter, it may, I hope, offer something in the former department. As pointed out by many reserachers in the field, “there are still relatively few experiences world-wide about what does and does not work effectively in Second Life. Whilst evidence is mounting and much of what is discussed is shared practice, relatively few new pedagogical models have emerged and theorisation is only just beginning” (Savin-Baden 2010:16).

The decision to balance the personal Second Life story with the impersonal Second Life research affects both the content and the form of this book. As far as the former is concerned, the reader will find accounts both of in-world events and of learned disputes, conducted mostly in the pertinent literature, both online and on paper. There will be excerpts from blogs and discussion fora, as well as from presentations and notecards delivered in either of the two worlds. As far as the latter is concerned, I will try to combine the appropriately academic discourse (with all its accoutrements of footnotes, quotes, (cross-)references, acknowledgements, dates and numbers) with a rather personal style of the language I write. I am fully aware that this mixture does not go down very well with some readers (and reviewers!), and what I have on hand to balance off this risk is only the belief that ultimately this kind of treatment of my SL life, work and research will be more true and revealing than if I decided to consistently take only one of these two perspectives.



Snapshot 1. Barbosa with Wankel and Kingsley’s *Higher education in Virtual Worlds*

This book has gestated for quite a while. There have been a variety of reasons why so. Let me name some of them, without any pretense to exhaustiveness or proper ranking. Getting to know a virtual world well enough to feel the confidence and the urge to write about it takes time. This is not unlike the so-called ‘real world’, of course, which, by the way, I believe to be a misnomer<sup>1</sup>. After five years of living and teaching in a virtual world of Second Life I finally believe I have a quantum of knowledge, skill and reflection to be able to share. There have been and will be authors/residents who manage to learn and mature faster, and see deeper, of course, and it would be very easy to throw in some names at this point. Many of them will appear on the following pages.

Another reason why I took so long to write down my observations and ideas about Second Life foreign language pedagogy is that I was forever searching for this one definitive treatment of it in book form. So I kept reading the by now many books published about various aspects of virtual world education, especially language education, of course. And, even though many of these texts were quite good (and some were not so good), I usually closed them after reading and still felt empty-handed. So it finally dawned on me that I might be in for a very extended wait to see a book-long treatment of exactly those aspects of VW foreign language teaching and learning which I believe to be the most crucial for both practitioners and theorists. This sentiment – the dissatisfaction with the current bibliography of a topic – is, I presume, rather common among all academic authors and publishers as the primary motivation behind their decisions to write and publish. As such it does not need further analysis here.

One more reason why I felt I was not ready to write about Second Life until now was that I needed to come to grips with a fundamental change in my research biography, which was a rather prolonged process. To cut the long story short, Second Life caught me in the middle of an academic identity crisis: after a dozen or so years of doing (meta-)lexicography I felt I had gradually less and less to say in the field, which would be of some interest and impact. My long-term interest in the educational applications of computers functioned as a scaffolding when I ventured into Second Life, and after a while it started to look like the stressful research void left from the lexicographic burn-out might be filled in again. Not quite surprisingly, I tended to integrate some of my previous academic interests into the new realm, so that I found myself teaching EFL pronunciation in SL and constructing in-world dictionaries.

These are only some of the more relevant reasons why this book appears now, and not, say, two or three years ago. Life (both first and second) being what it is, there have naturally been many more causes of my procrastination. My SL presence and activity went through highs and lows, partly in response to FL events, and partly due to the in-world dynamics of the community which I entered. The initial world-wide hype around SL, which was one of the factors why I joined in 2007, has worn thin over the following years, with moments when it was not clear to many residents if it was worth while continuing in-world at all, or if it was a good idea to migrate to a different virtual world. Over the last five years I was also involved in another major research project which, while completely unrelated to SL, drained heavily on my time. Finally... maybe I just needed the perspective which comes with time and experience. In this context I am reminded of my *English phonetics for Poles* book, a rather successful academic textbook which was written when I stopped actively researching phonetics academically. Whether or not this should be treated as a memento for my involvement with Second Life remains to be seen.

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<sup>1</sup> “If a user spends several hours a day working and meeting friends in a virtual world that completely resembles the real one, is it still possible to differentiate between what is virtual and what is real?” (Kaplan 2009:96).

As is customary on such occasions, but also because I do feel a genuine urge to do it, I would like to express my gratitude to a number of people, in both lives, who in many ways helped me put my act together. As far as Second Life is concerned I direct special thanks to Kip Yellowjacket (also known as Charles Boahn in FL<sup>2</sup>). Without his help and support in all aspects of my SL existence from day one I could hardly imagine my life and teaching in-world. If it was not for Kip (and Fire Centaur, in the early stages) I would never have taken roots in the great virtual community of Virlantis, which has been my homestead, both literally and metaphorically, over all these years.



Snapshot 2. Kip Yellowjacket



Snapshot 3. Virlantis friends and students – a wordle

Many other members of this community should be gratefully mentioned here, both my EFL students and colleague-teachers (also known as Activity-Organizers, or AOs). For fear of missing someone I will simply say: Thank you all! You helped me grow as a person, a teacher and a researcher. As a small token of my appreciation find above a wordle made from the attendance lists of all my Virlantis pronunciation meetings, with name size in proportion to the frequency of turn-up (wordle max tokens = 20).

As far as VW researchers and educators are concerned, both those whom I met in-world at conferences and workshops, and those whom I only know from their printed word, my debt to them is too obvious to discuss at length. Their inspiring texts, presentations and debates allowed me to find my place in VW research and to sharpen my own ideas with, hopefully, some benefit to both theory and practice of EFL teaching and learning in SL. In this context, the staff of LanguageLab in charge of the 2007 teacher-training course, which is described at length in Chapter 4.1., should be particularly highly commended, because my serious reflection on SL teaching started then and thanks to them. Thank you, Head Teacher (FL=Paul Sweeney) and Iffaf Ling (FL=Iffaf Khan)! This reflection was then developed enormously thanks to my involvement in the EVO courses: VWLL 2009 and TLVW 2010 (see Chapter 4.2.), with such excellent educators as Baldrick Commons (FL=Graham Stanley), Daffodil Fargis (FL=Nergiz Kern), Gwen Gwasi (FL=Heike Philp), Osnacantab Nesterov (FL=Dennis Newson), Nahiram Vaniva (FL=Nahir Aparicio) or Mary Roussel (FL=María Auxiliadora Pinto Fuentes). Thank you!

<sup>2</sup> From an interview which I conducted with Kip on October 18<sup>th</sup> 2008 in a FL demo of SL I held to my students in IFA: "My wife and I own a language school in Germany called the *Oxford School for English*. I am originally from the US but have been living in Germany for the past 8 years". Kip Boahn's CV here: <http://www.visualcv.com/kipboahn>.



Snapshot 4. EVO TLVW 2010 mentors

As far as my thinking about reification and augmentation in SL is concerned, I freely admit my debt to such fine authors, educators, builders and scripters as Calisto Encinal (FL=James T. Abraham), Pedro McMillan (FL=Peter Bloomfield), and many others, whose names appear under quotes liberally sprinkled throughout this book.

Last, but not least, my heartfelt thanks go to my family, including my wife in both worlds, Danka Aichi, and my kids. Thank you for your patience and for bearing with me and my infatuation with (and proselytizing for) SL!



Snapshot 5. Wlodek Barbosa with Danka Aichi

# 1. Introduction

Until a few years ago it was still customary to begin treatises on e-learning with an overview of this incredible situation where suddenly, for the first time in human history, people were able to function in a completely new world, the cybersphere or internet, with new rules of conduct, social mores, cultural institutions, language; indeed almost everything seemed novel and exciting, quite unlike in the old physical world of face-to-face interaction. After the summary of the most important concepts and events in the history of the web was over, the author passed on to finally develop his/her particular theme, for example the use of blogging as an FL teaching/learning tool. Some writers still begin their books in this way, oblivious to the ubiquity of online (and paper-printed) sources containing a wealth of information about every aspect of the web: its origin, its history, its use in all spheres of human life: from sex to education, from cradle to tomb.

In this situation, I believe, a thorough introduction to the web in a book about selected aspects of virtual worlds would be by-and-large superfluous. Even a hefty chapter on the definition and description of VWs, their genesis and spread, their variety and role in human life (unavoidably including a trip back in time to some seminal works of science fiction, where VWs originated), seems to be a waste of time and space. An interested reader will easily find enough bibliography on the subject to keep him/her busy for a lifetime. This is why I present only a very brief and rather imbalanced overview of Second Life as a VW. It is imbalanced because I purposefully give more weight to issues which are the main themes of this book, such as education, language, avatar psychology or technical issues, rather than to others, potentially equally or more important, such as ethnography, philosophy or the future of SL and virtual worlds. Such imbalance is, of course, unavoidable in a text of limited length and written with a specific agenda. The above proviso is not, thus, an apology, but rather a warning to the reader not to look for an all-round general introduction into SL on the following pages.

Having said this, it would seem somewhat odd to jump immediately in medias res, which for the sake of this thesis I define as PAVing Virlantis, without giving the (possibly quite uninitiated) reader some introduction. The proper *genus* for FLT in SL would appear to be education in VWs, and there is no shortage of good literature on the subject. By way of introduction, then, I could offer the reader a thorough overview of this literature, as is quite customary in all research writing. This is how Lorri Mon begins her summative paper on SL education, for example: “A long tradition of educational research exists within virtual worlds. In 2003, Delwiche (2006) taught ethnographic research to undergraduate students...” (Mon 2010:2). Kim, Lee and Thomas 2012 is a comprehensive and up-to-date metanalysis of the relevant research literature.

This kind of overview, while certainly somewhat repetitive, in view of the above sources, would certainly be of some use for the reader in forming a general conceptual frame of the field, it would, however, offer rather little scaffolding for the later treatment of the main themes of this book, namely some aspects of the added value of VWs and SL for FLT, EFL pronunciation in particular. This is because, as was mentioned above in the Preface, relatively few existing sources address these issues. Actually, when it comes to teaching EFL pronunciation in SL, I believe there are no sources yet available, which is, after all, my primary motivation for writing this text.

Considering the above I decided not to include an introductory literature overview at all, but rather quote and refer to the sources in the body of this thesis as the need arises. Nevertheless,



I do begin the next section of this Introduction with a very short treatment of the basics of Second Life, certainly not enough for complete novices to make their own picture of the world; rather a place holder or, if you like, the rim of the funnel down which I will take the reader in this book. And what would be a funnel without a rim?

As I said above, I do not plan to start from the big picture of the internet/web and how it is changing human life on Earth, even though I do believe it is fundamentally doing just this. In place of this, let the reader accept a single humble quote from some very VW-competent authors:

“We live in a world that is becoming more networked every day, and the internet has grown into an essential medium for communication, socialization, and creative expression. Virtual worlds like Second Life represent the future of human interaction in a globally networked world, and students who have grown up with the Internet naturally swim in these waters” (Rymaszewski et al. 2007:318).

Some of the underlying assumptions of this book appear here in a clear and compact form, ones which will not be further argued for or against in any depth: (a) the importance of the web for human life, (b) the current and future potential of virtual worlds, and (c) the naturalness of this environment for young generations of students. This completes the grand picture as far as I am concerned. Let us now turn to Second Life, its definition and basic characteristics.

## 1.1. What is Second Life?

As explained above, this section is not meant to be a thorough definitional treatment of Second Life. Quite apart from the fundamentally anti-essentialist sentiment of the present author, it is believed that an in-depth discussion of what SL is is mostly beyond the point of this book, even if it might be a fascinating intellectual exercise and a valid research project in its own right. After a rather short period of my own Second Life I came to realize that it is just like First Life (except a little better), which means, among other things, that to try to define Second Life is almost equally futile as to try to define (First) Life. And yet, there must be a simple formula of some kind to offer as answer to an innocently asked question about the definition of SL; not so much for research purposes perhaps, but rather to feed the well-intentioned newbie and general public curiosity.

Because Second Life is so many things to so many people, it is not surprising to find different answers to the ‘what is’ question. The big divide, and this hardly seems surprising, is between those who have Second Life, and those who have not. The former, known as ‘residents’ in SL parlance, have first-hand experience of living in this virtual world, so their definitions are bound to differ from those of non-residents. For this issue of the basic characteristics of SL, as well as for the multitude of other definitional and non-definitional issues discussed below in this text, I will consistently take the point of view of the resident, simply because I believe one cannot be an expert on (Second) Life without living it.

Unlike the so-called ‘actual world’, the virtual world of SL was created by human agency. So I believe it makes perfect sense to ask the creators of SL what SL is. Back in 2007, when I entered the world, the Linden Lab FAQ had this to offer: “Second Life is a 3D digital world imagined, created and owned by its Residents”. Should this be a thorough discussion of the definition of SL and VW, we would now go into analyzing the difference between ‘digital world’ and ‘virtual world’, as well as into the actual sense of 3D. Because we have other goals

here, let me just decide to use ‘virtual’, rather than ‘digital’, and let me not go into differentiating between various types of three-dimensionality. The reader will have a good idea of the many senses of 3D from playing computer games, frequenting the movies or watching 3D TV at home. There are many ways to view SL, some of them approximating the ‘true’ 3D experience of the cinema, but none of them actually close to our common 3D habitat in the First Life of the ‘actual world’. To most residents SL shows as a simulated 3D world, where the avatar moves through the 3D environment rendered on a 2D screen. In what follows I will assume this view of SL throughout.

As it appears, the spacial, three-dimensional view and interaction with the world while in SL is commonly listed among the main educational added values of SL, compared to ‘flat’ Virtual Learning Environments, such as Blackboard or Moodle, for example. I will have more to say on this issue later, in the added value Chapters 2.2. and 4.2.

Right under the 2007 definition of their creation LL decide to differentiate the concept of SL from MMORPGs. This is an important issue for education in SL, so I quote LL’s proviso verbatim:

## 2. Is Second Life a MMORPG?

Yes and no. While the Second Life interface and display are similar to most popular massively multiplayer online role playing games (or MMORPGs), there are two key, unique differences:

1. Creativity: Second Life provides near unlimited freedom to its Residents. This world really is whatever you make it, and your experience is what you want out of it. If you want to hang out with your friends in a garden or nightclub, you can. If you want to go shopping or fight dragons, you can. If you want to start a business, create a game or build a skyscraper you can. It’s up to you.

2. Ownership: Instead of paying a monthly subscription fee, Residents can obtain their first Basic account for FREE. (...) You also own anything you create—residents retain IP rights over their in-world creations.

It is interesting to notice what to my mind is a misnomer, namely the term ‘creativity’ used to refer to what is clearly meant to be freedom from strict superimposed rules of conduct, which are a characteristic definitional feature of games. While to many SL residents the ability to create ex nihilo, to build and script the behaviour of inanimate objects appears to be the strongest magnet<sup>3</sup>, it is not unique to SL or social VWs at all; MMORPGs usually do allow some level of creativity as well.



Snapshot 6. I build – therefore I am

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<sup>3</sup> “Within any thirty-day period, over 66 percent of the residents who used *Second Life* created something from scratch” (Ondrejka 2008:239).

On the other hand, the almost complete freedom to do what one wants in SL is at the same time its great asset and serious problem. Many newbies, indeed nine out of ten, according to LL statistics, including some potential language students, of course, tend to abandon SL shortly after they enter, simply because “there’s nothing to do there”. What they expect is a clear system of guidelines and rules, something they got used to both in their FL (family, school, society) and in their online life in games, such as the World of Warcraft<sup>4</sup>. Second Life provides no such rules, and many people shun this freedom. Not an entirely unexpected event to philosophers and anthropologists! Here is one pertinent quote from one of the best books on SL I know: “Second Life and many virtual-world societies can be cold places unless you already know people in the system who will help you get going (...) In order to enter any society, one must have a role. You must know something about the rituals and archetypes. You must have something to do there” (Meadows 2008:48).

Another clause provided in the LL quote above makes two claims of fundamental importance for SL education: first that the basic SL account is free, and second concerning the Intellectual Property Rights of the residents. Both provisions are of course very good news to educators and their students. For example, when I required some of my 2009 FL students to enter SL with their own avatars, I did not need to worry about the possible expense they would have to incur (except, of course, the cost of internet connection). Likewise, my own SL creations, which will be described later in this book, such as PAVed dominoes, for example, still belong to me in terms of IPRs, even if they are actually stored and rendered on LL’s servers. This means, among others, that I can freely quote from them here without having to ask LL for permission, or that I could sell them to another resident, should there be such demand. This is not to claim that the IPR interface between SL and Academia is entirely problem-free, as amply demonstrated by some SLED (<https://lists.secondlife.com/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/educators>) threads in the past, but following this theme would take us too far away from our main pursuit. Just one more relevant quote: “If the students produce videos, texts, or other material, the copyrights of that material should be checked and needed permissions asked from the students beforehand” (Palomäki 2009:79).

Should it be objected that taking the definition of an entity from the creator of this entity may be methodologically risky, here is another short definition-cum-description of SL, this time from Wikipedia:

“Second Life is an online virtual world developed by Linden Lab. It was launched on June 23, 2003. A number of free client programs, or Viewers, enable Second Life users, called Residents, to interact with each other through avatars. Residents can explore the world (known as the grid), meet other residents, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, and create and trade virtual property and services with one another. Second Life is intended for people aged 16 and over” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Life)).

There is little new in this definition compared to the previous one, so I will not comment on its elements here. The one exception is the fundamental importance of the avatar, both for the definition of SL as such, and for the entire educational enterprise in-world. That “residents interact with each other through avatars” has wide-ranging ramifications for teaching and learning in SL, especially for teaching and learning foreign languages. This I will discuss later in the book. For the time being, let me quote one more definition where the all-important

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<sup>4</sup> “Second Life is to a MMOG like World of Warcraft, as Legos are to Monopoly, that is the unstructured, creative play of Legos verses (sic – WS/B) the structured, rule-based game-play of Monopoly” (Aurilio 2010:157).



concept of avatar comes clearly to the fore. In his short paper on the definition of Virtual World, Bell offers the following, which appears to be a common denominator of the many definitions he had sampled:

“A synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers”. (...) One can't say “My Facebook profile is emailing you.” Avatars function like user-controlled puppets. Users command the actions of the avatar, but it is the avatar itself which performs the action. Even forms of communication which come more directly from the user, such as voice chat, are presented as actions taken by the avatar” (Bell 2008).

Like before, in a more in-depth treatment of the definitional side of SL, or if I were writing predominantly about the psychological aspects of SL (language) education, it would now be de rigueur to go into the subtle senses and distinctions having to do with the interaction between humans and their avatars in VWs (see, for example, Bartle 2003 or Messinger et al. 2008). It would certainly not be enough to satisfy oneself with defining avatars as ‘puppets’ of the users. Indeed, the very term ‘user’ carries overtones which come in direct conflict with those of the term ‘resident’, which happens to be my preference. Many SL residents, like myself, would fully subscribe to the following pledge: “I am my avatar, my avatar is me. I am beholden by any promises my avatar makes on my behalf and my avatar will honour any contract I make” (Scopes 2011:23). Such quibbles aside, let me promise that the issue of language learners using their avatars as, fundamentally, face-protecting and face-saving impostors helping them to reduce the affective filter in communicating in a foreign language, will be discussed later in this book.

Other characteristics of SL, some of them possibly definitional in nature, will likewise be discussed in extenso below, in Chapter 2.2. on the educational affordances of SL. What remains for me to do before I narrate some of my personal story as an SL resident is to set the stage, so to say, i.e. to draw the very rough sketch of the history of SL from an educator's perspective. I will, once again, take recourse to the Wikipedia article on SL.

In 2005 and 2006 Second Life began to receive a lot of media traction, including a cover story on Business Week magazine featuring the virtual world and Second Life avatar Anshe Chung. By that time Anshe Chung had become Second Life's poster child and symbol for the economic opportunities that the virtual world offers to its residents. At the same time the service would see a period of exponential growth of its user base.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Life))

I happened to enter SL at the peak of its hype, namely at the beginning of 2007. It was at that time that SL started to be a media topic of some importance in Poland also. Islands of:

- Second Cracow (25<sup>th</sup> July 2007; <http://pazurkiem.wordpress.com/2007/07/24/krakow-zaczyna-drugie-zycie/>),
- Second Poznan (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007; <http://www.poznan.pl/mim/wiadmag/news/poznan-w-second-life,22915.html>) and
- Second Wroclaw (17<sup>th</sup> April 2008; <http://www.dobreprogramy.pl/Wroclaw-kolejne-miasto-w-Second-Life,Aktualnosc,8119.html>)

were created, with the respective old town markets replicated with a high degree of precision, at least in terms of textures used to cover the old houses, Rathouses and churches. Below are views of Second Krakow and Second Poznan.



**Snapshot 7. Second Krakow**



**Snapshot 8. Second Poznan**

On the global scale, this was the time when many huge business firms, such as IBM, ventured into SL to try to extend their operations there and... failed miserably. It turned out that they had little to offer in-world beyond the front-end to their FL activities. In an important sense of the term, they failed to discover and exploit the added value of this virtual world for business. This is a sobering story of potentially enormous import for education as well, I believe. If educators fail in identifying and exploiting the added value of SL for teaching and learning, their students may leave SL in disappointment, just like the potential business clients.

After 2008 SL started a downward slide in popularity and media coverage, and it has continued to remain rather low to this day. There is extensive literature on why and how this happened, mostly in the form of newspaper articles and online texts. A number of factors have been blamed for the SL downfall in new registrations, concurrent in-world figures and in-world trading, all of these criteria generating solid statistics which are relatively easy to collect. Some of the possible mentioned causes were: GUI complexity, technical glitches, exorbitant hardware requirements, poor first-hour newbie experience, cartoonish graphics, inadequate LL customer service, and many more. From the point of view of educators, who for a certain period of time had been pampered by LL for their public relations value, everything looked reasonably well until the end of 2010, when LL decided to withdraw the significant 50% educational discount on the purchase and operational costs of land in SL. Universities and other educational organizations, which were mainly hit by this change, first protested loudly, but then gradually started withdrawing their assets and moving them to other virtual worlds, mostly built on the OpenSim platform, hence cheaper and safer. Thus, what was once at the very peak of hype gradually slid to the very trough of disillusionment in the Gartner hype cycle, where it has remained since: “3D displays, augmented reality and tablets cluster at the peak of this Hype Cycle in 2011, while previously hyped trends, such as virtual worlds, stagnate in the trough” ([http://www.gartner.com/DisplayDocument?doc\\_cd=215631&ref=g\\_noreg](http://www.gartner.com/DisplayDocument?doc_cd=215631&ref=g_noreg)). Currently, “Second Life is being portrayed as passé and outdated, and university administrators have started to believe the stories telling them that it is time for universities to move on to new educational tools that employ up-to-date gadgetry to augment rather than virtualise reality page” (Herold 2012:9).

All these global trends and events could not have been without any effect on the little educational community of Virlantis, which I joined when I entered SL. Some of my personal story narrated below, as well as some of the changes in my SL teaching over the years are rather closely related to what was going on around me. To the extent that this information is of relevance for the main thread of this book it will be mentioned as we go along.

Some reflections of the changing fates and main problems of SL on the in-world pedagogy are summarized in the following excerpt from the e-mail interview conducted with me by Veronica Omeni for her degree project in May 2010. The entire text of the interview is available here: <http://zajek.grou.ps/talks/2602288>.

“Q3> Do you think the idea will be popular with other language teachers? why/why not?”

Frankly, from my own experience over 3 years of having SL and spreading the word about it, it'll take quite some time for SL to get into the mainstream of e-teaching. There're many reasons, most of them mental blocks, I believe, but technological, financial and logistic obstacles also loom large. As far as the former are concerned, it's the traditional conservatism of teachers, technophobia, fear of steep learning curves, laziness, lack of innovation drive, weakness of e-teaching pedagogy, slim teaching experience with electronic media, reluctance to invest time and effort into acquiring the necessary skills, negative stereotyping of SL and VWs as places for sex exploration and entertainment (rather than education), generally low opinion of edutainment, etc. SL is expensive in terms of hardware and specs needed for its smooth operation, as well as in terms of required connection parameters (mostly bandwidth). It creates problems on the school LAN, if only with security measures (e.g. port blocking, firewalls) and admin support. These problems are more serious than in the case of “ordinary” 2-dimensional web2, with FaceBook or Moodle. On top of that, many teens have very high expectations of VWs, which they extrapolate from their experience with MMORPGs such as WoW: SL graphics will never satisfy them.”

However disenchanted many residents (and non-residents alike) may have felt by the tribulations of SL, it remains a fact that Second Life now has over thirty million registered users, with between 30 and 70 thousand of them concurrently in-world (Current user metrics for Second Life, August 2012). The resident base going into millions has been questioned as not much more than dead souls, i.e. those users who registered and then quickly abandoned their avatars. According to various analysts, including LL ones, the proportion of such dead souls may be as high as 90%. This may be quite damning as a demographic for business, but for language educators this means: potentially three million people, and actually as many as several dozen thousand people to talk to in a foreign language at any given moment. Because the language of communication in SL, its lingua franca, tends to be predominantly English, this appears to be a virtual paradise to EFL teachers and learners. Many of the potential interlocutors of EFL students venturing into SL would be native speakers of English, by the way, especially American English, with this demographic forever leading the pertinent tables of SL residents (47% are US citizens; they also lead the logged-in hour counts, with five times as many as the next-in-line Germans; see <http://www.metanomics.net/show/archive100608/> for 2008 SL statistics).

So what else remains to be said about the definition and character of Second Life as a virtual world? I could, of course, offer more statistics or quotes attempting to capture the sense of this strange environment to those who go there and remain (or quit). As demonstrated to some extent above, it is by no means completely unproblematic to try to make a working definition of SL/VW which would satisfy all interested parties. And a definitive history of SL still remains to be written, because – to the best of my knowledge – there is, at SL's ninth birthday, no extended book-length treatment of this fascinating topic (but see here for short overviews: [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/History\\_of\\_Second\\_Life](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/History_of_Second_Life) and <http://www.metaversejournal.com/2010/07/01/the-history-of-second-life>). But, however many dry facts could be provided, something would still be missing: the awe and wonder of the new world felt by its inhabitants, which might not be very different from the awe and wonder of all

intrepid travellers on missions of discovery in human history. These sentiments, as will be documented more fully below, are of enormous import for all residents' pursuits in-world, be it business, romance or education. Mostly because of this crucial association I really feel I must try to share some of this fascination with the non-resident reader of this text, however difficult it may be. Some of my own infatuation will be apparent in the following section of this book, where I briefly narrate my own SL story. To close this section, however, let me offer a characteristic flare of enthusiasm coming from another resident. In many ways it appears to me to be a better characterization of SL than the dry figures and facts so far adduced.

“A virtual world beyond your wildest imaginings; visit anytime, day or night; fly above the clouds; touch the ceiling of the Sistine chapel: swim among the mermaids at the ocean's bottom; ride a sea-horse; take a college course; build the house of your dreams; attend a support group, buy art, jewelry, clothes, horses; sell your creations; all the while meeting and chatting with any one of the 50,000 other residents on line with you” (Ladykat Tigerpaw, FL=Katherine Gordy Levine, on SLED).

## 1.2. Wlodek Barbosa in SL

I was born ('rezzed' in SL parlance) in SL on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2007 as Wlodek Barbosa. The last name was selected out of a list of a few hundred which were made available to choose from at that time by Linden Lab. There was no limitation on the shape of the first name, so I decided to simply keep the FL informal version of my 'real' first name *Włodzimierz*. I decided to drop the oblique-slash diacritic on the <ł> in *Wlodek* because I suspected that it could create many problems in the textual environment which was (and remains) almost entirely English-centered. I knew from more than forty years of learning and teaching English, as well as from about that many years of communicating with native speakers of English, that <ł> would be a problem on both counts: orthographic and phonetic. The former – because such diacritics are completely alien to English, the latter – because the word-initial /vw-/ cluster is unpronounceable in English. Without the diacritic we are at least getting a decent Roman character and a somewhat easier onset: /vl-/, which, although still unattested in English, does appear in some loanwords from Slavic languages.

As it turned out later in my pronunciation teaching in SL, the question of how to pronounce avatars' names is quite an issue in-world, considering the enormous variety of native languages used by the residents, with some of their graphophonemic idiosyncrasies and peculiarities percolating to the names displayed. In the following excerpt of the write-up of my impressions from my early lesson in-world (conducted as part of the *LanguageLab* teacher training course in November/December 2007; see Chapter 4.1. for a report) some of these problems are exemplified:

“And finally they came: *Jokinga*, *Abdullah*, *Anatema* and *Hoshy*, lead by their regular teacher, Captain Jaybird, who let us have his class for this trial lesson. How does one pronounce the names? Is it /dʒəʊ-/ or /jəʊ-/? Where's the stress in *Anatema*: second or third syllable? Oh, the joys of teaching a multilingual/multinational/multicultural class! I asked them to introduce themselves to hear the pronunciation, but I hardly remembered, busy manipulating my camera angle and the usual multitude of windows overlaid on the view of the terrain and avatars” ([http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/First lesson in SL.pdf](http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/First_lesson_in_SL.pdf)).

It is generally OK when in-world to freely ask strangers how they want their names pronounced, to avoid the embarrassment of mispronouncing what many regard (just like in FL)



as a very precious part of their personal identity. In full knowledge of these sociolinguistic ramifications I offered activities to my pronunciation students on a few occasions with the specific aim of making it easier to guess the right pronunciation of the avatar name from its spelling. Considering that the native language of the resident is only one possible problem in reading out avatar names (some contain digits, non-alphabetic characters, ciphers, non-Roman symbols, etc.) the activities turned out to be quite challenging, but – judged from student reactions – they were very well accepted. Because these activities were not PAVed they do not appear in the Appendix, however.

Almost unavoidably, right after being rezzed and having gone through the basic orientation with respect to some of the fundamental SL skills such as locomotion (walking, flying, teleporting), camera work (view angle, zooming, mouseview<sup>5</sup>) and communication (local text chat, IM) I started looking around for places of interest. At that time there were no Polish islands yet in-world, but there was a tiny polonicum in the form of the front-end office of one of the most popular Polish weeklies by the title of *Przekrój*. It was there that I took my first snapshot in-world on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2007.



**Snapshot 9. Wlodek Barbosa (3 days old) with a stranger**

At that time I was still using the default male avatar body (called ‘urban male’ if I remember correctly) which I selected from among the few offered at the moment of registration. I exchanged a few niceties with the lady sitting next to me, but I have not seen her since. A note to non-residents: the postures we both feature in the snapshot are not freely assumed or manipulated. Like with much other body language in SL, they are achieved by clicking on pose-balls (one is visible in the picture), whereby all the avatar can do is either accept the position/animation or quit it (‘stand up’ in SL parlance). Relaxed, laid-back poses, as the ones demonstrated in the picture above, are among the most common ones on offer in SL. This general feeling of rest and relaxation is, I believe, one of the trademarks of SL. It may also have some significance for in-world teaching and learning, of course.

Using the search-engine built into the SL viewer I was quickly able to discover some EFL activity on the island of English Village, with Fire Centaur (FL= Paul Preibisch) the founder and facilitator. I took part in some of their meetings and lessons, and discovered that I liked

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<sup>5</sup> In mouseview the viewpoint of the camera is inside avatar head, rather than a few meters behind and above, which is the default view. Thus, mouseview mimics the viewing experience humans have in FL. Some SL residents prefer this view.

the relaxed and convivial atmosphere, the friendliness of the teachers, and – first of all – the thrill of doing in-world what had been my career and my hobby in FL, namely English. It should be remembered that at that time, and until the end of July 2007, i.e. for the first few months of my SL, residents could only communicate in writing, either in local chat or IM. It was along this channel that all EV English tuition was going on. To give the reader some flavour of what it was like, below is an excerpt from my first taught lesson in SL showing some of the natural speech dynamics of the text chat interchange. The lesson lasted two hours in total, with three main parts: (a) first a short guided tour of the local resources (basically multiple-choice panels), (b) then we had a series of exercises using the aids, mostly concerning verb+noun collocations, (c) finally one student remained for a one-on-one extra of a similar character, methodologically speaking. The excerpt comes from part (b), which lasted one hour and twenty minutes. The original spelling of the text chat is retained throughout. My present comments appear in square brackets.

EV lesson transcript with Wlodek Barbosa, 15 June 2007

[...]

[11:49] You: Let's go to the maze.  
 [11:49] mayuka Yoshikawa: yes.  
 [11:49] You: Follow me, please. [SL spaciality]  
 [11:49] Remotac Bade: okay  
 [11:49] mayuka Yoshikawa: Ok  
 [11:50] You: Ready? [Right in front of the maze]  
 [11:50] mayuka Yoshikawa: yes.  
 [11:51] You: This is really quite automatic...  
 [11:51] You: I sit back and observe...  
 [11:51] You: ... and help if need be :-)  
 [11:51] Remotac Bade: okay  
 [11:51] You: Just touch the right panel.  
 [11:51] mayuka Yoshikawa: Yes  
 [11:52] You: Easy?  
 [11:52] mayuka Yoshikawa: Well,  
 [11:52] Remotac Bade: and?  
 [11:52] You: Let's have another one.  
 [11:52] You: I'll follow you.  
 [11:53] mayuka Yoshikawa: another?  
 [11:53] You: Just go down the maze...  
 [11:54] You: So?  
 [11:54] Remotac Bade: there is no question,how can i choose the answer?  
 [11:54] mayuka Yoshikawa: May I touch?  
 [11:54] You: You have the question on the black panel at the top  
 [11:54] Remotac Bade: i see  
 [11:54] You: So what do you get from the teacher?  
 [Prompting]  
 [11:55] Remotac Bade: love?  
 [11:55] You: :-)  
 [11:55] mayuka Yoshikawa: get?  
 [11:56] Remotac Bade: explanation  
 [11:56] You: Problem?  
 [11:56] mayuka Yoshikawa: No,  
 [11:56] You: Right - explanation.  
 [11:56] Remotac Bade: :)  
 [11:56] You: For which the verb is...?  
 [11:56] mayuka Yoshikawa: receive  
 [11:56] Remotac Bade: explane  
 [11:57] You: Well... I guess you can receive explanation, right.  
 [11:57] You: Explain... [correct spelling error]

[11:57] You: was what I had in mind, though :-)  
 [11:57] Remotac Bade: i see  
 [11:57] mayuka Yoshikawa: Sorry,explain?  
 [11:57] You: Now - receive is a verb, right?  
 [11:57] Remotac Bade: yep  
 [11:57] mayuka Yoshikawa: yes.  
 [11:58] You: What is the noun made form it?  
 [11:58] You: from [standard form of typo correction]  
 [11:58] Remotac Bade: and explain is the verb for explanation  
 [11:58] You: Right  
 [11:58] Remotac Bade: i dunt know what is "noun"  
 [11:58] You: Whe you "receive" a radio station well, you get a good... ?  
 [11:59] Remotac Bade: now i get it  
 [11:59] You: So what do you get, Mayuka?  
 [11:59] mayuka Yoshikawa: What?  
 [11:59] Remotac Bade: signal? [some more humour from this student]  
 [11:59] You: :-)  
 [11:59] Remotac Bade: nomen name. See {Name}.] (Gram.) A word used as the designation or appellation of a creature or thing, existing in fact or in thought; a substantive. [Great definition :-) for a beginner/intermediate]  
 [11:59] You: You get a good rece....  
 [12:00] mayuka Yoshikawa: reception?  
 [12:00] Remotac Bade: receive  
 [12:00] You: Reception, right!  
 [12:00] You: Ok  
 [12:00] You: Shall we go on?  
 [12:00] Remotac Bade: sure  
 [12:00] mayuka Yoshikawa: Yes.  
 [12:01] mayuka Yoshikawa: May I touch? [haptics]  
 [12:01] You: Sure  
 [12:02] mayuka Yoshikawa: I`ve seen the question in my first lesson here.  
 [12:02] You: OK.  
 [12:02] You: So resign - when you stop doing something  
 [12:02] Remotac Bade: give it up  
 [12:03] You: And the noun from this?  
 [12:03] mayuka Yoshikawa: I think so, -gibe up?  
 [12:03] You: Remo - why do you want to give up?  
 [Misunderstanding here – mostly due to mistiming]  
 [12:03] Remotac Bade: my merriage  
 [12:03] Remotac Bade: haha [funny guy, Remotac]

[12:04] mayuka Yoshikawa: marriage?  
[12:04] Remotac Bade: what do i wann give up?  
[12:04] Remotac Bade: my wife  
[12:04] Remotac Bade: haha  
[12:04] You: lol  
[12:04] You: OK  
[12:05] You: So the noun for "resign" is ...?  
[12:05] mayuka Yoshikawa: resign? Sorry I don't know..  
[12:05] You: OK  
[12:05] You: Resignation  
[12:06] You: Easy, no?  
[12:06] mayuka Yoshikawa: Thanks.  
[12:06] Remotac Bade: my friend wanna join  
[12:06] Remotac Bade: can i tp her?  
[12:06] You: let's go on to see if we can find the exit :-)  
[12:06] You: Sure, you can tp her.  
[12:06] mayuka Yoshikawa: Sure.  
[12:07] You: This is easy... :-)  
[12:07] Remotac Bade: follow me  
[12:07] mayuka Yoshikawa: It's Easy.  
[12:07] Remotac Bade: come on over here  
[12:08] You: Hi, Claire! [Remotac's friend arrived]  
[12:08] Claire Wellman: hi Wlodek  
[12:08] You: Want to join?  
[12:08] Claire Wellman: yes ;)  
[12:08] mayuka Yoshikawa: hi  
[12:08] Remotac Bade: wlodek is my teacher  
[12:08] Claire Wellman: Hi mayuka  
[12:08] Claire Wellman: okay okay :)  
[12:08] Remotac Bade: mayuka is my classmates  
[12:08] You: OK.  
[12:08] Remotac Bade: clair is my lover [potential grieving problem (?)]  
[12:08] You: Then let's have one or two more panels, shall we?  
[12:09] Remotac Bade: kidding [sigh of relief]  
[12:09] Claire Wellman: =)  
[12:09] Remotac Bade: LOL  
[12:09] mayuka Yoshikawa: Sure  
[12:09] You: Sorry ladies...I want to pass; maze is narrow.  
[12:09] mayuka Yoshikawa: hi,Senka. [another arrival]  
[12:09] You: Claire - just touch :-) [instruction for the newcomer]  
[12:10] mayuka Yoshikawa: Nice to see u again.  
[12:10] Remotac Bade: bingo  
[12:10] You: You look great, Claire :-) [Claire went into "changing my appearance" mode]  
[12:10] Claire Wellman: lol  
[12:10] Claire Wellman: Ty  
[12:10] You: Touch the right panel  
[12:11] You: Perfect!  
[12:11] You: Let's do something harder outside the maze...  
[12:11] Remotac Bade: something harder.....  
[12:12] You: OK  
[12:12] You: Take your seats [right next to the treehouse; with the two balls.]  
[12:12] mayuka Yoshikawa: Sure  
[12:12] You: Can you see the big balls?  
[12:12] mayuka Yoshikawa: Yes.  
[12:13] Remotac Bade: ep  
[12:13] Remotac Bade: yep  
[12:13] You: One is for verbs  
[12:13] You: The other is for nouns  
[12:13] You: Just touch them to see how tghey work...  
[12:13] Remotac Bade: oh  
[12:13] mayuka Yoshikawa: touch?  
[12:14] You: Just point and click  
[12:14] Remotac Bade: gotcha  
[12:14] You: left click :-)  
[12:14] Remotac Bade: disarm [Claire appeared pointing a gun at us]  
[12:14] You: Is this a hold up?  
[12:14] Remotac Bade: clair  
[12:14] mayuka Yoshikawa: Oh, occur the word?  
[12:14] Remotac Bade: come on  
[12:15] Claire Wellman: sorry lol  
[12:15] You: Claire - want to join? [let's get some order here]  
[12:15] Claire Wellman: :)  
[12:15] You: So...  
[12:15] You: The task is like this...  
[12:15] You: You touch the balls as long as it needs to get...  
[12:16] You: ... a meaningful combination of verb+noun.  
[12:16] You: For example...  
[12:16] You: Right now we've got: "duplicate contract"....  
[12:16] Claire Wellman: yes?  
[12:16] You: ... which is OK because one can do it.  
[12:16] Claire Wellman: and what have we to do?  
[12:16] Claire Wellman: okay  
[12:17] You: But "to emply a contract" is wrong...  
[12:17] mayuka Yoshikawa: yes  
[12:17] You: Let me show you how it works...  
[12:17] You: I will keep touching the verb ball...  
[12:17] You: To erect control does not mean anything...  
[12:18] You: "To extend control" is fine.  
[12:18] You: Do you get it?  
[12:18] mayuka Yoshikawa: to fasten control,Is it right?  
[12:18] Remotac Bade: get it  
[12:18] You: When you find a good phrase you stop...  
[12:18] You: ... and explain what it means or give an example,OK?  
[12:18] You: Who's first?  
[12:19] Claire Wellman: Mayuka?  
[12:19] Claire Wellman: :)  
[12:19] mayuka Yoshikawa: yes?  
[12:19] Claire Wellman: first?  
[12:19] You: Mayuka - can you starty?  
[12:19] You: start  
[12:20] mayuka Yoshikawa: start?  
[12:20] You: ... the game.  
[12:20] mayuka Yoshikawa: Yes.  
[12:20] You: go ahead  
[12:21] You: No success so far? [After a dozen touches]  
[12:23] You: Sorry - was IMing for a while... [multitasking...]  
[12:23] You: Mayuka - did you hit on something?  
[12:24] mayuka Yoshikawa: Well,to load employee.  
[12:24] You: What would that mean?  
[12:24] mayuka Yoshikawa: Is it right?  
[12:24] You: Anybody?

[12:25] You: Can one "merge equipment"? [Some further changes by different students]  
 [12:25] mayuka Yoshikawa: to merge the equipment?  
 [12:25] You: What would it mean?  
 [12:25] Claire Wellman: no?  
 [12:26] Claire Wellman: i thin it's wrong :s  
 [12:26] You: Well...  
 [12:26] You: I guess one could merge equipment, like...  
 [12:26] Claire Wellman: a  
 [12:26] You: Buy from different suppliers, for example,...  
 [12:26] You: ... and then merge into one system.  
 [12:26] Claire Wellman: but in my dictionnary, i think it is uncompatible  
 [12:26] mayuka Yoshikawa: ye s!  
 [12:27] mayuka Yoshikawa: Just to make a solution.  
 [12:27] You: Well, Claire - dictionaries cannot have EVERYTHING, can they?  
 [12:27] Claire Wellman: lol  
 [12:27] You: Remotac - would you like to try?  
 [12:28] Remotac Bade: i dunt know what r u talking about [is Remotac a griefer?]

[12:28] You: Try to find a good combination of verb+noun...  
 [12:29] Remotac Bade: they change randomly,how could i [true – they all keep touching now]  
 [12:29] You: This is the point - you click as long as it needs to get a good onme.  
 [12:29] Remotac Bade: should be one fixed  
 [12:29] Remotac Bade: okay  
 [12:29] You: You can only click verbs...  
 [12:29] You: or nouns...  
 [12:29] You: This is up to you.  
 [12:30] Claire Wellman: Over here!  
 [12:30] Remotac Bade: but she touch it.....  
 [12:30] You: Right...  
 [12:31] Claire Wellman: afk [Away From Keyboard]  
 [12:31] You: When two people touch at the same time it is hard to follow...  
 [12:32] Remotac Bade: in taiwan it's 3:30 am, excuse me,teacher wlodek [SL is global]  
 [12:32] You: OK  
 [12:32] You: Have a good night, Remotac.


The lesson plan was not my own; it came from Kip Yellowjacket, whom I met in the English Village for the first time, and who asked me to help him organize and conduct the EFL activities. It should be mentioned at this point that as an SL resident I was deliberately completely transparent from day one. This means that – unlike many people going into Second Life incognito for a variety of reasons – I included complete information about my FL identity in my SL profile, which is publicly available to anybody, both in-world and out. When in SL, one only needs to right-click on the avatar in view (or find one with the search engine) to see its profile, including some SL data, such as the rezday or the groups belonged to, as well as as much FL information as the resident wishes to share with the world. On the two-dimensional internet profiles can be inspected in the following way, by going to a specific url: <http://world.secondlife.com/resident/6b1918c0-55e5-4097-99ee-6787471df35e> in the case of Wlodek Barbosa.

**Wlodek Barbosa**  
 Resident Since: 2007-21-03 (5 years, 4 months ago)

Every Wednesday, 12 (midday) SLT I offer pronunciation tutoring in my launchroom on Knowingly (198/242/23; also look up Virtlantis on FaceBook or consult my in-world group IFA in SL). Every Sunday, 4-5 am SLT, I'm there ready to answer pronunciation questions.  
 I have enhanced some objects in the Knowingly treehouse (213/189/31) with pronouncing information (info & quizzes). Try them!

[View Full Profile in Second Life](#)

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**Snapshot 10. Wlodek Barbosa' SL profile (web2 view)**



All while developing my general resident and teacher skills in SL I started exploring the beauties of SL natural environment and social life. I teleported to many wonderful islands, mostly those offering lush tropical greenery (which are SL favourites) with cosy little nooks for meditation. My personal favourite in this category has always been the Lost Gardens of Apollo, which is unfortunately no longer on the grid (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWoRVQO3gJU> – watch in HD, please). To fully savour the environmental beauty I had to buy a good quality graphics card for my desktop computer, which could properly render the sky and the ocean, as well as the details of the ground and the shadows. While it is possible to view SL with in low-quality graphics, the experience is definitely much less pleasing and immersive, if only the so-called draw-distance must then be set to a few meters only, or the screen refresh rate drops so significantly that it is hard for the avatar to move in the 3d environment. The graphical requirements of SL in terms of the installed hardware have always been regarded as one of the serious obstacles to more people entering SL on a larger scale. Anything less than a top-quality gamers' graphics card will likely yield less-than-optimal visual experience of SL as a 3d environment. And this, again, can have consequences for SL teaching and learning. For example, think of a treasure hunt or quest in a three-dimensional environment, be it virtual or actual, where participants can see no further in space than, say, twenty meters, so that instructions such as “Please walk towards the nearest hill” can hardly be interpreted at all, because there is no hill in sight!

As far as social life and entertainment in SL is concerned, dancing soon became my favourite activity. I convinced my FL wife to enter the world and we went to many fine places together to dance and enjoy ourselves (like here, in Vision Club at Second Poznan: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeRse-mlzsM>). Because dancing is effected in SL in much the same way as sitting, i.e. by clicking on a dance-ball and selecting from a variety of animations (which are usually looped to provide for continuous movement), it often especially appeals to those residents who are very poor dancers in FL. Interestingly, dancing is probably the all-time favourite activity in SL, also with professional teachers and educators. I can remember no in-world conference or meeting which would completely exclude dancing, especially as an event closing the proceedings.



**Snapshot 11. Barbosa and Aichi dancing at Dolce Vita**

There are, I believe, good reasons why this is so, having to do with the boost of immersion experienced by the resident while dancing (also flying, and generally moving around). Immersion, in turn, is an important characteristic, or affordance, of virtual worlds with a very strong effect on the satisfaction from having a Second Life, and of crucial importance for

whichever pursuits are undertaken there. With this conviction I will have more to say about immersion later in this book. At this point let me only say that from the very beginning of my residence I discovered myself to be rather deeply immersed. It is only to an immersed person that concepts such as ‘natural beauty of SL’ or ‘the joy of SL dancing’ make sense. Likewise, only a person who can feel him/herself on the other side of the screen when in-world could really appreciate the following “10 rational arguments why SL is better than RL”, which I put forward on March 14th 2008<sup>6</sup>:

1. SL is free.
2. One can TP and fly in SL.
3. One can construct oneself in SL.
4. There is no pain, sickness or death in SL.
5. There is no hunger, poverty or war in SL.
6. One can log in and out of SL when one wants<sup>7</sup>.
7. People are more open in SL<sup>8</sup>.
8. Sex is completely safe in SL.
9. Everything is much cheaper in SL.
10. [Space for your own argument]

My sentiments about SL being actually superior to FL in some respects are not entirely unshared. In a paper on social virtual worlds, Bell, Smith-Robbins and Withnail notice, somewhat escapistically, that “the stresses of everyday life (food, money, family, traffic) are all removed in SL. This aids in creating that state of relaxed alertness while sitting in front of a computer and flying through the virtul world” (Bell, Smith-Robbins and Withnail 2010:189). According to a 2006 survey study by Nick Yee of 30 thousand gamers, “approximately 40 percent of men and 53 percent of women who spend time in virtual worlds said their virtual friends were equal to or better than their real-life friends” (Yee 2006, as quoted in Meadows 2008:50).

On the other hand, it is sometimes easy to forget that behind every avatar there is a real being, even if the avatar is less realistic than in the James Cameron’s movie. The person behind the avatar is real. To many this may create a conceptual/affective conflict: a cartoon-like puppet on screen (‘in front of me’, for the immersed types) versus a real human being hidden behind this puppet. The following little exchange, which happened by IM in one of the dancing places in SL, nicely underscores this subtle clash of SL with FL<sup>9</sup>:

[14:25] One Avatar: good evening :)  
[14:25] Wlodek Barbosa: Hello!  
[14:26] One Avatar: i am just curious  
[14:26] One Avatar: do you really teach english in a university???  
[14:26] Wlodek Barbosa: Yes.  
[14:27] One Avatar: woooooowwww  
[14:27] Wlodek Barbosa: lol

---

<sup>6</sup> This list was put into a notecard, and that into a notecard-reading script, which would read the nc line by line at the touch of a passing avatar. The script itself resided in a pyramid-shaped block standing in my launchroom in Virtlantis. That was my first ever experience of scripting, a crucial SL skill for an educator.

<sup>7</sup> “Humans can fall asleep, lose consciousness, hallucinate, even die, but none of these things are equivalent to the dialectic of logging on and logging off that is the originary boundary marker between virtual and actual” (Boellstorff 2008:243).

<sup>8</sup> “Respondents reported in-world behavior similar to, but somewhat less inhibited, than their real-world behavior” (Messinger et al. 2008:8).

<sup>9</sup> The timestamp shows SL time, which means that it was almost midnight of my FL time (CET).

[14:27] One Avatar: congrats  
 [14:27] Wlodek Barbosa: TY  
 [14:28] One Avatar: and you are teaching here too?  
 [14:28] Wlodek Barbosa: yes  
 [14:28] One Avatar: is teaching a passion?  
 [14:28] Wlodek Barbosa: Yes, it definitely is.  
 [14:28] Wlodek Barbosa: ... and vocation :-)  
 [14:33] Wlodek Barbosa: OK. My wife has joined me here for some dancing...  
 [14:33] Wlodek Barbosa: Have fun.  
 [14:33] Wlodek Barbosa: CU around!  
 [14:34] One Avatar: ok, same for you

This inherent characteristic of SL/WV whereby there is an unavoidable clash of the virtual with the real, like many other features of SL which I have been describing here, has a profound effect on teaching and learning in-world. For example, the teacher must never forget that the freaky non-humanoid creature in front of him/her in the classroom is actually (in FL) a real student, with all the psychological and linguistic complexities of a human being to be taken into account in the didactic process. Below is a tiny gallery of some unusual types which came to my pronunciation activities.



**Snapshot 12. A gallery of Barbosa's non-humanoid students**

I spent the rest of the year 2007 in-world developing my interest in how EFL is taught and learned in this environment. On June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007 I attended the first ever SLanguages conference in-world. As it turned out later, this conference was to become a widely acclaimed annual 24-hours event in-world, entirely devoted to discussing language education in SL. Dudeney Ge (FL=Gavin Dudeney), the conference organizer, was extremely active in SL at that time, sharing his expertise of VW teaching in a series of conferences, workshops and meetings. Below is a snapshot of a very typical conference auditorium, with the characteristically SLish laid-back postures and atmosphere.



**Snapshot 13. Barbosa at *Coffee with Dudeney Ge*, October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

At the end of 2007 a major event occurred in my budding EFL teacher career. In November I signed up for a teacher-training programme organized by the LanguageLab, the oldest and largest for-profit foreign language school in SL. As a teacher trainee under the expert tutelage of experienced in-world language teachers I went through an intensive course culminating in a project of teaching several lessons with the use of ‘rezzable’ objects with built-in sound. What I learned from LanguageLab was extremely seminal for my own later teaching and thinking about in-world education generally. Below I devote the entire Chapter 4.1. to describing and analyzing my two-month involvement with LanguageLab.

Early in 2008 Kip Yellowjacket decided to set up his own language community and island, separate from that of English Village, and called it SLEnglish. This is how he described the new venture in a notecard distributed in-world on 18 March 2008:

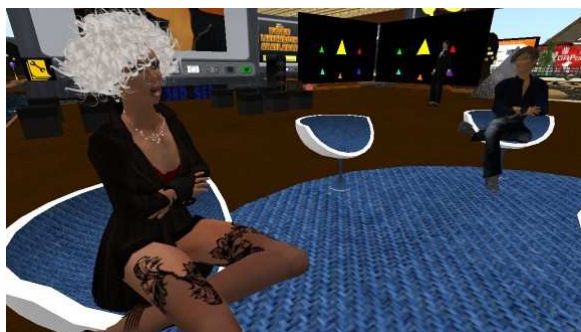
Welcome to Second Life English! What is Second Life English?

The Second Life English group has been helping language learners and teachers in Second Life since 2006. Our past activities were mainly held at the English Village where we organized weekly team-teaching events and assisted learners and teachers in various ways.

The Second Life English SIM is a free resource for language learners and teachers. We are not a school. We are a community of language learners and teachers who share the desire to use the virtual world of Second Life for the learning and teaching of foreign languages.

It is in this community that I have been developing my teaching skills over the years. As explained in the Preface, the influence which this experience has had on me, both professionally and personally, is second to none in my entire Second Life. I devote more time and space to describing the SLEnglish/Virtlantis saga later in this book (see Chapter 4.5.), but it should be remembered that the community remains for me the point of reference even when I seem to be talking about issues apparently unrelated to it. Quite simply put, SLEnglish/Virtlantis has always been my home in SL, both literally and metaphorically.

I started teaching pronunciation regularly in the SLEnglish/Virtlantis community on Sep 10<sup>th</sup> 2008. Over the four (school-)years 2008-2012 I have conducted 163 weekly meetings of ‘Pronunciation with Wlodek Barbosa’. As many as 213 unique participants turned up for these meetings, with the average student count per meeting being 6.4. The students were from all over the FL world, e.g. German, Israeli, Italian, Russian, French, Korean, Pakistani, Roumanian, Brazilian, Finnish, UAE, Turkish, Polish, ... Below, on the left, is a snapshot of one of my first pronunciation meetings in-world, with the timestamp of September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008.



Snapshot 14. An early SLEnglish pronunciation meeting



Snapshot 15. Pronunciation help with Wlodek Barbosa billboard



Some elements in the picture on the left deserve mention at this juncture. First, the circular seating arrangement around a table has remained in place ever since, even though the stools (with built-in hand-up animations, so that avatars may easily signal their intention to take the floor), which can be seen in the background, have not. Second, the pyramid with the notecard containing the ‘ten reasons’ (see above) can be seen right behind my avatar. Third, in the corner of the launchroom (see Chapter 3.2. for the discussion of the concept) there are two quiz panels, which at that time contained a simple multiple-choice pronunciation test. Fourth, right behind the lady in the forefront there is a whiteboard, a very popular teaching aid in-world, which has roughly the same functions as e-boards in FL: it can show pictures, text, video, as well as web content. One more observation concerning the picture above, which seems to be of some pedagogical relevance is that it is much easier for a teacher to be distracted while working in SL than in comparable circumstances in FL. In particular, as was mentioned above in connection with non-anthropomorphic avatars, there is virtually no dress code in SL, beyond what is required by the Linden Lab regulations and Terms-of-Service, for example the ban on nudity outside of adult-only islands. While SLEnglish/Virtlantis has always been a PG region, there is of course no restriction on student appearance comparable to school dress codes in FL schools and courses.

In none of my teaching in SL have I used a rigidly structured syllabus or a textbook. Likewise, I have never assigned any formal homework. However, practically all EFL phonetic areas have been covered: segments, juncture, prosody and graphophonemics. For my teaching I have used various resources in SL: PAVed objects (see Chapter 4.4. and 4.5.), sound files, pictures and graphics, notecards with word-lists and texts, YouTube video clips. I have also referred my students to various resources on 2d web: dictionaries, videos, recordings, charts, animations, and others. I have applied a variety of pedagogical techniques: lecture, drill, projects, guided tours, treasure hunts, conversation, pair-work, group-work, etc.

Two groups have functioned as the community support in-world: my own [IFA in SL] group (<http://world.secondlife.com/group/8fc67523-0a95-2fe0-5eee-70f6229966c0>) and the general Virtlantis group (<http://world.secondlife.com/group/4b6ce843-82ba-def8-a0b7-cd8a336a1a4a>), founded by Jayjay Zifanwe, now counting 1211 members. I have used both for sending information notices and for Instant Messaging with in-world group members. The former group was set up in January 2009, when it was needed ad-hoc for in-world communication with a seminar group of FL students of my FL department, IFA AMU. As of this writing \*\* the group counts 76 members, including its creator. Many of them, however, are just dead souls, judging from their group status; for example, ten of them have not been in-world after the end of 2009, and only twenty-five have logged in over the last month.

For 2d web community support I have used a succession of websites, such as <http://www.virtlantis.com>, as well as community portals, such as the Virtlantis accounts on Ning, Elgg (these two are now defunct) and Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/virtlantis>. There I have mostly been announcing and blogging about my meetings, as well as uploading textual resources used, mainly in the form of notecards. Some of these blogs have attracted attention of students and non-student discussants, with comments posted, both serious and humorous, sometimes migrating into themes quite detached from the original topic. This kind of chat-forum dynamics is nothing strange, of course, as it happens regularly in community and social networking portals, such as Facebook. As the Virtlantis group on Facebook now\*\* counts 755 members, I dare say that my pronunciation-related blogs may have reached a relatively high number of potentially interested EFL students. While blogging is one of the favourite web-enabled tools of FLT teachers, and has attracted considerable scholarly interest

as well, it is only tangentially related to the main theme of this book, so I will not continue on this topic here. I will, however, close with one very pertinent quote. Reporting on a non-experimental empirical study of Chinese students learning EFL in SL, Wang et al. noticed that:

“The use of a blog site is an incredible idea; as described by one of the student teachers: “the blog was really going to be, per your design, a crucial element in bonding the teachers with the students” (...) The use of a blog would give teachers and students a chance to reflect about the sessions, get to know each other even more and allow for the integration of writing and reading into the program” (Wang et al. 2011: 36-37).

I wish to close this section with the heavily abridged contents of the interview conducted with me by Daffodil Fargis (FL=Nergiz Kern) on June 30th, 2009, i.e. after two years of my second life, and one school-year of regular and independent teaching. Nergiz Kern is among the most expert specialists in VW FLT, with enormous experience of both teaching and researching in Second Life. This interview was part of her research project on SL pedagogy, done for a degree. The place chosen for the interview was my house at Virlantis. Below is a snapshot of Barbosa and Daffodil during the interview.



**Snapshot 16. Barbosa interviewed by Daffodil Fargis, June 30th, 2009**

The time shown in square brackets with each line of text chat is SLT, i.e. Second Life Time, i.e. PDT. For reasons of documentation Daffodil insisted that the interview be conducted in text chat, even though at that time voice was of course available in SL. The log of the interview is abridged and contains only those fragments which are relevant to the theme of this book, but otherwise completely unretouched, with the exception of typo correction (unless corrected by speakers themselves). It is published with permission of Daffodil Fargis, to whom I'm grateful for giving me this opportunity of thinking through my SL experience.

The reason why I chose to adduce some excerpts from this interview at this point of the text is that I believe they allow me to demonstrate the peculiar convergence, or fusion, of my private SL existence as Wlodek Barbosa with my professional pedagogical duties and academic research pursuits. As such, the interview furnishes a nice point of transition between the personal narrative above and the more detached treatment of selected SL teaching issues below. This is not to mean, as explained in the Preface, that the text in the following pages will be completely dry and impersonal, of course!

- [10:08] Daffodil Fargis: First of all I would like to thank you for taking part in the Second Life and English Language Learning research. The questions today are part of a research looking at how Second Life is used by ESL teachers. Feel free to be very candid in your responses, You will be shown an advance copy of our work that references your statements prior to publication for accuracy. Do you agree to let us use this data along with recording our conversation with you?
- [10:08] Wlodek Barbosa: Yes, I agree.
- [...]
- [10:15] Daffodil Fargis: Do you also use SL for other purposes like professional development or socialising/recreation
- [...]
- [10:16] Wlodek Barbosa: Apart from teaching myself, I go to all kinds of events like Holodeck challenge, for example, language teaching conferences, etc.
- [10:16] Wlodek Barbosa: Actually... all kinds of events where people gather interested in teaching and learning foreign languages, especially English.
- [10:17] Wlodek Barbosa: I've been to all three editions of SLanguages, for example, and learned a whole lot of stuff there.
- [10:17] Wlodek Barbosa: At the same time, I've also demoed SL for teaching in a number of places in RL, conferences, and the like.
- [...]
- [10:38] Wlodek Barbosa: Now teaching pronunciation has its specificity...
- [10:38] Wlodek Barbosa: This is hardly understood outside of the small circle of pronunciation teachers.
- [10:38] Wlodek Barbosa: Also in RL...
- [10:39] Wlodek Barbosa: For example: you can imagine teaching grammar in text chat, but hardly pronunciation.
- [10:39] Wlodek Barbosa: Other issues: realistic lip movement (none so far), facial gestures, etc.
- [10:39] Wlodek Barbosa: Good quality audio is important.
- [...]
- [10:42] Daffodil Fargis: 5. Do you like Second Life as a 3D MUVE (Multi-User Virtual Environment)? Why? Why not?
- [10:42] Daffodil Fargis: This is more a personal question.
- [10:42] Wlodek Barbosa: I positively LOVE it :-)
- [10:42] Daffodil Fargis: :-)
- [10:42] Wlodek Barbosa: It's much harder to explain why...
- [10:43] Wlodek Barbosa: I guess it has something to do with personality...
- [10:43] Wlodek Barbosa: ... When I'm in the movies, I really am IN the movie, rather than in the hall with the other viewers, for example,...
- [10:43] Wlodek Barbosa: Same with books...
- [10:43] Daffodil Fargis: So, you are immersive by nature?
- [10:44] Wlodek Barbosa: There must be psychological predictors of high immersion potential...
- [10:44] Wlodek Barbosa: But I'm not certain if there is actual theory and a checklist of such predictors...
- [...]
- [10:46] Wlodek Barbosa: If one feels engaged/immersed/"in", one takes stuff in better.
- [10:46] Wlodek Barbosa: I could speculate via Krashen's affective filter, I guess.
- [10:46] Wlodek Barbosa: When one is immersed in world, one has the filter low.
- [10:47] Wlodek Barbosa: ... then there's no obstacle to learning new stuff.
- [10:47] Wlodek Barbosa: But I know this is very speculative.
- [...]
- [10:58] Wlodek Barbosa: ... the affordance of actually having the description of ALL visible objects in SL (mostly in English) is a God-given to language teachers, I believe...
- [...]

[11:05] Daffodil Fargis: And you've never bought anything in SL?  
 [11:05] Daffodil Fargis: :)  
 [11:06] Wlodek Barbosa: Hard to believe, right?  
 [11:06] Daffodil Fargis: Right :-)  
 [11:06] Wlodek Barbosa: Well... let me think...  
 [11:06] Daffodil Fargis: But I haven't bought much in my first year either.  
 [11:06] Wlodek Barbosa: In my 2 and 1/3 years in SL I may have spent about 400 linden dollars<sup>10</sup>...  
 [11:06] Wlodek Barbosa: This is actually sth deeper...  
 [11:07] Wlodek Barbosa: Somehow I really wanted to keep SL (mentally) free/gratis...  
 [11:07] Wlodek Barbosa: Somehow it makes it even better, more wonderful :-)  
 [11:07] Daffodil Fargis: That is true. And different from RL  
 [11:07] Wlodek Barbosa: Yes.  
 [11:08] Wlodek Barbosa: I'm not saying I'll be able to keep doing it for ever...  
 [11:08] Wlodek Barbosa: ... But so far I've managed.  
 [11:08] Daffodil Fargis: Well, you were certainly lucky meeting Kip ;)  
 [11:08] Wlodek Barbosa: of course there're limits to that - one needs textures, sounds, etc to upload...  
 [11:08] Daffodil Fargis: Right.  
 [...]  
 [11:09] Daffodil Fargis: 8. Could you explain any special challenges with using Second Life for teaching, learning, or research for English language teaching?  
 [11:09] Wlodek Barbosa: OK - I'll skip research as I really have no experience first hand, OK?  
 [11:10] Daffodil Fargis: Fair enough.  
 [11:10] Daffodil Fargis: This is specifically about language teaching.  
 [11:10] Wlodek Barbosa: As far as teaching: the presence is simulated and lacks important signals: face, gesture, body movement.  
 [11:11] Wlodek Barbosa: Sound tends to be of poor quality, sometimes because peoples' mikes are bad.  
 [11:11] Wlodek Barbosa: Text rendering is poor, for example hard to show phonetic transcription.  
 [11:12] Daffodil Fargis: You mean in local text?  
 [11:12] Wlodek Barbosa: For both teaching and learning - time zones.  
 [11:12] Wlodek Barbosa: I mean showing anything non-ascii.  
 [11:12] Daffodil Fargis: OK  
 [11:12] Wlodek Barbosa: in text chat or notecards  
 [11:13] Wlodek Barbosa: Time zones - meaning hard to get people at convenient times sometimes...  
 [11:13] Wlodek Barbosa: Wide differences of culture in students make it hard sometimes...  
 [11:14] Wlodek Barbosa: This must be similar to teaching in the second language context... with many ethnically variegated students in one class.  
 [11:14] Wlodek Barbosa: And of course wide variety of language proficiency...  
 [11:14] Wlodek Barbosa: It's hard to ascertain equal level, especially in an informal setting like I've been teaching in.  
 [11:15] Wlodek Barbosa: As for learning... Well I've been trying to learn some building/rezzing/scripting, and of course it is not easy to find something for free :-)  
 [...]  
 [11:17] Daffodil Fargis: 9. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Second Life in terms of its place as an instructional tool?  
 [...]  
 [11:17] Wlodek Barbosa: Let me make one point here.  
 [11:18] Wlodek Barbosa: I really do not think of SL as a TOOL so much...  
 [11:18] Wlodek Barbosa: For me it's much more an environment, a world.  
 [11:19] Wlodek Barbosa: So... in some more philosophical sense, I guess, one can talk of the environment as a tool, also in RL  
 [11:19] Wlodek Barbosa: A classroom, for example, in RL as a tool...  
 [11:19] Wlodek Barbosa: But this is not how I think of the classroom in RL or in SL.

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<sup>10</sup> This would be about \$1.5 in FL.



- [11:19] Wlodek Barbosa: I know one can do blended teaching...
- [11:19] Wlodek Barbosa: with VW as only one TOOL...
- [11:20] Wlodek Barbosa: But I really have no experience of that, so I guess it'd be pointless to speculate...
- [...]
- [11:20] Daffodil Fargis: 10. Could you please describe your most positive experience in Second Life?
- [11:20] Wlodek Barbosa: You mean in the teaching context?
- [11:21] Daffodil Fargis: No, in general.
- [11:21] Wlodek Barbosa: Well... Let me order them...
- [11:21] Daffodil Fargis: It's up to you really.
- [11:21] Wlodek Barbosa: I guess No 1 would be dancing with my wife - Danka Aichi :-)
- [11:22] Wlodek Barbosa: We've had the time of our lives in many nice places :-)
- [11:22] Daffodil Fargis: Didn't know your wife was also in SL. Nice :)
- [11:22] Wlodek Barbosa: No 2 would be doing meditation (no technical sense intended) in Apollo's taichi area...<sup>11</sup>
- [11:22] Wlodek Barbosa: ... and in the floating jaccuzis :-)
- [11:23] Wlodek Barbosa: ... great music there, very peaceful, beautiful scenery :-)
- [11:23] Daffodil Fargis: :-)
- [11:24] Wlodek Barbosa: And No 3 would be all the satisfaction and fun of teaching/learning/meeting people in-world, also socially, like for my rezday every March 21st :-)
- [...]
- [11:25] Daffodil Fargis: 11. What potential do you see for Second Life in education general?
- [11:26] Wlodek Barbosa: Hmm... This is a BIG question...
- [11:26] Wlodek Barbosa: I guess the main point for me would be this: VWs are the future of the web in one way or another<sup>12</sup>.
- [11:27] Wlodek Barbosa: The interface will be getting easier and more natural with every month.
- [11:27] Wlodek Barbosa: The simulation of reality will be getting more and more realistic...
- [11:28] Wlodek Barbosa: ... so it is natural to expect that more and more teaching/learning will move online...
- [11:28] Wlodek Barbosa: ... this means MUCH more than is currently supported by the 2d internet such as LMSs (say Moodle), the community portals (such as Facebook), wikis, etc.
- [11:29] Wlodek Barbosa: Such education is ultimately much cheaper than f2f with expensive teachers and just a few students.
- [11:29] Wlodek Barbosa: Now... I'm fully aware of the need for some f2f contact...
- [11:30] Wlodek Barbosa: ... but even this is going to change, I believe, so that videoconferencing will be regarded as f2f...
- [11:30] Wlodek Barbosa: .. it's mostly the question of mental blocks which the older generation have and the youngsters do not.
- [11:31] Wlodek Barbosa: So... I believe the potential of SL on this background is absolutely great.
- [11:31] Wlodek Barbosa: All those problems, such as hard- and software, connectedness, transfer, cost notwithstanding.
- [...]
- [11:32] Daffodil Fargis: 12. What kinds of educational activities have you done in Second Life?
- [...]
- [11:38] Wlodek Barbosa: Daffodil - can you see the beauty of the moon reflected in the ocean?
- [11:38] Wlodek Barbosa: This is what I like most about SL :-)
- [11:38] Wlodek Barbosa: ... and the environment sounds...

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSW8qiW-bto>.

<sup>12</sup> I believe I would not be as enthusiastic today as I was three years ago about 3d-VW-only internet. Time has shown that attempts to render all of the web in the form of a virtual world, such as ExitReality (<http://3d.exitreality.com/>), for example, have failed.

[11:38] Daffodil Fargis: No, I think I'm facing the wrong direction. Have been admiring the beauty of your wife :-)<sup>13</sup>

[11:38] Wlodek Barbosa: lol

[11:38] Wlodek Barbosa: She's beautiful all right :-)

[11:39] Wlodek Barbosa: But face east...

[11:39] Wlodek Barbosa: ... and the local light of the fire...

[11:39] Wlodek Barbosa: different colour to the moon of course...

[11:39] Daffodil Fargis: I can see the moon and the ocean but no reflections. That's my laptop

[11:39] Wlodek Barbosa: Pure poetry/magic to me :-)

[11:39] Wlodek Barbosa: OK... sorry.

[11:39] Daffodil Fargis: :-)

[11:40] Wlodek Barbosa: That's why the hardware is crucial in SL appreciation :-)

[11:40] Wlodek Barbosa: But let's get back to work.

[...]

[11:45] Wlodek Barbosa: In my environment I go for a freak, on account of my involvement with SL...

[11:46] Daffodil Fargis: You mean in your country? Among your friends/colleagues?

[11:46] Wlodek Barbosa: ... but that's OK. Somehow it does not bother me at all... Maybe because I am university professor so I can afford more than lower ranks in terms of preoccupations and behaviours...

[11:47] Wlodek Barbosa: Both country and local environment.

[11:47] Daffodil Fargis: That might well be true.

[11:47] Wlodek Barbosa: ... and I cherish this professorial freedom :-)

[11:47] Daffodil Fargis: I can imagine.

[11:47] Wlodek Barbosa: I do admit to a certain amount of evangelizing I do for SL in my environment...

[11:48] Wlodek Barbosa: I believe this is my way of paying off my debt to Lindens, Kip, all the great people I met here.

[11:48] Wlodek Barbosa: ... and quite simply expressing my joy of being in-world, I guess.

[11:49] Wlodek Barbosa: So this would be one point - for me SL is a very emotional topic... I believe :-)

[11:49] Daffodil Fargis: I can see that :)

[...]

[11:53] Wlodek Barbosa: OK... maybe what I believe I need to learn in SL most...

[11:54] Wlodek Barbosa: Well.. mostly scripting, I guess...

[...]

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<sup>13</sup> A picture with the likeness of Danka Aichi was hanging on the wall of my house.

## 2. SL as a MUVLE

Second Life is a Virtual World (VW). Or Virtual Environment (VE). The latter term allows a nice transition, both conceptually and acronymically, to Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). And, because SL, like most (if not all?) VEs, is also a Multi-User VE (MUVE), a parallel transition leads to Multi-User Virtual Learning Environment (MUVLE). So, while to ‘ordinary’ people SL is a VW or a VE (and there is little sense of going into the potential subtle differences between W and E), to educators it appears mostly as a VLE or MUVLE. A host of other names and acronyms are in use, and it looks like every author writing on SL in education has an ambition of creating a new term to refer to this new educational environment. I will continue to think of SL as a MUVLE, even if this term itself does not offer an easy definitional demarcation between such world-like 3d learning environments as SL and the more traditional non-world-like 2d learning environments, called Learning Management Systems (LMSs), as Moodle or Blackboard, for example.

Volumes have been written about the divide and the similarities between the two types of environment, the pros and cons of either, and their respective predicted futures. Pedagogical enthusiasts of SL as a MUVLE have mainly talked about its immersive potential, three-dimensionality, constructive and collaborative spirit – all of these contrasted with the traditional LMSs. The critics have pointed out the poor accountability of SL as an educational environment, technical glitches and problems, the imbalance between education and entertainment. There have been attempts to marry the two sides and avoid the flaws and weaknesses of either, for example the Sloodle platform (<http://www.sloodle.org/moodle>). To the extent that this debate touches upon the theme of central interest in this book, namely the added value of SL for foreign language education, it will be taken up in the following pages. But I will not try to relate deeply to the more global issues of the debate, such as, for example, the question of effectiveness of teaching in SL/VW versus teaching ‘on the web’, be it on a specific LMS platform, or simply using the resources and affordances of the internet. There are now quite a few books on such global issues, as well as several serious empirical comparative studies of teaching in 3d versus 2d, e.g. Sheehy, Ferguson and Clough 2010, Hinrichs and Wankel 2011 or Topol (in preparation). See Chapter 2.2. for a very short overview of the literature.

Educators would normally come to VLEs with some past history and knowledge of ‘flat’ LMSs, if only because there are nowadays few schools, colleges and universities without their own LMS platform. Their attitudes and stereotypes with respect to a MUVLE such as SL would also commonly be based on what they see and hear in the popular media, mostly TV and the web. Younger teachers might have some experience of online gaming, as well, including the MMORPG type. In this situation it is only natural that they would be looking to SL for some new affordances for teaching, compared to either FL classroom f2f kind or LMS-based distant e-learning kind. In short, they would be looking for the added value, which is the central subject of this book. Before we inspect in detail the educational affordances of SL, and decide whether or not it actually offers any added value to foreign language teachers, I believe we should have a closer look at some of the properties of SL as a MUVLE, if only to use this description as a scaffolding to later discuss the somewhat more esoteric characteristics of this VW.

Entering SL as a newbie (or ‘noob’) can be a stressful experience. There are so many fundamental skills to master, not quite unlike those humans must acquire early on in their first lives: seeing, communicating, walking, organizing their possessions, using gadgets, etc. Only

some physiological functions are not (yet) replicated in SL: avatars do not need food or sleep, for example. After successfully mastering such basic skills (and, as was mentioned above, only a minority ever manage), a language educator qua SL resident is now faced with the necessity of learning a higher level set of skills, those which will allow him/her to conduct activities in-world. Because I am not writing a guidebook for in-spe or beginning (language) teachers, I will not go in extenso into the many skills or review all the background knowledge of SL functioning of potential use to educators (see Bignell and Parson 2010, for an example). Yet, because some of the following discussion of the added value, the reification of concepts and Phonetically Augmented Virtuality crucially depends on some basic understanding of educationally relevant SL functionalities, I offer to briefly describe some of them directly below. In each case I will specifically point to the educational relevance of the given issue.

## **2.1. Key SL skills – for educators**

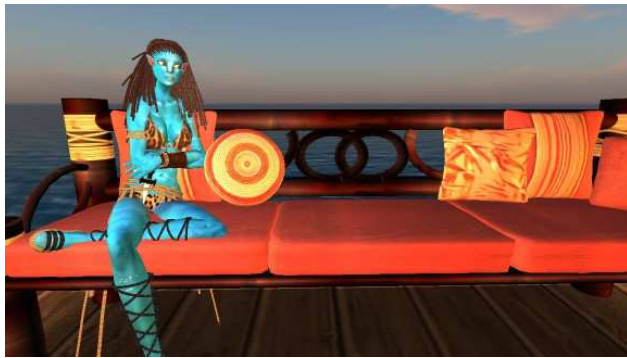
There are a number of SL ‘viewers’ now in use, i.e. client programs installed on the user’s computer allowing entry and interaction with the VE of SL. Some of these viewers come from Linden Lab itself, while others are offered by independent developers. In-depth understanding of all the mechanisms of these viewers and differences between them is rather arcane knowledge in its own right. The good news is that most of the viewer functionalities are shared among all of them, and that few, if any, of the differences would be relevant for this brief overview of SL functionalities for teachers.

The very first affordance which SL offers at login is the option of choosing the avatar name and appearance. While the latter can then be tweaked almost without any limits, the name sticks, so some thought should go into it because it will often be the first glimpse of the resident in-world to the onlookers, especially in those not uncommon cases when, due to lag, the actual shape of the avatar is not yet apparent. In the Preface I explained how I selected my own avatar’s name. Today new users have much more freedom of choice in this department, technically speaking, but there are limitations nevertheless if one goes in-world to teach. For example, it might be good to think about the pronounceability of the first and last name to the potentially many in-spe students with very different mother tongues.

Once the teacher first sees his/her avatar on screen (an extremely exciting moment to the immersive type), it is time to adjust its appearance. Judging from anecdote and research (e.g. Ducheneaut et al. 2009), this is exactly what most newbies do right after they were first rezzed in-world. SL allows for almost unlimited freedom in tweaking the avatar looks, and that in three different senses: (a) a given avatar can be changed along a few hundred dimensions, such as height, skin colour, hip shape, eye size, etc., (b) an avatar can change its appearance completely by simply donning a different shape/body/skin – in effect looking quite unrecognizable (but still carrying the same name tag), (c) there are literally zillions of apparels, both free and at-cost, which each avatar shape/body can put on, with many articles of clothing juggled independently, just like in FL: t-shirt, trousers, belt, shoes, etc. With this combinatorial explosion, the teacher can easily look quite different from one day to the next, or from one student group to another.

Because of this exciting freedom some teachers, especially at the beginning of their SL career, fall into the trap of excess, donning extravagant, and sometimes quite risqué clothing. I have witnessed a number of discussions in-world about teacher dress code, and it looks like the

consensus is that there are limits to what teachers should wear in class<sup>14</sup>, even if these limits are by far looser than in FL. I would, for example normally avoid parading my Neytiri avatar in front of my students, even if I did this a few times for socializing and merrymaking after class. On top of general modesty and adherence to social rules, however, there is the added argument that “attire, physical appearance (...) influence pupils’ perceptions of teachers ability to teach (...) The refined nature of the avatar (...) could impact upon learner attitude and learner confidence in the teaching process” (Woollard 2011:35).



**Snapshot 17. Barbosa in his (her?) Neytiri avatar**

Clothes, together with all other avatar possessions are kept in the inventory, which can grow in size to many thousands of items. The same inventory would hold avatar shapes, gestures and animations, textures, sound files, notecards, scripts and all sorts of objects, from jewellery to castles. To an SL teacher the inventory is an absolutely incredible resource: s/he can pull out of it and ‘rez’ (bring into existence in-world) almost anything instantaneously: a whiteboard, a notecard reader, a picture, an audio recording, a videoclip, a board game, a class register, etc. Any commonly used teaching aid in FL f2f teaching can be replicated and used in-world. So far, there is no added value here, of course. But the teacher’s inventory can also hold objects which would hardly be possible in FL, such as the PAVed objects which I will discuss in-depth in Chapters 4.4. and 4.5. With this multiplicity of items of various kinds and applications it is easy to lose track of some needed objects right when the teacher needs them most urgently, in the middle of the lesson, for example. While inventory can be keyword-searched and ordered in various ways (similarly to the contents of an ordinary hard drive), this will only help if the teacher has some recollection of the name of the item. The only sure policy when it comes to managing the inventory contents appears to be strict order and continuous update and purging.

Among the inventory item types of most importance to educators is the notecard (‘nc’ in SL lingo). Many teachers deplore the very modest editing functionalities of the built-in SL editor. As a matter of fact, just very simple formatting in one font only is allowed, without even the option of italics or bolding, at least in the SL viewers known to me. For many applications this may indeed be a heavy limitation, but this does not stop notecards from being extremely useful pedagogical aids. Even though entering phonetic transcription in a notecard is painfully hard, I

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<sup>14</sup> “The example of clothing was raised, with many arguing that as a professional educator they would always wear appropriate clothing in class – which seemed to mean clothing that was not sexually provocative or aggressive in character” (Biggs 2009:17). “It’s just like in real life. If someone has fifteen safety pins in her face then you will have some specific reservations or a specific way to act in relation to her. And it is the same here, in Second Life” (Jensen 2012:213).

have found myself using notecards on very many occasions in my teaching, in clear preference to a whiteboard, for example. The main advantages of notecards include:

- (a) flexibility of use: notecards can be distributed in various ways, shared among students, copied at will<sup>15</sup>, stored easily, attached to other notecards (i.e. embedded) and group notices, etc.,
- (b) ease of transfer into and from FL: notecards can be made from text normally copied (in FL) and pasted (in SL), this in stark contrast to photographs, pictures and textures, which cost ten Linden dollars a piece to upload to SL (and may cause other problems, such as proper scaling),
- (c) media embedding: objects such as textures, sound files or landmarks (as well as other notecards) can be easily embedded in notecards to produce a fully fledged educational multimedia resource.

This last advantage is not of much added value compared to, say, Word for Windows, of course, but it is certainly a very didactically useful feature of the otherwise rather plain SL text editing functionality. In my own teaching I have used embedding many times, for example in producing 2d versions of some of my PAVed games, whereby the sounds would be entered into a notecard itself, rather than into a 3d object lying on the SL ground.

Once the new resident feels reasonably conversant with the GUI of SL, i.e. with the basic menu options, avatar appearance tweaking and inventory, it is time to start exploring the environment. The skill of fundamental importance for all residents at this point, but for educators especially, is camera control. By default, the 'point of view' of the person manipulating the avatar is a few meters behind and above the avatar head. This camera position can be adjusted with almost no limits, meaning it is possible to position one's point of view anywhere in the concentric spheres whose centre is the viewer's avatar. This freedom tends to be quite overwhelming and somewhat confusing to newbies, as this is one of the features of SL so different from what humans are used to in FL. While most SL guides for newbies show the blue on-screen camera controls as the default method to control one's point of view in-world, I believe the best, fastest, and by far most convenient method is really using the Alt key in combination with the mouse left key and wheel. Fast and unobtrusive adjustment of view distance and angle is of crucial importance for teachers, of course, who must interact in various ways with a number of students at the same time. Immediate zoom, for example, can help decide which of the present avatars is currently speaking (there will be green waves around the white dot above its head). On a less technical level, most residents like to face the interlocutor, exactly like in FL, so immediate switch of camera focus may be extremely useful for the teacher who wishes to address a number of individual students in turn. If voice is switched to be heard 'from camera position', rather than 'from avatar position', skillful manipulation of the camera is also fundamental for proper hearing in-world<sup>16</sup>.

Sound and voice issues in SL remain one of the most serious problems which educators, and especially language teachers, must face. As mentioned above, voice communication was a relatively late addition to the functionalities of SL: it appeared in July 2007, i.e. when SL was four years of age. Some residents, including some learners, refuse to use voice even nowadays for a variety of reasons (see Wadley, Gibbs and Ducheneaut 2009 for an excellent treatment). These will be detailed below, when I discuss aspects of teaching pronunciation in-world.

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<sup>15</sup> As long as they are made to have so-called 'full perms', which is easy to do.

<sup>16</sup> I am deliberately avoiding more advanced viewing/camera issues here, for example mouselook, machinima or avatar gaze control. These would require a separate lengthy treatment.

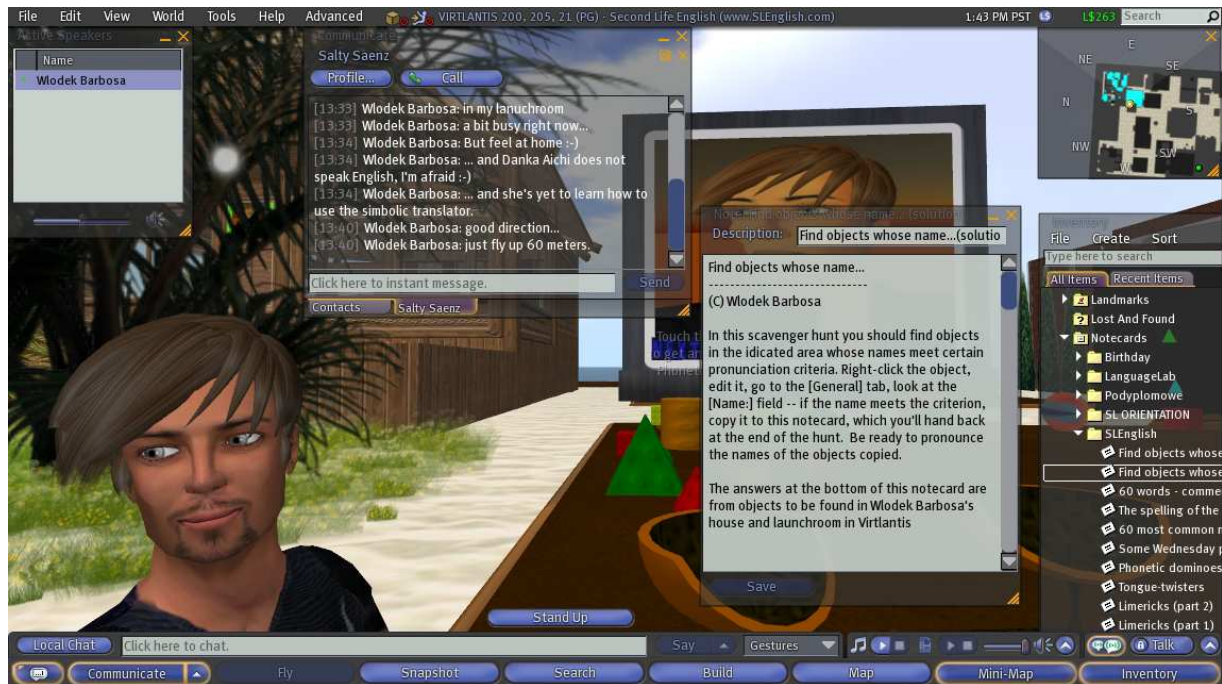
Those who do use voice are likely to experience a variety of problems, from breaking (usually due to slow internet connection or poor mike quality), through overdrive (when the mike is too close to the mouth, or when the input sound level in SL or in the PC is too high), interference and echo (when many residents have their microphones open at the same time), to complete silence (when the SL voice server has a temporary failure, and needs to be restarted). Quite independently, many newbies cannot adjust the voice controls properly in their SL clients, and some do not even know where the button is which must be depressed to start speaking (and clicked again to stop!). Even very experienced residents tend to forget to push the speak button, only to discover that what they had just said was not heard by anybody, or to keep the mike open, with all the extraneous (and sometimes embarrassing) FL noises transmitted into SL. With all these effects it is not uncommon to observe lessons in-world where most of the time is taken up by solving issues in one way or another connected with voice, with the teacher instructing newbies in proper voice control, at the same time struggling with his/her own controls (for example muting participants who fail to heed repeated appeals to close their mikes). In this situation there is little universal advice one can offer beginning teachers, except: have lots of patience and adjust the planned timing of your lesson to allow for such problems. Also, like in many other difficult situations: have a contingency plan ready not requiring voice (if possible).

Because text chat is such a sturdy technology it is commonly used on those occasions when voice fails, as well as by those residents who would rather not speak in voice. As a method of communication in-world local/public text chat is also the easiest to learn: chatting proceeds in much the same way as it does on dedicated servers on 'flat' internet, be it on Skype or Facebook, for example (which means that touch-typing skills are at a premium here too). There are certain features of SL chat which are slightly different, of course, for example the fact that it is public and spacial, which means that every passing avatar in the radius of twenty meters from the speaker (including in the sky, under the ground, and behind a wall by the way!) will be able to read it. 'Whispering' reduces the distance to 10 meters, while 'shouting' extends it to 100 meters. This means that in some public gatherings, including lectures and workshops, the 'speaker' will not be heard beyond a certain range if she/he uses the ordinary chat level. Should a teacher choose to use public text chat for instruction s/he should be aware of this issue, of course. On the other hand, should s/he want to address one selected student only (for example to gently remind him/her to close the echoing mike), s/he will need to use the private one-on-one chat channel, i.e. the Instant Message (which can also be conveyed in voice, by the way). This channel has no spacial or temporal restrictions, and in this sense is more like the chat experience we all know from 'flat' internet. There are, of course, pros and cons of either type of text communication, and which method is selected will depend on the aims of the communicators and the context of use. It may be remembered, for example, that Daffodil Fargis chose to interview me in text chat rather than in voice, and this mainly because of the easier later processing of text, compared to a sound file.

There is one more feature of public text chat which is very pedagogically inspiring: it allows and invites multitasking and backchanneling. Experienced residents in social situations would normally multitask heavily, both in-world and out. For example, they would be talking in voice, while controlling their avatar body and gestures at the same time, concurrently answering an incoming IM call and monitoring for their friends' appearance in-world, all while adjusting the streaming music level and the voice level of their interlocutors, as well as experimenting with the best camera position for the ongoing conversation. As far as communication in-world concerned, quite apart from what they might be doing in FL at the given moment, some students would be likely to speak, public-chat and IM at the same time. This is, after all, not very different from they have got used to doing in their FL class. Some of



the public chat remarks could be directed to their classmates, but they might also relate to the process and conduct of the lesson or activity in progress. Experienced SL teachers can monitor the public text chat channel and draw useful reflections from there, for example directly answering some of the issues raised by the students or modifying the flow of the activity to better suit the expectations and preferences of the participants expressed in text chat (either directly or not). This skill, i.e. being able to multitask and backchannel fluently all while conducting a coherent and well-paced lesson, workshop or presentation is, I believe, the sign of a true master-teacher<sup>17</sup>. The following is an example of what the SL GUI might look like during such a session.



**Snapshot 18. Multitasking with the SL GUI: inventory, chat, notecard and more**

There are five windows opened directly on the main screen of the SL GUI, from left to right: (a) local voice chat 'active speakers' window (here showing only one speaker, Wlodek Barbosa), (b) IM window with a text chat going on between Barbosa and Salty Saenz, (c) a notecard window showing the beginning of the text of one of my pronunciation activities: "Find objects whose names..." (activity in Appendix 6.), (d) a fragment of the main inventory window, with the SLEnglish folder open, and (e) above it, the local map window, here showing most of the island, with avatars marked as yellow dots (me at the vertex of the view cline towards NE, and another avatar in the SW area). At the bottom of the screen the local chat window is open, and some other standard elements of the GUI are visible, such as the top menus and the bottom buttons. Regardless of which specific viewer the SL teacher might be using (here the oldest viewer is shown), the screen clutter would probably be similar, and is

<sup>17</sup> "Text chat is very useful in that it can be saved and sent to the students at the end of the lesson. This is comparable to a handout in real life, and the teacher needs to make sure that all the important language and key terms discussed in the lesson appear in text chat as well. Of course as a teacher this means that one needs to be able to speak and use text chat at the same time" (Hundsberger 2009:12).



the feature of SL which newbies must quickly get used to if they are to enjoy their SL (and teaching there, if any).

Multitasking is not limited to the screen, of course! Chances are the teacher would have other resources ready at hand electronically, and FL has its demands, too. Here is a description of my multitasking during one of my own lessons in-world, taken from the write up of my experience of SL teaching with LanguageLab:

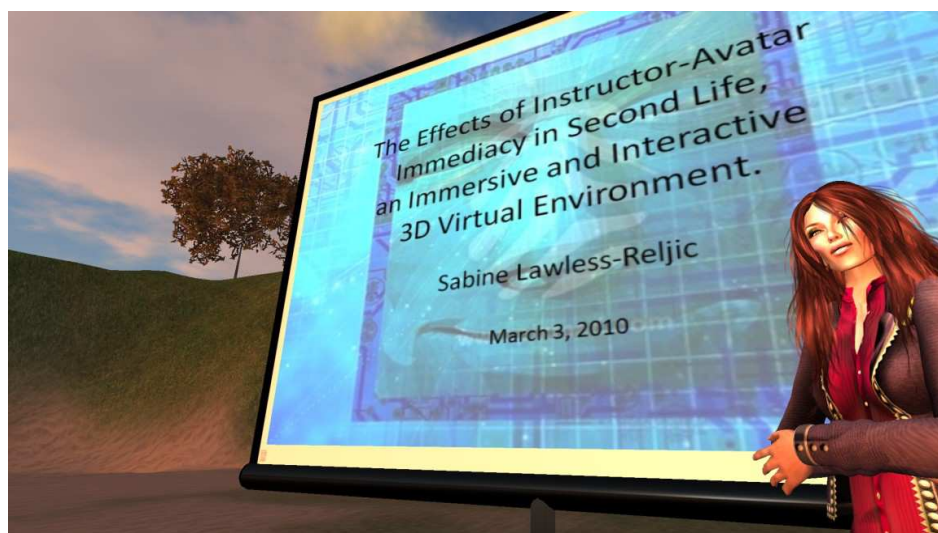
“One window for IM, with tabs for the Mentor, fellow team teachers, and whoever of the online friends wanted to drop a line at this very inopportune moment. Another window with the notecard holding the vocabulary items in use. One window with the lesson plan – to know what to do next, just in case. The near-speakers window to turn loud ones down and soft ones up. The chat line was also open to drop text there if somebody had audio problems, or simply to reinforce the message (also good for archiving). A low tech piece of paper on the desk by the mouse – to jot down quick notes. A few MSWord documents open concurrently in good old Windows. The muting button on my headset cable to press when my grandpa clock strikes – to avoid confusingly streaming the sound into the world (there’s some charm in the out-of-world sounds in SL, however :-). The feats of multitasking!” ([http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/First lesson in SL.pdf](http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/First_lesson_in_SL.pdf)).

Body language, especially gestures and animations, is seldom used in SL to the extent made possible by the system. This is mainly because, unlike voice and text chat, it does not come instinctively as a method of communication, but rather has to be deliberately switched on and manipulated. Additionally, the default avatar body posture animation in SL is hardly more than a subtle swaying movement signalling life. Eye blinking and lip movement while speaking are built-in, too, but hardly visible from a distance, so that appreciation of this aspect of avatar animation requires zooming one’s camera rather close to the speaker. One more animation present by default and triggered automatically is the typing gesture when the user is communicating in public text chat. What newbies typically find painfully missing after a few hours in world is a system of gestures coordinated with speech; it is hard, after all, to find speakers in FL who would let their hands hang motionless while speaking. Such speech gestures, which are triggered by the microphone signal and do not need to be controlled deliberately, reside in the avatar inventory, but must be activated, and newbies may not know how to do that. The gestures are not, however, in any sense coordinated with the content of speech, so – even though they do give avatars some natural body movement when communicating – after a while they, too, can make an impression of artifice.

All other gestures and animations useful in classroom communication (with the exception of half a dozen items available from the inventory ‘library’ by default) must be either bought or created from scratch. The student’s hand-up gesture, for example, which was mentioned above, is not provided by the SL simulator. The direction of the avatar gaze can be controlled with some experience, but – like other such movements – requires a deliberate decision and mouse manipulation every time it is changed. A pointing gesture (other than point-at-you, which is built in) is hard to effect, so that the only substitute to pointing at an object – an extremely useful and common educational gesture in FL – remains an attempt to edit the object. There is then a visible stream of particles between the avatar hand and the object. This is not always a viable option, however, because permissions to edit objects in-world vary widely, so that avatars would normally be able to do this with a tiny minority of items only. Alrayes and Sutcliffe report that all their 38 students “suggested having the ability to point to enhance the interaction with the objects in SecondLife (sic – WS/B), especially for presentation purposes” (Alrayes and Sutcliffe 2011:14). To get around this problem I have usually nominated the desired object for students by simply walking up to it and saying: “I

mean the object lying at my feet”; certainly not the most natural method to refer to the ‘physical’ environment!

On top of the inherent weakness of gesture simulation, which is due to the SL system itself, there is generally little awareness of the importance of body language for communication even in FL, mostly because it is heavily automatized and reflexive. And yet, in SL all those subtle handwaves, head tilts and body sways, which we would perform in FL without even knowing we are doing it, must be consciously and deliberately triggered, either by clicking on the dedicated menu and scrolling to the one required (see the bottom menu ‘gestures’ in Snapshot 18 above), or by a text chat shortcut (usually typing the right slash followed by a mnemonic, e.g. /wave). Thus, with such psychological and technological hurdles, it is not surprising that gestures are pedagogically underused in-world. This is deplorable because, as shown by Sabine Lawless-Reljic (SL=Willow Shenlin) in her doctoral dissertation *The effects of instructor immediacy in Second Life* (defended in-world on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010), the perceived teacher immediacy, clearly partly dependent on body language, is a factor contributing to student achievement in-world.



Snapshot 19. Willow Shenlin (FL=Sabine Lawless-Reljic) at her PhD defence in SL

It remains to advise both beginning and experienced teachers that they recognize the importance of body language for teaching and acquire the necessary skills to put this realization into practice. “For instructors wishing to bolster their own nonverbal immediate behaviors while teaching in Second Life, the recommendations (...) are: (...) (b) using one’s avatar to gesture and smile (...), (c) moving the avatar around them (virtual) location where the class is taking place (...) (d) and positioning the avatar so that it is facing the students” (Anderson 2009:110).

There are many other properties and functionalities of the SL environment and GUI which are potentially of some relevance to educators, including language teachers, and which should be discussed at length, were this book a general introduction to SL for FL teachers. The selection above was dictated in part by its elementary character, and partly by its pertinence to the debate on the added value of SL in language teaching, as well as to the idea of reification and augmentation. For example, to conduct an activity with PAVed objects the teacher and the participants must be able to: (a) see them well and at close range (if only to be able to read the hovertext above them), which requires good camera skills, (b) to manipulate them by moving

around, which calls for a number of skills, but mostly those connected with handling objects in-world<sup>18</sup>, (c) to listen to the embedded sounds, which needs skillful control of the audio sliders and some other arcane knowledge (listening to sound files playing in-world or 'locally', i.e. on one's PC only, inaudible in-world), not to mention the very obvious need (d) to communicate with one another, both by voice and text chat.

Among the affordances of SL which I have not described and analyzed are those which will be treated in some more detail later, such as holodecks (see Chapter 2.2.), and those which I will, by and large, ignore, such as MoaP, or Media on a Prim technology, which makes it easy to view all web content in-world, including for example YouTube video, a feature of obvious importance in education, and language teaching in particular. Communal videoclip and movie watching by a congregation of avatars on a big screen in-world brings undeniable pedagogical advantages, of course, compared to the situation when all participating residents watch the material individually and without synch out-of-world. This option, however, does not by itself bring much added didactic value compared to a similar setup in a FL f2f classroom, where multimedia are nowadays a matter of course. This is why it will not be discussed further here, beyond pasting the following snapshot taken in my launchroom on March 14<sup>th</sup> 2012 during a listening comprehension activity, with Katie Melua's *Secret Symphony* trailer on screen.



**Snapshot 20. Katie Melua's *Secret Symphony* trailer on the screen in-world**

There is one more key educator skill, however, which I believe should be mentioned in this section before I pass on to talk about specific SL affordances for teaching: how to handle grieving. Griefing is defined as “activities designed to make another player’s life or experience in Second Life unpleasant”, or like this: “A griefer is a player in a multiplayer video game who deliberately irritates and harasses other players within the game, using aspects of the game in unintended ways. A griefer derives pleasure primarily or exclusively from the act of annoying other users” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Griefing>), and is certainly not unique to

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Handling’ is defined here with respect to the GUI and physics of Second Life, not the cyberglove-enabled handling of objects in true 3d environments. “The lack of haptic and sensory domains serves to partially demonstrate the divergence of 3D virtual worlds from virtual reality” (Scopes 2011:8).

SL/VWs. Unruly and spiteful behaviour is known from social networking places as well, although it may be called other names, such as ‘trolling’, for example. So what can a teacher do when an avatar engages in some seriously disruptive behaviour which could jeopardize the flow of the activity? There are of course many potential remedies, just like there are many types of grieving: dropping foul language in text chat, pushing other avatars, playing loud sounds which can completely obliterate voice communication, meddling with the whiteboard and other aids and resources, rezzing hundreds of objects, which can finally crash the simulator, are just some examples.

Some griefers would be satisfied with the shocking value of some taboo words, and simply pass on after a while. Some others would not stop before the entire SL island comes to a standstill and no further activity is possible. The most serious offences can best be dealt with by the owner of the island only, because it is in his/her power to eject the offender and get rid of whatever objects were rezzed or scripts started. I believe the best a teacher can do, when grieving starts in the middle of an activity, is first to try to talk some sense into the griever (in case s/he doing this out of ignorance rather than spite), and if this does not help... ignore him/her. Ignoring the offender is probably the best option in all grieving save the most seriously disruptive ones, because (like with trolling on Facebook, for example), it removes the primary motivation behind the griever’s action: the obsessive egotistic need to be noticed. One example: In a grieving event which occurred during my pronunciation activity in Virtlantis on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2012 somebody rezzed a rain of excrement falling on the island. While certainly unpleasant (especially to the immersive residents), it did not disrupt our activity seriously because we could still communicate easily. I used this occasion to teach my students’ the pronunciation and pragmatics of the phrase *Who threw poo*, providing an excellent opportunity to practice the long tense high-front vowel in English.

## 2.2. Educational affordances of SL

After this overview of the basic SL functionalities and educator skills let me now pass on (moving a bit deeper in the metaphorical logistic funnel mentioned in the Preface) to discussing selected educational affordances of SL as a MUVLE. Some of these affordances have been proposed as good candidates for the added value which SL might offer educators, although, as I will try to demonstrate below, most of them fail as such for a variety of reasons. Educational affordances of SL are among the most commonly treated topics by interested researchers, so it is not surprising that there is no shortage of pertinent literature. Relevant quotes will be adduced as we go along. In the following I will try to extract and condense the many threads present in the bibliography of the subject, often using quite varied terminology to refer to what is fundamentally the same. There will be unavoidable simplifications in my treatment, I am afraid, if only because the sheer number of sources has now grown exponentially, especially in the last four years or so. This probably means that a number of SL-related research projects started at the time of SL hype in 2007-2008 have now come to their fruition (read – publication). Many of them, by the way, show age in the rather programmatic/qualitative treatment of SL educational issues, often without any pretense to applying empirical methodology to test specific hypotheses and claims. According to Kim, Lee and Thomas, however, a “trend toward experimental rather than descriptive research on virtual worlds could be identified when research methods were analyzed by year (...). Experimental research had not been conducted until 2005; it was started in 2006 and is still growing” (42% out of the reviewed 65 studies; Kim, Lee and Thomas 2012:10).



Let me now introduce the term affordance itself, which has so far been used without explicit definition, and which is a fundamental one in talking about the potential added value of SL for teaching. Wikipedia defines the term rather briefly: “An affordance is a quality of an object, or an environment, that allows an individual to perform an action”

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affordance>). This definition is based on the original one provided by the ecological psychologist J.J.Gibson in his 1977 article *The theory of affordances*. Another, later, and slightly more elaborate, definition of affordance says that: “an affordance refers to the fact that the physical properties of an object make possible different functions for the person perceiving or using that object. In other words, the properties of objects determine the possibilities for action” (Sellen and Harper 2003:17). By limiting the definition to only “the physical properties of an object” Sellen and Harper make it difficult to sensibly talk about educational affordances of the whole MUVLE, such as SL, with a number of commonly named affordances having little to do with the physicality of specific objects, for example the three-dimensionality of the virtual world. Not to mention the rather unfortunate and confusing appearance of the term ‘physical’, of course, as applied to a virtual environment. While objects and people in SL may well look and feel very physical to the immersive types of residents, such as myself, this is, after all, only physicality by extension, so to say. Wlodek Barbosa might not agree, but Włodzimierz Sobkowiak must.

On the other hand, it seems perfectly all right to talk about the affordances of my PAVed objects in-world, for example, which would afford touching, moving, magnetizing, reading, and even listening to! Thus, “a phonetic affordance is a quality of an object, or an environment, that allows a learner to perform a pronunciation-oriented activity” (based on the Wikipedia definition above). The very essence of PAVing is that phonetic affordances are added to the otherwise ‘ordinary’ in-world objects, on top of whatever educationally exploitable affordances the objects have already had. I will go in-depth into this subject later on in Chapters 4.4. and 4.5.

One more definition of affordance comes from a Polish source (original version in the footnote), and contains two interesting examples:

“Affordances are those properties of the environment which allow for something. In order to function efficiently one must behave in accordance with them. One example could be a piece of string holding together two parts of a foldable chair – untying it allows one to unfold the chair (...) A tired person is looking for some flat surface in the environment so that s/he could sit or lie down (...) In other words, affordances are such features of the environment which are relevant to cognition and behaviour”.<sup>19</sup>

Notice the extension of the scope of this definition of affordance to include cognitive aspects. This, I believe, is extremely important for the discussion of specifically educational affordances in SL. They are not just some characteristics of the environment allowing avatar action; they are only interesting pedagogically if they allow action with cognitive, and specifically – educational, effects. Unfolding a chair or lying down in a clearing of the woods may well be good examples of the environment’s affordances, but they are not educational affordances as long as they do not allow the person to learn something. Somewhat simple-

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<sup>19</sup> “Affordances to właściwości środowiska, które na coś pozwalają. Aby móc sprawnie funkcjonować, trzeba zachowywać się w zgodności z nimi. Przykładem może być sznurek wiążący dwie części rozkładanego krzesła, - po rozwiązaniu pozwala on na jego rozłożenie. [...] Zmęczony człowiek szuka w otoczeniu płaskiej powierzchni, aby usiąść lub się położyć. [...] Inaczej mówiąc affordances są to takie cechy otoczenia, które mają znaczenie dla poznania i zachowania” ([http://akaszik.w.interia.pl/procesy\\_poznawcze\\_wyklad\\_3.pdf](http://akaszik.w.interia.pl/procesy_poznawcze_wyklad_3.pdf)). Notice that no attempt is made to translate the very term *affordance* into Polish, not even as a calque equivalent *afordancje*. This shows that the concept has hardly at all been integrated in Polish scholarship of the subject.

mindedly, then, and precariously balancing on the edge of a vicious circle, let me offer the following definition: “an educational affordance is a quality of an object, or an environment, that allows an individual to perform an educationally relevant action” (see Rambusch and Susi 2008 for an in-depth analysis of the concept of affordance in the related context of computer gaming).

Now, what affordances, and what educational affordances, does Second Life offer? What are its qualities as a (MU)VLE that allow individuals (avatars in-world and/or their ‘drivers’ in FL) to perform some educationally relevant action? As I mentioned above, there are many answers to this question in the available literature of the subject. I will aggregate and discuss them below. Notice first that all of them are positively marked on the axiological dimension. In other words, all of the authors dealing with the issue of educational affordances of SL only point out the positive or advantageous ones, even though standard definitions of *affordance* do not stipulate this, staunchly remaining axiologically neutral. “Perform an educationally relevant action” could include grieving as well, to take an arguably far-fetched example. Yet, none of the authors referred to below would ever admit such examples and classifications. This may be a minor point to start a discussion of a grand topic, but then maybe it is reasonable to dispose of this issue right away.

What do the makers of SL, Linden Lab, have to say about the (educational) affordances of their world? Even a casual look at their main website reveals some possible answers. Here is the list, taken from <http://secondlife.com/whatis/> on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012:

Second Life is a 3D world where everyone you see is a real person and every place you visit is built by people just like you. Enter a world with infinite possibilities and live a life without boundaries, guided only by your imagination.

- Exploring and Discovery. Travel with friends to thousands of beautiful and exciting places — all created by the Second Life community.
- Filled with Friends. Millions of people have already joined Second Life. Chat for free using voice or text with folks from around the world who share your passions and interests.
- Self-Expression. Dress up and design a new 3D you. There are thousands of designer items to explore in our Marketplace where the selection is as endless as your imagination.
- Endless Fun. Every day there are thousands of new experiences and events created by the Second Life community.
- Artistic Bliss. Discover your artistic talents and share them instantly with friends. Take beautiful snapshots, create machinima videos or build something from scratch inside Second Life.

Now, the above is not part of an academic treatise on the affordances of SL, of course, but a piece of PR pitch by the makers and sellers of the product. But some crucial affordances are indeed correctly identified: building, creating, exploring, chatting, sharing, self-expression, fun. Now, if we were to be satisfied with just this list, which of the affordances provided by LL would count as educationally promising? I dare say: building<sup>20</sup>, creating, exploring, chatting, sharing, self-expression, fun, i.e. all of them. This is because there are potentially “educationally relevant behaviours” inherent in all these activities. And which might count as affordances from the point of view of a foreign language teacher/learner, call them linguistic

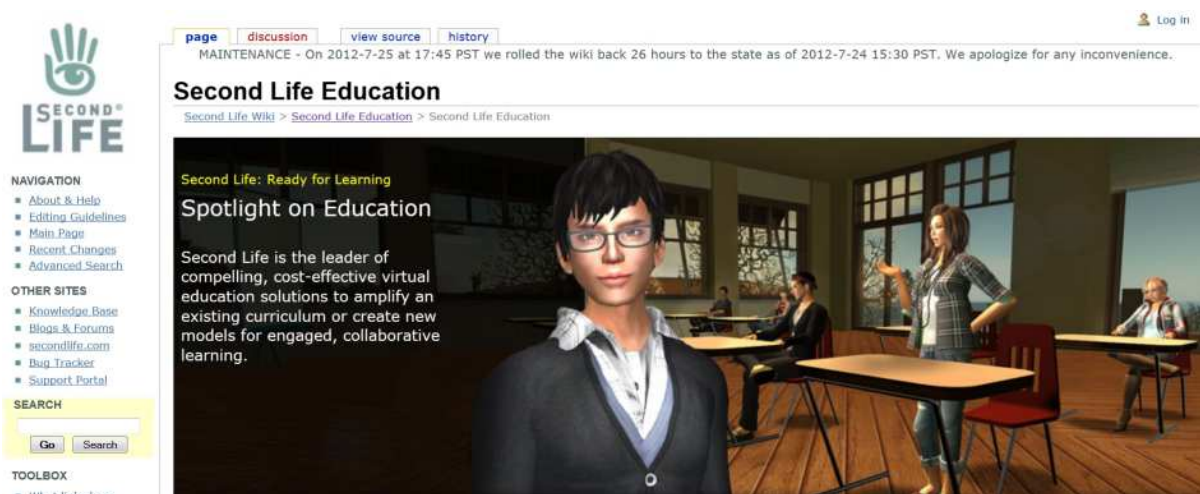
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<sup>20</sup> “The crux of Second Life® learning is world-building” (Aurilio 2010:10). “The primary distinguishing factor between virtual worlds and other Web 2.0 applications is their generative capabilities. Users can create three dimensional objects that can be seen and used by the person that created the object as well as other users in the virtual world” (Kluge & Riley 2008:129).



affordances? Again, potentially all of them, with some qualifications in the case of building/creating, which can be conducted singly, without much need for interpersonal communication. This across-the-board usefulness of SL affordances in education is not particularly surprising if we realize (and there is never enough reminding) that SL is a world, i.e. the type of environment richest in affordances from all those known to mankind. And practically each and every such affordance can be exploited educationally if need be and skills suffice. This is how all properties of the environment are used by infants in FL: for learning. No wonder they progress so quickly!

This is one crucial observation about their own creation which apparently escapes the CEOs from Linden Lab. Consequently, when we look at the educational pages of the SL wiki we see the following picture, a prototypical icon of a college classroom, with tables nicely arranged in rows, facing the whiteboard and the teacher, and students standing up when asked a question. How, then, is this “a new model for engaged, collaborative learning”?



Snapshot 21. SL wiki – Second Life education

I believe part of the confusion and misunderstanding here is due to the lack of clarity with respect to the term of comparison for SL education. To oversimplify, is it f2f classroom setting of FL or the distance e-learning model known from online LMSs? The above scene shows “a new model” only if compared against the latter educational setting, but not vis-à-vis the former. At least not without further provisions. This confusing issue in the added value debate will be discussed much more in the pages and sections to come.

So, what do academic researchers have to say about the specifically educational affordances of VWs in general and SL in particular? In the ESL-oriented review of SL of June 2008 Karina Silva had the following to offer, acknowledging other authors: “The sense of telepresence obtained by having an avatar is considered to be one of the benefits of SL for education”. Indeed, to many other researchers, “an early and central value of virtual worlds is that they provide a sense of presence” (Aldrich 2009:49). Other crucial points made by Silva in this connection, this time relating directly to what I called above ‘linguistic affordances’, are as follows:

“Among the advantages of SL for educational purposes, experiential learning, collaboration, social construction of knowledge, and role playing, have been highlighted (...). Learners can work together with other learners as well as with native speakers of the target language; they can collaborate to create objects; they can role play situations such

as ordering food at a restaurant; and they can also participate in scavenger hunts and guided tours”.

These are some of the canonical SL affordances discovered and discussed by most researchers: “experiential learning, collaboration, social construction of knowledge”, in particular, are among the all time favourites. Notice, however, that, just like before in the case of LL’s own self-description, there seems to be confusion here concerning which learning environment functions as point of reference for claims of superiority or advantageousness: f2f or e-learning? Clearly, “experiential learning, collaboration, social construction of knowledge” are advantages (=added value) only with respect to individualistic e-learning on the ‘flat’ internet of some LMS. There is certainly nothing to stop teachers and learners from engaging in this type of educational experience in the traditional f2f environment of the FL classroom. So these particular affordances are not unique to virtual worlds. In the following Linden Lab’s own short appraisal of the educational affordances of SL, appearing in the brochure on Second Life education, the confusion observed in previous LL’s and Silva’s texts does not occur. The author explicitly states the term of comparison in each case:

“Second Life amplifies learning beyond capabilities afforded by teleconference calls and web presentation tools--but it also creates opportunities for field trips inside virtual organs, machines and other environments that go far beyond the walls of traditional learning spaces. Training simulations are also incredibly powerful in Second Life because they simulate complex, processes in the physical world and avatars can take on different roles to enhance learning” (<http://lecs-static-secondlife-com.s3.amazonaws.com/work/SL-Edu-Brochure-010411.pdf>).

Thus, to quote Bell 2008 again: “One can’t say ‘My Facebook profile is emailing you’.” The owner of the profile is not present on Facebook (or Moodle) in the same way that the owner of the avatar is present in SL. Notice that the very term “owner of the avatar” (ditto “driver of the avatar”, which I used before) appears to be a kind of oxymoron, at least to the immersed types, i.e. those who do feel themselves to be (virtually) present in-world, rather than on this side of the screen in FL. The presence/immersion/embodiment in SL would thus be an important educational affordance of the environment, compared to traditional e-learning. Notice, however, that this is only potentially the case for those SL users who, in David White’s terms, are ‘residents’, rather than ‘visitors’. I have been using the term ‘resident’ before without any definition. Here is what White 2011 has to offer:

“The Resident is an individual who lives a percentage of their life online. The web supports the projection of their identity and facilitates relationships. (...) The Resident will (...) use the web to socialise and to express themselves (...) The Visitor is an individual who uses the web as a tool in an organised manner whenever the need arises. (...) They always have an appropriate and focused need to use the web but don’t ‘reside’ there. They (...) don’t feel the need to express themselves by participating in online culture in the same manner as a Resident. If your learners are mainly Visitors, (...) they are unlikely to blog or comment as part of a course. The Resident will expect to have the opportunity to offer opinions on topics and to socialise around a programme of study.

The reader may remember that in the review conducted by Daffodil Fargis I refused to accept SL as just a tool, one of many such tools in the educator’s toolbox. This was because I felt I was a resident, not a visitor (or ‘augmentationist’, to use another phrase current in many discussions of VWs<sup>21</sup>), who only “uses the web (SL in this case – WS/B) as a tool in an organised manner”. This crucial difference, and the fundamental importance of immersion in

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<sup>21</sup> See here, for example: <http://massively.joystiq.com/2008/05/15/augmentation-vs-immersion-the-debate-that-never-was/> or here: [http://www.rikomatic.com/blog/2006/10/immersion\\_versu.html](http://www.rikomatic.com/blog/2006/10/immersion_versu.html).

SL for its educational affordances and benefits, will be recurring themes in the added value debate of 2009 presented in abridgement below.

White points to the fundamental importance of immersion for learning in VWs: immersed learners (true ‘resident’ learners) learn better because they invest themselves in the virtual experience, rather than treat it as just another tool. They blog and comment, they offer opinions and “socialize around a programme of study”. Such willing bloggers can – with particular reference to foreign language learning and teaching – expect to develop language proficiency faster and less painfully than those who only ‘visit’, without feeling immersed. I have experienced exactly this effect in my pronunciation students in Virtlantis. The ones who seemed most immersed (judging by the time logged in-world, the intensity of in-world interaction, as well as by their own declarations) progressed the fastest: their fluency increased rapidly, their vocabulary repertoire grew amazingly, their self-confidence reached new levels.

Having had this experience, I tend to agree with voices vindicating the role of emotion as one exponent of immersion and a good predictor of learning efficiency. Here is one such voice from Rafał Moczadło, a Maria Curie-Skłodowska University specialist in distance education (my translation): “People talking about the didactic quality of SL underestimate immersion. The feeling of immersion in an environment is quite important because it generates emotions”<sup>22</sup> (<http://historiamedia.org/2010/06/22/kulturoznawstwo-2-0-czyli-projekt-jarocin-85-w-second-life>). A similar opinion is put forward by Woollard 2011: “When the learner reflects that the experience is strange, different, novel, new or even perverse or wrong, then they are engaging emotionally with the activity. It is that emotional engagement that can drive or diminish the cognitive engagement” (Woollard 2011:32; Riva et al. 2007 reach similar conclusions).

Apart from White above, there are some other findings in the pertinent literature strongly corroborating the hypothesis that educational (and linguistic) advantages accrue to those learners who are the immersed residents. For example, Annetta, Folta and Klesath quote a number of sources supporting the conclusion that “student self-identity and presence (...) are strongly correlated with student satisfaction and enhanced student engagement and performance within virtual learning environments” (Annetta, Folta and Klesath 2010:78). In his excellent PhD dissertation, Childs finds that “a learner that does not experience presence will almost certainly not be satisfied with the learning activity; a learner who does experience presence will almost certainly be satisfied” (Childs 2010:232). The author of the wikipedia article on VW language learning ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual\\_World\\_Language\\_Learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_World_Language_Learning)) considers immersion as one of the most vital learning experiences propitious to the process of acquiring a foreign language:

Virtual world language learning can be considered to offer distinct (although combinable) learning experiences.

- Immersive: Immersive experiences draw on the ability to be surrounded by a certain (real or fictitious) environment that can stimulate language learning.
- Social: Almost all 3D virtual spaces are inherently social environments where language learners can meet others, either to informally practice a language or to participate in more formal classes.
- Creative: A less-developed approach to language learning in virtual worlds is that of constructing objects as part of a language learning activity.

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<sup>22</sup> Original: „Bardzo często osoby wypowiadający się na temat jakości dydaktycznej SL nie doceniają immersyjności. Poczucie zanurzenia w jakimś środowisku jest dosyć istotne, bo wywołuje emocje”.

So, what exactly is immersion, this fundamental (educational) affordance of VWs/SL? To start off with wikipedia again:

“Immersion is the state of consciousness where an immersant’s awareness of physical self is diminished or lost by being surrounded in an engrossing total environment; often artificial. This state is frequently accompanied by spatial excess, intense focus, a distorted sense of time, and effortless action. The term is widely used to describe immersive virtual reality, installation art and video games, but it is not clear if people are using the same word consistently. (...) The sensation of total immersion in virtual reality (VR) can be so described: ‘You lose your critical distance to the experience and get emotionally involved. It could be not only a game you are a part of, but any kind of experience. ... You feel as if it is very real but know it is not’”  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immersive\\_digital\\_environment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immersive_digital_environment)).

As would be unavoidable in humanities, this definition, whereby “immersion is the state of consciousness”, could hardly go unchallenged. According to Dalgarno and Lee, this is the early (read: dated) definitional convention:

“In early writings about VEs, there was a tendency to use these terms interchangeably; subsequently, debates occurred in the literature about the definitions of these terms (see for example, Slater, 1999; Witmer & Singer, 1998). We concur with Slater (1999, 2003, 2004), who defines presence as the subjective sense of being in a place, and immersion as the objective and measurable properties of the system or environment that lead to a sense of presence. In other words, immersion relies on the technical capabilities of VR technology to render sensory stimuli, whereas presence is context-dependent and draws on the individual’s subjective psychological response to VR (Virtual Reality – WS/B)” (Dalgarno & Lee 2010:13).

Childs 2011, in turn, offers further detailed taxonomies and increasingly subtle distinctions of the concept of presence in VWs/VEs, such as: mediated presence, telepresence, virtual presence, copresence, social presence, self-presence or embodiment, i.e. “users’ mental model of themselves inside the virtual world (Biocca, 1997)”.

I see little practical benefit in going deeper into such definitional subtleties, at least not in this book, which is not focussed on the issue of immersion/presence as such, even if I freely admit its importance for EFL teaching/learning success in SL. However, considering that immersion remains only one of the specific (educational) affordances of SL, let me propose to close the terminological discussion here on a lighter note, with the very practical question of measurement. While any reliable measurement of SL immersion is tricky for a number of methodological reasons, here is a selection of some of the less subjective criteria of immersion from a list I first compiled in January 2009, while engaged in lively debates about SL as part of the TESOL EVO VWLL course. The full list, as well as a certain number of comments and reflections on immersion gleaned from a variety of blogs and discussion lists, is available at <http://grou.ps/zajek/blogs/item/immersion-in-sl>.

“You know you’re immersed in SL if: you don’t hear the RL phone ringing, you see nothing wrong in people getting married in-world<sup>23</sup>, you find nothing strange in the concept of in-world cemeteries, you feel you must face other avatars when you talk to them, you’d rather listen to the SL radio than your own CD-player, you’ve found yourself romantically attracted to an avatar, you love your SL house and like to lounge there, you

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<sup>23</sup> “When people become so immersed in a virtual environment, such as the virtual marriage in Second Life© between two people who never met in real life, it is high time to rethink how learning is transmitted” (Annetta, Folta & Klesath 2010:21).



tweak your av from time to time to look better<sup>24</sup>, you've got by far more clothes in-world than in RL, you've tried hang-gliding, scuba-diving, bungee, ballooning, and other extreme sports in-world, you regularly take your RL/SL partner to dance in-world, you've experimented with sexual pose-balls, you remember your partner's rezday”.

This list was offered partly tongue-in-cheek, but I am certain it corresponds well to the feelings and experiences of many SL residents. This conviction is partly built on the content of multiple messages on SLED, where long-time residents of VWs share their immersive reflections. One example, from November 1<sup>st</sup> 2009: “But in general, I think there's two types of people, the ones who don't care if their avatar is buck-naked, and the ones who react as they would if suddenly their RL clothes disappeared. It probably has to do with how much we identify with our avatars, as you said. But as to WHY some identify that much with their avatars, and others don't, I have no idea”. It is hardly at all apparent from the published SL literature either, incidentally. In his highly acclaimed essay *Zen and the art of avatar maintenance*, John Kirriemuir says: “Some people, when encountering a virtual world, want to ‘be’. Others just want to ‘do’. Others still don't even want to ‘do’ that. Why?” (Kirriemuir 2010:2) – and he finds no answer to this question.

So far I have reviewed some of the educational affordances of VWs/SL as discussed in the literature. The picture is not all rosy, however, so let me now briefly look at the disadvantages or counter-affordances of SL for education. There is no shortage of authors and sources rather severely critical of SL and other VWs, and that for a variety of reasons. Some of the criticism is arguably due to poor acquaintance with, and understanding of, the environment, as well as to preconceived and ideologically fossilized prejudices, often generated in reaction to the perceived SL's disruptive technology value<sup>25</sup>. For example, one of the most loudly voiced criticisms of SL as a MUVLE in the USA has been that it is not a student-safe environment, that it is one where the educators have little control on what can happen during the lesson, especially when it is planned to be of a more open kind, with tours or quests in not necessarily PG-rated regions of the world (incidentally – the SL affordance very highly valued by language teachers, as we will see later in Chapter 2.2.). Incidents of griefing, pornography, stalking and other types of similarly antisocial acts were mentioned in this connection. “Example keywords and phrases that emerged to reveal this context included, ‘playground for sexual experimentation,’ ‘legal liabilities,’ ‘sexual harassment,’ ‘accountability,’ ‘assault,’ ‘legal and ethical complaints,’ ‘institutional liability,’ and ‘murder’” (Westmoreland Bowers, Davis and Neely 2010:151). Only a few isolated voices have dared to point out that if there is a problem, it is not specifically with the ethics of SL as a VW (which is by and large like that of FL), but with the regulations and customs of the American educational establishment, which verge on the hysterical when it comes to shielding young people from the bare truth of real life (rather than discussing it).

Not all criticism has been ill-informed, however. Some real problems with SL have been raised which function as educational counter-affordances, i.e. such properties of the environment which make it positively hard to use for teaching and learning. Most typically, such issues have been mentioned as: (a) the steep learning curve on entry and poor newbie experience, (b) the glitches of the software on both sides: server and client, (c) the exorbitant

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<sup>24</sup> “Most respondents make body and facial features for their avatars similar to, but with some improvements on, their real appearance” (Messinger et al. 2008:8).

<sup>25</sup> “Disruptive technology is a term coined by Harvard Business School professor Clayton M. Christensen to describe a new technology that unexpectedly displaces an established technology. (...) Disruptive technology lacks refinement, often has performance problems because it is new, appeals to a limited audience, and may not yet have a proven practical application” (<http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/disruptive-technology>).

hardware requirements, (d) the complexity of the Linden Scripting Language used to animate everything in-world, (e) lack of dedicated mechanisms enhancing educational affordances, like those built into LMSs by default, (f) poor support for educational institutions and organizations on the side of Linden Lab (especially after 2009), and some others<sup>26</sup>.

In my October 18<sup>th</sup> 2008 interview with Kip Yellowjacket, which I conducted as part of an SL demo to some of my FL students, I asked him two questions about the relative pros and cons of SL as an educational platform. This is what he answered:

“2. How is SL as a VW better for EFL than dedicated distance e-learning systems?”

I don't think the question should be whether a virtual world such as Second Life is BETTER than other e-learning systems or platforms. Virtual worlds simply offer us an immersive 3D component which can be viewed as an add-on to any existing e-learning or distance learning system. Virtual worlds will need to be further developed before they can be seen as being stand-alone e-learning solutions.

3. What are, in your opinion, the main downsides of SL as an educational platform?”

I think SL is a perfect platform for a learner who already possesses a voracious appetite for learning. The initial learning curve which one confronts in SL can be a bit intimidating for those who quickly grow impatient during the learning process. Those who struggle with new internet technology, and are not especially tech savvy, will likely find a virtual world experience such as Second Life frustrating. User experience in SL also varies from user to user. Hardware insufficiencies, lack of technical troubleshooting skills, and overall platform unreliability can lead to a lot of variation in user experience. More development is needed to make virtual world platforms such as Second Life more stable. Stability and a predictable user experience are crucial elements in any e-learning strategy”.

Some elements of the first answer will be picked up again later in this book, when I discuss the added value of SL for language education. While I might take issue with Kip's dismissal of the 'better' question, I am fully in agreement with his second claim: VWs are no more “stand-alone e-learning solutions” nowadays than they were four years ago. The educational counter-affordances of SL/MUVLEs mentioned above are only partly to blame for this state of affairs, however. Some other global technological and economic developments have also been instrumental.

As far as the downsides of SL as an educational platform are concerned, I believe Kip provided a very succinct overview of the main points to be found in research. The first point in particular is one which sometimes escapes the more technologically minded analysts of SL education because it concerns human factors. The 'nothing to do in SL' is a notorious slogan exploited by some critics, and apparently reflecting the sentiments of newbies, especially newbie teenagers, who are used to be guided in VWs, just like they are in FL by the family, the school and the mores of society. This is why they find MMORPGs an environment with which they identify much more easily: the rules, goals and incentives are clearly formulated and guarantee success if obeyed closely. Not so in non-gaming SL/VW/VE.

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<sup>26</sup> “There are many objects in SL that could interfere and disrupt students when attempting to complete given tasks. For example, it may not be appropriate to select a seashore site in SL where, among other things, several dolphins regularly jump out of the sea when the students need to concentrate on a discussion that is not related to dolphins” (Wang et al. 2009:18).



There is relatively little empirical research on the exploitation of educational affordances of SL/VWs. ‘Significant difference’ queries (see Oblinger and Hawkins 2006 and <http://www.nosignificantdifference.org>) are notoriously difficult to study empirically. It is even hard to imagine a controlled experiment where, say, two groups of students would have a differential treatment: one performing the same task in FL or on web2, the other in-world. To properly test a hypothesis of a significant pedagogical difference the experimenter would need to keep incredibly many variables under strict control, so that the putative differential effect were not due to an extraneous variable of some sort, rather than the effect of SL immersion, reification, simulation or any other of the many potential affordances. There are very few studies which even attempt to apply such controls. Here are some of them. Jones and Bronack report that UNT students

“felt that the 3D online learning environment provided the same level of satisfaction and interaction as the face-to-face course (...) When the 3D online learning environment was compared to the Web-based course delivery, students felt that the 3D online learning environment provided a much richer and satisfying learning experience” (Jones and Bronack 2006:108).

The students using the 3D online learning environment showed accelerated discourse, a greater number of exchanges on average by week, and prolonged interaction via e-mail over the semester” (ibidem, page 110).

On the other hand, Cliburn and Gross 2009 found that “those who attended the real world lecture performed significantly better on a posttest quiz than those who attended the same lecture in Second Life”. However, this study was conducted on a much smaller scale (28 students), and only compared lecturing in the two environments. Some of Cliburn and Gross’s effects seem to have been caused by idiosyncratic behaviours of their subjects, such as grieving in SL. This is just a glimpse of the methodological problems encountered in testing SL educational effectiveness empirically. As they themselves admit,

“it should also be noted that the participants in the study consisted predominantly of those who were novices to Second Life; it was the instructor’s first lecture in Second Life, and two-thirds of the students did not regularly use a visual program like Second Life to communicate with others”.

The NIFLAR project team has researched a large group of Dutch secondary and tertiary level learners of Spanish, and has confirmed, with a very well designed methodology, that video-conference and VW-based communication with native speakers of the target language significantly improved both linguistic/cultural competence and attitude: “The learning effects varied between talking more accurately, learning new words and expressions, to very particularly being more confident and motivated to talk and being aware of cultural similarities and contrasts” (Jauregi et al. 2011:16). The effect was somewhat stronger with groups doing tasks in SL than with those using video-conferencing.

Paweł Topol’s Habilitationsschrift is one of the most methodologically robust comparative studies I know. One of the threads in his rather elaborate research design is the comparison of learning effectiveness in about seventy Polish university students instructed to: (a) visit the Canaletto exhibit at the Dresden Gallery and (b) shop for indicated household appliances in SL and on 2d web. His results show that, both culturally and linguistically (EFL), the experimental SL group did better on post-tests than the control web2 group (see Topol, in preparation).

Thus, considering the relative paucity and equivocality of comparative effectiveness research so far, I tend to agree with Westmoreland Bowers, Ragas and Neely that “future research should explore how instructors are specifically implementing Second Life into their curricula.

Important questions include what features instructors are currently using in Second Life, what kind of activities work best in Second Life, and what features need to be improved or are yet to be designed” (Westmoreland Bowers, Ragas and Neely 2009:50, my emphasis – WS/B). Three years later this appeal was repeated by Herold; apparently there is still a great need for solid empirical research in this area:

“there is a dearth of studies that look at the embedding of virtual world use in actual Higher Education practice. In order to frame research based on actual practices in higher education, different questions should be addressed: How do lecturers use and feel about using Second Life to teach their courses? How quantifiable are the Second Life parts of their courses, that is, do they provide measurable benefits?” (Herold 2012:13).

Let me now summarize the educational affordances of Second Life so far identified by simply itemizing them. The ordering of the list below should not be taken as significant. Second Life affords:

- distance, flexible, anytime/anyplace learning
- situated/collaborative/constructivist/dialogic/democratic learning
- project/discovery/exploratory/data-driven/inquiry-based learning
- treasure/scavenger hunts, quests, edutainment
- replicas of FL objects/places, simulations, holodecks
- 3-dimensionality, immersion/presence/embodiment/engagement, ‘flow’ (see Csíkszentmihályi 1990 for the last concept)
- virtual identity creation, educational role-playing
- authentic and spontaneous communication
- social networking/bonding, community spirit<sup>27</sup>
- visualization/reification of FL concepts/symbols
- augmentation of objects/places with additional information

I will have much more to say about the last two affordances in the list later, in Chapters 4.4. and 4.5. Before we go into the discussion of reification and PAVing, however, let us have a look at some of the most brilliant attempts at exploiting the educational affordances of SL. In the next section I will briefly review the educational showcases in SL. The list will only include those which gathered most notoriety, but are not specifically related to EFL as such. An overview of EFL schools and communities in SL will come a bit later.

### **2.3. Educational showcases in SL**

Of the many potential educational affordances of SL listed and partly discussed in the previous section some have been more readily actualized than others. The two types which appear to be particularly salient are replicating and simulating FL places, processes, objects and events. On the one hand, then, there are replicas of FL and ‘real/actual’ world, with the affordance of visiting and engaging with the environment in ways similar to what could be possible ‘in real’. On the other hand, simulations are built which offer students experiences downright impossible, or only hardly so, in FL. Downtown Bloch (FL=Paula Christopher of Georgia

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<sup>27</sup> “SL as an environment has many features which make socialization easy. For example, when first meeting, the course participants are often quick to comment on each others’ appearances, and initial inexperience in how to move the avatars often leads to laughter as participants bump into each other. All this helps to break the ice and creates a friendly atmosphere and a sense of group belonging” (Deutschmann and Panichi 2009:33).

State University), in an SL-distributed notecard (January 28<sup>th</sup> 2009) gives two examples of the latter category, both of them among the most notorious educational showcases in SL:

“Students may read about hurricanes and know there are five progressive categories of strength. In Second Life, a student may actually watch a hurricane develop and observe damage as it occurs at each level. The simulation may be replayed as many times as the learner wants. Another example is a medical or psychology major studying schizophrenia. A book will only list symptoms. Second Life can allow the student to actually experience those symptoms to give a richer understanding of the condition”.

Kapp and O’Driscoll provide another, somewhat more extreme example of an educational affordance of SL which is practically impossible to replicate in FL, so called ‘identity tourism’: “students could read articles about gender and identify (sic – WS/B), but didn’t really grasp the concepts at a deep level until they switched genders. When they switched genders for an evening, it gave them a new understanding of the feelings and issues involved with gender roles and expectations” (Kapp and O’Driscoll 2010:171). This is the kind of experience which I can relate to personally, as shown in slide 7 of my *Teaching EFL in SL* presentation at the Warsaw *V-lang* Conference of November 17<sup>th</sup> 2011 ([http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/Teaching EFL in SL.pps](http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/Teaching_EFL_in_SL.pps)), reproduced for convenience below. The person in the snapshot is Wlodek Barbosa exploring the cultural concept of gender as his (her?) alternative avatar (i.e. incognito) in a popular dancing parlour in SL. The dialogue is authentic, and illustrates both: (a) gender stereotyping, and (b) communicative foreign language use in a fully immersive situation.



Snapshot 22. Barbosa transgendering as his (her?) alt avatar

For many years of SL existence, until early spring 2010, one of the LL staff, Pathfinder Linden (FL=John Lester) was in charge of the LL service aimed at educators. He coordinated LL policies aimed at supporting and stimulating educational activities in-world, such as the setup of virtual university campuses, organization of conferences and workshops, raising public awareness of SL education on the ‘flat’ web, brainstorming the educational present and future of SL, etc. Among other duties he performed as the LL educational officer was cataloguing initiatives, organizations and places in SL devoted to educational pursuits of various kinds. In a notecard distributed in-world on April 4<sup>th</sup> 2009, he listed a number of the best known ventures of this type. Below is an extract from this notecard. While, after three years, some of Pathfinder’s data is no longer up-to-date, of course, I decided to paste this snapshot of

educational activity in SL here, not so much for its topicality, but rather its coverage and representativeness. What I want to do is not, after all, to capture the current status quo in SL with respect to educational islands and institutions, but to paint a more general picture of how some MUVLE affordances can be actualized in SL. Pathfinders notecard has been heavily abridged, and rotten url links have been deleted (or updated where possible).

“At the Second Life Science Center you’ll find a 3D visualization of live national weather, an exhibit on 3D carbon nanotubes (<http://knowledgecast.wordpress.com/2006/10/14/nanoscale>), and more!

The US government’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Earth System Research Laboratory has set up a simulation space in Second Life to teach folks about the earth’s weather and oceans. Ride a plane inside a hurricane, experience a tsunami, take a trip in a submarine and more.

Interested in artificial life? Check out the Second Life Ecosystem on Terminus, which features a working ecosystem with different species created by various Resident developers. You’ll see many natural wonders, elusive “gridlouse” scurrying about, and beautiful swimming jellypods in the ocean.

Svarga. Nearly all of the plant-life in this area of the sim is part of a beta test for a fully functional artificial ecology system for Second Life. Everything is actually growing and replicating by itself, complete with a simulated weather system. See [http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2006/05/god\\_game.html](http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2006/05/god_game.html).

Glidden Campus is a replica of a real life campus in midwest USA. Altgeld Hall is the main structure on the Glidden Campus and was originally built in 1895 by the Architect Charles Eliphalet Brush of Chicago. This 130,000 square foot building was then renovated in 2004 and built in the virtual world in 2006. In order to preserve the immersive quality of the Glidden Campus landscape our virtual classrooms are 600m in the sky. To access them use the bus stop/teleport.”

Among other educationally relevant SL islands, sims and builds most often mentioned as successful projects are (see Mon 2010 for more):

- Eduserv Island: <http://secondlife.com/destination/eduserv-island>
- Etopia Eco Village: <http://secondlife.com/destination/etopia-island>
- Paris 1900: <http://secondlife.com/destination/paris-1900>
- Sistine Chapel: <http://secondlife.com/destination/sistine-chapel>
- Terracotta Warrior Army: <http://secondlife.com/destination/terracotta-warrior-army>
- Testis Tour: <http://secondlife.com/destination/testis-tour>
- University of Texas: <http://secondlife.com/destination/university-of-texas>

These are just some destinations in the LL’s directories of *Education & Nonprofits* (72 items; <http://secondlife.com/destinations/learning>) and *Real Life* (64 items; <http://secondlife.com/destinations/real>). According to Wikipedia, there are now, even after the downslide of SL on the Gartner’s hype curve, and withdrawal of some educational institution privileges by LL in 2010, “over one hundred regions used for educational purposes (...) Research has uncovered development, teaching and/or learning activities which use Second Life in over 80 percent of UK universities. At least 300 universities around the world teach courses or conduct research in SL” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_Second\\_Life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Second_Life)). Such statistics should be taken with a grain of salt, however, because: (a) there is a lot of fluidity on the educational SL arena, (b) some institutions formally present in-world offer little more than a few empty place-holder builds, (c) it is notoriously difficult to classify destinations as inherently educational in nature.

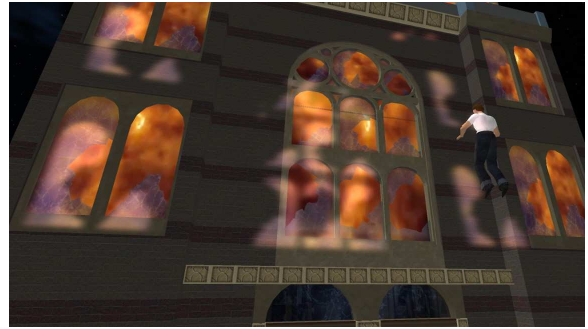
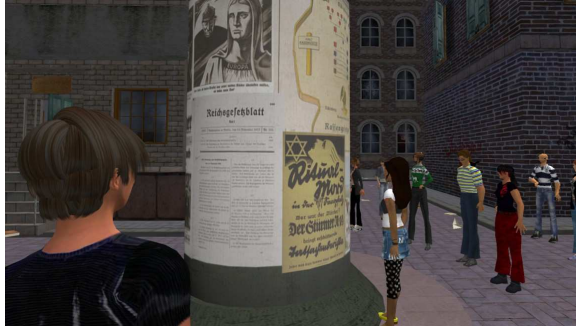
Most of the places, islands and sims in SL listed above, could hardly be classified as belonging to the traditionally conceived humanities. Indeed, the most successful replicas and simulators seems to belong with the sciences: the NOAA sim and NASA spacecenter, the many ecological builds, the historical-architectural exhibits, such as the Sistine Chapel, the biological/medical constructions, such as interactive surgery wards. I believe one of the main reasons behind this imbalance may be the inherent feasibility of replication and simulation in these areas, compared to such fields of knowledge and learning as literature, music, history, philosophy or linguistics. The study of these disciplines involves abstractions, such as rules, concepts, codes, and ideas – and these are hardly pressed into objects, which in turn could be replicated or simulated in a virtual world. Indeed, as noticed by Aurilio 2010: “while Second Life® is thought to be ideal for simulations, pedagogically effective simulations are difficult to design, but more so using platforms and technologies over which designers have limited control” (Aurilio 2010:26). This issue will be picked up and discussed somewhat more deeply in the added value debate later in this book.

This does not mean, of course, that there are completely no destinations in SL offering to exploit the specific educational affordances of a 3d virtual world in the service of widely conceived humanities. Below I narrate my own first-hand experience of two such places, one a sui-generis replica of a piece of physical FL environment, the other a reification-cum-simulation of an abstraction. Both figured prominently in the two TESOL EVO VW language learning courses which I took part in, as a trainee in 2009 and as a trainer in 2010. Neither of them is specifically concerned with language or language teaching, but they were selected as destinations for study visits because it was felt that they exploit very well some of the unique educational affordances of SL, specifically those which allow learners to have an immersed, embodied and emotionally intense experience of events, narratives, characters, ideas, motifs, traditions, values and tropes which would otherwise have to be conveyed in a classroom by little more than dry text of a textbook, at most embellished with a foray to some internet multimedia material. The two places are: the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (<http://secondlife.com/destination/747>) and the Virtual Macbeth sim (<http://secondlife.com/destination/shakespeare-s-macbeth-in-second-life>).

I visited the Holocaust Museum in SL a number of times. On January 21<sup>st</sup> 2010 I went with the TLVW 2010 group on a tour guided by David Klevan, an employee of the USHMM in FL. The fact that the visit was with a group made it a particularly enriching experience. As rightly noticed by Kapp and O’Driscoll in connection with their own discussion of the Holocaust Museum: “Museums are also social spaces. Visitors frequently enter exhibitions in pairs or in groups. They share their thoughts about content they encounter. And sometimes they experience vicarious or incidental interactions with strangers responding to the same exhibit content at the same time” (Kapp and O’Driscoll 2010:144).

The HM in SL is a complex sim: it contains a number of partly coordinated exhibits and builds, such as: (a) the 1938 Kristallnacht sim, (b) a cramped secret behind-the-wardrobe Jew hideaway, and (c) a period newspaper’s office. The two snapshots below show the scenes from the first sim: on the left, Wlodek Barbosa and other participants of the tour read authentic period announcements (*Bekanntmachungen*) and propaganda materials glued on an advertising column in the middle of a downtown square; on the right, one member of the group is looking through shattered windows into a burning synagogue, while hovering in the air a few meters above the curbstone.





Snapshot 23. EVO TLVW 2010 *Kristallnacht* tour, January 21<sup>st</sup> 2010

The USHMM’s own website offers a rather matter of fact and surprisingly low-profile description of their SL exhibit (<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/kristallnacht/>): “The virtual learning environment – Witnessing History: Kristallnacht, The November 1938 Pogroms – blends archival sound, video and photo material with narrative story-telling in an immersive environment”, and it is of course impossible to convey the cognitive and emotional impact of the sim without actually going in-world. Short of doing it ‘in-avatar’, it is possible to view the YouTube machinima clips, such as <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hk2uN7fh4s>, for example.

As far as I am concerned, what I found especially effective in the way the educational affordances of SL are exploited in the sim is the seamless combination of text with specialized multimedia, such as the sound of shattered glass and the roar of fire, the 3d sets and animations of destruction, the interactivity of the press office (offering evidence to be used in writing a report on the pogrom), and the emotional video/audio recollections and affidavits of the Kristallnacht survivors. The market cobblestones cluttered with debris, the demolished homes, offices and synagogues, the burning fires and the cloudy dusk sky<sup>28</sup> created a most depressive ambiance of the place, which, in a person with an even moderate level of SL immersion/presence had to leave a permanent and educationally relevant memory. I believe one could only better this kind of experience in terms of its cognitive and affective impact with a fully immersive multisensory interactive movie, a technological feat not yet in existence.

The Kristallnacht sim can be regarded as a replica of a few typical physical locales as they existed in 1938, with the affordance of immersion-boosting interactive walk-through added. The other tour which I wish to briefly narrate here was to a simulation par-excellence, namely a 3d reification-cum-simulation of an abstract object, in this case – thoughts and emotions of a fictional character in a classical drama story: Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. I visited *Virtual Macbeth* with a guided group tour on two occasions: January 25<sup>th</sup> 2009 (in the EVO LLVW course) and January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010 (in the EVO TLVW course). The guide of both these tours was Anya Ixchel (FL=Angela Thomas), whose brainchild the sim is. According to <http://virtualmacbeth.wikispaces.com>:

“*Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters* - A Second Life Treatment of Macbeth is dedicated to the exploration, adaptation and performance of Shakespeare’s Macbeth (...) The island is divided into four key spaces: the arrival grove, Macbeth’s head, the “what if?” copse

<sup>28</sup> There is the environmental editor in SL which affords easy time-of-day setting, which can then be made permanent, so that regardless of which time and sky hue is selected as default in the visitor’s client viewer, the setting of the given sim will remain constant.



and the teaching studios. In general, the island has a feeling of being windswept heathland. In addition to being windswept, the heath has areas where fog is thick and “dirty”, to resonate with the foul imagery from the play”.

Again, like with the Kristallnacht sim, it is difficult to convey the peculiar ambiance of the place and the many educational affordances exploited there without actually going in-world. This fly-through on YouTube is probably second best:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QNxe2gePEQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QNxe2gePEQ). In the two snapshots below I mingle with the ghosts in the main Macbeth castle chamber and follow the path of no return, with roses quickly morphing into threatening outstretched fingers (and excerpts from the play linger in animated festoons on the sides of the path).



Snapshot 24. EVO TLVW 2010 *Virtual Macbeth* tour, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010

In a notecard distributed by Anya Ixchel in-world she explains that:

“*Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters* is a symbolic treatment of the key themes of Shakespeare’s play, *Macbeth*. Exploring the island allows you to experience the key milestones on Macbeth’s journey. Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is the story of a serial killer whose emotional journey is one from the will to power, through to bloodlust, moral confusion and ultimately to death. You can also drill down to investigate themes such as the notions of authorship, adaptation, the playhouse, power and ethics” (my emphasis – WS/B).

It is exactly in the sim’s potential to exploit SL affordances to reify and simulate such abstract and esoteric notions as the ones underlined in the quote which makes it – in my opinion – one of the most successful examples of educationally relevant building ventures in SL. In relation to *Virtual Macbeth*, Hamlet Au (FL=Wagner James Au), one of the most perspicuous and intelligent observers and reviewers of SL, in his *New World Notes* asked: “It’s very cool, though I’m also curious if it’s an effective teaching tool. Will students gain more understanding of the play if they experience *Macbeth* Island, as opposed to just reading the text and watching a performance?” (<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/11/the-island-of-m.html>). Now, this is not a question which I can answer with any degree of certainty. As pointed out above, there are few methodologically respectable empirical studies of the differential pedagogical effectiveness of various SL affordances. As far as I am concerned, however, after a visit to Macbeth’s head, where I could sit in his throne, be scared by the ghosts speaking some of the play’s characters’ monologues, enter a dagger duel with spirits only to have my

head cut off<sup>29</sup> eventually, I can say: to me *Macbeth* comes very much to life, to use a somewhat risqué pun. The ambiance of the place, just like in the case of the Kristallnacht sim, is quite overwhelming. It is dark, windy, and parts of the island (the centre of which is Macbeth's head) are under incessant rain, exactly as one would expect from a place so grim. Incidentally, because SL is a generally joyful and sunshiny environment, rain is not quite straightforward to program. I have seen very few rainy islands in my SL peregrinations; Virtual Macbeth is one of such exceptions.

This concludes the overview of educational affordances and showcases in Second Life. I have said this a number of times in this chapter, but I feel I must reiterate this essential point here: the above treatment is extremely selective in scope and rather shallow in treatment. This is unavoidable in a book with a different focus than the global affordances of virtual worlds for education. One could easily enlarge the scope and deepen the treatment, of course. Such a project would require a different perspective, however, ultimately encompassing all, or at least most, affordances, suitably set in an appropriate theoretical framework informed by insights from pedagogy on one hand, and VW/gaming studies on the other. The result would be a monumental treatise of a few hundred pages at least. I am not aware of a single volume of such proportions devoted to the subject at hand. A project like this is, I believe, eminently feasible and expected, but I have no ambition of undertaking it here. Instead, I will now move deeper in the metaphorical organizational funnel to analyze a subset of SL educational affordances, those relevant to foreign language teachers and learners. From this scaffolding I will later approach the issue of PAVing, which is of central interest for me in this book.

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<sup>29</sup> This effect is achieved quite 'physically', by removing the avatar head temporarily in the SL viewer. This is obtained under control of the so-called HUD, which the avatar must agree to wear when in the sim. HUDs are a very popular in-world mechanism to afford additional functionalities when in-world.

### 3. EFL in SL (SLEFL)

“Joe Miller, Linden Lab Vice President of Platform and Technology Development, claimed in 2009 that ‘Language learning is the most common education-based activity in Second Life’” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual\\_world\\_language\\_learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_world_language_learning)). While this claim may have been a little overblown, it is true that foreign language education flourishes in SL on a much wider scale than in any other VW currently in existence. Even after the gradual involution of educational activities in SL after 2009, there appear to be a number of thriving language schools, conferences and communities.

Probably the oldest of them all, and still the biggest and most highly respected is LanguageLab, founded in SL back in 2005, i.e. only two years after SL went public in June 2003 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languagelab.com>). English Village, SLEnglish and Virlantis mentioned in the Introduction as part of my own personal story of SL, are examples of foreign language communities of comparably old and good standing. In this chapter, entirely devoted to teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in SL, I will first take a bird’s eye view of the main EFL-related meetings, schools and communities present in-world AD 2012, and then go deeper into the metaphorical funnel, which I use as an organizing principle of this book, and discuss the main educational advantages and problems of teaching EFL in SL (or SLEFL, for short). Finally, issues related to teaching and learning SLEFL pronunciation will be picked up, EFL phonetics having been my research and teaching theme now for more than thirty years.

#### 3.1. SLEFL organizations, communities and schools

As this text is not meant to be an encyclopedia of SL language learning/teaching, and because information on in-world language institutions and communities is easily available on the web, even without going into SL, I will give them a rather summary treatment, only to devote more space to Virlantis; that not because I believe that it is somehow the most important or the best such specimen in all of SL, but because I have tied up my own life and work in SL to this group of people. Naturally, then, my inside knowledge of this community allows me to make some educationally (and glottodidactically) relevant observations of potential use by both current and in-spe teachers of foreign languages in VWs, as well as researchers interested in this field. Also quite expectedly, my involvement with the group, the many friendly ties with, and fond memories of, many group members will stand in the way of impersonal and objective (=academic) treatment. As explained in the Preface, I do not believe that it is necessarily a bad thing to weave the two threads together in parallel, as long as neither suffers from the entanglement with the other. Ultimately, though, this is for the reader to judge.

A number of organizations in SL target foreign languages as (one of) their main activity foci. Some of them only exist in SL, some others treat SL as their VW front-end, and there are many in between these two poles. Most would have some rather salient SL presence, with their own islands or plots of land, as well as with at least some regular meetings or conferences held in-world, or sometimes concurrently in SL and in FL. In its *Virtual World Language Learning* article ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual\\_World\\_Language\\_Learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_World_Language_Learning)), wikipedia mentions the following organizations and conferences:

- The **SLanguages** conference is (...) a free annual 24-hours event, bringing together practitioners and researchers in the field of language education in Second Life (sixth edition in 2012, <http://avalon-project.ning.com/page/about-slanguages> – WS/B). Below is Dudeney Ge (FL=Gavin Dudeney) speaking from his segway at SLanguages 2009 and Wlodek Barbosa being interviewed during SLanguages 2010.



Snapshot 25. SLanguages 2010 conference, October 15-16<sup>th</sup> 2010

- **SLExperiments** is a group managed by Nergiz Kern (Daffodil Fargis in Second Life) for collecting and sharing ideas on how to use Second Life for teaching foreign languages. The group meets twice a month in Second Life. (<http://slexperiments.pbworks.com> – WS/B).
- The **Virtual Round Table** conference takes place twice a year, focusing on language teaching technologies. A substantial part of the conference takes place in Second Life (<http://www.virtual-round-table.com> – WS/B).
- The **Virtual Worlds Best Practices in Education** (VWBPE) is a global grass-roots community event focusing on education in immersive 3D environments (<http://conf.vwbpe.org> – WS/B).
- The **Virtual Worlds Education Roundtable** (VWER) group meets each week to talk about issues that concern educators with regard to using virtual worlds as a teaching and learning tool (<http://virtualworldsedu.info> – WS/B).

To these I would add the following organizations and projects:

- “the **EduNation** islands are focused on the potential for Virtual Worlds (VWs) to enhance the language learning process and is (sic – WS/B) maintained by a community of educators” (<http://edunation-islands.wikispaces.com>).
- the **TESOL CALL** Interest Section **Electronic Village Online** (EVO) annual sessions, with a rich programme of workshops and courses devoted to VW foreign language teaching and learning.<sup>30</sup> (<http://evosessions.pbworks.com>).
- **EUROCALL/CALICO** Virtual Worlds Special Interest Group “aims to explore the possibilities of language learning and teaching in virtual worlds such as Second Life. Our (...) headquarters in Second Life is located (...) on EduNation III Island” (<http://virtualworldssig.ning.com>).
- “the **AVALON** project (...) is a two-year project funded by the European Commission. (...) Creating the materials and training course will involve a broad sample of the target language learning and teaching communities. This will lead to a further promotion of the

<sup>30</sup> Such as the two which I participated in (see above for some memories of SL educational trips to the Kristallnacht and Macbeth sims): Virtual Worlds & Language Learning (VWLL 2009; <http://evosessions.pbworks.com/w/page/10708585/virtualworlds>) and Teaching Languages in a Virtual World (TLVW 2010; [http://evosessions.pbworks.com/w/page/10708583/Teaching\\_Languages\\_in\\_a\\_Virtual\\_World](http://evosessions.pbworks.com/w/page/10708583/Teaching_Languages_in_a_Virtual_World)).

benefits of the use of 3D worlds in the development of real world language skills” (<http://avalon-project.ning.com/page/about-avalon>).

- “the international project **NIFLAR**, Networked Interaction in Foreign Language Acquisition and Research, founded by the European Commission (2009-2011), aims at making foreign language education more authentic, relevant and rewarding through the use of innovative e-learning environments: videoweb-communication and 3 D Virtual Worlds” (<http://cms.hum.uu.nl/niflar/index.php?page=about-niflar-2>).

When it comes to language schools, the undisputed flagship is **LanguageLab** (<http://www.languagelab.com>). In her LanguageLab appraisal written in 2008, Robin Linden (FL=Robin Harper), at that time one of the Linden Lab liaison officers in charge of SL education, wrote: “It’s long been known that immersion in an environment with native speakers is the best way to practice and learn a second language. And (...) the virtual world environment naturally lends itself to language learning, due to its immersive nature and ability to make learning contextually relevant to both situations and locations” (<http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Features/Stories-from-Second-Life-How-LanguageLab-gave-language-learning/ba-p/639629>). Notice the appearance of two of the commonly applauded SL affordances, namely the potential for immersive and contextualized learning. In the LL’s online promotional materials one can also read and hear (because many of these materials have a form of machinima videoclips shot in SL) about the following advantages of LL tuition, all of these exploiting some affordances of SL for language learning: “truly international community”, “everyone you meet is a real person”, “native English speakers”, “anywhere and any time”, “it’s not a game (...) everything is live”.

One of the LanguageLab’s early innovations, now regarded as among their main achievements, was the development of a multi-sim virtual *English City* (and *Ciudad Bonita* for learners of Spanish) with realistically rendered downtown scenes and builds, such as offices, markets, hotels, restaurants, airport, etc. It is in such natural environments that LanguageLab students learn by communicating on a number of situationally matching topics: ordering a meal, checking in at a hotel, taking a flight, etc. It was in such a setting, at the LL conference centre, that I took my first teacher-training course with LL back in November-December 2007. I will present excerpts from my project report below, in Chapter 4.1.

Another highly regarded language community, although not a for-profit school like LanguageLab, is **Cypris Chat** stationed in Cypris Village in-world, Professor Merryman (FL=Mike McKay) being the community’s founder and spiritus movens, quite like Kip Yellowjacket is for Virlantis.

“Cypris Chat strives to provide an educational, fun and interesting environment for English learning and teaching. Members have the chance to be part of a living community surrounded by others who are learning, teaching or simply interested in speaking English with people from around the world” (<http://secondlife.com/destination/cypris-chat>). “Cypris Chat is not a school, however we offer “practice times” in the form of organized lessons, discussions, chats, events, and activities” (<http://cyprischat.org/about>).

In many respects Cypris is like Virlantis; for example the community mission, activity types and rules of conduct could be copied verbatim between the two groups. For this reason I will not go into details here, leaving the more extensive discussion of these issues until we deepen our acquaintance with Virlantis itself.

**Avatar Languages** (<http://www.avatarlanguages.com>), on top of the by now run-of-the-mill e-learning offer which exploits their own LMS platform, Skype or Google Docs/Maps, etc. (“Individual lessons from zł 39 per hour” – the only such school explicitly catering for Polish



learners, by the way), give “Innovative Language Lessons” in SL wherein “Avatar Languages focuses on using public spaces in virtual worlds to take advantage of the diverse contexts available and of the potential for social interaction”<sup>31</sup> (<http://www.avatarlanguages.com/howweteach.php>). An example of a lesson in-world, a visit to a restaurant with intensive teacher-student voice interaction, pedagogically reminiscent of the methodology of *English City* use by LanguageLab, appears in a 1.5 min machinima clip on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tO3v0\\_qeOug](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tO3v0_qeOug). The way Avatar Languages combine 2d and 3d resources in their tuition is described in this blog with an informative SlideShare presentation included: <http://www.avatarlanguages.com/blog/add-3d>.

**English (ESL) Drive-Through** (<http://www.drive-through-esl.info>), also presenting itself as Drive-Through **ELF** (English as a Lingua Franca), with Giovanni Tweak owner and head-teacher, is a for-profit school (text classes: 750L\$ – 1.9 euro; 2.9 US\$; voice classes: 1500L\$ – 3.8 euro; 5.8US\$), which introduces itself like this:

“There are many class activities: reading, pronunciation, description, discussion, grammar, Business English, classes for absolute beginners. And remember, you can ask questions at anytime during class. You can learn from other people’s questions and from the teacher’s answers. (...) Don’t be afraid your question is too difficult, or that other students will not understand. The teacher will answer for everybody. Don’t be afraid to ask a question just because you’re worried it might not be correct English. That’s the reason you’re here! Ask your question anyway. The teacher will understand, and by correcting your question, the whole class learns something” (<http://www.drive-through-esl.info/ABOUT.html>).

The emphasis on asking questions and not being ashamed of one’s linguistic ignorance and deficiencies is quite uncanny in this short notice. While the face-masking SL affordance allowed by the avatar immediately comes to mind here, it is not clear if it was deliberately alluded to above. The repetitive appeal to overcome the fear of linguistic inadequacy and losing face may simply acknowledge the importance of this psychological issue in all FLT/L.

The **BABEL Language School** offers small-group communicative activities in a number of foreign languages, at relatively low tuition levels: “With you as a student of a class of 2-3 learners, you would get 2 lessons for L\$ 3000 (about 12 US\$ – WS/B)” (<http://www.babellanguageschool.dk/index.html>). As stated on the school’s website,

“the vision is fully to transform methods from real life circumstances to the virtual world’s needs to enable borderless language instruction. (...) Various kinds of lessons are used depending on the students’ needs and preferences for their language learning process at BABEL Language School at Second Life. In hands-on-excursions some regions, in which the target language is used, are visited. In a walk through the schools locations the foreign language will be used to talk about what is seen and what is experienced. Back in the classroom, the topic of the recent unit is visualized on boards and screens. Former tasks will be commented and deepened out and new exercises will be introduced to start up a new homework. Grammatical overviews are present in the classroom as well as touchable objects to play the sound of single idioms or expressions.

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<sup>31</sup> It is interesting that the “diverse contexts” and “social interaction” appear on the Polish version of the website as (my translation): “affords the student contact with a variety of native speakers of the language, hence with various pronunciations of it”. Polish text: “umożliwia to studentowi kontakt z różnymi ludźmi władającymi danym językiem, a co za tym idzie z różnym sposobem wymowy” (<http://www.avatarlanguages.com/pl/howweteach.php>). The emphasis on pronunciation is particularly alluring for me, of course, as well as the mention of various native accents. This is one linguistic affordance of SL which is seldom mentioned in the literature. I will have more to say about SLEFL pronunciation below.



Interviews, dialogues, passages of radio or TV programs are played from Media Boards” (<http://virtuallanguagelearning.babellanguageschool.dk/#home>).

It is interesting to hear about “touchable objects to play the sound of single idioms or expressions”. This is reminiscent of the use of ‘rezzable’ objects by LanguageLab, as well as my own PAVed objects, except that Babel’s objects apparently did not show any correlation with the built-in sound message. In this case the object appears to have been just a convenient holder of an arbitrary language item. The repertoire of Babel’s activities seems to have exploited SL affordances quite well; it would be interesting to know why the school failed ultimately.

In this short overview of language schools in-world I had of necessity to ignore certain otherwise interesting initiatives and organizations somehow related to FLT/L, firstly because there are many of them, and some may have a rather too low a profile to be visible in-world or on the web, second because some of them are not schools or language groups in the proper sense, third because my focus here is EFL, so organizations catering for other foreign languages would fall outside of my range. Fire Centaur’s *Avatar Classroom* is an example of the second category: <http://www.avatarclassroom.com>. This is an interesting fusion into a blended ‘Sloodle’ environment of the idea of SL classroom and the flat-web Moodle LMS. Fire Centaur has been the main creator and supporter of Sloodle now for a few years, the learning/teaching environment which has gathered some positive publicity and serious academic interest. This is, however, one of many threads which I need to let hang loose for lack of space and their tenuous relevance to the main theme of this book.

### 3.2. SLEFL at Virlantis

“Virlantis is a free resource and open community of practice for language learners and teachers in Second Life. Join Tea Time!, a popular opportunity to practice your English language skills” (<http://secondlife.com/destination/tea-leaves-virlantis>). This is Virlantis in a nutshell, as seen by casual searchers using the widely popular SL destination guide, which shows many SL islands and places, nicely classified by the main type of activity going on there. Both Virlantis and Cypris appear in the category of *Education & Nonprofits*, together with seventy other positions in the catalogue. Incidentally, the category label fits Virlantis ideally, because since its very beginning it has been staunchly and emphatically a non-profit language community, just like the now defunct English Village, from which it evolved.

I entered English Village right after I was rezzed in SL, as I explained in the Preface. That island was the place of my first educational experiences in-world, my first taught lessons (see Chapter 1.2. for an excerpt of the text chat log from June 2007) and my first in-world friendships, many of which continue to this day. At the time when I joined the EV community the ‘physical’ shape of the island was changing rapidly. In October 2007 it looked like in Snapshot 26, with the pavillions situated on the mammoth pylons above the ground level later morphing into ‘launchrooms’ in SLEnglish and Virlantis. A nice machinima guided tour of EV (as it was in the early 2008) with Professor Merriman is hanging here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwHrjS-ENec>.



**Snapshot 26. English Village in October 2007**

In a notecard, created on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2007, which I got on March 29<sup>th</sup>, i.e. about one week after I appeared in SL, Fire Centaur laid out the main principles of the EV community in this way:

Hello, thank you for your interest in studying at English Village!  
 My name is Fire Centaur, I am a Canadian English teacher living in Seoul, South Korea. I created English Village in order to bring the language learning community together. As such, teachers use our island, and our classrooms for language instruction.

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 Terms and Conditions for studying at English Village

This document is in draft format. Please give us your feedback. Thanks  
 fire@eslteacherlink.co.kr

- You will be respectful of others on the island
- You will not harass others on the island
- You will conduct yourself in a positive manner.

Thanks for your interest! Let's build a great teaching environment together!

Thus, while there is little in the notecard about the methodological or logistic details of the educational process, the focus on creating an open and convivial community of teachers with students is obvious. The idea of creating a space in SL for potential language teachers to come and offer their services for free, and be rewarded with an opportunity to practice the new trade of SL teaching without worrying about the cost of buying or hiring islands, plots or classrooms in-world<sup>32</sup>, has continued from EV to Virlantis throughout the five years of the latter's existence. What appears to have changed slightly is the shift of the emphasis from teaching ("language instruction", "teaching environment") in the EV to learning in Virlantis. This shift was gradual, and was mostly due to Kip Yellowjacket's philosophy of in-world language education, as explained below in his own words.

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<sup>32</sup> This is an excerpt of a SLED post from Fire Centaur in April 2007: "That's pretty much why I built English Village -so educators, who didn't have an island, could come, and experiment teaching in the metaverse without being burdened with all of the barriers to entry which goes along with the change in scenery!!!".

At the beginning of 2008 Kip decided to create a new language community, called it SLEnglish and rented a new location for it, called *Second Life English*. In a notecard of 18th March 2008 Kip had this to say about the SLEnglish venture:

Welcome to Second Life English! What is Second Life English?

The Second Life English group has been helping language learners and teachers in Second Life since 2006. Our past activities were mainly held at the English Village where we organized weekly team-teaching events and assisted learners and teachers in various ways. The Second Life English SIM is a free resource for language learners and teachers. We are not a school. We are a community of language learners and teachers who share the desire to use the virtual world of Second Life for the learning and teaching of foreign languages. Our goals are to:

- (1) help language learners and teachers connect
- (2) offer free advertisement to language teachers, groups, schools and “conversation partners” (so-called language buddies)
- (3) help language learners and teachers by answering questions, giving tips and freely sharing ideas about Second Life and learning/teaching in Second Life
- (4) make language teachers aware of useful tools and resources in Second Life
- (5) suggest ways of supplementing the SL learning/teaching experience
- (6) offer free language learning/teaching activities such as team-teaching and workshops
- (7) continuously develop the Second Life English SIM
- (8) promote a culture of online and life-long learning
- (9) encourage the idea that all of Second Life is “the classroom”
- (10) help interconnect the various language communities in Second Life
- (11) encourage communication and cultural awareness/understanding
- (12) promote the idea that we are all learners and potential teachers

We want to help EMPOWER language learners and teachers!

This policy has remained in force with virtually no changes to this day. It can now be gleaned from the main Virlantis website: <http://virlantis.com>, its Facebook wall: <http://www.facebook.com/VIRTLANTIS>, and other places in the cybersphere, such as Virlantis on Voicethread (<http://voicethread.com/?#q+Virlantis>), or on Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/virlantis>), for example.

While Virlantis may be a free resource for both activity organizers and participants (teachers and students in the traditional parlance), there are obviously costs incurred in renting, building and sustaining a virtual environment. While some of these costs are covered by voluntary donations, Virlantis is primarily sponsored by an actual FL language school, the Oxford School for English: [www.oxfordschool.de](http://www.oxfordschool.de). Virlantis activity calendar is posted on Google: <https://www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=virlantis@googlemail.com>. For residents in-world there is the UWA<sup>33</sup> Virlantis group, which is open to all willing participants.

As far as teaching methodology is concerned, Virlantis is a very liberal place. The issue is by-and-large left to activity organizers, as explained in this notecard from Kip Yellowjacket time-stamped 28th September 2010:

All activity organizers (AOs) are free to choose how to carry out their language learning activities. It is nice when activities take place at VIRTLANTIS, but we also encourage AOs to view all of SL as “the classroom”. There are no concrete “rules” to follow when

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<sup>33</sup> The sign of the past association of Virlantis with the University of Western Australia. Mostly of historical interest now.

offering an activity at VIRTTLANTIS. AOs are free to experiment as they wish. There are however 2 things to remember when offering an activity at VIRTTLANTIS:

- 1) The activity must be FREE.
- 2) The VIRTTLANTIS sim has a PG status, meaning no adult content or activity is allowed.

The view of all SL as the classroom, the pedagogical approach and didactic concept very popular in SL education, especially language education, ties in nicely with Kip's own idea of treating Virltantis classrooms as 'launchrooms'. This is how he himself explains the philosophy of the 'launchroom' (excerpts from my interview with him on Oct 18th, 2008 and from an in-world notecard of August 6th 2008):

“Which pedagogical resource in Virltantis are you particularly proud of?”

I am particularly fond of our “launchroom concept”. Launchrooms allow teachers to have a private space in which to experiment and hold lessons and/or meetings. We try to encourage teachers to view these spaces primarily as “launch pads” for launching or teleporting to other locations in Second Life. The idea we are trying to promote with this concept is that all of Second Life (and even the internet) can be viewed as “the classroom”. This differs from the more traditional stationary model of teaching which encourages the idea of always learning and teaching in the same static place.

What is a launchroom?

Second Life English offers a number of so-called ‘launch pad classrooms’ or ‘launchrooms’ to language teachers free of charge. (...) Teachers are given the ability to manage access to their classroom, which means groups can meet in a ‘private’ space in Second Life for activity briefing, pre-post assessment, post-activity discussion, etc. However, teachers should also feel free to utilize the classroom in a more traditional manner (...) Each launchroom comes equipped with various useful teaching tools: 1 whiteboard, 12 hand-show chairs, 1 scripted filing cabinet and an LMS-integrated quiz/survey/assessment tool.”

Below, on the left, is a view of SLEngish on March 14<sup>th</sup> 2008, showing rows of launchrooms with their teaching aids, as mentioned by Kip. This arrangement has morphed over the years, of course, into what is shown in the snapshot on the right, the contemporary shape and location of a launchroom.



**Snapshot 27. SLEngish/Virtlantis launchrooms**

As can be seen from the above overview of language schools and organizations offering FLT/EFL activities either wholly or partly in-world, there is a whole spectrum of options: pedagogical, methodological, didactic, financial, organizational. Some schools charge tuition,

while others are free. Some groups and communities, such as Virlantis, for example, positively shun the traditional conceptualization of ‘school, lesson, teacher and student’, and prefer the more liberal ones: ‘community, activity, organizer/facilitator, participant’. All of them, however – and this is hardly unexpected – try to leverage the specific educational affordances of Virtual Worlds, SL in this case, for their pedagogy. Also in this area there is great variation of models: from blended ones to wholly in-world, from grammar-translation to situational and communicative learning, from heavy to only nominal reliance on the in-world teaching gadgetry, such as whiteboards, notecard givers and drop-boxes, rezzable objects, illustrative textures, etc. Only LanguageLab managed to build their own fully didactically functional English City, other schools/communities would rely on some basic classroom-like provisions on their own islands (e.g. English Village or Virlantis), yet others would not even rent their own space in-world, but would use SL’s existing places of didactic relevance for teaching (e.g. Avatar Languages). In the last chapter of this book I will have more to say about the pros and cons of these models, specifically as far as the ‘added value’ of SL is exploited (or not) for language learning and teaching. Before I do this, however, I will have a more general look at the commonly discussed advantages and disadvantages of teaching and learning languages in a virtual world.

### 3.3. SLEFL affordances

I have discussed the main educational affordances and counter-affordances of SL in some detail before in this book. It is time now to look into what could be called specifically linguistic affordances, i.e. those functionalities of SL as a MUVLE which are of particular relevance to foreign language teachers and learners. To the extent that foreign language teaching/learning is a proper part of education sensu largo, some of the general educational affordances of SL will automatically function as linguistic affordances. Thus, for example, if there is general educational value in the immersion potential of VWs of interest to pedagogically oriented engineers, architects, ecologists, etc., so there must be for language teachers, *ceteris paribus*. But in the following discussion I will concentrate on the specifically linguistic affordances, advantages and disadvantages of SL. Naturally, compared to the grand picture, the amount (and depth) of the existing bibliography on this topic is smaller. This is, of course, both disappointing and inspiring.

Like before in this book, my interest will centre on EFL, rather than the much bigger field of FLT/L. It should be remembered, however, that – while it is a very English-centred virtual world – SL is nevertheless so huge and varied that it does include a large number of islands and communities natively speaking other languages than English, such as: Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, even Polish<sup>34</sup> :-). Second Life destination guide features 58 ‘international’ destinations (<http://secondlife.com/destinations/international>). Many of them contain replicas of FL culturally relevant monuments and edifices, such as the Eiffel Tower or Big Ben, for example. The affordance of visiting such places – potentially of a lot of

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<sup>34</sup> Incidentally, after the demise of the three islands of Second Poland mentioned in the Preface the Polish community now occupies a few disconnected plots of land in SL, such as PoziCity (<http://secondlife.com/destination/poziciti---polska-poland-polish>) or Academia Electronica (<http://www.academia-electronica.net>).



educational and linguistic value to foreign students – is one of the most commonly noticed and discussed by SL theorists and practitioners. Thus, Hundsberger noticed that:

“A typical real life traditional language travel package implies that one goes to a particular country where the accommodation is in a home-stay situation associated with a language school so that there are language lessons in the morning and field trips in the afternoon. This can be replicated with the help of virtual classrooms and SL in that the lessons take place in the virtual classroom (similar to face-to-face teaching as it involves a whiteboard, text readings, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) and then SL can be used as the immersive environment for the equivalent of field trips. The real potential of SL is seen in taking the students to meet other nationalities in their natural surroundings which makes it a complete language learning experience. The social aspect of SL can't be rated highly enough” (Hundsberger 2009:13).

The use of SL as “an immersive environment for field trips” was mentioned before, by virtually every EFL school and community advertising on the web. It is easy to understand why this affordance appears to be so popular. From the point of view of the traditional enclosed language classroom in FL, as well as seen from inside a similarly locked LMS like Moodle, the vision of visiting far-off lands and talking to their inhabitants in a foreign language, the vision to be achieved by not much more than a press of a button on the computer screen, appears to be wildly exhilarating and immensely promising. To a teacher it seems to answer the eternal ‘if only I could take them to...’ kind of dream, impossible to realize ‘in-real’. While many would see this affordance as the primary example of the SL added value in language teaching, I will explain later that I believe this opinion to be misguided. For now, let us see what other linguistic affordances have appeared in the literature on SL education.

In his presentation to the fourth SLanguages conference on October 17<sup>th</sup> 2010, Kip Yellowjacket listed a dazzling repertoire of SL affordances, many of them directly linguistic. The following is his, slightly abridged, notecard:

Why is SL an interesting platform to consider for language learning/teaching?

1. multinational/multiethnic/multilingual platform
2. social networking in 3D
3. a sandbox for highly immersive experiential learning
4. a multitude of manipulatives
5. English is lingua franca (metalanguage of SL)
6. greater potential for retention due to word (etc.) to image/action/experience association
7. instantaneous virtual travelling (RL locations in SL, etc.)
8. SL is a less intimidating place to seek out casual conversation<sup>35</sup>
9. both native & non-native interaction possible
10. wide range of accents, pronunciation, and language usage
11. express and experience personality
12. relate emotionally to peers and mentors
13. easily join and/or form groups to meet likeminded persons
14. potential for community building and SL --> RL carryover
15. both formal and informal learning can be experienced
16. quests, storytelling, games<sup>36</sup>, roleplaying

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<sup>35</sup> “Subjects report that their behavior is significantly more ‘outgoing’ in SL than in the real world” (Messinger et al. 2008:12). Uma Cunningham in her seminal 2011 paper relates this affordance to the disinhibitory laminar effect of being ‘between’ the two worlds: the physical and the virtual.

<sup>36</sup> “86% of the students state that their motivation towards online-learning increases significantly when learning contents are embedded in a game-based environment” (Berns, González-Pardo & Camacho 2011:37).

17. holodecks (instant simulation, situation-based learning)
18. team-teaching & collaborative projects
19. platform difficulty (learning curve) necessitates communication
20. (de)evolution of teacher status (hierarchy has no place, all are learners)
21. (de)evolution of teacher role (more of a facilitator than ever)
22. in-world tools<sup>37</sup> & resources (continuous creation and development)
23. SL as blended learning component vs total solution
24. private/public text and voice communication

It would be hard, in the available literature, to find a more extensive list. Most researchers, like Hundsberger above, would itemize and discuss only selected affordances. I could now analyze each of Kip's 24 points in detail, but I choose not to. First, most of them are really quite obvious; second, some were discussed above; third, those affordances which relate most closely to my main thread in this book, such as numbers 4, 6, 16, 17 and 22 in the list, will be treated in-depth in the next chapter. Notice, however, that many of the 24 affordances listed relate to collaboration, socializing and community learning. This is expected from linguistic affordances of VWs: in a communicative approach to language learning and teaching there is, after all, nothing more pedagogically precious than the opportunity to talk in an authentic setting and for an autonomously selected purpose. Kip has just leveraged this aspect of language education in his list.

Far from being uncritically overenthusiastic, Kip compiled a list of potential problems and issues, as well. Like before, I quote from his notecard, with some abridgement, mostly concerning items of no direct and unique relevance to SLEFL.

Concerns?

1. human disrupters (griefing, etc.)
2. digital native vs digital immigrant
3. determining teaching format/ideal group size (1-to-1, small...5-10, large...10 +)
4. low number of pre-defined activities
5. certified vs non-certified teachers (various linguistic backgrounds)
6. lack of good in-world assessment possibilities<sup>38</sup>
7. multiple levels, needs, learning styles, etc.
8. in-world content (copyright vs creative commons, etc.)
9. confidentiality (recording chat, etc.)
10. text manipulation not SL's forte (absence of dynamic text)
11. no dominant standard (American, British..., etc...Globlish)
12. net & sl lingo (abbreviated vs non-abbreviated language)
13. concurrent communication with natives and non-natives (sometimes problematic)
14. pro-text, anti-voice vs pro-voice, anti-text & adopters of both

This is a very interesting list of counter-affordances. The first two points appeared before in this text. I also mentioned the rudimentary editorial options with respect to SL text (point 10) and the SLEFL-difficult issue of voice versus text (point 14). All remaining points would merit a separate treatment each. For example No 9: the contents of the text chat logged during an activity or lesson may be of immediate EFL use to both the teacher and the learner, and this regardless of whether the meeting is conducted mainly in voice or in text. The learner may wish to refer to the log for explicit instruction or examples of erroneous language usage of his/her own or from other learners. The teacher may like to go over the text chat and analyze the flow of the lesson or some specific point of grammar or vocabulary. Either of the two may

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<sup>37</sup> See Topol 2011 for a brief overview of tools used for SLEFL.

<sup>38</sup> See Richardson and Molka-Danielsen 2009 for an excellent treatment of this issue.

want to share their analysis with other learners and teachers, either in private or in public, say on Facebook. This is where pertinent IPRs come into play, however, making it mandatory for the sharer to obtain explicit permission in writing from all participants of the chat quoted in the publicly disclosed excerpts. This is exactly what I had to do before I could publish fragments of the added value debate which took place on the EVO VWLL 2009 Ning forum site. Another option is to anonymize the chat log, which I have also done on a number of occasions for my presentations and papers about SL. All this can be a potentially serious problem for freely exploiting the otherwise precious SL affordance of being able to easily log and analyze the text chat (both public and private, i.e. IM).

Similar copyright restrictions apply to all SL resident-created content, of course. This is no different from the situation in FL, even if, excited by the novelty of the SL experience, many learners and teachers tend to forget about it, especially during their newbie time. All of my own in-world materials, such as the activity notecards or PAVed objects are explicitly marked as free to use for noncommercial purposes, without any need to contact me first. This is, however, just one possible approach to the intricate issue of in-world copyright. For example, for-profit organizations, such as LanguageLab, are usually very particular about the copyright clearance of their materials and resources produced and used in-world. This is quite understandable, and should be kept in mind when preparing to teach SLEFL.

To illustrate the above discussion of linguistic affordances (and counteraffordances) of SL let me now adduce a short excerpt from the materials prepared for a lesson in-world by one of the most experienced SLEFL teachers and researchers – Baldric Commons (FL= Graham Stanley, with his permission). The lesson took place on January 28th 2009, and was part of the TESOL EVO VWLL course for language teachers planning to extend their activities from FL to SL. With over 350 teacher trainees and a team of highly expert SL teachers/mentors, this was an excellent occasion for me to both brush up my practical skills of SL and to think about some fundamental issues of SL pedagogy. Later in this book, in Chapter 4.2., I summarize some of the thinking; here I propose to take a more practical stance. Of the many activities conducted by Baldric I selected only one, namely a virtual visit to *Wonderful Denmark*, a beautiful replica of a typical Danish town. I start with a reproduction of parts of Baldric's notecard delivered to the tour participants in-world:

#### CITY 2 - WONDERFUL DENMARK

Sometimes there are people in this wonderful sim prepared to take visitors on a guided tour. Choose which one of these two tasks you would like to do...

##### A) Guided Tour

You are going to take our chances to see if you can persuade people we meet to give us a tour of the place or to explain something about Danish culture to the group. So... in pairs, go out into the city and try to find someone willing to do this. If you are successful, use group IM to let us know and arrange a place for us all to meet.

##### B) Learning Danish

Take 15 minutes to look around the sim and see if you can...

- i) learn some Danish - try to collect any words or terms / phrases you can find (or that people you meet can teach you)
- ii) make some observations from the buildings and other things you find in the sim about Danish culture in general

We shall all meet (I'll contact you all using group IM) and discuss our findings and share observations and language that we have managed to make/find.

I picked the second task, and emerged from my little snooping trip around the island with the following notecard:

Denmark activity by Wlodek Barbosa  
<http://slurl.com/secondlife/WD2/252/208/23><sup>39</sup>: sandbox, with rules

Take the notecard with Regler.  
Open the Regler of the Wonderful Denmark sandbox.  
Compare pairwise the rules: English-Danish.  
Make a bilingual word-list.  
Ask a native if in doubt.  
Alternatively: consult a dictionary.

Læs dette:  
- Ingen våben  
- Ingen sex  
- Ingen salg  
- Ingen reklamer  
- Autoreturnering efter 4 timer  
- Ryd op efter dig  
- Spørgsmål? Kontakt Doctor Asp

Read this:  
- No weapon  
- No sex  
- No sales  
- No advertising  
- Autoreturn after 4 hours  
- Please clean up  
- Questions? Ask Doctor Asp

As can be seen, the *Regler* notecard conveniently offered ready-made translation of the sandbox rules into English, so that a pairwise look-up activity would actually yield some vocabulary acquisition, as well as might afford a later discussion of some unclear lexico-grammatical points with a (native?) speaker of Danish.

Thus, as far as the linguistic affordances are concerned which could be potentially exploited in this activity, there were: (a) exploration of a linguistically/culturally rich authentic ethnic setting in three dimensions, (b) autonomous choice of an activity involving situationally relevant language of rules of conduct (applicable both in SL and FL), (c) exploitation of target-native language translation for lexico-grammatical pattern-matching and lookup, (d) integration of out-of-SL learning aids (e.g. Danish-English dictionary) with in-world activity, (e) opportunity for linguistic contact with native speakers of the target language (Danish) in a non-threatening situation. In terms of Kip Yellowjacket's list of linguistic affordances above, I believe that more than half of them could be invoked in reference to this simple activity organized by Baldrick Commons in *Wonderful Denmark*. Below is one of the snapshots I took on the island at that time.

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<sup>39</sup> This is the exact location of the sandbox in-world, identified by the SLURL which is directly read by all web viewers, such as Chrome, Internet Explorer or Mozilla FireFox. SLURL is the the SL Universal Resource Locator identifying SL places in three dimensions with metre-precision. Sandboxes are popular places in SL allowing avatars to experiment with building/rezzing on land where they have no proper building rights; their builds are cleared after a few hours.



Snapshot 28. EVO VWLL 2009 *Wonderful Denmark* tour, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2009

What potential problems and possible counter-affordances can be encountered in a language lesson/activity which includes a visit to a geospatial replica of some FL location, frequented by real native speakers of the target language? Baldrick has the following note of caution (an excerpt from his in-world notecard of January 25<sup>th</sup> 2009):

Obviously, caution has to be taken not to create waves. And here, a little SLetiquette will go a long way. Here are some tips:

- \* Get your students to approach people who are talking in groups
- \* Ask them to address people by name e.g. "Hola Pablo" in text chat
- \* Tell the students to wait for people to respond
- \* If someone doesn't respond, then move on
- \* If they respond, then suggest students tell the person who they are and what they are doing in the area. i.e. "I am a student of Spanish and I've come to find someone to talk to"
- \* Before using voice, ask the person if they can/want to
- \* Speaking favourably about the target culture and the place you find yourself in will also help the conversation. e.g. "I love Venice and want to learn more Italian because the people are so friendly...."

These guidelines relate to only one potential problem, namely grieving: not all of the locals need to be positively disposed towards a bunch of foreign students treating them as native-speaker guinea pigs. In a trip to Second Barcelona, also led by Baldrick Commons during the seminal EVO TLVW 2010 course, I experienced some hostility first hand. After a few moments there we had to move on because some of the local macho men started to be rude to our female colleague teacher-trainees<sup>40</sup>. So, is this a specifically SL-related problem? I believe not. One could encounter similar behaviours during a FL educational tour as well.

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<sup>40</sup> The British flag seen in the snapshot was rezzed in excess in the Barcelona square in a typically grieving fashion. Some excerpts from Barcelona public text chat (translated into English with Google Translate):

- el otro dia iba por la calle y alguien me dijo cuidado con el agujero , me tapé el culo y me cai en la alcantarilla -- the other day going down the street and someone told me beware of the hole, I covered my ass and I fell into the sewer
- que tienes una cebolleta muy pequeña -- you have a very small onion





Snapshot 29. EVO TLVW 2010 *Second Barcelona* tour, January 31<sup>st</sup> 2010

Now that we have looked at some linguistic affordances and potential problems of SL for language teachers and learners, it is time to slide ever a little deeper into the funnel and focus on SLEFL pronunciation teaching and learning. It is in the context of my own activity in-world in this field that I have been thinking about the added value of SL for EFL, as well as about the specificities of the design and use of PAVed objects, topics which I pick up in the next chapter.

### 3.4. SLEFL pronunciation

Most foreign language educators and researchers agree that pronunciation is special: as a body of learner knowledge, a language skill, a component of the language code, a didactic pursuit, and in other ways. For example, out of all foreign language skills to master by a learner pronunciation is the most ‘physical’, indeed ‘physiological’. One can at pains learn grammar and vocabulary from a textbook, but there is no way to transform, say, a good command of phonetic transcription into the ability to speak language even remotely similar to its native version. Or, to take another example, no other component of language appears to be so downright hard to master, to the point where only very few otherwise highly advanced learners ever get near to native speaker phonetic norm, so that despairing pronunciation methodologists resign themselves to proposing a downgraded model of pronunciation as a learning/teaching target (*Lingua Franca Core* of Jennifer Jenkins). Considering such hardships of teaching EFL pronunciation in the ‘real world’, it was, I believe, quite daring for me to attempt to do exactly this soon after I entered *Second Life*, a virtual world which poses its own specific obstacles not only to foreign pronunciation teaching, but also to speech communication as such. And yet, on June 11th 2008, just about over one year of age in-world, I posted the following notecard to the SLEnglish community:

Pronunciation with Wlodek Barbosa

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English is not only grammar and vocabulary.

- 
- a mi me gustan las mujeres de Barcelona -- I like my women from Barcelona

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) is not only syntax and lexicon.  
 Second Life EFL (SLEFL) is not only text chat.  
 SLEnglish now offers tutorials and consultations on EFL pronunciation in-world.

- If you want to improve your speaking skills in the voice mode,
- If you need some information or advice on English phonetics,
- If you are still not certain how to pronounce some English words,
- If you have been wondering about the differences between British and American pronunciation,
- If you need to know exactly what RP (Received Pronunciation) is,
- If you have heard about Lingua Franca Core (LFC) pronunciation for EFL, but want to know more,
- If you need some additional information about SLEnglish and Virlantis
- If you simply want to talk (by voice :-) about English and Second Life,

... come to Launchroom 2 at Virlantis (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Virlantis/208/200/21>) every Wednesday at SLT 12 noon (9 pm CET). You'll find Wlodek Barbosa there (web2 at: <http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek>) ready to serve you. You can also drop me a line (by IM in-world or by email: e-mail: [swlodek@ifa.amu.edu.pl](mailto:swlodek@ifa.amu.edu.pl)) to ask a question or fix a meeting. All suggestions for enhancing SLEFL pronunciation profile are most welcome!

This post and my decision to try teaching SLEFL pronunciation resulted in a four-year-long journey which I described in some detail in the Introduction to this book. In this section I propose to discuss some of the pros and cons (with the unavoidable focus on the latter) of SLEFL pronunciation, mostly from the point of view of the teacher. The treatment can be seen as part of the ongoing debate on the affordances and counter-affordances of SL for (language) teaching and learning, which we have been following above. In this section, however, unlike in the previous parts of this text, I will concentrate on the difficulties and problems, rather than advantages and potentials. This may be natural: this time I am talking about my own pedagogical activities, and this conceptual frame is most conducive to seeing problems to be solved on the mundane down-to-earth level.

In the following I will use some ideas and insights which I presented in a number of conferences, workshops and meetings, both in FL and in SL. One such LanguageLab-organized debate, *Foreign language acquisition: SL and RL inputs in teaching*, took place in-world on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008. There, I presented on “EFL pronunciation in SL compared to RL”. In the *Accents2008* conference in Łódź (12-14 December 2008) I had a plenary paper on “SLEFL pronunciation, or: on teaching and learning EFL pronunciation in Second Life” (published as Sobkowiak 2010). Another occasion when I talked about SLEFL pronunciation was the EVO VWLL 2009 course, which has been mentioned above in various contexts. There I used the course’s Ning forum to lead a debate; these contents I later salvaged by copying them to my (then) department Grou.ps space (<http://zajek.grou.ps/blogs/item/voice-communication-for-foreign-languages-in-sl>), where they are still available online, as mentioned before. I will start from the more technical issues related to voice communication, then I will treat of the more pedagogical questions having to do with teaching SLEFL pronunciation.

On August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010, in a SLED post, Rolig Loon, one of the most respected educators in SL, a ‘senior helper’ in Linden Lab’ parlance, the Manager of the *Info Island International* sim, coordinator of *SL Librarians Virtual Reference* group (SLLVR), offered these reflections on SL voice, which nicely summarize most of the criticism aimed at it by SL residents:

“Voice per se is not dumb, but LL’s implementation of it was flawed at the start and has not improved. Voice quality is irregular, often very muddy and crackly and sounding as if it were coming from the bottom of a well. These are largely problems that start at the microphone and are made worse by poor hardware at the client end and along the Internet

pathway. Surprisingly, though, these same microphones and computers seem to produce much better sound quality with Skype, which is (I am told) the preferred system for many voice users. If Skype can manage to clean up a digital audio signal, why can't LL?

Beyond that, Voice is a confusing tool if used for much more than a lecture or a one-on-one conversation. One voice spoken in a crowd is impossible to identify. (This is true, but at least in SL voice in public chat is spacial, which means that turning your avie around may help identify the direction/distance where the voice is coming from. This is not true of Skype, of course – WS/B) Several voices in a crowd is cacophony. Even for those who are not marginally hard of hearing, Voice in LL (sic! clearly, what was meant was SL – WS/B) can be frustrating. Here again, LL might have implemented something better than a glowing green dot to help us tell who is speaking, or might have tried damping voice signals so that volume is proportional to distance. (It is, to the best of my knowledge – WS/B)

Finally, from a social perspective .... and I freely admit that this is a personal point of view ...Voice invites participants to ramble on at the mouth, filling space with ums and ers and giggly noise that is all very humanizing but makes it all the harder to follow what's going on. By contrast, typed chat is relatively parsimonious and can be reviewed later. It is simply a cleaner and easier system for me and many others to follow”.

To summarize the technical issues surrounding the use of voice in SL raised by Rolig Loon, and some others, which were not mentioned, but are at least equally important, here is my own list:

- voice quality in SL is often poor, due to server, client and connection reasons,
- voice quality suffers when the mike is overdriven,
- many open mikes tend to produce interference/echo,
- there are problems identifying the current speaker (both audio and visual channel),
- there is no easy method to log the contents of the spoken chat with the SL GUI,
- USB headsets behave more reliably than standard double-jack ones,
- restarting the voice server from within the SL client takes time and is unreliable,
- there can be temporary sound loss when crossing sim boundaries or teleporting.

Going even deeper, there are some more subtle sociolinguistic and pedagogical issues involved in using the voice communication channel in SL teaching. Complete silence, when all participant avatars have momentarily switched off their mikes can be stressful to the point of awkwardness<sup>41</sup>. This is something which does not happen in FL; there's always some vocal sound when two or three people meet to talk (the “ramblings on at the mouth”, to use Rolig Loon's parlance); this does not exist in SL. Silence is generally abhorred in human communication. For this reason, and others, turn-taking is harder in-world than it is in FL: there are no vocal signals from speakers wanting to take the floor. Experienced residents use the text channel for signalling this, but this requires fast typing, best touch-typing. With no such skills the learner may find the conversation proceeding without him/her. Alternatively, s/he can switch on the mike, hoping that by the very sound of this action (click, squeak, hiss) their intention will be conveyed to the current speaker. Considering the frequent interference created by many open mikes, mentioned above, this may be a rather risky trick, especially as by this trick alone it will be hard for the current speaker to know who wants to take the floor: the green ‘soundwaves’ around the white speech dot may be too weak. Pedagogically

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<sup>41</sup> Some vocal ramblings of mine on this topic can be found here: <http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/silence.mp3>. This is part of the OsnaGroup meeting held on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2009 in-world, where I talked about my SL teaching and PAVing.

speaking, student silence is often wrongly interpreted as idle daydreaming, and yet “the notion of ‘lurking’ often seems to imply that silence and watching are inherently bad, but students often need to watch and listen in Second Life, so it is important not to confuse lurking with thinking space” (Savin-Baden 2010:79). It certainly requires experience and some emotional intelligence from the teacher to know when s/he should not try to fill the silence with “ramblings of the mouth” or appeals to students to finally say something.

Another common problem is voice lag, somewhat like that observed in transatlantic live transmissions in the media, e.g. on TV. It may take one or two seconds for one’s utterance to reach the conversation partner. This is much more than in FL, so – if one forgets about this lag effect – one may start to fidget: is s/he ignoring what I said? is s/he shocked? did s/he understand? shall I repeat? Clashes and overlaps of utterances are common in-world for exactly the same reason: the unavoidable (?) voice lag. This can produce further problems, because such clashes are normally avoided in FL, and they call for excuse. The gravity of this excuse is calculated according to rather complex sociolinguistic rules, which also depend on the speakers’ cultural background (which in-world is often unknown). In effect both speakers may choose not to take the turn the next time over, which is disastrous to any conversation, let alone one conducted for learning in a foreign language, with so many other psychological learner blocks...

My first pedagogical reflection on the use of voice for SLEFL came with an in-world discussion session held on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2007 in the English Village island, with Kip Yellowjacket presiding. The main topic was the model of teaching in the community, and the debate was entirely held in text chat, as there was no voice yet in SL at that time. A number of teachers and learners were present, and some offered their opinions on the pros and cons of voice in SLEFL. This part of the two-and-a-half-hour long debate spans only about eleven minutes. Here is a selection of the crucial issues:

- The desirability of using voice communication for learning purposes: discussants appear to generally agree that “it will be better to have audio to learn a language”, which might be too trivial to discuss here. Consider, however, the downsides noticed by some residents, such as that “writing help us to write better- more corect”, which I interpret as realization that speaking in a foreign language exposes learners to the additional risk of errors, compared to writing. This apprehension may be one reason why many SLEFL learners still prefer to stick with text chat. Also, “If I can read a new word its easier to me to save this word”, which is presumably a comment on the relative advantage of writing in memorizing vocabulary.
- One of the participants noticed (like Rolig Loon did on SLED three years later) that the issue of voice in SLEFL is subtly correlated with another pedagogical variable, namely learner group size. This is mostly due to technical glitches of all sorts: SL voice servers become unstable and laggy, audio levels are imbalanced (so that one must constantly adjust them for each speaker separately), speaker directionality signals are lost in the din, etc. As there is so far no realistic lip movement or facial expression reliably coordinated with avatar speech and gestures in SL, it becomes quite a skill in-world to locate the current speaker in a large group (one must look around for the animated speech symbol hovering over the head of the speaker).
- Jordyn Peccable (FL=Jennifer Kraft) noticed that voice “also takes away another level of anonymity”. This is indeed one of the most crucial phonetic aspects of SL. Many avatars cherish the almost complete incognito afforded by this virtual world: some because they do things which are tabooed in FL, others because they simply want to keep the two personas – the FL and the SL – separate for some reason. Thus, because human voice is a powerful identifier, somewhat like fingerprint or iris pattern, SL residents who crave for anonymity

would naturally avoid voice. In the case of foreign language learners it may be that they feel less inhibited to communicate in text chat than in voice. There is some empirical research to support this hypothesis: see Hudson and Bruckman 2002 and Wadley, Gibbs and Ducheneaut 2009:4.

- The pros and cons of using voice for EFL teaching and learning were summed up by Jordyn Peccable: “We will probably have classes/groups that contain students who would like to have the option of using voice and those that don’t (...) It would probably be based a lot on level and learning style (...) Auditory learners will definitely have a preference for the voice”. While a structured EFL programme referred to by Jordyn was never started in the EnglishVillage for a number of reasons, it is interesting that the voice-text option for EFL learners was at all considered in June 2007. With the full-scale introduction of voice in SL in the second half of 2007 all language courses are now offered in the voice modality only. Text chat is used, however, for occasions when voice malfunctions and in situations where it is pedagogically desirable (facilitating understanding, back-channel explanation/commenting, spelling help, etc.).
- Barbosa’s question: “What benefits for your learning do you expect from voice in SL?” did not – counter to expectations – trigger off a discussion on pronunciation learning.

To complement these remarks, the following are some more potentially troublesome issues connected with using voice for SLEFL pronunciation teaching/learning. Many questions can find no ready answers, and remain fertile ground for research and experimentation in-world. Because we are now close to the narrow end of the metaphorical funnel: from SL education, through SL language education, to SLEFL, and finally to SLEFL pronunciation, there is not much literature on the subject, and few academic researchers who would have the necessary background in FLT, SLEFL and phonetics at the same time. It is with this awareness that I offer my reflections below: let them be helpful to the researchers who consider starting projects in this field.

Quite apart from making it hard to locate the current speaker, no lip-synching is of course a serious deficiency in using articulatory modeling in teaching pronunciation. The teacher cannot simply turn to his/her learners and say: “Now look at my lips when I pronounce this difficult <th> sound”. No visual support is also a problem in listening comprehension, a skill of utmost importance in foreign language teaching and learning. With the SL voice channel, then, avatars must effectively resign themselves to telephone speech. This is not, however, a weakness specific to SL, or indeed to virtual worlds. Even dedicated programmes and packages, such as those produced by the Center for Spoken Language Research, University of Colorado in Boulder, where “the synchronization of the human voice to the movements of the lips (...) occurs fully automatically” (<http://www.bltek.com/bordeaux-workshop/virtual-tutoring-and-therapy-programs-at-cslr.html>) have serious problems achieving realistic lip-synch.

Pronunciation needs of EFL learners are quite varied both in FL and in SL: (a) to sound near-native-like, (b) to sound professional in EFL, (c) to avoid misunderstanding in voice communication, (d) to avoid embarrassment due to mispronunciation. But there could be generally less need for EFL pronunciation in SL than in FL, due to the obvious backdrop of text chat and the face-protecting affordance of the avatar persona. On the other hand, because English functions as a lingua franca in SL to an even higher degree than in FL (most residents speak English natively or near-natively), its importance to all SL residents is boosted. It is not clear if this boost translates to pronunciation. From my own anecdotal observations and impressions during five years in-world it would rather look like the answer is – no. This is somewhat surprising, also because, unlike in the case of some other SL-internal skills, foreign



language skills learnt in-world, including pronunciation, are easily transferred into FL. In other words, there is no problem ‘mapping’ them to real world (Williams 2010). By this token they should in theory be highly valued.

Phonetic transcription in SLEFL pronunciation teaching remains a subject of its own. On top of IPA being regarded as a four-letter word in many EFL pronunciation teaching circles, SLEFL offers some additional troublesome issues. While IPA symbols can be obtained by copy-and-pasting them in the text-chat window or in a notecard (but not in inventory object name labels under some viewers, such as the PhoenixFirestorm viewer client<sup>42</sup>), there is practically no way to enter them directly from the keyboard without using an elaborate shortcut systems and/or cheat-sheets. This is quite similar to typing under Windows, but not in Word, where a number of options have been worked out over years, but in the simple notepad application, with only very basic font editing options. This is why, on those occasions when I deemed it necessary to use phonetic transcription, I opted for a simplified system, which is widely used in electronic communications, even if not rigorously standardized (yet, similar to SAMPA in some parts; <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/sampa/index.html>). It makes liberal use of mnemonics and capitals to code the non-Roman IPA characters. I have collected these symbols in a table, which I distributed to my students in-world, as well as hung on my personal website: <http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/SL-IPA.pdf>. Below is a replica of the notecard.

#### Phonetic transcription lookup table

This lookup table is meant to help students of EFL pronunciation in SL to be better able to read and write phonetic transcription. The “official” IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) transcription relies on non-ASCII characters, which are hard to obtain in the SL client, so a substitute system is used below which has been adapted from existing systems of this kind, widely used in the earlier stages of the internet development. In the notecard distributed in-world only ASCII symbols are used, of course, so students wishing to correlate them with their IPA equivalents can use this page.

Only those symbols whose phonetic value differs from the “ordinary” expected pronunciation are listed here, i.e. 27 out of 44 (British) English phonemes. For each SL symbol its proper IPA symbol is provided, coded in the Doulos SIL font, a widely used Windows standard font for coding phonetic symbols. There are many websites where it can be downloaded for installation on your PC, including its original “home”:  
[http://scripts.sil.org/cms/scripts/page.php?site\\_id=nrsi&id=DoulosSILfont](http://scripts.sil.org/cms/scripts/page.php?site_id=nrsi&id=DoulosSILfont).

Important notes: (i) this is British English pronunciation of the example words, (ii) a colon /:/ is used to mark the so-called long/tense vowels, as opposed to short/lax, but (iii) two lax vowels have their special symbols: /I/ and /U/, (iv) the vowels in diphthongs have their short/lax values, but no /I/ and /U/ are used there, for simplicity, (v) word examples and ordering are taken from:  
<http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/sampa/english.htm>, (vi) the order of the symbols is not important.

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<sup>42</sup> Which makes it impossible to name and search files in the inventory (for example notecards or PAVed objects) using IPA symbols. Substitutes must be used. A counter-affordance par excellence!

	SL	IPA	word	SL transcription
1.	C	tʃ	<i>chin</i>	CIn
2.	J	ɟʒ	<i>gin</i>	JIn
3.	T	θ	<i>thin</i>	TIn
4.	D	ð	<i>this</i>	DIs
5.	S	ʃ	<i>shin</i>	SIn
6.	Z	ʒ	<i>measure</i>	'meZ@
7.	N	ŋ	<i>thing</i>	TIN
8.	I	ɪ	<i>pit</i>	pIt
9.	e	e	<i>pet</i>	pet
10.	&	æ	<i>pat</i>	P&t
11.	o	ɔ	<i>pot</i>	pot
12.	^	ʌ	<i>cut</i>	K^t
13.	U	ʊ	<i>put</i>	pUt
14.	@	ə	<i>another</i>	@'n^D@

	SL	IPA	word	SL transcription
15.	i:	i:	<i>ease</i>	i:z
16.	ei	eɪ	<i>raise</i>	reiz
17.	ai	aɪ	<i>rise</i>	raiz
18.	oi	ɔɪ	<i>noise</i>	noiz
19.	u:	u:	<i>lose</i>	lu:z
20.	@u	əʊ	<i>nose</i>	n@uz
21.	au	aʊ	<i>cows</i>	kauz
22.	@:	ə:	<i>furs</i>	f@:z
23.	a:	ɑ:	<i>stars</i>	sta:z
24.	o:	o:	<i>cause</i>	ko:z
25.	i@	ɪə	<i>fears</i>	fi@z
26.	e@	eə	<i>stairs</i>	ste@z
27.	u@	ʊə	<i>cures</i>	kju@z

As it turned out with time and practice, such crutches were not very popular with SLEFL pronunciation students in-world, mostly because they are rather allergic to phonetic transcription as such, regardless of the niceties of the actual system. Like their FL colleagues, they tend to regard the system as an additional hurdle in the already difficult race to master EFL pronunciation. To accommodate this sentiment, with time I designed fewer and fewer activities which would call for the active use of phonetic transcription, instead trying to refer to sounds in a descriptive way, such as: “what I mean is the first sound of the word *another*”.

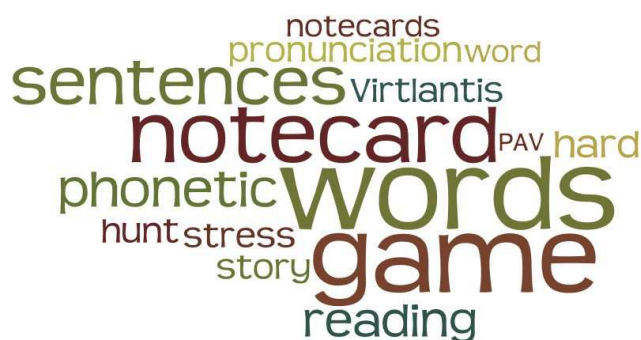
As mentioned in the Introduction, over the four (school-)years 2008-2012 I have conducted 163 weekly Wednesday meetings of ‘Pronunciation with Wlodek Barbosa’. The PAVed games and activities, which account for about one-fifth of this number, will be discussed in Chapter 4.5. Their full list, complete with the entire notecards and resources used during the activities, is attached in the Appendix. The other meetings were devoted to a variety of issues. Sometimes, for all kind of reasons, there was little explicit pronunciation at all. For example, this is my mnemonic list of the themes covered in the first ten meetings in my sessions:

1. Br/Am accent differences, LFC/EIL, accent vs dialect
2. just wants to talk in English; showed my house
3. rezzable objects; small talk
4. small talk
5. small talk
6. small talk
7. small talk
8. why have they left LanguageLab?
9. what is hard in pronunciation? needs analysis. stress placement in various languages. panel quiz examples.
10. rezzable objects of LL + project1 warmer tasks

As can be seen, I started with ‘small talk’ mostly, with no specific attention to phonetic issues. We did cover some rather sophisticated topics, too, for example *Lingua Franca Core* and *English as an International Language*. In meetings 9. and 10. I used two types of pronunciation teaching aids: (a) quizz panels installed by default in SLEnglish launchrooms at that time, loaded with some simple multiple choice tests of declarative pronunciation knowledge, and (b) some of the ‘rezzable objects’ which I kept (with LanguageLab

permission) in my inventory after the completion of the teacher-training course in 2007 (see Chapter 4.1. for a report of the project). Thus, I was using PAVed objects quite early on in my teaching career in-world, without at that time having much in the way of theoretical underpinnings of this intuitively pleasing (and plausible) concept.

It would be rather tedious to go through the remaining 153 session themes in this manner, of course (but see Appendix 30 for a summary of the 2008/2009 themes). Considering that the one-liners, like the ones shown above, were meant but for my own memory, most of them would be completely cryptic without heavy explanatory annotation. To convey some of the information about the recurrent themes in my pronunciation cycle, below is a wordle constructed from the content of the theme notes, with 15 being set as the maximum word limit.



**Snapshot 30. Pronunciation with Wlodek Barbosa – most common theme keywords**

It is seen at a glance that *words* (*function words, object name words, [-ain] words, hard words, common words, <-ate> words, etc.*) and *sentences* (phonetically difficult/easy, containing segment /.../, etc.) were the most commonly covered topics. These would mostly appear in *notecards*, as part of pronunciation *games* and *hunts*, and used in *stories*, which were *read*. The *PAVing* of *Virtlantis* is also visible, if not very salient (in proportion to its incidence in the whole series, as mentioned above). The only specifically phonetic term showing up in the wordle is *stress*, which is an adequate reflection of its role in our activities (fifteen occurrences in the theme list). On the whole, then, I feel that this wordle does reflect quite well the contents of my pronunciation meetings. We used a variety of topics as subjects, only seldom going into phonetic technicalities of some pronunciation courses, with places and manners of articulation, for example. To the extent allowed by my competence, participants' proficiency, learning styles and preferences, and the affordances and counter-affordances of teaching EFL pronunciation in SL I tried to provide my students with an opportunity to brush up their existing skills in English pronunciation, as well as acquire some background declarative knowledge which could be of use.

In the following chapter I will look deeper into some of the teaching aids which I used in the process, as well as the theory underlying their application. Specifically, those aids which might appeal especially to kinesthetically minded learners will be discussed: SL 'rezzable' objects as reified concepts and as interactive holders of phonetic augmentation.

## 4. PAVing SLEFL

We are now at the bottom of the metaphorical funnel which I use as an organizing principle to structure the flow of argument in this book. I started from the grand educational scene in Second Life, then to go gradually deeper (and narrower) into SLEFL and its pronunciation. In this chapter, where the current of discussion and analysis will be the fastest and most condensed, I will attempt to present my thinking about two related concepts which, I believe, are good candidates for the holy grail of ‘added value’ in SL (language) teaching and learning: reification of abstract concepts into SL ‘rezzable’ objects and augmenting SL objects with (phonetic) content. Both are made possible by one affordance of SL which has not yet been discussed in-depth, and which was signalled by Karina Silva in her SL pedagogical review thus:

“While exploring the virtual world, users can interact with the environment by clicking on, moving or picking up objects and receiving information from them. For instance, users can click on objects and start a video clip, or they can be directed to a website. Similarly, SL objects can be programmed in such a way that, when a user gets close, it offers a notecard with information about the object itself or the place” (Silva 2008).

It is interesting to observe at this juncture that this SL affordance is often perceived as somewhat ordinary, apparently without a deeper realization of its revolutionary educational value. In their guide for (psychologist) educators in SL Bignell and Parson notice interactive-object affordance, just like Silva does, and associate it with Artificial Intelligence, rather than Augmented Virtuality: “The 3D virtual world can contain a wealth of ‘intelligent’ objects in the shape of everyday items that can be programmed or ‘scripted’ to respond when avatars interact with them. These can take the form of, for example, magazines, pictures and TV screens” (Bignell and Parson 2010:29; similarly Wodecki and Moczadło 2010). While SL is a natural testing ground for AI (ro)bots, of course, AI is not a specifically MUVE/VW-related affordance, which leaves it outside the scope of this book or chapter.

This, then, is supposed to be the most academically substantial chapter of this book, and one which makes certain empirical claims, even if it does not try to test them. As far as the form of the text is concerned, however, I will purposefully retain the rather free-flowing mix of discussion formats and styles, hoping that it will not hinder the reading process and appreciation of the research proposals. Indeed, I hope it could even enhance them. For example, the debate on the added value which I started on the Ning discussion forum of the TESOL EVO VWLL 2009 is here reproduced almost verbatim, with all the immediacy of such discussions, and very much in the Socratean erotematic spirit.

As far as the content of this chapter is concerned, I propose to start at the very beginning, i.e. at the LanguageLab course for budding SL language teachers organized at the end of 2007, where I took part as a teacher trainee. That was my first mind-blowing experience of ‘rezzable’ speaking objects in SL which could be used for teaching and learning. Some of my elation caused by this discovery was captured in a short piece, titled “My first lesson in Second Life” (even if it was not, really; <http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/First lesson in SL.pdf>). Then, I will report, with some abridgement, the TESOL EVO VWLL added value debate of the early 2009, where I tried to deepen some of my intuitions about what could count as a killer affordance for education in SL, and why some of the commonly touted advantages of SL as a MUVLE (e.g. holodecks) might not be as relevant as usually presented. Finally, I will treat two of my favourite themes separately, one section each: reification of (linguistic) abstracts into manipulable objects, and phonetically augmenting SL objects, i.e. PAVing them,

just like FL objects are in Augmented Reality devices. Some remarks on the practicalities of my work in PAVing Virtlantis will be offered at the end of the chapter.

As will be seen in this chapter, my ideas are not revolutionary. Some of them are not even entirely new. In my long Second Life I have gone through academic ups and downs, just like most researchers do in FL. There were times of intense activity when I seemed to have got some genuinely original insights into matters of interest in this study, only to be followed by some lull. Some of the insights later turned out not to be so original, after all. Whenever that happened, I fully admitted this fact in my presentations and workshops. There is nothing really extraordinary about this process, I believe. This is how Khunian normal science proceeds. The reason why I am writing these words here is, I guess, to defend my dare to gather my thoughts in one place and try to paint a relatively coherent picture of them. The defense is: even if everything in the following pages is not entirely new and original, I hope it is indeed a viable, and not quite reproductive, academic treatment of a subject which – to the best of my knowledge – has not yet received such attention.

#### **4.1. LanguageLab rezzable-object teacher training project**

At the end of 2007 all I knew about *LanguageLab* was that “2005 saw the first large-scale language school, *LanguageLab.com*, open its doors in Second Life” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual\\_world\\_language\\_learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_world_language_learning)). As it turned out, my involvement with *LanguageLab* was to be among the most seminal educational experiences in my entire SL. In November-December 2007 I took part in a teacher-training course organized in-world by LL. Part of this course was a project developed from November 12th to December 17th with the aim to “explore a variety of ways in which bank of rezzable objects could be drawn on by the teacher in a formal teaching situation”. Under supervision of one the LL mentors the team of four teacher-trainees from different countries, including Wlodek Barbosa, worked on a project which culminated in two trial/demo lessons on December 10<sup>th</sup> and December 12<sup>th</sup> 2007. Below is an abridged version of the report of this project, which was one of the deliverables. The entire text of the report, together with appendices holding the materials and resources used in the project, counts 36 standard pages.

The participants of the project were: Iffaf Ling (FL=Iffaf Khan, mentor), Bees Despres (FL=Beatrice Hochart Alves), Stefi Kohime (FL=Štěpánka Jůnová), Misy Ferraris (FL=Carmen Dell’Aria) and myself. There were other concurrent projects in the entire course, with other participant teacher trainees and mentors. The reason why I am reporting on this one is two-fold: (a) I know it at first-hand as its participant, and (b) only this project was devoted to what LL called ‘rezzable objects’, i.e. – in my own parlance in this book – virtually augmented objects. For the needs of the project, as well as for later use in LL’s regular educational activities in-world, a bank of such objects was developed at that time. It was my task to select food-related objects for the project. Below I report on what criteria I used to carry out the selection. Some of these objects, with permission of LL, were later used in my own PAVing efforts. Many of them appear in these two snapshots, taken during the first (left) and second (right) trial lesson.





**Snapshot 31. LanguageLab 2007 rezzable-object teacher training project**

I now append excerpts from the original text of the team’s report, which I authored with some help of the other three team members. Left-out material is indicated with (...). While I would normally use the standard quotation style with existing documents (smaller-font indented text), I decided against this policy here because: (a) it is indeed my own text, (b) it is quite extensive, (c) only tiny fragments thereof have been published in my 2010 paper on “SLEFL pronunciation...”.

Report on LL Project#1 in LanguageLab  
 Rezzable objects in the classroom  
 (December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

(...)

During a meeting with our mentor Iffaf, the list was discussed and it was decided that the efforts would be focused on the pronunciation and grammar (passive voice) activities to trial the objects. So the list of objects was handed to LanguageLab for rezzing. While they were being produced we worked on the lesson plans. At first, we were supposed to present twice the same class; however, since the objects were so flexible and the purpose was to show they could be used in a great variety of ways, we ended preparing two completely different classes in two sub-teams.

(...)

The rationale behind the decision of working on food and clothes rather than leisure was:

- (a) they appear to involve more easily tangible, manipulable, rezzable objects than leisure,
- (b) they are relatively culture-neutral, hence better fit the multicultural environment of SL,
- (c) they offer a certain number of items varying across cultures in interesting ways – hence a pedagogical potential in a multicultural classroom,
- (d) clothing remains in the centre of avatar interest, for newbies and experienced residents alike,
- (e) food is obviously essential in learning a foreign language, whatever the purpose of the students.

(...)

The team invented a variety of situations and activities to be created and exploited in the SL classroom. Most activities could be carried on in RL classroom with realia. However, the

possibilities offered by SL and the fact that customized objects would be rezzed, with features unthinkable in RL, added value to the teaching/learning process.

(...)

The vocabulary had to meet the following criteria:

- (a) be appropriate for learners at all levels,
- (b) be easily rezzable (hence – concrete/imageable/tangible),
- (c) be relatively common in English,
- (d) be relevant for the situations,
- (e) add value to the activities selected,
- (f) be limited in number (for practical reasons of rezzing deadlines),
- (g) suit not only one, but a series of activities (...).

The resultant list answered all these requirements, represented a group and, although relatively short, let itself to varied use in the context of the lesson, on all linguistic levels: lexical, grammatical, cultural, and phonetic. For example, the lexical item *orange juice* can be exploited phonetically (e.g. geminate voiced affricate in sandhi position), lexically and morpho-syntactically (uncountable, needs containers, special meaning of juices) and grammatically (*oranges* are grown, *orange juice* is produced, *should have bought more oranges*, etc.) The real plus compared to RL realia was that these objects incorporated audio and were self-teaching: when touched they would tell their name.

(...)

On Monday the lesson took place on the lawn near the car-park in the LL Business sim. The rezzed objects were lying around on the ground to make it easier for the learners to approach them and navigate the terrain for the phonetic activity, which involved touching the objects in turn to hear their names and answering some questions about their phonetic structure.

(...)

The rezzed objects were used mostly in the phonetic warm-up part of the lesson. In the ensuing activities (for example in the food categorization activity) no significant recourse was made to them directly, which was a notable deficiency, because the activities could gain in communicative relevance, affective appeal and tempo. This deficiency reinforces how important it is to use rezzed objects in SL classes :

- to get students' attention and participation by adding an emotional dimension. For example, the student living in a desert would probably never have the opportunity of manipulating blueberries in a real life class,
- to give the class a more appropriate pace,
- to reduce teacher's instruction time and increase learner's speaking time,
- to apply the "learn by manipulating and doing" approach,

thus reaching a higher level of achievement in the teaching/learning process.

(...)

For all activities in the lesson a plan B for contingencies was in place, specifically notecards with food & drink vocabulary plus a few simple exercises (with and without audio) which could be performed by the learners with audio problems, or at times when the teacher is temporarily absent from the scene for technical reasons. Luckily, there were on the whole no such problems, although one learner's audio was deficient at times and text chat had to be used.

(...)

One obvious limitation in using objects for class activities are SL-imposed difficulties in handling objects in SL, which would have required additional EFL-unrelated time to instruct the learners in. But the disadvantages are outnumbered. From the experiences described above, it is obvious that having at hand a set of rezzed objects, mostly self-teaching speaking ones, offers great advantages and leads to more meaningful and time effective classes. They also help improve the communicative and social dimension. Their flexibility and multifunctional characteristics justify the time and energy put into their rezzing. Not only can they be used for different level groups (from beginner to upper advanced) but for all kinds of skill development (communication, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, culture, etc). Due to their nature, most of them may also be used in self-access guided activities or free discovery. They could also be gathered in some illustrated speaking dictionary.

(...)

EFL learners in SL need (pedagogical) dictionaries for the same reasons they need them in RL: to look up definitions of unknown words, to check spelling and pronunciation, to find examples of usage, etc. The virtual environment of SL creates exciting opportunities in terms of building dictionaries directly into objects, gestures, textures and other manipulables provided by default by Linden Lab. SL scripting language can be used to create ‘walking’ dictionaries with all the properties of existing electronic versions, and many new ones. The LL Project#1 experience with built-in sound retrievable at a touch shows that such dictionaries are indeed quite feasible.

(...)

## Appendix 8. Phonetic aspects of rezzable objects

### 1. Selection of words to be rezzed

According to the LL stated aims of the project, “the bank (of rezzable objects) will consist of the most common words in English along with common lexical sets across a range of levels”. Project#1 Team decided to focus on two lexical fields of the three suggested by LL: food&drink and clothing. To meet the demands of the task, a few pedagogical e-dictionaries of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) were sampled: Oxford, Longman, Macmillan and Cambridge. Only *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (CALD) offered a suitable subject search in the two lexical fields. The number of hits was: for headword food&drink nouns = 2207 (the list was truncated to 1024 by the CALD software), for headword clothing nouns = 817. For verbs, respectively: 243 and 31. (...) While no verbs were later used in the Project, it is possible to design methods of using the affordances of SL to implement some verb-denoted actions as avatar gestures or poses, e.g. through pose-balls. Verbs could then be illustrated in ways not unlike that of illustrating nouns by rezzing appropriate objects. A suitably animated learner’s avatar could, for example, perform some activities associated with a given lexical field, say food&drink, such as *bottle-feed, butcher, chew, drink, grate, grill, gulp, lick, press, salt, spoon-feed, suck, tenderize, toast*, for example (taken from the CALD list of verbs below).

Only highly imageable words nouns can be rezzed into SL objects. Of the first few of CALD food&drink nouns, the following are practically not rezzable: *accompaniment, acidity, additive, afternoon, afters, aftertaste, Aga, albumen, alcoholic*. To filter out such unrezzable objects, the CALD noun lists were confronted with those of high imageability, as rated empirically by the so-called Paivio index (see Bibliography). Only words with Paivio index > 600 (range 0-700) were extracted as subsets for rezzing purposes. Because imageability

correlates highly with concreteness and familiarity, as well as with commonness, (all important criteria for vocabulary choice in the EFL context) no further filtering was applied. The resulting lists are provided first below. Some manual tweaking was necessary mostly to eliminate vocabulary unrelated to the two lexical sets.

High imageability CALD “food&drink” words: *alcohol, apple, apricot, asparagus, banana, bean, beef, beet, bread, butter, cabbage, cake, candy, carrot, cauliflower, cereal, cheese, cherry, chicken, cider, coffee, cookie, corkscrew, crab, cream, cucumber, dough, doughnut, duck, egg, fruit, fudge, garlic, gin, gingerbread, glass, grape, gravy, honey, ice, kettle, knife, lamb, lemon, lemonade, liquor, liver, macaroni, pickle, seed, skin, spoon, stew, sugar.*

High imageability CALD “clothing” words: *ankle, bag, belt, blouse, bra, button, coat, collar, elbow, glove, handkerchief, hat, helmet, jacket, kilt, leg, moccasin, nightgown, overcoat, pants, sandal, shawl, shirt, skirt, straw, toe, umbrella.*

At that stage it was decided that only one lexical field would ultimately be rezzed into objects and tried out in actual teaching in-world, that of food&drink. (...) The associated audio files, in wav format, were partly obtained from native-speaker recordings for an earlier project (now defunct, with IPRs secured<sup>43</sup>), and partly created ad hoc by the undersigned.

(...)

There were a number of didactic aims behind the decision to use audio-enhanced food&drink objects in the *SL* classroom. One was to give the learners an opportunity to practice pronunciation of words to be later used vocally in lexical and grammatical activities. Touching 3D simulated objects to hear their ‘names’: (a) provides an exciting way to expose the learner to the phonetic side of practised vocabulary, (b) takes their attention away from spelling and into pronunciation, (c) creates a direct link between the mental picture of the object and its phonetic form on the linguistic level, (d) offers a natural context for repetition, (e) generates many opportunities for meaningful pronunciation-focused exercises with and without the teacher, (f) is cognitively similar to the familiar act of consulting an electronic dictionary, (g) uses the affordances of *SL* virtual environment for the benefit of language learning.

(...)

There are many ways in which phonetically-enhanced rezzed objects can be used for pronunciation-focused EFL instruction in *SL*, using its rich 3d affordances. The objects themselves can be equipped with additional properties, for example they could be “magnetized” to attract or repel each other depending on whether they are similar in phonetically predefined ways. Suitably scripted objects could be made to fit into some containers, but not into others, e.g. one container for object words containing a nasal sound, another for ones composed of more than two syllables, etc. Various activities could be spun around such objects for various proficiency levels, learner needs and lesson plans<sup>44</sup>.

Some examples are suggested below.

1. Phonetic domino: objects are linked to each other domino-style one by one to match the offset-onset sounds, e.g.: *alcohol-lemonade-duck-cabbage-gin*. Complications are discussed (e.g. ‘linking’ /r/). Correctly linked objects ‘stick’ into a flexible chain, wrongly linked repel each other. In both cases objects ‘say their name’ without any additional learner action.

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<sup>43</sup> Sobkowiak et al. 1997. *Pop-English 3.0: A multimedia computer-assisted course of English for Polish learners*. Zielona Góra: Awangarda Software House.

<sup>44</sup> These two paragraphs appeared in print in Sobkowiak 2010:206-208.

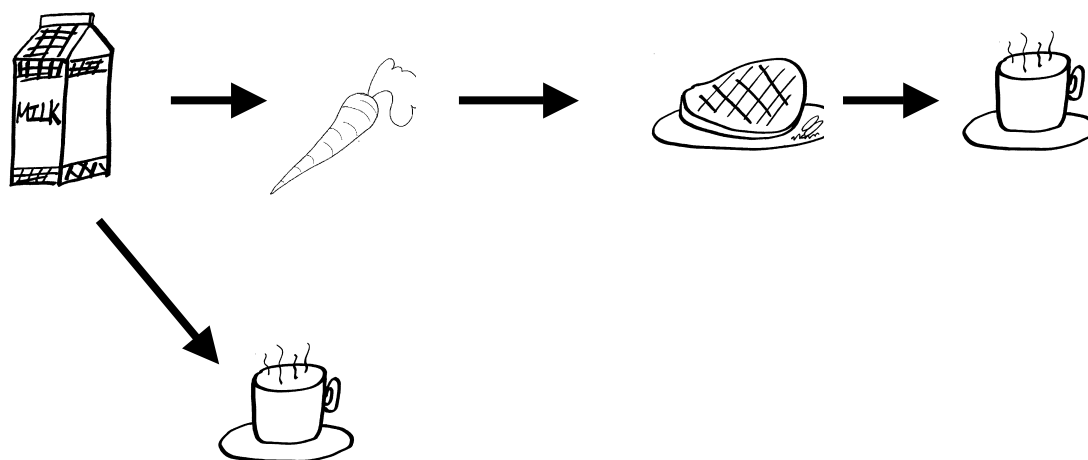
Group-work possible, depending on the number of learners, their proficiency, audio conditions, etc. Teacher(s) walk around and facilitate, stimulate learners to say the words, explain phonetic problems. The most elaborate domino wins. All correctly linked objects are kept by the winner(s).

Follow-up: can these ‘phonetic recipes’ be made into eatable dishes? Aim: phonetic awareness raising (letter-phoneme mismatch in English), pronunciation practice. Time: ~15 mins.

Problems: (1) how do avies actually handle the objects and stick them together (by pushing them), (2) how to avoid audio overlap (copies of sets in audio-separated locations?), (3) some chains quickly end in cul-de-sac: {apple-lettuce-spoon}, {cheese-zucchini}, {banana}.

Example of a possible object domino chain (clipart from:

<http://tell.fl.purdue.edu/JapanProj//FLClipart>): milk-carrot-[T-bone-steak]-coffee



2. Phonetic classification: clothing objects are strewn all around the house in great disarray. Learners sort them according to their phonetic properties into wardrobes, suitcases, bags and other containers. Possible criteria: (a) number of syllables, (b) contain a specific sound, (c) do not contain a specific sound, (d) do not / contain a specific cluster of sounds. For example: “clothes containing the sound schwa go into this wardrobe...” - *collar, handkerchief, moccasin, overcoat, umbrella*. Teacher helps with borderline cases: *ankle, button, helmet*, etc.

3. Phonetic gestures: learners pick gestures at random from a lexical-field heap. Gestures are identified by codes, not by explicit names. Learners wear each gesture in turn, trying to guess the verb which they are gesturing. Pairwork possible here. Next they pick objects which will ‘fit’ both semantically and phonetically (criteria as in activity 2) to those verbs as direct objects. For example: *bake+cake* (domino), *bite+fruit* (one syllable), *chew+chicken* (same onset consonant), *cube+stew* (/ju:/), *consume+alcohol, flavour+lemonade* (offset-onset stress). Fitting objects ‘stick’ to hand, wrong choices jump back.

4. Audio definitions: learners hear dictionary-style definitions read aloud. They guess the word defined. If guessed properly, the object rolls off the opaque container into their lap to keep. The gesture is offered for wear. For example: *a colourless liquid which can make you drunk - ?*, *a large round white vegetable which is eaten cooked or raw - ?*, *a square piece of cloth used for cleaning the nose or drying the eyes when they are wet with tears, to (cause to) become free of ice, or to (cause to) become no longer frozen - ?*

5. Phonetic jigsaw puzzle: blocks and spheres are lying around in large quantities. Each stands for a syllable, and will ‘say its name’ when touched, but no spelling is used. Learners walk

around and try to put syllables into meaningful words within the given lexical set. When successful, the objects miraculously transform into the object named with the word, and can be kept by the learner. For example (here in orthography): *un dress butt on buck le mar in ate per col ate dough nut*. Object attributes can be used to make the puzzle easier, such as colour, shape, size, texture.

6. Synaesthesia: blocks are lying around in large quantities. They vary in colour, shape, size, texture. Each object attribute correlates with one phonetic attribute, as above. Learners walk around touching the objects, which ‘say their name’. Learners must guess the correlation. The smaller the number of touches the higher the reward. For example, all of ankle, elbow, overcoat and umbrella are blue - they begin with a vowel; all of apple, butter, chicken, cider, cucumber, kettle, liquor, liver, pickle and sugar have spikes - they all end in a syllabic sonorant (in American English).

In all of these activities varieties are possible using phonetic transcription (textures on objects?) rather than audio.

This completes the excerpt from the original report on the ‘rezzable objects in the classroom’ project. As can be seen from it, many of the issues later appearing in my own thinking and writing about the added value of SL in language teaching/learning had their beginning during the course. As it turned out in trialling, objects with built-in audio were quite useful and enjoyed some popularity among the students, even if there were certain problems, both incidental, caused by technical glitches of the environment, and fundamental, such as the lack of object-handling gestures built-in by default in the SL software. Issues connected with reification of abstract concepts were also marginally present – to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.3. below. Other threads also appeared, such as the feasibility of creating an in-world ‘rezzable’ SLEFL dictionary, with viewable 3d objects holding all expected lexicographic information (including audio recording), possibly exploitable for ad-hoc tests and games. Later in my SL teaching work I actually rezzed a dictionary like this (see [http://www.slideshare.net/Włodzimierz\\_Sobkowiak/dictionaries-in-second-life](http://www.slideshare.net/Włodzimierz_Sobkowiak/dictionaries-in-second-life) for a short slide presentation of May 26<sup>th</sup> 2010). Below are snapshots of two (early version) dictionary entries for *shirt* and *alligator*: a click on the texture/object would play a sound file, show phonetic transcription, definition and example sentence, etc.



**Snapshot 32. Interactive ‘rezzable’ SLEFL dictionary: textures and objects**

On a grander scale, the LL project was probably the beginning of my dream of turning all of SL into a dictionary of sorts, with all visible objects equipped with pedagogically useful



information, thus turning them into Augmented Virtual (AV) objects in ways parallel to Augmented Real (AR) objects work in FL. At the end of 2007, however, my PAVING project did not yet exist, and the ideas concerning the added values of SL were just germinating. They were to obtain a strong boost from my participation in another teacher-training course in-world, part of the TESOL EVO event of January-February 2009, the VWLL 2009 course. I briefly relate my experience of it in the next section, and append a lengthy discussion on the course's Ning site forum on the added value of SL for language education.

## 4.2. EVO VWLL 2009 added value debate

As can be seen in the many wikis and blogs left on the web after the original EVO VWLL 2009 Ning site stopped existing (but see here for course description: <http://evosessions.pbworks.com/w/page/10708585/virtualworlds>), the experience of going through the course was extremely useful professionally and greatly enjoyable for very many participants<sup>45</sup>. There were all the elements of a great online course: excellent facilitators, interesting places to visit, useful materials and resources provided, well-constructed tasks to perform, a comfortable discussion forum, a motivating community spirit, and a good professional focus and relevance. As far as visiting is concerned, my personal favourite during that course was the *Virtual Macbeth* tour, which I reported on earlier in this book (see Chapter 2.3.). But there were many other excellent trips, workshops and discussions, the latter both in-world and out. The added value debate happened in cyberspace, but not in SL.

Below I provide a heavily abridged log of this lengthy discussion, held in January-March 2009 on the forum of the TESOL Electronic Village Online Virtual Worlds and Language Learning course, where I was one of the over 350 teacher trainees. The blog was originally available in its entirety on the Ning page of the course (<http://evovwll.ning.com>), which has been taken offline, mostly due to Ning commercialization. I managed to salvage the debate before the Ning course page was discontinued by porting it to my own departmental community portal on Grou.ps: <http://zajek.grou.ps/talks/2601781>.




This discussion shows the development of my own thinking about how Phonetically Augmented Virtuality (PAV) can provide some of the added value. All quotes are reproduced by permission of their respective authors, identified below with their SL avatar nicknames. Due to the constraints of this medium, only a very superficial portrayal of PAVING will be possible. For a fully interactive and multisensory experience of my PAVED objects the interested reader is welcome to go in-world and visit my launchroom and house on Virtlantis: <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/198/242/23>.

The added value thread was one of 19 'other' discussions held during, and after, the extremely active and fruitful six-week online course held between January 12th and February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009. Of the nineteen discussions in the 'other' category this was the most contributed to, with 52 replies, the last reply dated March 9, 2009. The next discussion in the frequency ranking, with 26 replies, was about "nothing to do in SL", and concerned mostly the difference between the gamelike nature of such virtual worlds as the *World of Warcraft* and the open-scenario

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<sup>45</sup> A selection from the first page of google results: <http://michalska.wordpress.com/category/vwll2009/>, <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/metaweb/virtual-worlds-language-learning-vwll-evo2009>, <http://www.slideshare.net/nnoakes/virtual-worlds-and-language-learning>.

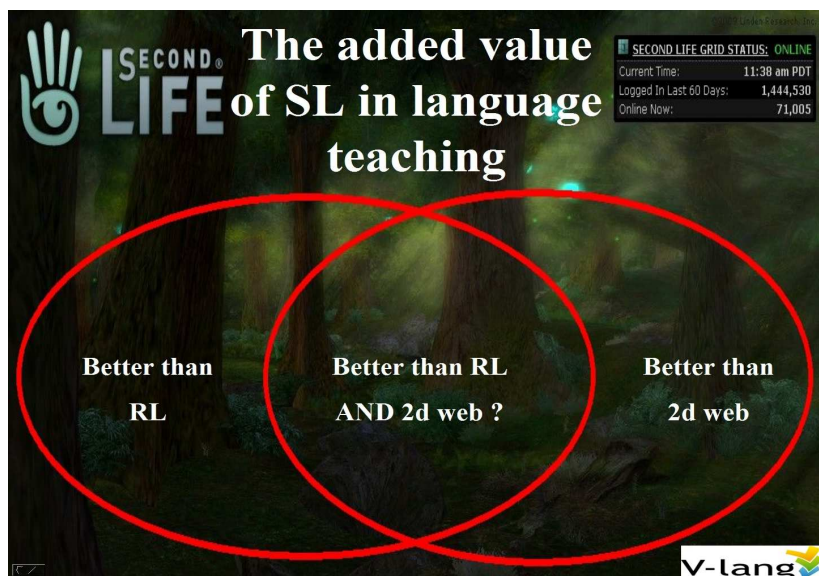
character of SL, with its affordance for building, creating and collaborating. Here is a screenshot of the Ning page at the end of the debate.

	<b>Added value of SL for FLT</b> What is the added educational value of SL, compared to FL? The most obvious and most commonly touted advantages of SL you'll have heard aro... Started by you	52	Mar. 9, 2009 <a href="#">Reply by Włodzimierz Sobkowiak</a>
	<b>"Nothing to do in SL"</b> About the "nothing to do in SL" complaint frequently voiced by noobs... Joining groups, finding freebies, dressing up, being other avies ar... Started by you	26	Jan. 28, 2009 <a href="#">Reply by First Virtual</a>
	<b>Event Configuration (Windows) for Newbies, Intermediates, and Pros</b> How should you and your computer be configured for a SL event? What knowledge, skills, experiences, and capabilities can you gain here? Sec... Started by James O'Reilly	16	Apr. 15, 2009 <a href="#">Reply by James O'Reilly</a>

### Snapshot 33. EVO VWLL 2009 added value debate on Ning

Clearly, then, the added value discussion, which I started, generated ample response, which, incidentally, came from some of the most expert SL language educators. It is by taking issue with, and elaborating upon, some of these responses that my own views on the issue gradually developed. This is why I chose this somewhat unorthodox way of presenting the theoretical basis for my PAV experiments: discursive, dialogic, eristic, confrontational, collaborative, constructivist, augmentative. The reader will thus be presented not only with my current stance on the discussed issues, but also with the account of the process of reaching it; this corresponding with the commonly postulated educational character of MUV(L)Es.

The following abridged log of the thread picks on the responses most relevant to the focus of this contribution, namely those which are concerned with the actual identification of what could effectively constitute the added value, i.e. those affordances of SL for teaching/learning foreign languages which do not simply replicate those of FL on the one hand, or of two-dimensional web applications and Learning Management Systems (LMSs), such as Moodle, on the other. In other words, I see added value as the conjunction of two sets: (1) those SL affordances which beat FL, and (2) those SL affordances which beat LMS. In slide 7 of my *Teaching EFL in SL* presentation at the Warsaw *V-lang* Conference of November 17<sup>th</sup> 2011 (<http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/Teaching EFL in SL.pps>) I illustrated the idea in the following manner:



Snapshot 34. Educational added value of SL as a conjunction of two sets

Naturally, in a discussion of this length and scope, there were many extraneous threads and loose ends, which are not covered here. Likewise, entries in this discussion may at times be heavily shortened, thus possibly misinterpreting the original goals and intentions of the discussants. This is not meant, however, to be a faithful representation of the whole discussion, but rather an account of my personal journey through conceptual space, thus unavoidably subjective. Nevertheless, a draft version of this text was presented to all quoted discussants for approval, and such approval was granted.

The style of the discussion log following is that of a lively and rather informal exchange typical of such social networking platforms as Ning, where it was originally taking place. This is of course rather different from what is expected in carefully edited academic prose. It would be possible, at pains, to bring the following text into closer conformity with such discourse, but (i) some of the original impact of the exchange would necessarily be lost, (ii) gradually more and more research is conducted in this collaborative manner and style, especially research on such thoroughly community-oriented pursuits as online FL teaching. Therefore, I decided to present the discussion content without major stylistic changes (just a few typographic corrections here and there, and rotten url update, where possible), fully aware that it may offend the stylistic taste of some readers. Caveat emptor!

### Wlodek Barbosa on January 20, 2009

What is the added educational value of SL, compared to FL? The most obvious and most commonly touted advantages of SL you'll have heard around are those where SL is compared against web2, i.e. two-dimensional web applications, such as Learning Management Systems (LMSs, e.g. Moodle), community portals (e.g. Ning or Facebook), collaborative spaces (such as Google docs), file-hosting services (such as Flickr or YouTube). It is in this comparison that SL shines, with its immersiveness, embodiment, social presence, three-dimensionality, literally understood constructivism, simulated natural environments, replicas of FL objects/monuments/ places, etc. But how is SL educationally better than FL?

Well... What immediately comes to mind in this context are fly-through hearts, simulated CPR phantoms, the Sistine Chapel or Virtual Macbeth. These are sims/builds which share a number

of characteristics, the crucial being: affording a rich multisensory experience of an aspect/object of FL going beyond what is feasible in FL. One cannot experience the living heart from inside in FL; one cannot fly up to the ceiling of Sistine Chapel in FL<sup>46</sup>; one cannot enter Macbeth's head in FL. Let us assume (without empirical proof, which is not easy to come by, BTW) that such affordances are actually conducive to better learning/ understanding/ knowledge creation. And that this advantage carries over to FL. So far so good.

But in this community we're concerned with language. Language is a system of immaterial symbols. So how do we, language teachers, construct the "rich multisensory experience" which would provide affordances going beyond what is possible in FL? We're not doing this by asking our students to solve multiple-choice tests, even if – instead of clicking – they need to move their avatars to occupy certain positions in-world. A multiple choice is a multiple choice. We're not doing this when we tell them to answer vocabulary questions whereupon they'll be able to open another door in a simulated maze. The vocabulary remains symbolic, and the maze is just an icing on the cake, rather than the crucial element of the experience. Even the hyped scavenger hunts only add value to the entertainment side of the exercise, not to the actual linguistic content or skill. If we tell students to TP to Barcelona and find answers to some language questions in their notecards by talking to the (presumably) native speakers of Spanish (and we all know that is an extremely risky task to issue, pedagogically speaking), exactly where's the added value, compared to grabbing a mobile phone (or VoIP) and calling Barcelona Tourist Information, right here and right now, in the FL classroom?

It is easy enough to imagine a fly-through simulation of the oral cavity for pronunciation training in a foreign language, with some of the same pros and cons as the human heart experience, I guess. But this is because here we have the most "physical" end of the knowledge of a foreign language: the positioning of the tongue with respect to the teeth, the rounding of lips, the opening of the jaw, etc. Some linguists do not count phonetics as part of linguistics, by the way, simply because it is physical, and language is not. But beyond such simple ideas? How do we add SL value on top of what is already doable in FL? (And we're not talking about SL allowing geographically distanced students to come together – this is another matter altogether). How do we use the amazing affordances of SL to really go *beyond* FL in teaching/learning languages. How do we avoid simply replicating our tired teaching techniques in-world? How is SL better than RL for FLT? What is the bottom line? What is the *experimentum crucis*?

### **Lynn Carlucci (FL= Barb Sakamoto) on January 22, 2009**

There's always a trade off. For example, is it better language practice to send students to virtual Dublin to practice social conversation at the pub, or have a practice session in class where it might be easier for the teacher to identify whether a problem is with the language or simply not understanding how to work the voice toggle? Obviously, Dublin is more "fun" but is it better teaching? Undecided.

[At this point of the debate I was asked by the facilitators of the course to suspend it because it was felt that the discussion was premature for most course participants, many of whom would just have begun their second lives, and would have had too little in-world experience to relate

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<sup>46</sup> I discovered the following pertinent quote after the debate: "What are you doing in Second Life that you can't do with our normal distance learning tools? There was the typical tap dancing and so forth, but really the answer was, "Nothing." And that's where we are right now. For instance, you can go in a virtual world and look at the roof of the Sistine Chapel, and you can fly your avatar up to look at it. But we can see very good digital representations of the Sistine Chapel online as well, from multiple points of view and so forth, without using Second Life or a virtual world." (Welch 2008).

to the debate content meaningfully. I complied with the request. The thread was picked up almost a month later by one of the facilitators, Daffodil Fargis (FL=Nergiz Kern).]

### **Daffodil Fargis on February 16, 2009**

Hm, I've just read your post again, Wlodek (now that we are in week 6 ;). What strikes me most is that it seems you put SL on one side and FL (First Life or Real Life) on the other as if they couldn't exist side by side like other tools we use. I think we (at least you and me and some others) agree that SL is a tool among many. For me, SL is one of my FL tools. SL is my 3D tool but I also have Web 2.0 tools and offline tools in a face-to-face class. Also, you say that games like scavenger hunts, mazes, etc. "only" add to the entertainment. But don't you think that we learn better when learning is entertaining whether this is in FL, SL or online?

### **Wlodek Barbosa on February 17, 2009**

Entertainment, as part of edutainment, certainly helps teaching, but it can be achieved in many ways and in many places, ordinary RL classroom including. We don't need to enter SL to have fun teaching and learning. I fully understand that SL is/can be a powerful motivator to students because it adds the (quote from my original post) "immersiveness, embodiment, social presence, three-dimensionality, literally understood constructivism, simulated natural environments, replicas of FL objects/monuments/places", etc. But these advantages come from simply *replicating* RL, not from adding any specific VW value. My original "additional value" question concerned the so-far hardly well understood unique features of MUVES which can be employed for teaching/learning. What are they? Oversimplifying: what is it in SL that we can do pedagogically that we cannot do in RL? My ideas of voice-enabled dominoes (see <http://www.ted.com/talks/view/id/457><sup>47</sup> for a similar RL concept) or ubiquitous in-world dictionary distributed in virtually all objects/gestures are but humble attempts to wrap my mind around this question.

Notice that in today's panel discussion we hardly at all moved beyond the usual advantages of SL: immersion, role-playing, easy aid use. Walkthroughs were mentioned once by Frank Spemann in the context of literature teaching/learning. So what have we got in language pedagogy, beyond the idea of a guided tour of the mouth cavity (of use to pronunciation teachers)? Towards the end of the panel, Gwen Gwasi asked: "can I ask a question to the teachers here, what was it that made the difference for you in SL?". She then continued to summarize some answers. At [4:35] she said: "can do the impossible". So this is my challenge: *Let's find ways in language teaching/learning to do the RL-impossible in SL!*

### **Osnacantab Nesterov on February 17, 2009**

In any case, as I tried to state in chat during the panel - just part of the problem is the basic one of how foreign languages are learned and taught/facilitated, which is partly a question of how to use SL more exploratively, creatively and innovatively - is we still tend to base our views on how languages are learned on the scholastic model - sitting at desks, books, rules, exercises, tests, final examinations. There is, however, at least one other model - more natural and interesting, I'd say, though I've come across no written studies - they must exist. It is what I call the NMM method - the natural market method. Just think of all those people in the large markets of India, Africa, Istanbul where people pick up foreign languages. No evening classes in hot dusty classes for them. (Think of taxi drivers around the world, too).

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<sup>47</sup> "MIT grad student David Merrill demos Siftables -- cookie-sized, computerized tiles you can stack and shuffle in your hands. These future-toys can do math, play music, and talk to their friends, too. Is this the next thing in hands-on learning?" – from TED description.



And a final point - connected in my inner logical processes though probably not transparent to anyone reading this - the sense that SL works best when the language as such is virtually forgotten, when SL is being exploited as a setting, a milieu, place where things can happen, be enacted be done - which will probably include language, but not necessarily as the focal point.

**Wlodek Barbosa on February 17, 2009**

I can only add wrt to your market method – well, this is what has gone down in the history of FLT as a direct or natural method, I guess. There’s no denying that SL, as well as any other VW (the more realistic, the better), is a good environment to apply it, quite simply because it replicates RL, where people learn languages naturally/directly. Lots of role-play, authentic tasks, no reading, etc. I said “gone down”, because I believe current FL pedagogy has since distanced itself somewhat from it, for all kinds of reasons, which we need not go into here. All this does not answer my question/challenge, though: we can use SL to teach/learn ‘directly/naturally’, *like in RL*, but then there’s no added value of SL over RL, is there? In this way we’re not doing anything ‘impossible’ to do in RL; we’re simply replicating one method of RL language pedagogy in-world.

The close association between the teacher’s feeling of SL immersion and their pedagogy, which I sense, should ideally generate teaching ideas/techniques/methods/aids which would cohere with this feeling, i.e. which would employ the affordances of SL which attract residents in the first place. If SL were a simple replica of RL there would be no reason to go in-world. The point is: there’s *something* more there. I’ve been trying to capture this intuition by the seemingly paradoxical saying: “SL is just like RL, except better :-)”. Likewise SL pedagogy: it should be just like FL, except better. The crucial question is: how can we make it significantly better (and better implies different, even if different does not imply better)?

**Logan Walker on February 18, 2009**

I think some of the advantages of using SL are:

1. It provides access to visually stimulating, three dimensional environments – students can get a more genuine experience of spatial relationships in a 3D world than a 2D map.
2. It provides opportunities to communicate with real people from all over the world – students can have genuine interactions with others where they need to negotiate meaning and achieve a communicative purpose (rather than always talking to their classmates).
3. It never closes – students can log in and find someone to talk to and something to do without waiting for their scheduled language class to start.
4. It provides a kind of mask – students can hide behind their avatar and may be less conscious of making mistakes or speaking out (and using an avatar also means people can’t form opinions based on things like RL looks, clothing, age, etc.).
5. It speaks to “digital natives” in a language they understand – for some younger learners, textbooks and board work are boring symbols of traditional education; a virtual world is something fresh, exciting and engaging.
6. It provides a new and different way to practice language and engage students – which allows teachers to add more variety to their classes and hopefully provides a rich and memorable experience for students which may aid their retention of words or phrases.
7. It provides instant access to a wide variety of interesting experiences in diverse settings which can be the start point for discussions and group work (both in SL and in RL).
8. It is a uncensored world with many different kinds of people – students are not protected by the sanitized world of ELT textbooks where everyone is always nice to each other and everything is very jolly.

9. It can all be quickly and easily recorded and stored – you can take photos and keep chat logs, and then blog about it or keep it for yourself (and it probably looks much more interesting and memorable than lots and lots of photos of the same people in the same classroom).

However, I think RL is better because:

1. You know who you are really talking to and where you are, so you can choose appropriate language.
2. You can use and understand body language and gestures (especially ones that people don't mean to make - SL gestures are planned and deliberate).
3. You are not distracted by technological issues.
4. It's easier to maintain focus on one thing at a time, because there is often so much going on in SL!
5. SL doesn't really prepare students for situations in which they are likely to use the language – unless they are learning English because of their interest in virtual worlds.
6. Some conversation topics within SL are limited to SL and use SL-specific vocabulary which is not useful outside of SL.
7. The main focus is on reading and typing skills – rather than speaking and listening (in fact, due to audio issues, listening may be more difficult in SL than in RL).

#### **Lynn Carlucci on February 18, 2009**

When video became widespread, there were teachers who used it extensively in class because video provided added value to their classes. When multimedia became more common, teachers brought in computers and stuck students with CD Roms because they provided “added value.” And at first, students (and their parents) were happy with these new toys. But toys alone didn't make for better teaching. Good teachers found more effective ways of using these new tools, and their classes and students flourished. Bad teachers depended on the “added value” to continue to keep their students happy, and it didn't. When they didn't improve in the way they expected, students (or their parents) moved on to another instructor who provided what they needed – good teaching.

#### **Wlodek Barbosa on February 18, 2009**

Let me comment wholesale on the many issues raised by the participants of this thread over the last 24 hours. We seem to be having a problem here with the definition of “added value”. True: I never explicitly defined it in the first place, mostly assuming an intuitive understanding. So maybe I should start from this. Lynn, you say: “I don't think there is any “added value” to Second Life for Language Learning. Incredible potential and possibility, yes, but nothing that makes SL intrinsically better”. In my understanding the “incredible potential and possibility” are precisely the added value. We now need to implement this potential into techniques, aids, methods which will *actualize* that potential, and which – when compared against RL techniques, aids and methods will clearly constitute the SL added value. My original question concerned such concepts/objects.

Logan: “It provides a kind of mask – students can hide behind their avatar and may be less conscious of making mistakes or speaking out”. Now *this* to me is a good candidate for some added value. The learner cannot hide behind an avatar *in RL*, so if this is indeed in any way

conducive to learning (and we need much more research here, of course<sup>48</sup>), this is an obvious advantage of SL over RL learning.

### **Wlodek Barbosa on February 19, 2009**

Gestures obviously benefit both parties. There's the crucial difference in intentionality, though. Some gestures (minority) are under conscious control of the speaker, most are not. The receiver/decoder gets both categories in one bunch. Some gestures the speaker would be happy to avoid making, if only s/he knew how to stop. So much for RL. In SL the situation is very different: practically all gestures are controlled (even the standing ones, if you know how to use AO). This has two types of consequences for the speaker: (a) good - because there is no fear of exposing oneself through unintended gestures, and (b) bad - because the repertoire of gestures, compared to RL, is minute and hard to implement; hence less expressivity. On the receiving end there are no good consequences: a motionless avi with a frozen face and unsynched lips is obviously a worse conversation partner than a RL person. No gain at all here...

### **Wlodek Barbosa on February 19, 2009**

In *3D Virtual Learning Environments*

([http://iresearch.edumall.sg/iresearch/slot/fm3\\_posts/ah01/59fa3741d\\_u2861.pdf](http://iresearch.edumall.sg/iresearch/slot/fm3_posts/ah01/59fa3741d_u2861.pdf)) Darren Nonis says that "From the research literature, the following advantages have been associated with using 3D VLE for teaching and learning (with my cuts):

1. The novelty of the three-dimensional virtual reality environment
2. The sense of empowerment, control and interactivity
3. The game-like experience, heightened levels of motivation and extrinsic and intrinsic rewards
4. The concretizing of objects to support visual learners
5. It supports a constructivist approach to learning
6. The allowance of greater self-awareness, support for interaction, and the enabling of real-time collaboration
7. The ability to situate students in environments and contexts unavailable within the classroom
8. The ability to scaffold student learning

In my mind, only points 4. and 7. might qualify to constitute added value of SL over RL, and that under additional conditions. The remaining advantages are achievable in RL with well-constructed learning environments. If so, the questions are: (a) how do we concretize linguistic objects to support visual learners? and (b) how do we best model in SL linguistically advantageous "environments and contexts unavailable within the classroom"?

### **Wlodek Barbosa on March 1, 2009**

One more take on the issue of added value of SL for FLT. John Lester (Pathfinder Linden) said: "If you want to teach biology, why build a virtual classroom with desk and a blackboard in Second Life when you could build a whole interactive human cell?" (*Guide to getting started in Second Life*, 2006, <http://www.simteach.com/SLCC06/slcc2006-proceedings.pdf>). Now, there're probably few SL language teachers in this community and elsewhere who would question this. So, applied to FLT, what would Pathfinder's words be? "If you want to

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<sup>48</sup> "The ability to project oneself onto a virtual being offers significant advantages to those less confident by offering a safe opportunity to expose ones (sic – WS/B) personality to others" (Minocha & Mount 2009:39).

teach a foreign language, why build a virtual classroom with desk and a blackboard in Second Life when you could build a whole ..... ?”

**Osnacantab Nesterov on March 1, 2009**

Well, Wlodek, I guess a simple end to the sentence would be... “when you can build a whole city.” There is no doubt that classrooms and boards are not necessary for language learning in SL. Classrooms are OK for getting out of and as long as the facilitator has a display device in his/her inventory you can write things in the North Pole or the Sahara Desert - as long as there are SL versions. What your question really invites us to consider, though, is just what do we, ideally need for effective language learning in SL - and what don't we need?

**Wlodek Barbosa on March 1, 2009**

The city for language learning is no equivalent of the cell for learning biology. The city is just a venue/opportunity/stimulus to use/learn language, whereas the cell is the actual object of study for biologists. As I was emphasizing a few times on this community, the question really is: if (foreign) language is the object of study, how does one “rez” it in SL, considering that language is an abstraction, not like a cell (to biologists), a planet (to astronomers), a building (to architects), etc. Language is a *code*, not an *object*. Some parts of language are less abstract: sounds, for example, are actually physically articulated in the mouth. But most language is really pretty much unrezzable, otherwise than as a certain reified metaphor: hence my domino idea and a few others. But... I feel this is still sadly inadequate, especially in comparison with those proverbial biologists.

**Osnacantab Nesterov on March 1, 2009**

But isn't one important fact that language learning is about behaviour? Learners are not, or not principally, learning ‘facts’, they are learning how to behave. So what can be modeled in SL? Perhaps there are parts of language that could be helpfully modeled – some of the linguistic systems that are fairly stable – but learning a language, surely, involves performing it. And where SL can help there is in providing physical scenarios that would provide opportunities for certain parts of a language to be used. I'm not sure there are equivalents for language learners to cells and buildings.

**Daffodil Fargis on March 1, 2009**

Wlodek, provocative question maybe but why do you want to “rez” language? SL itself can be the object of study (e. g. going to places and reporting about them, examining attitudes, etiquette, appearance in SL and writing or presenting orally about it, ...) So, I would modify your sentence a bit and say: “If you want to teach a foreign language, why build a virtual classroom with desk and a blackboard in Second Life when SL can be your “classroom?” :-)

**Logan Walker on March 2, 2009**

I think one of the best things about SL is the creative freedom it gives people. So students can work together to build their own places and communicate with a lot of people while they do so - with sellers, builders, scripters, and eventually visitors. Does this mean that the way to complete Wlodek's sentence is: “If you want to teach a foreign language, why build a virtual classroom with desk and a blackboard in Second Life when you can help the students build whatever they want?”

**Wlodek Barbosa on March 2, 2009**

Logan Walker said:

>(a) “help the students build whatever they want?”

>(b) “tendency of work in CALL to rediscover the same instructional practices and problems with each generation of computer hardware and software”. So, is SL just the next generation of software?

Thank you, Logan – great points! WRT to the two I itemized I have the following to say:

(a) This is the leading issue of this discussion thread. I still tend to look up in envy to those biologists, with their walk-through hearts and testes... They do not simply build “whatever they want”; they build educational objects which can then be analysed, manipulated,... cognized in ways which linguists or language educators have not yet fathomed how to apply to their educational objects. We do have our own linguistic objects to analyse, manipulate, cognize... Or don't we? More on this in my replies to Osnacantab and Daffodil.

(b) I'm afraid this observation (from a leading ICT-in-education specialist) is very true. FLT educators also have a long row of mea culpas in this respect. More often than not we do tend to replicate solutions which we're used to from RL, rather than think of innovative ways of teaching (or facilitating learning) foreign languages. Role-playing in SL is great fun, and doubtless educationally useful/effective, but how does it differ from RL? OK - less need to imagine the environment, with all the glittery holodecks. But in terms of techniques/effects... Not much different, is it?

#### **Wlodek Barbosa on March 2, 2009**

Osnacantab Nesterov said:

>But isn't one important fact that language learning is about behaviour? Learners are not, or not principally, learning 'facts', they are learning how to behave. (...) I'm not sure there are equivalents for language learners to cells and buildings.

Of course lg learning is about behaviour! But in order to behave you must know the code. It takes newborns years to learn the code to behave linguistically in roughly the same ways as adults do. We (lg teachers) do not throw our beginning learners into a communicative situation and tell them to behave :-). They must first have some code. Not all of it surely, but some, so that they can then improve the bit and pieces they have and add new ones *while behaving*. As far as I can see, most of the FLT literature is about how we best make them learn the code. And of course there are wildly differing ideas on this issue, from grammar-translation to silent way, and dozens more. But have the code they must.

So, my provocative questions really refer to this bit: learning the code, to be able to use it and improve its knowledge and skill. Now, code is about facts: sounds, words, grammatical structures, spelling, turns of phrase, conventional chunks, etc. If there's any equivalent in language to biologists' cells, hormones, bones, etc. it must be these linguistic 'objects'. So, to rephrase my take on this once again: how can language teachers use the rich affordances of SL, including especially three-dimensionality, but not excluding many others, to help language learners learn these 'facts'/'objects' in ways similar to SL biology teachers helping their learners learn about cells, etc.?

#### **Wlodek Barbosa on March 2, 2009**

Daffodil Fargis said:

>Wlodek, provocative question maybe but why do you want to “rez” language?

Let me answer with a question: why do biologists want to rez cells? astronomers - planetary systems? literary scholars - Macbeth? This may indeed be a hard question. Some of them may not even know why they rezzed what they rezzed. If so, this would only show that they should do some more analytic thinking... But most would probably answer you something like this:



“We rez because we believe that by interacting with the object in ways only SL allows you to learners will “learn better” (whatever that may mean) about the object itself and about the field of study this object/concept is immersed in”. So: why do I want to rez language? For exactly the same reasons. Is it doable with language (in ways in which it is with other objects of learning)? I do not know. But I feel it would be great if it were :-)

### **Wlodek Barbosa on March 9, 2009**

Using Lego and Plasticine to “model” metaphors:

<http://mutablematter.wordpress.com/tag/lego-serious-play>. Pretty much what I’ve been trying to find for SL reification/rezzing of linguistic objects :-). Also see here:

<http://www.artlab.org.uk/rsa-workshop.htm> and here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILGQahsXjVM>.

After the added value debate ended with the completion of the EVO VWLL 2009 course and the demise of the course Ning site, most of its content was ported to my (then) IFA department Grou.ps website, which is still active at this writing. On <http://zajek.grou.ps/talks/2601781> two things happened: (1) additional discussants joined the debate, (2) I added some web-incited reflections and links, mostly reacting ad-hoc to some new technological developments of some relevance to the main theme. A selection of this material is reproduced below. Unfortunately, Grou.ps does not provide for exact time-stamping, so the dates are approximate. The Grou.ps added value debate was active between January 2010 and September 2011.

### **Wlodek Barbosa, January 2010**

OK, so now continuing this discussion almost one year onwards, now “in real time”... I just found this quote by Douglas Blane at <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6032871>: “But if virtual worlds were good only for distance learning using the transmission model of education, innovative educators wouldn’t be as excited. Their real potential lies in interactive, collaborative, student-led models of learning”. This “innovation”, however, is not what I have in mind when I talk about the added value... One can have “interactive, collaborative, student-led models of learning” in RL, and – let’s hope – some teachers actually endorse and practice such pedagogy . The only potential of SL here is that it makes it possible to practice such pedagogy at a distance, but being able to teach at a distance is not a specific added value of Second Life, of course: it started long before virtual worlds were first conceived or implemented. OK... Time to go on in search of the added value...

### **Wlodek Barbosa, January 2010**

A message from Nathan Lowell on SLRL, 24 Jan 2010: “If you can instantiate your lessons in three dimensions, you’re gold. If all you’re going to do is put 2d media in the 3d space, apply the effort another way”. So, what he does is by and large associate (or equate?) the added value (=gold) of SL for teaching with its 3-dimensionality. This is a very common argument, based, as far as I can see, on the implicit comparison of 2d web with 3d web as channels of delivery and communication. Fair enough. But RL is three dimensional, too, isn’t it? So why should it be a specific advantage of SL that it is (simulated) 3d either? Look at it like this: 2d web augmented/replaced 3d RL some time ago as VLE or VTE (Virtual Learning/Teaching Environment); in terms of dimensionality of the respective experience, this was obviously a retrograde step. Now we increasingly see 3d web augmenting/replacing 2d web as VL/TE, which is of course a step forward in terms of dimensionality, *but only wrt 2d web, not wrt RL*, right? So we’re now back to 3d, right? (Simulated, BTW). So what’s the big deal? Where have we progressed? The bottom line, then, for me, is: if it is true that “If you can instantiate your

lessons in three dimensions, you're gold", then it must be true that "if you can instantiate your lessons in ways using SL affordances going beyond RL, ones not possible in RL, ones adding value to teaching not by replicating RL dimensionality, but in other ways, then you're platinum"

### **Wlodek Barbosa, January 2010**

"There is clear evidence that for students learning certain technical skills, such as computer programming or civil engineering, undertaking group educational projects in SL can function to enhance their learning and skills acquisition. An excellent example of this is the wind turbine design and construction project undertaken by students of Bromley College, London (affiliate of the University of Greenwich, upon whose island this project is located). In this project students were required to design and construct a virtual wind farm in what was effectively an SL based 'sandbox' environment. Not only were the students required to learn the skills to construct the windmills but they also had to ensure that each device was capable of producing data about itself (speed of rotation, power generated, efficiency outcomes, etc) so that they could evaluate the different models of windmill they designed and built" (Biggs 2009:6).

Now, this is a good example of added value. As such, it has gained some notoriety in the SL pedagogical literature. But this brings us back to the old question: OK, so engineers can rez wind turbines and then test them in-world to learn about windfarming. But what can linguists and language teachers rez? Well... language, right? How?

### **Wlodek Barbosa, August 2010**

Date: Thu, 12 Aug 2010  
From: "Terris Mikelk" <TMikelk@dcccd.edu>  
To: <slrl@list.academ-x.com>  
Subject: No Confidence in Educational uses of SL

(...)

"2. If it is not 3D and physical, don't kid yourself that SL is the correct platform, e.g. for sculpture, architecture, choreography, et al definitely use SL. But for painting or music there are better and easier 2D platforms.

3. I have been teaching introductory computer programming (3 and 4 credit hour courses) every semester including summers. The classes are entirely online. Course management and grades are on the college standard Blackboard platform, but all the programming projects are in SL. The plan is to create more interest with the action and visual appeal of a 3D world, while teaching the basics of programming using the "C" like programming language of SL. It has been an unqualified success".

Right! Soooo... is (foreign) language 3D and physical? Prima facie – no. But on 2nd thought? Is language more like sculpture or more like painting/music? Computer programming is easier: it's definitely language, right? The success story described above comes from using this language/code to manipulate/create the "physical" environment in SL, that is to control the very basis of this reality, to the extent that it is scripted (and most of it is scripted one way or another). Now, this is different from using natural language to control/change/manipulate reality, be it in FL or SL. Natural language affects the reality symbolically, but not directly (outside of fables, of course). We can and do "make" things using language, we "move" them, we "destroy" them, but not directly. Yet, in doing all this, we DO interact with the environment, especially the social environment, of course, with/via language. So, maybe language is more like sculpture, after all? Maybe SL can be used as a natural environment for learning language in its manipulative function, i.e. better than the plethora of 2d environments? This is getting rather philosophical...

## Wlodek Barbosa, August 2011

“So it only makes sense to use virtual world technology if you are making use of its unique affordances. That is, if you are doing things that can only be done in a virtual world. If you bring your learners into a beautiful virtual environment and then talk at them with a PowerPoint deck for an hour, everyone will leave feeling cheated. Instead, make it work for you. Devise a simulation, do some role playing, leverage some whimsy, do some collaborative building, defy the laws of physics – make it clear why you have all gone to the trouble to be there” (Heyden 2011).

This was my last post in the added value thread on Grou.ps. Appropriately open-ended and devoid of my own comment. Just a quote, really. Summarizing this long discussion: the added value of SL, as defined somewhat negatively in the course of this exchange by providing arguments why I believe an SL property X *does not qualify*, remains elusive. At the end of the day, then, the best candidates for those pedagogical affordances of SL which do not exist, or are practically hard to obtain, in FL (or in 2-dimensional internet) appear to be: (i) avatar masking, (ii) text and audiovisual recording, (iii) gesture control, (iv) building (these from Logan Walker), and (v) “environments and contexts unavailable within the classroom”, (vi) “concretizing of objects to support visual learners” (these from Darren Nonis). This is arguably a rather meager catch in this search for the FL-impossible in SL (language) pedagogy. It shows, I believe, that SL (language) educators are still at the very beginning of the long and winding road of (re)conceptualization, implementation and testing.

Before we leave this section, let me discuss one more SL affordance often nominated as pedagogical added value, that of constructing holodecks. The concept appeared before in this book, notably in the added value debate, where I mentioned “the glittery holodecks”. The topic is huge and rich in interfaces, such as with psychology, architecture, cognition, even philosophy (simulation within simulation), so all I can do here is to offer my general impression, rather than in-depth analysis.

“The term holodeck derives from the Star Trek TV series and feature films, in which a holodeck is depicted as an enclosed room in which simulations can be created for training or entertainment. Holodecks offer exciting possibilities of calling up a range of instantly available simulations that can be used for entertainment, presentations, conferencing and, of course, teaching and learning. For example, if students of hospitality studies are being introduced to the language used in checking in at a hotel a simulation of a hotel reception area can be generated instantly by selecting the chosen simulation from a holodeck rezzer, a device that stores and generates different scenarios. (...) Holodecks are commonly used for a range of role-plays”.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual\\_World\\_Language\\_Learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_World_Language_Learning))

I’ve always been somewhat uneasy about the status/desirability/usefulness of holodecks. It seems the only real advantage is that they are easy to rez out of the SL inventory, when and where one wants them. But I fail to see how they provide the real added value on top of what one already has as default in SL... If we want a nice greengrocery place, for example, to play out some communicative scenarios with our students, then surely there is no shortage of such on the grid. Many will be much more detailed and better quality/functionality than the holodeck we have got.

Enhancing/augmenting the holodeck with one’s own material could be this added value, like adding HUDs, notecards, activities or sound files, etc. But then, some holodecks will not let one do that unless one is willing to spend money on some customized versions. Additionally, the whole task stops being the relatively easy one of rezzing a ready-made holodeck out of

one's pocket. One needs building/scripting skills to enhance a holodeck with one's own stuff, Linden dollars to upload the stuff from FL, or to buy in-world. This then becomes a major undertaking, which undermines the supposed ease and availability of holodeck simulation.



Snapshot 35. Virtilantis Madurodam-like holodeck scene

The convenience and control afforded by holodecks in this connection are obvious, and I have never doubted them in any way. What I remain somewhat sceptical of is not the value of holodecks in creating the setting for communication and teaching thereof, but rather their added value over FL classrooms and places, on top of affording synchronous meeting of a number of geographically distanced learners. I am far from denigrating holodecks as such, but I somehow feel that we can do better than that, that we can actually 'rez' language (simulate it, reify it) to the benefit of learners, as I was trying to explain above in the added value debate, and as I will be proposing below, in the section on reification and PAVing.

Thus, at the end, rather than wait for the entire theory of SL pedagogical affordances with added value to be built, I originally decided to develop one of the ideas which seems to me to be the most fruitful among those mentioned above: that of concretizing or reifying abstract concepts in SL, such as most linguistic concepts on all levels of language structure, for the sake of better learning, with particular focus on experientially, visually and kinesthetically minded learners of foreign languages. This original reification programme subsequently passed through a number of stages to morph into Phonetically Augmented Virtuality (PAV).

### 4.3. Reification of abstract concepts in SLEFL

One of the most commonly noticed educational affordances of VWs/SL is that in this virtual environment visible structures and objects seem so... tangible as to feel almost physical. This immersive paradox is believed to be of utmost importance in teaching and learning because it affords employing didactic methods and techniques known from FL, which in turn eases the cognitive load on the mind initially stunned by the unusual settings. Both teachers and learners can continue in more or less their old ways: sitting on chairs, posting stuff on whiteboards, putting (rezzing) objects on tables for inspection, walking around the vicinity in search of hidden treasures, etc. In other words, the awe factor of this affordance seems to reside in its replicational potential with respect to the actual world. What enthusiasts appear to be saying is "Don't be afraid of this world! It only looks so strange from the outside. In fact it is very much like the real world!". Why this should be construed as an incentive for uncertain and doubting

teachers and students to visit SL has always been seriously beyond my ken. But this is the main thread of the added value debate which I reported on above, so there is no reason to repeat this argument here.

What seems to be a much better candidate for an SL (educational) affordance with added value vis-à-vis FL is the reification potential inherent in this MUVE. In the discussion above I alluded to it only once at any length, when I reported on my experience of Virtual Macbeth. In that sim, most of which is occupied by the severed and tilted Macbeth's head, there are a number of abstract concepts reified into visible objects. Macbeth's thoughts appear as festoons of scrolling text on the ground, his murderous intentions show as spilled blood, visitors descend down spiral stairs into the deepest recesses of his soul, then experience the morphing of the (literally) rosy path of his life into the horror it became, etc. As I said before, I believe this island to be among the best ever examples of a successful educational use of a number of SL affordances in widely conceived humanities, first of all of the affordance to reify abstractions.

It could now be raised that there is nothing really unique in the SL potential to sculpt abstract concepts into visible, tangible and manipulable objects. Human cognition being what it is, with its evolution-induced reliance on the concrete and visible, much of the educational system, especially at the lower school levels, depends on reification. Kids learn to count by moving coloured blocks around with digits on them; they learn phonics in a similar way; they paint, sculpt and tinker in kindergarten and grade schools until they hit the age when such cognitive scaffolds are no longer needed at the onset of Piaget's formal operational stage. Later, "intelligence is demonstrated through the logical use of symbols related to abstract concepts. (...) This type of thinking involves hypothetical situations and is often required in science and mathematics".

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piaget%27s\\_theory\\_of\\_cognitive\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piaget%27s_theory_of_cognitive_development)). All this is of course true. There are some examples of successful application in the digital realm of such reification techniques as the ubiquitous building blocks. One of my own favourites are David Merrill's siftables (<http://web.media.mit.edu/~dmerrill/siftables.html>):

"Siftables aims to enable people to interact with information and media in physical, natural ways that approach interactions with physical objects in our everyday lives. As an interaction platform, Siftables applies technology and methodology from wireless sensor networks to tangible user interfaces. Siftables are independent, compact devices with sensing, graphical display, and wireless communication capabilities. They can be physically manipulated as a group to interact with digital information and media".

Merrill's siftables can be used for a variety of tasks, including education. They can be programmed to behave in various ways, also to embody such abstractions as digits, letters, musical notes/scores, directions, order, grouping, sequencing, etc. It is enough to view some of the demo videos of siftables on YouTube to appreciate that the learners most grateful to Merrill for his insights and inventions will be kinesthetic learners, who "want to sense the position and movement of the skill or task. These learners generally do not like lecture or discussion classes, but prefer those that allow them to 'do something'. (...) These adults do well learning a physical skill when there are materials available for hands-on practice" (Russell 2006:352). Confucius captured the essence of this important human cognitive trait some millenia ago in a memorable adage: "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand"<sup>49</sup>. One can hear about abstractions, but then... one forgets. Seeing them is better,

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<sup>49</sup> Also known as the somewhat less autonomous: "Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may/will remember; involve me and I'll understand".



but being able to do something with them is best of all. Now, doing something with abstract concepts in the physical world is only possible if these concepts are reified, i.e. “converted into or regarded as a concrete thing” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/reification>).

Researchers and educators writing about VWs were quick to discover the reificationist affordance of SL, of course. Winn and Jackson suggested 1999 that VEs are “most useful when they embody concepts and principles that are not normally accessible to the senses (p.7) (...) For example, they describe an environment that allows learners to control greenhouse gas emissions and view models that metaphorically represent the effects of global climate change” (Dalgarno and Lee 2010:19). Referring to SL, Kemp and Haycock wrote: “A skilled instructional developer in such a setting would build structures, walkways, and interactive objects. Much research is needed to help direct instructional developers working in immersive spaces to create original learning experiences, to assess them and gauge improvements” (Kemp and Haycock 2008:95). Reinforcing this message, Jeremy Kemp later wrote on SLED that SL “is a joyous eden of manipulatives, a sandbox of experiential learning and a way for learners to relate emotionally to peers and mentors. It’s a crappy slide and talk tool”. This manipulative-kinesthetic joy is evident in the following affidavit: “I can visualize everything,” said 21-year-old Jacqueline Rodriguez, a senior biology major at Texas Wesleyan University, who took an advanced genetics course last semester that featured lab experiments conducted in the Second Life world. “When we’re going over an idea, you can simply walk over and ‘see’ what you’re learning.” (<http://vertito.blogspot.com/2008/07/second-life-wide-world-for-med-science.html>).

Many threads concerning SL affordances, advantages over FL and LMSs, added value and reification have appeared on the SL Educators discussion list (SLED) during my five years in SL. Most of them come from extremely well-informed SL theorists and practitioners, usually affiliated with some institution of tertiary education in the USA. Here is a short selection of posts concerning reification:

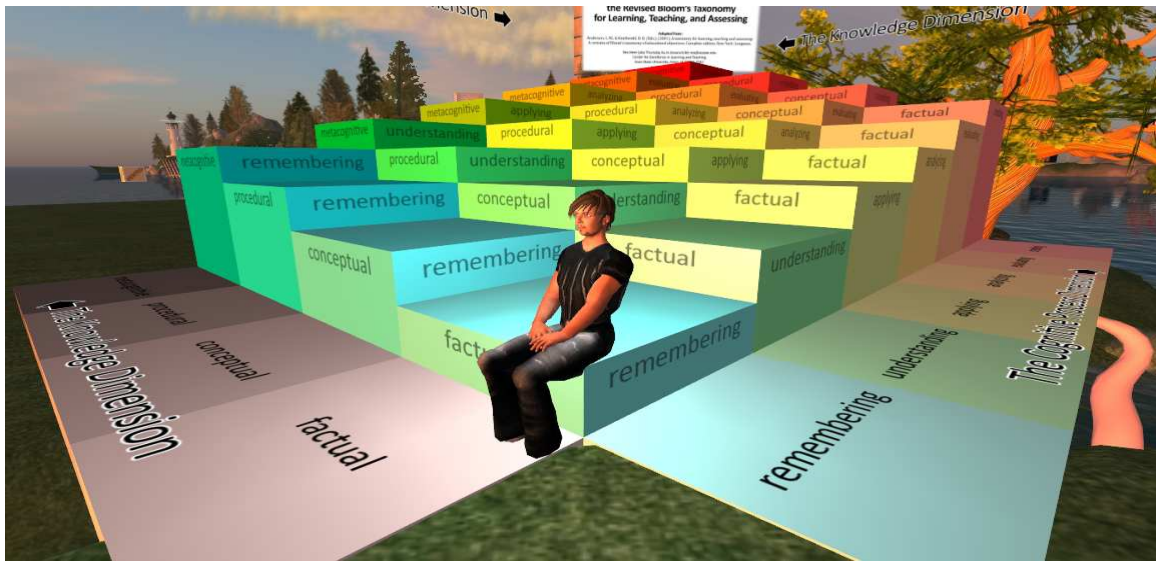
- On February 13<sup>th</sup> 2008, praising the virtual testis build in SL, where visitors can physically go inside the testis and watch its chemistry and microbiology in action (see Danforth 2010 and 2012), Nanci Burk remarked: “One of the potentials of Second Life is the idea of “Wow, what if students could fly through a [you-name-it]...?””. In a way, this is a borderline case, because it could be claimed that what happens inside of the testis (or heart – there have been fly-through hearts in SL) is not an abstraction, but only hard-to-visualize physical processes. It may be so, but to non-specialists such processes verge on the abstract in their sheer complexity and mysteriousness, I believe. From this point of view, flying through a testis is not very different from flying through Macbeth’s head.
- On August 7<sup>th</sup> 2008, Rochelle Mazar, an Emerging Technologies librarian at the University of Toronto Mississauga library, the maker of *Cancerland*, brought up the reification of emotions: “I think one of the advantages of SL is the ability to make concepts “physical”. I’ve been learning a great deal about that in building *Cancerland* (...), which includes conveying fear, anxiety, brain fog, feeling cold, tired, and in pain. I don’t see why it would be any more difficult to build up a definition of postmodernism”.
- On August 12<sup>th</sup> 2008, Tom Werner reiterated the common SLED appeal: “Consider Second Life for topics and learning objectives that involve 3-D objects, unique physical settings, physical movement, decision-making in physical situations, and when access to realistic settings is limited, when real-world settings are dangerous, and when repeated practice in unusual setting is helpful”.



Thus, there appears to be this popularly accepted opinion that SL/VW excels educationally where it affords manipulable (walkable, flyable) modelling of either abstractions or physicalities which are hard to visualize or approach in FL. It is no wonder, then, that there are, besides *Macbeth* and the attempts mentioned directly above, a number of examples of successful reification builds in SL. None of them, however, to the best of my knowledge concerns the conversion of specifically linguistic concepts/abstractions into virtually ‘real’ objects and structures. Here is a very brief overview:

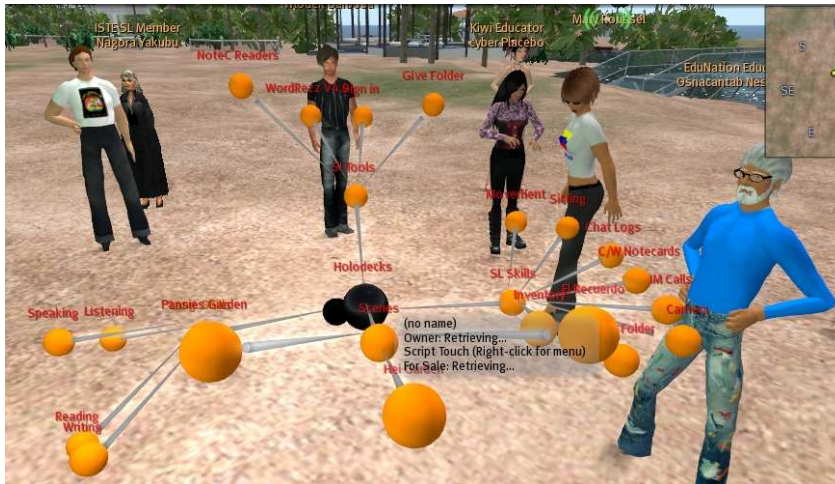
- On April 16<sup>th</sup> 2009 Lance R. Williams of UNM (<http://www.cs.unm.edu/~williams>) presented, at the BGSU SL site and in FL, on the topic: *Beyond Visualization: Explorations in Reified Computation in a Virtual World*. This is the summary posted at <http://www.bgsu.edu/virtualcampus/page37993.html>: “Many ideas in computer science began initially with a physical analogy and ended up as mathematical abstractions. Reification turns this trajectory on its head – the underlying physical analogy returns in the form of unusually literal implementations that are only possible inside of a virtual world. Dr. Williams will illustrate this concept with multiple examples including Alan Turing’s famous idealized computer, the Turing Machine, Conway’s celebrated Game of Life, and finally, a reified implementation of the Scheme programming language”.
- The virtual hallucinations project, rated among top 10 virtual medical sites in SL (<http://sciencerooll.com/2007/06/17/top-10-virtual-medical-sites-in-second-life>), was started back in 2004 (!) by Nash Baldwin (FL=James Cook of UC). “The facility was built to simulate the hallucinations of those with schizophrenia and the SL experience is based on actual experiences reported by people with the condition. It contains both visual and auditory hallucinations and it produces a truly unnerving experience for the visitor. But, it also allows those without the disease, such as medical students, caregivers and loved ones, to better understand the world of those living with it” ([http://freshtakes.typepad.com/sl\\_communicators/2006/08/virtual\\_halluci.html](http://freshtakes.typepad.com/sl_communicators/2006/08/virtual_halluci.html)). “76% thought the environment improved their understanding of auditory hallucinations, 69% thought it improved their understanding of visual hallucinations” (<http://ap.psychiatryonline.org/article.aspx?articleid=50418>).
- Maslow’s needs hierarchy pyramid was constructed by Jackie Rexen (FL=Jackie Gerstein, Boise State University; VWBPE 2010 presentation by the author/builder here: <http://business.treet.tv/shows/bpeducation/episodes/2010-maslow>). “This installation is a walk through of the levels of Maslow’s classic model ... literally. The learner starts at a basic ground level point (meeting physical needs) and literally walks an obstacle course to get to the self-actualization level in the sky. (...) It is worth visiting this place, to begin to understand that the classroom can be stretched and expanded ... an (sic – WS/B) that the online course can contain experiences like this, which are not exact duplicates of what one might do in a physical classroom, but that can be used to increase understanding and retention beyond what can be achieved with mere words” (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/bjohnson/bridge/188878.html>).
- In a similar vein, Bloom’s taxonomy was rezzed in-world by Thursday Xu (FL Rex Heer from ISU). “As your avatar takes in the scaled presentation, you can click on each block to be rewarded with chat text providing a concrete example of a lesson in which that particular understanding can be mastered” (<http://scottsecondlife.blogspot.com/2009/01/blooms-taxonomy-inworld.html>). “I have been working on an interactive New Bloom’s Taxonomy based on the work of Marzano (2007) but it is only in excel. After studying your SL object, I see instantly how the excel tool will not communicate to the user the concept of knowledge integration and discrete

measurement” (Jenny Ankenbauer on SLED). To better visualize what Bloom’s taxonomy may look like in SL, here is Wlodek Barbosa sitting on it:



**Snapshot 36. Reified Bloom’s taxonomy**

- Vicki Robinson, associate professor at National Technical Institute for the Deaf, on her SL island “was able to develop activities for topics such as one-dimensional constant motion, acceleration in a straight line, vector addition and resolution, free fall, graphing, volume displacement, specific gravity, density, buoyancy, translational statics, density and some associated concepts such as area and volume” (<http://wallacecenter.rit.edu/tls/teaching-physics-immersive-3-d-environment#accord=1>).
- Michael DeMers reified some rather abstract geographical and topographical concepts, such as map projections and spacial distributions with his MSU students using some of the simplest default SL rezzing and GUI mechanisms, such as basic prims (spheres, cones, cylinders) and maps (DeMers 2010).
- The *Literature Alive!* project has been developed since 2007 by Desideria Stockton (FL=Beth Ritter-Guth), teacher of English and Women’s Studies at Lehigh Carbon Community College in Schnecksville, PA. A number of mostly British and American classics, from Beowulf to Poe, have been reified into interactive spaces and exhibits for students to walk through and engage with the facts and ambiance of the given work of fiction (Ritter-Guth 2007).
- Mindmapping in three dimensions has been rather popular in SL. There are various models, “where every person can collaboratively touch to add nodes, connecting the nodes change the shape, name the nodes, put notecards and links insides (sic – WS/B), and have other getting the notecards” (Salahzar Stenvaag on SLED, July 1st 2009). Here is a snapshot of one such object (Barbosa and some SL friends and colleagues standing around):



**Snapshot 37. Reified mindmapping in SL**

- Other interesting reifications include: (a) Alliance Virtual Library's walk-through book, a virtual reality version of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. In this case, scenes from the book were rezzed in turn to follow the narration of the story, (b) the Freud Iceberg – an interactive tour of the basic tenets of Freudian, Jungian and Rogerian psychology (conceptualized by AJ Brooks (FL=AJ Kelton), the Director of Emerging Instructional Technology for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Montclair State University in New Jersey), (c) the Gardner's Multiple Intelligences interactive build by Zotarah Shepherd, an MA student of Education Technology at Sonoma State University.
- Finally, Rochelle Mazar proposed on SLED (September 10<sup>th</sup> 2008), possibly partly tongue-in-cheek, to try to reify music in the following way: "Anyone want to loan me some space to build an awesome interactive exhibit? I want to build a walkthrough Pachelbel's Canon".

As I said above, I have not been able to discover any comparable reifications in SL focusing on the language code. Prima facie, this might look rather strange, considering the amount of foreign language contact (especially EFL/ESL, of course) and tuition going in SL. No fly-through language grammar rules, no walkable vocabularies, no semantic networks built from stretchable strings and interactive balls (like the mindmapping object mentioned above). No hyperonym-hyponym hierarchies reified into pyramids, no complex multi-storey builds to model the tense system of English, no building-block toys visualizing grammatical inversion in question formation or the lexico-grammatical shifts in reported speech (sequence of tenses). No manipulable 'siftables' à la Merrill to join into complex words by pre/suffixation in English word-formation or to move around in forming multiple adjective-onset noun phrases. Nothing to help visual/kinesthetic SLEFL learners to get to grips with the complex syntactic rules governing the behaviour of subordinate clauses in English. And finally, nothing at all to help them visualize SLEFL pronunciation.

The only exhibit which at all comes close to demonstrating the reificatory affordances of SL in reference to EFL pronunciation which I know is the IPA chart converted into a stepping-stone grid whereby by stepping on the stone representing a particular phoneme one can hear the phoneme pronounced. The picture below comes from October 31<sup>st</sup> 2007, and was taken on the lawn of one of the LanguageLab's islands. This is an example of indirect/secondary reification of a linguistic object, simply because the IPA symbols themselves obviously do not belong to



the language code, but are rather themselves representations of an abstract system, namely the system of phonemes.



Snapshot 38. Reified IPA transcription chart from LanguageLab

One fundamental objection to my argument that reification of abstractions might be one of the affordances of SL which could count as its educational added value in the sense defined earlier could be formulated like this: “So what is the big deal here? All these builds and structures could in principle be erected in the real world as well, so where is their educational added value compared to the tangible and interactive exhibits one can find in better museums, libraries and educational institutions, such as, for example, the Berkeley Natural History Museum (<http://bnhm.berkeley.edu>) or Narodowe Centrum Nauki (<http://www.ncn.gov.pl>)?”. This is a very strong counterargument to propose to someone who, like myself, is trying to identify or create SL affordances which might be regarded as in some sense ‘better’ than those offered by both FL f2f teaching and LMS-based e-teaching. Reifications described about could still count in the latter comparison, but not in the former.

The crucial point, I believe, is the issue of feasibility in most cases, rather than categorically conceived possibility. Let me take an example. To make the IPA code more memorable and conceptually accessible a teacher might decide to (have students) build a structure in the classroom exactly like the one shown in Snapshot 38, and with the same functionalities. Compared to this kind of didactic aid its SL replica has little or nothing to offer as added value. Indeed, the net result could be in favour of FL, with the well-known counter-affordances of SL mentioned before, such as access difficulties and glitches. Yet, while certainly possible, is this line of action ‘in real’ at all feasible? I guess not really (pardon the pun). It is easy to see that the resources, effort, expertise and time necessary to build a FL IPA stepping-stone grid would be prohibitive, to the point of making the venture completely unfeasible. It is in this context that its SL analogue does offer added value, I believe. This situation is different from the hyped SL affordance of taking a bunch of foreign language students to a place frequented by native speakers to let them converse in an authentic setting: first, we are now talking about actually ‘rezzing language’, rather than only creating opportunities for its use, and second, language trips and camps seem to be much more feasible in actuality (if not very common), compared to language reifications, judged from available data.

Let me take one more example to illustrate the added value of SL reification of some language abstraction, compared to FL. The following is a quote describing the tortuous FL construction

of a teaching aid for pronunciation, specifically to let students visualize some liaison phenomena of English:

“The pull of magnets can be a physical metaphor to emphasize the attraction between succeeding words, especially if the following word begins with a vowel. (...) We used some empty audio-tape cases and magnets to produce this effect. Flash cards (e.g., *pick, it, me*) were put in different tape cases and the magnets were glued onto the two ends of each tape case. Make sure that the two words can be attracted only when the first word’s final letter is a consonant and the second word’s first letter is a vowel (e.g., *pick it*); otherwise, the two words are repulsed (e.g., *pick me*). It helps students remember to link words through this physical image” (Lin, Fan and Chen 1995).

My own domino blocks described above (see Chapter 4.1.), which use Pedro McMillan’s stackable cubes (<http://forums-archive.secondlife.com/54/3d/295491/1.html>), were conceived of before I came across this paper, but the ideas are indeed very close. Unlike with the previous hypothetical example of FL IPA build, the problem with the Taiwan solution above is not so much cost, but rather time, reusability and scalability, not to mention the arguably doubtful motivational value of paper-glue-scissors work with youth above a few years of age AD 2012, of course. Once we take SL as a given in this equation (and this, of course, is another story!), visualizing liaison by reifying it there seems to be by far more feasible than in FL. Incidentally, all such block manipulatives as reifications of linguistic relations would seem to be an perfect area for Merrill’s siftables described above.

The nine-piece domino game, which I rezzed in my SLEnglish launchroom on December 10<sup>th</sup> 2008, was my first attempt to use scripted SL PAVed objects to reify the mildly abstract concept of the difference between sound and letter (see Appendix 1.). A more radical reification in terms of the level of abstractness came with the phonetic synesthesia game (ver. 1) of December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Here, as can be seen in the notecard in Appendix 2., the physical properties of shape, size and colour reified the three properties of lexical items, in turn: number of syllables, compound status, phonemic composition. The remaining manipulables were concerned with word and phrase stress and the phonetic differences between American and British English. The following list contains them all, in the chronological order, with their respective Appendix numbers:

- Word stress block game, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, Appendix 5.
- Phonetic walk-through grid (word-stress version), June 24<sup>th</sup> 2009, Appendix 9.
- Phrase stress block game (ver. 1), November 4<sup>th</sup> 2009, Appendix 13.
- Phonetic walk-through grid (Am-Br version), September 14<sup>th</sup> 2010, Appendix 19.
- Phrase stress block game (ver. 2), January 12<sup>th</sup> 2011, Appendix 21.
- Phonetic synaesthesia game (ver. 2): 18 animals, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011, Appendix 24.

As I will explain in the following section of this chapter, some of the effects I wanted to obtain with the manipulable blocks reifying some linguistic abstractions were difficult to program. This was one reason why I gave up my initial enthusiastic plan to rez some more games of this sort. The necessary level of expertise in scripting proved to be too high for me without spending much more time on acquiring these skills<sup>50</sup>. Other problems included the rather limited SL affordances of handling objects by avatars, the issue which I mentioned above, as well as the dawning realization that such games are better suited for asynchronous self-access than for synchronous group work, which was my regular lesson setup. In effect, out of almost

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<sup>50</sup> In the spring 2007 *New Media Consortium* Survey “Educators in Second Life” as many as 2/3 educators answered “Learning how to write or use scripts” to the question “What topics would you like to know more about in Second Life?” ([www.nmc.org/pdf/2007-sl-survey-summary.pdf](http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2007-sl-survey-summary.pdf), page 12).

thirty PAVed activities listed in the Appendix only one-fourth involved work with reified phonetic abstractions. This is, I am sure, not the limit of what can be done in SL with more time, skill and dedication. Some ad-hoc ideas: (a) phonetic elision and silent letters could be reified by kicking blocks out from the row, (b) insertion – vice versa, (c) phonetic odd-man-out could be pushed outside a group of blocks, (d) AmE and BrE blocks could be moved to different containers, (e) sounds could be rezzed from their distinctive features: textures, colours, shapes, (f) intonation could be reified by positioning syllable-blocks or word-blocks in the air<sup>51</sup>.

I have been peddling these and similar ideas in a variety of places in FL and SL alike. Some of these presentations and lectures were recorded and are freely available online. For example, in my OsnaGroup (<http://osnagroupnew.pbworks.com/w/page/36120415/FrontPage>) presentation on PAV, held on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2009 in SL I talked, among others, about: (a) phonetic dominoes (<http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/dominoes.mp3>), (b) word stress blocks (<http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/word-stress.mp3>) and (c) the phonetic walk-through grid (<http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/walk-through.mp3>). Interested readers can listen to my presentation by downloading the mp3 sound files indicated. All three games are visible in Snapshot 39, taken during the presentation, with numbers indicating their location in the order above.



Snapshot 39. Barbosa's PAVed games in his Virtlantis launchroom

Part of my plenary presentation on *Teaching English pronunciation in Second Life* to the audiences of one FL language education conference on March 26th 2011 was also devoted to reified PAVed objects. Go to <http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/pron.mp4>, download the video of the lecture (55 minutes! Shot by Kip Yellowjacket in-world) and fast-forward to 28:00. Also my pecha-kucha presentation on *Phonetic affordances of Second Life for EFL*, prepared with a lot of help from Gwen Gwasi (FL=Heike Philp) and available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDIWtCtQB8I>, is partly devoted to reification.

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<sup>51</sup> One can easily defy gravity in this way in SL, but in many respects SL physics is just like in FL.



With time and reflection I realized that the reification programme was just an integral part of something much bigger, ideas which apparently needed time to germinate after they had been sown in the LanguageLab ‘rezzable objects’ project in late 2007. The ideas finally found a label some time in early 2009, probably due to the immensely stimulating EVO VWLL course. I realized that what I was trying to do in SL with my ‘rezzable’ speaking objects, loaded with phonetic information and quizzes, was simply bringing Augmented Reality from FL into SL and using it in the service of SLEFL pronunciation teaching and learning. Because it was all in a virtual world, and because it concerned pronunciation, I called it Phonetically Augmented Virtuality. I believe that augmenting virtual environments, such as SL, with educationally relevant information and media is one of those in-world affordances which offer the best chance of genuinely adding some value to the teaching-learning process, in comparison both with FL physical classrooms and with cybersphere-based e-learning systems. The following section of this chapter is devoted to PAVing.

#### **4.4. Phonetically Augmented Virtuality (PAV) in SLEFL**

The innovative educational builds briefly discussed in the previous section drew the attention of theorists and practitioners of teaching in virtual worlds mostly because they offered to make abstract ideas more tangible to learners by reifying them. Descent into madness was reified by stairs going down in Macbeth’s head; Bloom’s taxonomy was rezzed as a pyramid, concepts were symbolized with solid spheres in mind-mapping objects. At the same time, however, and on a different conceptual level, those structures were also examples of augmentation. Many of the objects available in Virtual Macbeth had notecards or soundfiles inside of them, containing additional information of educational use. The Bloom’s pyramid also contained a fairly extensive treatment of the taxonomy in the form of text offered in a notecard. By clicking on pictures and objects in the virtual hallucinations build one could learn a lot about a variety of psychic disorders. My own dominoes and other block games were at the same time examples of reification of some phonetic abstractions and of augmentation of simple SL objects with additional information. Thus, the relation between augmentation and reification is that of logical inclusion, rather than anything else: reified objects form a proper subset of augmented objects, but not vice-versa. In other words: all objects reifying an abstract concept in SL are ipso facto augmented in some way, but augmented objects need not necessarily represent reified concepts. While one-fourth of my own pronouncing games using ‘rezzable’ objects in SL belong to the reification category, as shown in the previous section, the rest belong with augmentation without reification. It is to the discussion of such PAVed objects and of the process of PAVing that I now turn.

One unique affordance of Second Life, and commonly regarded as one of its strongest advantages over some other virtual worlds (see Chapter 2.2. for the list of affordances), is that the environment allows almost unlimited construction. Indeed, except for the ground, the sea and the sky provided by Linden Lab upon purchase of the sim, i.e. an area of land, everything else is literally built by the residents: trees, houses, streets, mountains, everyday objects, everything. Snapshot 40 shows the very beginning of such terraformation and construction. This is Virtilantis at the end of November 2010.



**Snapshot 40. Early terraformation of Virlantis**

Each object in SL exhibits a number of physical properties known from FL, such as gravity, mass, colour, shape, texture, etc. What is much more interesting for (language) educators, however, is that it can also have features which are impossible or extremely hard to implement in FL. For example, objects can behave in many programmed ways in response to touch or impact. Objects can also contain other objects inside, such as notecards, audio/video recordings, or their own replicas ready to rez.

These unique SL properties of all objects have not escaped notice by language educators. As was mentioned earlier, when discussing the reification potential of SL, one of the most popular affordances is making objects dispense notecards when touched by an avatar. The notecard can contain explanatory/informative text, a test question, some instructions on the next step in a quest, a picture, a landmark to teleport to, a url link to a web page, another notecard, and other types of information. Objects which play linguistically relevant sound files, such as recorded object name, are also used in many places devoted to foreign language teaching and learning. As an example, one of the *General specifications for the NIFLAR 3D world* was: “5. In addition to providing context for teacher designed, educational task driven activities the 3D environment should also optimally support object-triggered avatar interaction” (Koenraad 2010:13).

In this book we have so far encountered such objects in the quoted report from the LanguageLab ‘rezzable objects’ project (Chapter 4.1.) as well as in my own pronunciation games. Virtual Macbeth and the Kristallnacht exhibition also contain some objects with built-in audio which is played upon avatar touch. Because inserting sound files into objects and the LSL script playing them out are relatively easy to do in-world, this technique of delivering multimedia content has been almost as popular as note-giving, i.e. programming objects to dispense built-in notecards. Both techniques are widely used in many places in SL, both educational and not. Successful use of audio playback from objects for foreign language teaching and learning is a different story altogether, however. The best such achievement I know is Calisto Encinal’s *Mi Casa*.

Calisto Encinal (FL=James Abraham), has created a rich environment for learners of Spanish, where he has used such affordances of SL to the utmost (see here <http://blip.tv/file/1320301> for a video tour). Briefly, in a Mexican-style villa many objects are interactive and offer quizzes and quests. They give notecards, play audio files and ask test questions. Thus, while walking around the house the learner will pick up many vocabulary items as well as a fair amount of cultural information, especially concerning architecture and painting. The following is a short introduction excerpted from Calisto’s own notecards available on the site. For more information, visit his blog at <http://calistoencinal.wordpress.com>.

Loosely-based on San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, *Mi Casa Es Su Casa* is directed at true beginners to intermediate learners in the US university system. (...) The goals of this project are:

- to create a rich, simulated environment for role-play activities
- to create a virtual study abroad experience
- to create a visually interesting immersive environment to display cultural information (see pictures on walls of *Mi casa*)
- to create interactive activities for (...) study and practice (see *Escuela, Mercado, Farmacia*)
- to create activities that simulate videogames in order to tap into student persistence and motivation
- to create bot or helps using artificial intelligence to model controlled dialogs (see *Panadería La Princesa*)
- to create the ability to save progress on levels, store data/answers and report using database connectivity (see front door of *Mi casa*)

Here are some of the things available now.

- The front door asks a multiple choice challenge question which the avatar must answer correctly before the avatar may enter. Once the task is completed, the avatar's name is stored in a database and it is not asked again.
- The living room doors ask a fill-in-the-blank question which the avatar must answer correctly before the avatar may enter. (...)
- All of the art objects have embedded cultural information. Click on art to receive notecard with information about the piece and the artist. (...)
- Vocabulary Hunt Game, select #5. In this game, students must touch a series of objects within a set time period in order to fill in a belt with jewels.

Thus, it looks that Calisto has managed to follow quite closely the wise advice of Aldrich to the effect that “a sim consisting of only simulation elements is incomplete (...) simulation elements are like life. Therefore, in a good sim, they need to be mixed with: game elements to make it engaging (...) and pedagogical elements (including coaching) to make it effective” (Aldrich 2009:23). From our particular point of view in this book, however, what is most interesting in *Mi Casa* is the liberal use of phonetic augmentation, with many objects speaking the foreign language to the visitor and offering action contingent on his/her answer. This is in the best tradition of gamifying language learning, so that the learners feel they are actually playing an interactive game of the ORPG kind. There are also less game-like audio features of the environment. Some objects carry letter symbols on them, and “you can click on each letter to hear it pronounced. In addition, you can put a word in on channel 711 (text chat in SL – WS/B) and it will be spelled back to you in text and audio”

(<https://lists.secondlife.com/pipermail/educators/2008-December/027920.html>).

In effect, then, even though Calisto was not specifically aiming to do that, *Mi Casa* is a heavily PAVed environment, i.e. on top of all other linguistic information available from the rezzed objects in the villa, the learner/visitor can obtain a fair amount of Spanish pronunciation input. As I will demonstrate below, my own PAVing attempts are naturally more phonetics-focused than Calisto's, but it is obvious that *Mi Casa* has been of prime importance for me in terms of inspiration, as indeed I mentioned in the Preface.

Embedding sounds into objects in-world is not the only method of phonetic augmentation, technically speaking. Audio clues for quests and tasks in SL can also be delivered via the streaming audio channel, which is usually used to stream music radio broadcasts. This may be more effective when there is a need for the learner to listen to a recording for longer than a few seconds, because SL only allows audio file update in chunks of 10 seconds at a time (with a

cost attached of L\$ 10 per chunk). This method was used with great success on the British Council island in SL to cue learners going on the Merlin and Robin Hood quests. See here for more information: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/links/second-life-learners-teachers-english>).

Such SL environments containing some extra information superimposed on the ordinary 'physical' objects, and available to the passer-by equipped with the right hard- and software, are directly reminiscent of what is quickly becoming a standard functionality of the latest models of mobile phones, i.e. Augmented Reality (AR). With built-in GPS and g-sensor modules such smartphones can superimpose arbitrary information in audio-visual form on the view of the physical environments mediated by the smartphone's camera. One definition of AR is:

“a live, direct or indirect, view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are augmented by computer-generated sensory input such as sound, video, graphics or GPS data. (...) As a result, the technology functions by enhancing one's current perception of reality. (...) With the help of advanced AR technology (e.g. adding computer vision and object recognition) the information about the surrounding real world of the user becomes interactive and digitally manipulable. Artificial information about the environment and its objects can be overlaid on the real world<sup>52</sup>.”

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented\\_reality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented_reality)).

As can be seen in the wiki article, as well easily gleaned from querying the web with the phrase, AR is now booming, which unavoidably leads to the inflation of terminology and taxonomy. For the sake of this discussion, however, let us assume that there are basically two functional types of AR currently used for education, regardless of the actual technological solutions involved:

1. augmenting a book or another type of traditionally printed material with 3d pop-up visualizations, e.g. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q\\_xF8ujj7ko](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_xF8ujj7ko) from Facoltà di Architettura Valle Giulia, and
2. augmenting the wide view of the environment with educational content, e.g. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8L6ht0fNBRA> from Harvard *HARP* Project; an hour-long lecture delivered at the VWBPE 2009 conference in SL here: <http://business.treet.tv/shows/bpeducation/episodes/bpeharp>); HARP home here: <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=harp&pageid=icb.page69587>.

Augmenting SL objects with additional information, such as that encountered in *Virtual Macbeth* or *Mi Casa*, is naturally closer to the latter FL implementation of AR. Because the augmentation is effected in a virtual world, the term I tend to use for this SL affordance is *Augmented Virtuality*. Augmented Virtuality (AV) “refers to the merging of real world objects into virtual worlds (...) It refers to predominantly virtual spaces, where physical elements, e.g. physical objects or people, are dynamically integrated into, and can interact with the virtual world in real-time” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented\\_virtuality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented_virtuality)). And because the range of my own AV interest has so far been limited to SLEFL pronunciation, the appropriate acronym results in *Phonetically AV*, or *PAV*. Hence: *PAVed* objects, blocks, toys, games, etc. My own definition of PAVing follows: “enhancing a virtual world with phonetic information in the form of sound files, text-to-speech synthesis, phonetic transcription, explanatory text, as

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<sup>52</sup> Or vice versa: “one could use AR to hide images (such as signs, video displays, even other people) considered distracting or offensive” (Cascio et al. 2007:13).

well as exercises and tasks of all kinds. This phonetic information is built directly into objects in the virtual environment and can be interactively accessed by the avatar”.

So, what exactly is the added educational value of this SL affordance? How does AV-supported language teaching and learning compare to language education face-to-face in FL and digitally mediated on the flat internet? From the short introduction of Calisto Encinal's *Mi Casa* it should now be obvious that the AV affordance inherent in SL has an enormous potential for FLT/L. In a gamified virtual environment where literally every object can be easily turned into an interactive learning aid all advantages of the more traditional didactic methods can be exploited. The immediacy and embodiment of f2f 3d interaction between the student and the teacher, as well as among students themselves, is replicated in the MUVE<sup>53</sup>. The rich content characteristic of LMSs can be delivered to students where and when desired, including to some mobile devices which are powerful enough to support virtual worlds. Finally, the astounding affordances of AR in FL can be ported to MUVES as AV to create what is nowadays commonly called mixed reality ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed\\_reality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed_reality)), allowing educators to get the best of both worlds.

Notice that Augmented Virtuality, in the sense in which I defined the term above, is by far more feasible than AR in the 'real' world. On the level of hardware, to take advantage of the augmentation of the real environment a visor of some kind is necessary. Nowadays this is most commonly the screen of a smartphone (see HARP example above) or dedicated goggles, such as in the much hyped Google glasses: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSnB06um5r4>. Such solutions tend to be either uncomfortable in many learning situations or too expensive, or both. On the level of software, AR requires: (a) extremely powerful image recognition to identify objects of interest to the user, (b) very precise geolocation for the system to know where the user is on the globe (and which direction s/he is looking), (c) mammoth databases stored on the central servers, which deliver the augmenting information to the user, (d) lightning-fast and incredibly capacious wireless transmission channels. Additionally, for hands-free operation, like in Google glasses, (e) reliable speech recognition is needed, of course. All these are costly to the extent of verging on the unfeasible. This may explain why, barring the few exceptional niches where AR is actually used outside of demos and advertising, we are yet to see it implemented on a larger scale. It may indeed be ominous in this context that Gartner decided to put AR on a downward sliding course leading into the trough of disillusionment, the same trough where VVs have been for quite a while now, by the way.

The situation of AV looks in principle much more optimistic. Given the existence of the virtual world and some method to access it for the residents, all of (a)-(d) are automatically solved. In a seminal blog post of February 20<sup>th</sup> 2007, one of Linden Lab staff, Babbage Linden (FL=Jim Purbrick) made a rather technically sounding comment, which translated into simple English means more or less what I wrote above:

“Second Life is potentially a great platform for prototyping networked augmented reality applications. Everything in Second Life has an Id, everyone has a HUD and scripts in Second Life can use lSensor to scan the local area to read the Ids and lHTTPRequest to retrieve information from the web associated with those Ids. Second Life is a world in which everything has an embedded RFID tag and everyone can have an RFID reader, internet connection and augmented reality display for free”  
(<http://lindenlab.wordpress.com/2007/02/20/augmented-virtual-reality>).

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<sup>53</sup> “3D VLEs are as close as humans have gotten to replicating traditional face-to-face instruction (from a psychological perspective) at a distance” (Annetta, Folta & Klesath 2010:86).



Immediate identification of all avatars and objects in-world is guaranteed automatically by the id built into them, so no visual recognition is necessary at all. The same id tags locate every object and avatar in-world with precision yet impossible to achieve in AR. The virtual world itself contains the enormous database of information which is of immediate use by the system, but if more is required (like in my PAVing), it can easily be built directly into the objects, with no mediation of a separate database system. Finally, because all components of the system are held on the same servers<sup>54</sup>, all transmissions are also internal to the system. This includes data transmission from the databases to the user visualizer/client as well. In the case of AV there is only one visual channel, of course, and no additional gadgetry is needed to put in front of one's eyes through which the augmenting information could be fed. The same computer monitor handles both functions: showing the virtual world and the augmentation of it.

The affordances described by Babbage Linden have been used in-world in a number of applications. Babbage himself designed and created *Carbon Goggles* (<http://carbongoggles.org>), which afforded to overlay objects in SL with their carbon footprint rating from AMEE (<http://www.amee.com>), as well as *SlateIt*, a social tagging and rating tool to use in-world (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsfZpYXrVvM>). One of the most notorious SL AV systems is called *Max, the virtual guidedog* (<http://www.virtualguidedog.com>). Max can use the AV affordances of SL to provide to blind residents what effectively amounts to audiodescription of the nearest environment. Max “gives constant feedback about the immediate surrounding area, so like a real guide dog, he helps visually impaired users avoid crashing into other people and objects. He assists them in navigating the virtual world, reading messages and information with text to speech technology” (from Facebook description: [http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=90406984043](http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=90406984043)).

Why, then – it would be legitimate to ask – with all these awesome developments, have we still not got an all-out MUVLE completely linguistically augmented (say, Linguistically Augmented Virtuality, or LAV)? If all objects in SL have some textual information in them by default, for example in the [name] and [description] fields, why is it that we see practically no LAV in SL which would exploit this affordance for foreign (practically – SLEFL) language education? There are a number of reasons why this has not happened: from the global economic issues affecting VWs, through the changing policies and strategies of Linden Lab towards education in SL, down to some technical problems having to do with in-world object creation (rezzing) and editing. I will discuss some of the latter problems in the last section of this chapter, where I report on my own efforts to PAVe Virlantis.

Before we go there, however, one more fundamental question should be raised in this section, where I argue that PAV is one of the few affordances of SL as a VE which constitute its genuine added value in comparison to FL education, be it f2f or online. The question concerns the educational effectiveness of AV. Put in simple terms: is there some empirically observable added value in student achievement when AV (LAV, PAV) is used in the teaching/learning process, compared to: (a) in-world teaching/learning without AV on the one hand, and (b) FL teaching/learning with AR, on the other? The disappointing answer is: we do not know. Because Linguistically Augmented Virtuality of the *Mi Casa* type, as well as PAV, which I have been implementing in Virlantis, have never been tested for effectiveness, the jury is not even yet out on this issue; the jury has not yet assembled.

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<sup>54</sup> This is a gross oversimplification from the point of view of the internal hardware-software server structure of Second Life, but what counts here is the confrontation with AR, rather than the internal details of the Linden Lab systems. In this sense, all of SL is in one place.

Even on the more general question of global MUVLE effectiveness “much research is needed to help direct instructional developers working in immersive spaces to create original learning experiences, to assess them and gauge improvements” (Kemp and Haycock 2008:95). And yet, it is naturally even harder to propose valid and reliable research design comparing the effectiveness of language pedagogy with and without AV resources. While it would seem to be (at pains) possible to narrow down the targeted dependent variable cloud to a manageable size, for example focusing on vocabulary retention, the complexity of the independent variables is quite forbidding. This is one of the main methodological problems in researching the effectiveness of ICT in education globally; here the difficulties are compounded by the specificity of MUVLE and AR. For example, as mentioned earlier in the section concerning immersion (Chapter 2.2.), the educational effectiveness of MUVLEs seems to depend on the level of immersion of the student, and this is very hard to gauge objectively. One can only hypothesize that how students react to (L)AVed objects, and how much learning benefit they draw from them, will also partly depend on their feeling of presence in-world. This is not to say that contrastive research of the kind sketched here is impossible, but only that it will be very difficult. This awareness among potential researchers may be – to offer this somewhat cynical remark – one reason why we are yet to see empirical studies of this kind.

Even the slightly easier empirical research design where effectiveness is studied in FL only, with the experimental condition involving AR, and the control condition being AR-less teaching, is hardly forthcoming. For example, “Patrick O’Shea, the current HARP director at Harvard, says that by entailing students to walk around and rely on handhelds, augmented reality tools force them to play a more active role in their own education. While O’Shea notes that researchers have not conducted rigorous quantitative analyses on whether or not augmented reality is improving learning, anecdotal evidence does show that it is certainly boosting student excitement about learning” (<http://vroot.org/node/4826>). Now, if AR appears to be effective, and AV is its analogue in VWs, it should logically be effective as well. This, however, remains an empirical issue to be studied.

#### **4.5. PAVing Virtlantis**

In this last section of the PAVing chapter I will be considerably more practical and down-to-earth in the discussion of my work with phonetically augmented objects in SL. I propose to have a look at the actual process of working with them: from the pedagogical design of the activity, through collecting and creating content, to embedding the content and the scripts in the rezved objects, with particular attention paid to problems encountered along the way. While educational AV may be by a wide margin easier and cheaper than comparable AR in the ‘real’ world, it is certainly not problem-free! Unlike in the previous chapters of this book, the main target reader of this section is the EFL teacher, rather than (SL)EFL researcher. What I hope to achieve mostly is to show him/her that, despite unavoidable technical issues and some difficult questions, designing, making and using PAVed (LAVed) objects for teaching in-world can be both challenging and fun. Even though I cannot at this time provide empirical confirmation for this claim, I strongly believe it can also be useful and fun for students.

It all started at the end of 2008, i.e. a few months after I began teaching SLEFL pronunciation at what was then called SLEnglish community in-world. As far as my thinking about SL as an environment for SLEFL is concerned, this was a year after the LanguageLab course, and just a month before the beginning of the EVO VWLL 2009 course, both extremely seminal events in my pedagogical career in SL, as mentioned above in many places of this text. The very

beginning was not any grand scheme or project, but a rather inauspicious message which appeared on the SLED list, whose avid reader I have been throughout my five years in-world.

Date: Thu, 4 Dec 2008  
From: "Peter Bloomfield" <pedro.mcmillan@googlemail.com>  
Subject: New tool: Stackable Graph Cubes  
To: educators@lists.secondlife.com

Greetings all,

I was encouraged to share this with you lovely folks, in case any of you can find it useful. It's a way to drag cubes around in SL (using regular click+drag, rather than edit mode) so that they will 'snap' together into neat shapes. You can easily set it to let anybody drag the cubes, so you can let your class use it to collaboratively build 3d graphs, or anything else that can be made of cubes. (Old 8-bit games in 3d seems like a good use to me! :-)

The script is free and open source (GPL). You can get more info, watch a demo video, and download the script, from here: <http://www.avid-insight.co.uk/projects/stackable-graph-cubes> (this link is still active as of this writing – WS/B). Feedback and suggestions are welcome!

-Peter R. Bloomfield

(SL: Pedro McMillan)

As can be seen in Appendix 1., shortly afterwards I created my first 'reified' domino game, with Pedro's script inside. I used the inspiration and the sound files from the 'rezzable objects' project (with LanguageLab permission), but the application of Pedro's script to afford a domino game was my own. Notice that my first PAVed build was at the same time one where a grapho-phonetic abstraction (phonemic identity versus graphemic difference) was reified into the edges of domino stones rezzed as coloured cubes on the ground. Phonemically matching stones were to be dragged together so that they could then snap tight, once in close proximity of each other. This trick created a nicely arranged domino string, exactly like in FL dominoes, where the match criterion is usually the number etched on each side of the stone.

Pedro's script, as mentioned in his mail message, managed to exploit the ordinary physics of SL to make it easier for the avatar to handle and move the objects. Ordinarily, in order to drag an object in-world the avatar must first [edit] it, and then operate a rather unfriendly system of controls. Objects are easily lost underground with this method, so that they become invisible, and there are additional problems with permissions: normally only the owners of the objects can move them around in [edit] mode. Pedro managed to avoid these problems in his script, which is one reason why it has become rather popular in-world for a number of application. Another reason, of course, was his generosity in freely sharing the script for free with everybody, in the true SL spirit.

In Snapshot 41, taken during my domino activity on December 10<sup>th</sup> 2008, the line of cubes is already assembled. A PAVed T-bone steak from LanguageLab is visible on the plate at the bottom left-hand corner...



**Snapshot 41. PAVed domino game in Barbosa's launchroom**

The problem with Pedro's script was that it made objects attract, but not repel. So, the dominoes were happy to snap into any sequence whatsoever, without first checking if the phonemes on the edges of the words built into each stone matched. According to Pedro (personal email communication): "the Stackable Graph Cubes would need a lot of changes to make them work" in the selective domino fashion, i.e. with movement to and away. Nevertheless, the effect of magnetized cubes achieved with but a few lines of code in-world, compared to the sophistication of its possible FL analogues is quite astounding, I believe. I have used Pedro's script later in a variety of games, and I daresay they always met with considerable success among my students.

The main pedagogical goal of the domino game was of course phonetic awareness raising. EFL learners often think about words in terms of letters, rather than sounds; this heavy orthographic bias appears to be caused by the overreliance on printed sources in EFL teaching, with spelling pronunciation being an almost unavoidable consequence. The concept of phonemic identity despite graphemic difference (and vice versa, of course) can be relatively hard to grasp, especially to those learners whose native tongues are graphophonemically more consistent than English.

My second activity exploiting PAVed objects, and targeting the same erroneous impression that English words mainly have a graphemic shape, was the *Phonetic synesthesia game* of December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 (see Appendix 2.). In this game objects were not magnetized and there was no requirement of moving them around at all. The players simply walked among them, clicked and listened (LanguageLab's sound recordings were recycled), whereupon they tried to correlate sound with the visual attributes of the objects (the very essence of synesthesia). This turned out to be among the hardest of all my phonetic games and quests ever rezzed in Virlantis. Quite apart from suppressing the strong orthographic bias and having to think in terms of sound, the participants had to form new conceptual categories in their minds, such as "compound or phrase", on the basis of very limited evidence. To make the game even more challenging (probably too challenging!), and to further underscore the phonetic aspect of English words, I did not put the graphemic names of objects in hovertext above them, so that players really had to click and listen to know what the actual name of the object was. Eventually, quite a few of the participants failed to correctly create the phonetic categories, even though the visual categories, correlated with the phonetic ones bi-uniquely, were in plain sight.

Snapshot 42 shows the first version of the synesthesia game, with my avatar on the left, the launchroom whiteboard on the right, and my SL home in the background (pool in front). As can be seen, at that time I did not have to commute very far to work!





Snapshot 42. PAVed synesthesia game in Barbosa's launchroom

For my next PAVed game, *Proverbs halved* of March 4<sup>th</sup> 2009 (Appendix 3.), I used my own recordings of the five actually rezzed proverbs. I edited the wav audio files with Audacity, and uploaded all ten proverb halves into SL for \$L 10 each (= \$L 100 = about 40 US cents). Unlike with the previous two games, the goal of this one was not specifically phonetic, even though it was PAVed with the built-in recordings. The proverbs activity turned out to be a nice pretext for talking about cultural/historical differences across different languages embedded in 'wise sayings' of various nations.



Snapshot 43. PAVed proverbs game in Barbosa's launchroom

Notice that in all of the three cases above, like in many other activities which I designed later, there was a contingency plan in case participants had problems with sound, movement and/or manipulation of objects. As explained in Chapter 2.1., sound files can easily be embedded in SL notecards, so students can manipulate words and sentences there, rather than in the 3d environment.

For the *What am I?* activities on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 and on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2011 (see Appendices 4. and 25.), I used the sound files with sundry recordings available in the inventory 'library' of free objects, which each avatar gets as default on first entry into SL. These were inserted into ordinary plywood boxes, which are the default objects rezzed ex-nihilo (rather than out of the inventory) in-world. Again, like with synesthesia, to make participants focus on sound, no



graphemic prompts were given. In the first version of *What am I?* the initial letter of the name of the sound file was provided. Because there is no one correct word to refer to the variety of Linden Lab recorded sounds, even this prompt was not enough in some cases, and students called them other names than the ones found in the inventory.

In the second version of this activity, where actual emotive utterances were used, such as *boo*, *chuckle*, *gasp*, *hey*, *laugh*, etc., there were various questions asked, both about their content and phonetic structure, as seen in Appendix 25. In both activities there was a lot of jocular banter in the group, with new words and expressions coming up, some of which I briefly discussed phonetically and pragmatically for the benefit of all, e.g. *boing*, *cricket*, *locust*. For example, the *X-mas* sound file contained an excerpt of the well-known Billy Mack Christmas song from the *Love, actually* movie ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7Q\\_bq07GVs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7Q_bq07GVs)), containing the lines: “I feel it in my fingers, I feel it in my toes”, with wonderfully voiced /z/ at the end of each line, a great example of word-final obstruent-devoicing suppression, of especial relevance to most of my pronunciation students in Virlantis, with their heavily devoicing mother tongues.

In the *Word stress block* game of April 8<sup>th</sup> 2009 (Appendix 5.), I again used Pedro’s magnetizing script, this time to make syllable blocks snap together into words. This activity used the reification affordance of SL in that the level of lexical stress (strong-weak) was reified as block size (big-small). The sound files from LanguageLab were recycled once again. I did not divide them into syllables because I believed that they might be: (a) difficult to recognize by students as nonsensical sound bits, and therefore (b) hard to connect into words. Thus, even though syllables were reified as blocks, each block played the entire word to which it belonged upon avatar touch. In Snapshot 44 Wlodek Barbosa is testing the game in his launchroom with Kip Yellowjacket. Some of the Virlantis whereabouts is seen in the background.



**Snapshot 44. PAVed word stress game in Barbosa’s launchroom**

My first treasure hunt/quest came with the next activity, the *Find objects whose name...*, on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2009. As can be seen in Appendix 6., I did not insert any phonetic material into existing objects, nor did I rez any. The hunters only needed to find Virlantis objects matching phonetic criteria. The way the activity was designed did not make it very easy for newbies or inexperienced SL residents. This was because in order to find objects with fitting names, they had to “right-click the object, edit it, go to the [General] tab, look at the [Name:] field”, and

this is a lot of clicking! I later discovered a trick, built into the elaborate SL GUI menu system, which made it considerably easier to discover object names in world (see Appendix 8.). Like before, the main goal of this hunt was to raise the phonetic awareness of the participants: objects have names which can be perceived as strings of sounds, not only as strings of letters. The (strings of) sounds, with their particular phonetic difficulties, which I used in the activity were selected on the basis of my own teaching experience, as well as phonetic literature, as those which are most troublesome to many learners. In the cues I used simplified phonetic transcription, rather than IPA, for reasons explained earlier in Chapter 3.4.

In the *Phonetic dice game* on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2009 (Appendix 7.) I used another clever LSL script, which simulates a dice toss. This kind of effect is not built into the regular SL physics and needs to be specially scripted. With a little knowledge of LSL one can change the number of dice, as well as the parameters of their movement. I experimented with both to get the best effect for this game. As explained in the notecard itself, the elaborate mental number crunching required from the player for the calculation of the date was meant to make the phonetic task of correctly pronouncing the date actually more difficult than it might have been with the date components simply spelled out in words. There are quite a few potential pronunciation problems inherent in date reading, of course, and my students duly encountered all of them: (a) difficult segments, clusters and stress patterns in the names of days and months, such as: *Wednesday, Thursday, January, February, April*, (b) ditto for numerals, such as: *eighth, twelfth, thirteenth, 2006*, etc. In effect, reading aloud a date like *Wednesday, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2006* off from two dice can be quite a mouthful!

In this game there were no sound files built into the dice. The textures with month names were gratefully received from Carolrb Roux (FL=Carol Rainbow). The stream of particles emanating from Barbosa's hand in Snapshot 45 is the default visual effect generated by SL whenever an avatar touches/handles an object.



**Snapshot 45. Phonetic dice game in Barbosa's launchroom**

Finally, on June 24<sup>th</sup> 2009, “phonetically augmented virtuality (PAV) has come to Wlodek Barbosa's launchroom and house in Virtlantis” (see Appendix 8.)! This was my first properly PAVed treasure hunt: the objects actually contained some extra phonetic information which augmented the normal contents. At that time only five of the objects held sound files; this changed gradually until as many as forty objects around Virtlantis were PAVed with sound in September 2011. One obstacle to more extensive PAVing was the complex SL permission (perms) system, whereby only creators/owners can edit their own objects without any limitations. As explained in the notecard, I did not PAVe the existing games beyond what they had already contained. A magnetized domino piece with the additional phonetic question in

the [name] or [description] fields would be a bit too much, I thought. The method of retrieving the PAVed textual content from an object by hovering the mouse over it, even if better than constant [edit]ing, was still rather unfriendly. I later managed to get a script which was able to read this information to the touching avatar on the private IM channel directly from a notecard inserted in the object.

In Snapshot 46 one can see exactly how treasure hunters saw the embedded phonetic information: Barbosa is [edit]ing one object in his launchroom; the edit window opens with the [name] and [description] fields on the [General] tab. The former field contains the name string *Tropical Plant*, the latter holds the PAVing information: “Tropical Plant - in <plant>: /a:/ in British English, /&/ in American English” (see item 28 in the notecard in Appendix 8). At the bottom of the [edit] window one can see that nobody is allowed to move or copy this object, save the owner, i.e. Wlodek Barbosa in this case. On the left of the scene the red/green/blue object positioning arrows can be seen.



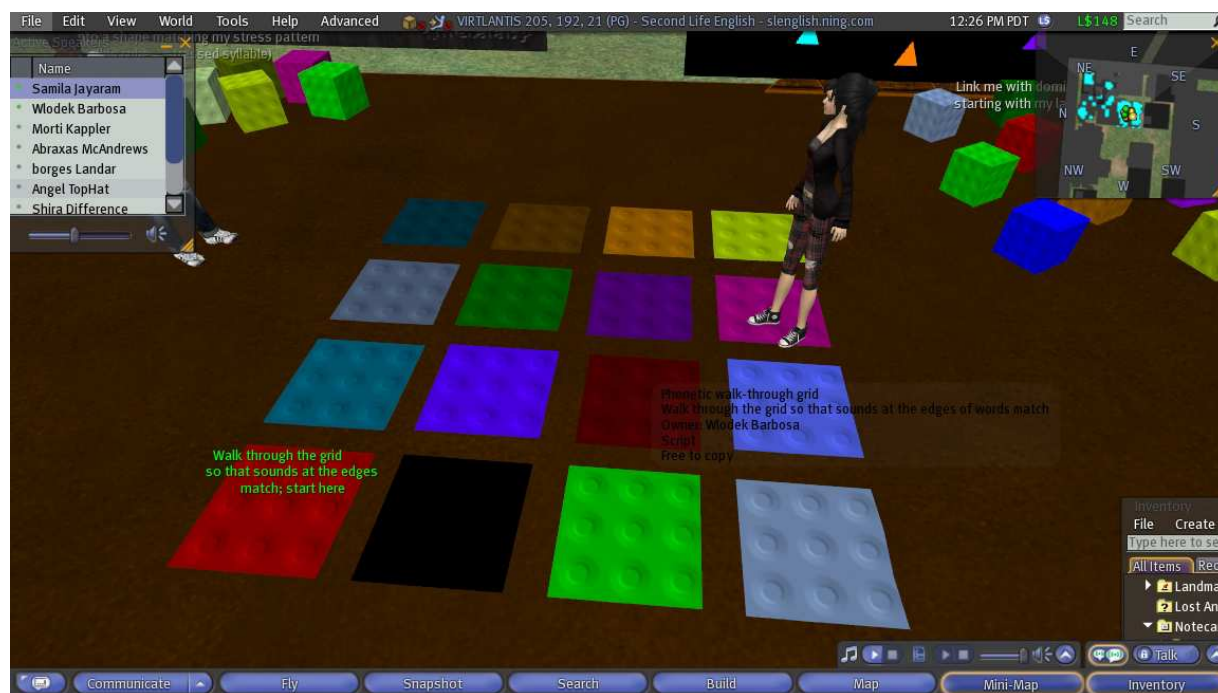
Snapshot 46. PAVed treasure hunt in Barbosa’s launchroom

Concurrently with the treasure hunt I was working on the *Phonetic walk-through grid* (word-stress version), which was also unveiled on June, 24<sup>th</sup> 2009 (Appendix 9.). This was a simple activity which should appeal particularly to highly kinesthetic learners, of course, as it afforded (and required) ‘physical’ avatar body movement. From the reificatory point of view, an abstract concept of the dactylic rhythmic foot (regardless of the particular exponent word) was reified as a stepping-stone path through the grid. A fancy script added to the walk-through even lit up, Saturday-night-disco style, the stone on which the avatar was standing at the given moment. There were two other versions of the walk-through: one with the path leading along stones with phonemically matching edges (like the domino game), and the other (Appendix 19.) where the player was supposed to step on British-English-pronounced stones. Some of the sound files in my walk-throughs I got from Carolrb Roux, together with textures containing digits, day- and month-names.

The domino walk-through is illustrated in Snapshot 47. As can be seen, the starting red stone is identified in hovertext above it, in the bottom left-hand corner. Because Barbosa’s GUI at the moment of taking this snapshot was set to reveal basic object information on mouse hover,



the label and general info (plus the owner, etc.) are shown across the light-blue square. With default settings they would not be visible. The local map of the surroundings appears in the right-hand top corner of the screen.



**Snapshot 47. PAVed walk-through grid in Barbosa's launchroom**

With the beginning of my second year of SLEFL teaching I was continuing PAVing with some new ideas. In my *Phonetic transcription game*, tried out on July 8<sup>th</sup> and September 16<sup>th</sup> 2009 (Appendix 10.), I first used the newly acquired 'finder' software from the in-world firm *Magicians*. As explained briefly in the notecard, this script locates all objects and avatars in the given radius by looking into their [name] fields. Needless to say, this is a wonderful tool for PAVing, or indeed AVing generally. The SL affordance making its operation possible was mentioned above in connection with Babbage Linden's augmentations in-world. The rationale behind it is simple: if everything in SL is tagged with an id, it is enough to query the servers with these specific tags to see whether and where the objects are on the given island.

On top of this affordance, normally exploiting regular orthography of object names, I now built the phonetic transcription layer. If queried with the proper string, such as /Co:k/ for *chalk*, the *Finder* would point its cone towards the object and beam a stream of particles, as shown in Snapshot 48. The avatar could then follow the beam to locate the object. With no object of the given name in the vicinity, the *Finder* would return a not-found message, which meant that the transcription entered in the query was wrong. This was actually often the case in my activity, because of the notorious difficulty of handling phonetic transcription by EFL students. As it turned out, then, the problems with transcribing somewhat obliterated the main goal of the activity, which was, like before, the raising of phonetic awareness of the participants (globally) and the exercise in pronouncing the names of the specific objects located by the *Finder*. It is after such negative experiences of using SL-adjusted IPA transcription, as well as some explicit comments from my students, that I gradually phased out the use of transcription in my activities in-world whatsoever.

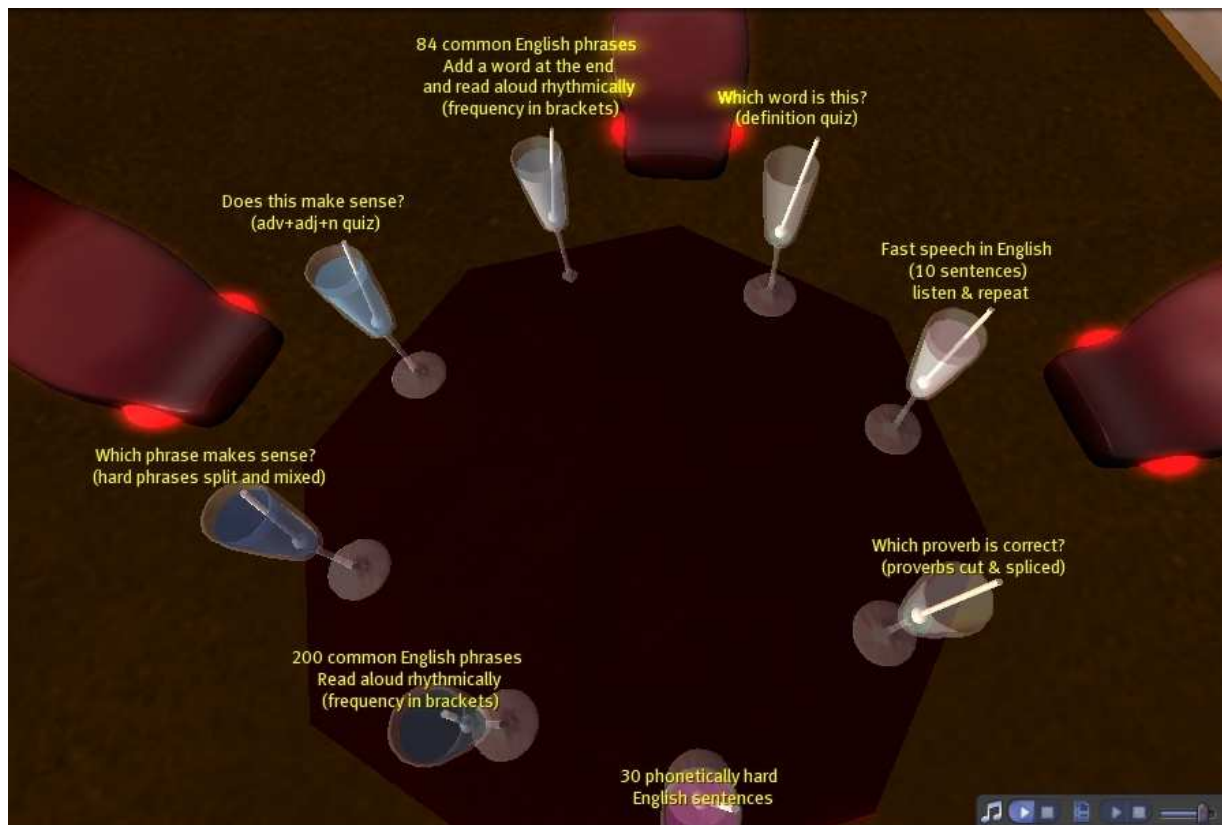


**Snapshot 48. Phonetic *Finder* in Barbosa's launchroom**

The next two games, *10 most common 4-syllable words in English and their stress patterns* of October 14<sup>th</sup> 2009 and *Phrase stress finder game* of October 27<sup>th</sup> 2009 (Appendices 11. and 12.), used the same *Finder* mechanism, except this time the query terms were word and phrase stress patterns symbolized with strings of big and small Oo's. At that time there were 28 objects PAVed in Virtlantis which could be searched with the *Finder*. The main pedagogical problem with the two activities was that they both required only one precise stress pattern entered in the search, with no space for casual speech variation, for example. Thus, [ordinary Oooo] had to be entered with four syllables, i.e. as a slow/careful variant, rather than as [ordinary Ooo] with weak vowel syncope. Theoretically, one could tweak the *Finder* script to intelligently parse the query string to take care of such variation, but this requires a rather advanced level of LSL skills, which I did not have at that time (or now). Another potentially difficult issue with these activities, like with all word-stress-related activities, was the cross-Atlantic variation in accentuation. Students speaking American English might be tempted to search for [ordinary OoOo], or even [ordinary ooOo], with the frustration of getting a not-found message. What seems to be required here to fully account for natural language phonetic variation is much more Artificial Intelligence. This remains true of PAVing, as well as all of SL education, and practically all of educational ICT, whether online or not. It seems that educators will need to be rather patient on this front.

As can be seen from the inspection of the remaining notecards in the Appendix, most of the other games and activities were variations on the themes described above. There are some, however, which deserve some discussion. In spring 2010 I started making 'phonetic cocktails': cocktail glasses were rezzed and PAVed with notecards and scripts to generate lists of words or phrases upon touch, most with some pronunciation relevance. The text would appear in the avatar private IM channel, not to spam the surroundings; these activities were expressly designed to be asynchronous self-access only, even if I did use them with a group on a few occasions, mainly as a filler. No answer verification or evaluation was built in, mostly due to my meager LSL scripting skills. The task for the learner in each case was to read (listen to) the generated text, with advice to read aloud (repeat) and pay attention to pronunciation. As many as eight such cocktails were rezzed, eventually. All are shown in Snapshot 49.





Snapshot 49. PAVed cocktails in Barbosa's launchroom

The 200 common English phrases of June 9<sup>th</sup> 2010 (Appendix 17.) is at the bottom left, with the following cocktails, going clockwise:

- *Hard phrases split and mixed*, e.g. which of the three is correct? 1. “failure to tap into human potential”, 2. “failure to tap into a certain number of options”, 3. “failure to tap into imaginable outcomes” (phrases taken from the log of one of Kip’s own activities in Virtlantis)
- *Does this make sense*, e.g. “recently similar community”, “absolutely individual policy”, “suddenly particular example” (*Phrase generator*, June 9<sup>th</sup> 2010, Appendix 16.)
- *84 common English phrases*, e.g. “an increase in the number” (121), “the economy as a whole” (87), “a knock on the door” (77) (taken, with frequency figures, from the British National Corpus; a variant of activity in Appendix 18.)
- *Which word is this?*, e.g.: “an animal which has black and white fur, lives in holes in the ground, and is active at night” (*badger*; taken from my in-world dictionary, a separate P/LAVing thread of my work which is not covered in this book)
- *Fast speech in English*, e.g. “By the time you’re old enough to appreciate your parents you’ll have children of your own who take you for granted” (recordings for this cocktail came from the *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* course, used with permission from the Publishers; see Mańkowska, Nowacka and Kłoczowska 2009)
- *Which proverb is correct?* (based on *Proverbs halved*, see Appendix 3.)
- *30 phonetically hard English sentences*, e.g. “Many of these people came from southern Europe, particularly Italy and Eastern European countries, such as Austria, Hungary, Poland and Russia.” (phonetic difficulty measured with my PDI tool, see Sobkowiak 2004 and conference handout here: <http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/PDI in SLEFL.pdf>)

The last three PAVed quests in Virlantis, on September 21<sup>st</sup>, November 23<sup>rd</sup> and December 14<sup>th</sup> 2011, were rather special. On top of the by now familiar treasure hunt activity scenario I wanted to bolster textual creativity in the participants by asking them to write their own stories based on the PAVed objects, thus turning the chaotic hunt into a respectable quest, with some plot in it. First I asked the participants to write their own tweet-long stories. Heimlaga Svenska's tweets were voted best by all the students, so I PAVed them into the objects which Heimlaga had used (see Appendix 27.). The other objects were used as the basis of longer stories written by a few of the participants during the November activity (see Appendix 28.). Two of these stories appear in Appendix 29.: Alf Septimus's *Turn off your lamp* and Angel Tophat's *Christmas time again*. These stories were used as quest scenarios, with avatars going from one asterisked object to the next on the island and discovering their PAVed contents. Angel's story was used in the beginner's Polish lesson which was prepared by Wlodek Barbosa (see the end of the notecard in Appendix 29.).

The [Follow-up on Facebook] section at the end of Appendix 28. is just one example of how my activities, duly reported and blogged about on Facebook, sometimes engendered further comments and reactions. Professor Merryman (FL= Mike McKay) questioned the pedagogical objectives of my activity, to which I informally answered with the seven points. Martina Zeiner added some more from the perspective of the student and Virlantis facilitator. Many other such exchanges could be quoted because I regularly blogged about my activities on the websites which functioned as web2 supports for the Virlantis community: Ning, Elgg, Facebook, as well as <http://virlantis.com>. Some of these postscripts were lost during the community's many changes. The others could be quoted in extenso, but this would make the Appendix section even heavier than it is now. Additionally, few of them had anything directly to do with PAVing, the main theme of this book.

After December 2011 I have not PAVed any more objects in Virlantis. This was due to a number of factors. In the following paragraphs I discuss some problems I encountered in my PAVing efforts, hoping that this account may be of some use to SLEFL/VWEFL teachers who are considering starting some activities in VWs, as well as to those who are already teaching there, but have not used AV yet. As it happens, what I discovered by trial and error matches very well some warnings expressed in the SL research literature. For example, in their review, Salt, Atkins and Blackall state:

“Thus the elements of such a build could include, complex 3D objects constructed from one of (sic – WS/B) more primitives, each of which will require its own textures; each object may also require one or more pieces of embedded software (scripts) written in Linden Scripting Language (LSL), embedded information or instruction notecards, textures, other objects or sounds; (...) and an external database may be required. In addition to managing the creation and version control of such elements, a means of standardising such things as the naming of elements, the determination of ownership, and relevant permissions will be important for the smooth running of the final build. The need for some form of formal development process is clearly essential” (Salt, Atkins and Blackall 2008:61).

Arguably, the highest obstacle to my PAVing in Virlantis has already been mentioned a few times in this book: my lack of necessary Linden Scripting Language skills. LSL, together with building skills, is a sine qua non for a teacher seriously considering exploiting the educational affordances of SL, such as the easy construction of AVed objects, quests or interactive tests. In my own attempts I made do with the free scripts which I could get, such as Pedro's *Stackable Graph Cubes* or the Magicians' *Finder* script, but this minimalist tactic is not scalable to an all-out attempt to PAVE hundreds of objects in an island with truly interactive functionalities. Calisto's *Mi Casa* is close to my ideal of AVing, but it could only come into being because

James Abraham had the necessary scripting expertise (and some funds) to gamify the villa. Now, LSL is not rocket science, so with proper dedication to the task I could have simply learned it. Alternatively, I could have set apart some funds to hire specialists to do it for me. I have done neither; in effect Virlantis got some PAVing only, with relatively little interactivity and gamification built into the objects.

Another serious problem is more technical in nature. As mentioned above, there is in SL an elaborate system of property rights, called permissions ('perms' in SL lingo), whereby editing, copying and otherwise manipulating an object can only be performed by the avatar who has the right perms to do it. Without going into the details of this complex system: this is usually the [Creator], i.e. the avatar who first rezzed the object, or the present [Owner]. Because many objects are very complex internally, with various parts, notecards and scripts inside, for full permissions to an object to be granted to one avatar, all perms of all parts of the object must be set accordingly, and this is often hard to achieve. What all this means practically in the case of PAVing an island, such as Virlantis, is that in order to be able to insert PAVing files and scripts into many objects on the island I would need perms to do it from many Owners, with all the potential consequences of such a cede, for example possible mishaps or losses. There have been cases in SL where beginning builders/scripters accidentally deleted entire cities! No wonder that administrators of SL sims are not happy to grant unlimited perms to happy-go-lucky PAVers! Besides, administrators and object owners must be able to freely change the island setup at any moment without having to notify (or negotiate with) the PAVer. The given island's PAVing would thus be in a state of constant flux, and requiring continuous re-PAVing – certainly not a very feasible plan.

Some other local PAVing problems I encountered were: (1) copyright: most content which I used to PAVe (sound files, definitions, example sentences) had come from *Wiktionary*, but this is clearly not scalable, (2) objects otherwise functionally active (e.g. games or teleporters) cannot be PAVed because it could cause user's confusion and interfere with the scripts already built in, (3) objects must be relatively small/simple for PAVing, so whole buildings or sandboxes are not good tokens, (4) names hovering above the PAVed objects make them easy to spot, but may not be a welcome visual addition to the countryside, (5) PAVing holodeck scene objects, while potentially solving some issues (such as the need for constant re-PAVing with the changing conditions of the sim), creates others, such as generating the additional layer of artifice, which may not be welcomed by some learners<sup>55</sup>.

Problems with (P)AVing go far beyond the island scale, however. In my initial enthusiasm I was testing the feasibility of treating the entire SL world as a virtually augmented MUVLE. If, as mentioned above, all avatars and objects carry unique ids, and if all objects carry some description in their [name] and [description] fields by default (i.e. without any additional AVing), why not use this affordance for SLEFL teaching? It would be great, from the point of view of the learner/teacher of EFL functioning in-world, to, for example, have a ready-made 3d universal dictionary of SL objects. You do not know the English word for what you see in front of you in-world? No problem: you click on it and the name appears in spelling (or, better still, also in sound). It could also work the other way around: you want to find the meaning of a word while in-world? No problem: just type it and you're informed if there's an object by that name in the vicinity, how far and in which direction. Isn't this, after all, the kind of situated learning which educators have preached for decades? Isn't this what educational game

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<sup>55</sup> After a few attempts to PAVe Virlantis holodecks I gave up because it turned out that my scripts interfered with the ones embedded into the holodeck and responsible for its correct functioning. With more scripting skills I am certain this problem could be overcome.

specialists have seen as a prime example of gaming advantage over dry school learning? After all:

“People are poor at learning what words mean when all they get is a definition that spells out what a word means in terms of yet other words. Recent research suggests that people only really know what words mean and learn new ones when they can hook them to the sorts of experiences they refer to — that is, to the sorts of actions, images, or dialogues the words relate to (...). This gives the words situated meanings, not just verbal ones (...) Games always situate the meanings of words in terms of the actions, images, and dialogues they relate to, and show how they vary across different actions, images and dialogues. They don't just offer words for words” (Gee 2005:36).

There are two basic conditions for such radical SL AVing to work: (1) it must be feasible and relatively easy to query the island database for names/descriptions of the objects on it, and (2) the names/descriptions of the objects must show some consistency. As it turned out, neither condition can be fulfilled. Below are some excerpts from the (short) SLED thread which resulted from my query:

Date: Sun, 4 Jan 2009  
From: “Włodzimierz Sobkowiak” <swlodek@ifam.amu.edu.pl>  
Subject: Object names in SL  
To: <educators@lists.secondlife.com>

Dear SLEDers,

For some time now I've been thinking about the issue of in-world dictionaries for learners of English as a foreign language. One thread of this thinking leads me to the question of possibly taking advantage of the ready-made lexical information normally built into SL objects by their creators, and available from the object <edit> menu. My question to to SLED is this: is there a way to easily collect the names of all objects in a sim/region/plot, say from the <name> field in the <General> tab of the edit menu? Maybe in another way? BTW, from your own experience: how often does the field contain the actual name of the object?

I was lucky to get some response from the most experienced builders/scripters in SL. Here is what they said:

“Sensors only return the closest 16 “hits” so scanning a whole sim takes quite a bit of effort for each object to get complete coverage (...) Quite a lot of important things are well named, and pre-bought things, but there are an awful lot of “objects” out there too. I'd guess over 30% in general<sup>56</sup> (Eloise Pasteur, <http://educationaldesigns.eloispasteur.net/#aboutme>).

“There's no standard protocol for naming objects, or even a requirement that an object's creator assign it a name. SL automatically gives any object the default name “Object.” A lot of builders are part-timers, like me. We're building for ourselves or for a group we belong to, rather than building things for sale to the general public. We aren't very methodical about naming things (...) As I look around SL, it seems to me that other builders, other than the commercial guys, are no more logical than I am about how they name things. (...) There are thousands of objects on most sims, ranging from building-

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<sup>56</sup> “A study showed one of the biggest barriers to making Second Life accessible to visually impaired users is its apparent lack of metadata, such as names and descriptions, for virtual world objects. This is a similar problem for the accessibility of the web where images may lack alternative tags. The study found that 32% of the objects in Second Life are simply named “object”, and up to 40% lack accurate names.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Life))

sized things to individual flowers. I wouldn't WANT a catalogue of all that stuff, even if I could sort it to figure out what all the random names meant" (Rolig Loon).

"My company already has some of the things you're looking for – we've done a lot of work scripting language learning tools for SL. One of the things you're after is a basic scripted object called a Finder. You type the name of the object you want to locate and then (depending on the specific script) the Finder will say the name and distance to the object and/or target it with a trail of particles so it's easy to find (...) I'd be happy to send you basic Finder code if you drop me an IM in-world" (Kim Anubis (FL=Kimberly Rufer-Bach) from the *Magicians*).

Thus, as a result of my query on SLED I was given the basic *Finder* free of charge (!), but I also realized that it would be highly unrealistic to expect that the millions of SL residents will start naming their objects consistently in the foreseeable future. Giving up the beautiful dream of SL-as-dictionary, I resigned myself to manually PAVing some objects on only one SL island, Virlantis, with all the troublesome issues detailed above; the nitty-gritties of PAVing are described below in some detail. It will immediately be seen that without some kind of automatization of the process it can hardly be scaled to hundreds of objects without the expense of time and effort which would be hard to obtain from most SL residents on a voluntary pro-bono basis. My estimate is that one object takes about 10 minutes to PAVE. Thus, PAVing the forty objects on Virlantis would have taken me the whole day's work. In reality, of course, it took much more... These are the main steps necessary to PAVE one object:

1. An object appropriate for PAVing must be located (I avoided scripted objects, such as holodecks, teleporters, poseballs, etc., for reasons explained above)
2. Lexicographic content must be found for the object's name: *Wiktionary* is default, but other sources are sometimes used. Recordings or example sentences are sometimes not to be found in *Wiktionary*; phonetic transcription sometimes only appears for one English accent, e.g. American English; definitions are sometimes too scientific...
3. The content must be edited in most cases: (a) soundfiles are captured, cleaned, amplified, cropped and uploaded to SL, (b) definitions, transcriptions and example sentences are adjusted/edited.
4. I must decide on the pronunciation issue to ask the phonetic question about, and about the appropriate formulation of the question.
5. Content is loaded into the object in the form of: (a) the .wav soundfile, (b) the LSL script which creates the hovername, plays the soundfile and IMs the text to the avatar upon touch.
6. The functioning of the PAVing is checked (script clashes happen), the SLURL is taken down to easily locate the object later, and the object is added to the list of PAVED objects.
7. Points 5 and 6 are repeated for those objects which are replicated around the sim, such as fences, palms or stones.

So, at long last, what have I achieved PAVing Virlantis? At the end of September 2011 there were about forty PAVED objects around the island. All of them contained:

1. name,
2. phonetic transcription (in IPA),
3. definition (from Longman dictionary, ver. 4.2. on CD-ROM),
4. example sentence (from Longman dictionary, ver. 4.2. on CD-ROM),
5. recorded audio file,
6. a phonetic question.



Thirteen of them were later equipped with Heimlaga's crazy tweets, as mentioned earlier. When touched, the object would [say] (on the IM channel, i.e. to the avatar who touched only) and [play] (the recorded sound file) all this information, like in this example:

picture: /'pɪktʃə/ - shapes, lines etc. painted or drawn on a surface, showing what someone or something looks like; I asked the waiter if he'd mind taking our picture. [Which vowel in the first syllable of <picture>: /i:/ or /ɪ/?]

Now, saying that all I have achieved PAVing Virtlantis is just the few dozen objects which can be used by SLEFL learners as resources would be unjustly negative. I have learned an immense lot in the process: from SL technicalities, such as scripting and permissions, through VW treasure hunt/quest design, to some global pedagogical/ecological issues in MUVLEs, such as how to augment/enhance the environment without disturbing it. This knowledge and experience is priceless, of course, in the general sense. More specifically, *hic et nunc*, it allowed me to write this book, with – I hope – some benefit to the reader.

## 5. Conclusions

There is the unfortunate academic tradition to treat the conclusion(s) section as a sheer summary of the contents of the submission. This is, I believe, both disappointing and superfluous, as the reader would have had a relatively good idea of the overall argument from reading the table of contents or the abstract. Both these components appear at the very beginning of this book, so there is little reason for me to repeat what I wrote there. However, once we agree that a repetitive concluding section is useless, the question arises about exactly what it should contain. Google concurs that it is a difficult question, but adds that “A writer needs to keep in mind that the conclusion is often what a reader remembers best. Your conclusion should be the best part of your paper” (<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/conclude.html>). This is a tall order, indeed!

There are basically two goals which I hope to have achieved in this book: (1) report on the four years of teaching SLEFL pronunciation, and (2) make some empirically verifiable claims about the added value of (phonetic) reification and augmentation in Second Life. The former part was mostly narrative, while the latter was mostly speculative. The main weakness of the latter part, as I see it, is that I have not tried to verify my hypotheses myself through some empirical procedures, such as an experiment, for example. My hope is that, on the scaffolding which I have constructed, it will now be easier to actually conduct such experimental testing.

From the available research literature on SL education it transpires very forcefully that

“educators for the most part do not make use of the distinct features of a three-dimensional environment (being embodied as customizable avatars, moving around in a configurable responsive space, sharing that 3D space with data and information) (...) Moreover, many of the virtual environments that are currently (...) being advertised as offering great productivity boosts for collaborative work emphasize the collaborative editing of text documents, spreadsheets and presentation slides that are mounted on big virtual walls (...) – a method of working together that may work similarly well without gathering in a three-dimensional virtual environment” (Schmeil, Eppler and de Freitas 2012:16).

In this situation all attempts to incite some reflection on how best to identify and exploit the educational added values of the virtual environments are inherently interesting and potentially useful. While there is a rapidly growing choice of such scholarly reflection on a theoretical pedagogical level, as well as a slightly narrower repertoire for (exact) sciences, the offer put forward by humanities is rather modest, with almost nothing in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. This relative paucity is yet one more reason why I used discussion lists and blog posts as both sources of inspiration and targets of criticism: there are simply very few academic analyses of SLEFL conducted with proper research tools and methods.

So, how do I close this story? According to the many academic writing guides online, including the one quoted above, the writer has the choice of the following strategies: echo the introduction, synthesize, challenge the reader, sum up his feeling (!) and drop a clincher, i.e. “make an amusing, light-hearted or insightful observation” ([http://www.ehow.com/how\\_2085208\\_write-conclusion-essay.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2085208_write-conclusion-essay.html)). In the following paragraph I will try to do all these.

In the five years of my Second Life I have made it a custom to summarize my reflections in a rezday (birthday) poem written each March 21<sup>st</sup> (links from the bottom of [http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/Second\\_Life.html](http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/Second_Life.html)). To close this book I have selected excerpts of two of these poems, which: (a) echo the introduction by referring to my life and work story in SL, (b) synthesize the two main threads of my Second Life and of this book, namely the

personal and the professional, (c) challenge the reader by liberally using some rather advanced SL slang terms, (d) sum up my feelings concerning the joys and tribulations of SL, and finally (e) drop a clincher! With such conclusions, how could I fail?

*Being three in Second Life (21/03/2010)*

It's funny to be three at fifty-five...  
To learn how to balloon and to skydive.

To go on a Neytiri shopping spree,  
Then take her to [VWBPE](#)

And [EVO TLVW 2010](#)  
To snugly join [tsaheylyu](#) there and then :-)

Funny to go to work on Wed, 9 CET...  
To tweak those scripts... And [Murphy](#)? Yes! You bet!

*Being four in Second Life (21/03/2011)*

It's funny to be four at fifty-six...  
To throw some old-age wisdom in the mix.

Funny being kicked out from some good old sims,  
Being careful with rezzing – for lack of prims,

Still struggle with scripting and with perms,  
And moving... 'cause Lindens changed the terms.

Funny to see enthusiasm ebb and wane...  
Then re-ignite and kindle, never feign.



Snapshot 50. Wlodek Barbosa as of July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012

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More links on SLEFL pronunciation teaching are available from my dedicated website: [http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/Second\\_Life.html](http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/Second_Life.html).



# Appendices

## 1. Dominoes (9 cube version), December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008

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I HEAR AND I FORGET, I SEE AND I REMEMBER, I DO AND I UNDERSTAND

Audio-enhanced objects are linked to each other domino-style one by one to match the offset-onset sounds, e.g.: alcohol-lemonade-duck-cabbage-gin. Complications are discussed (e.g. 'linking' /r/). Correctly linked objects 'stick' into a flexible chain, wrongly linked repel each other. In both cases objects 'say their name' without any additional learner action.

This original phonetic idea can be applied to any language units and structures. Their properties/features/functions can be the basis for their differential behaviour, e.g. irregular verbs will attract each other, or parts of a complex grammatical structure, such as some English tenses.

Right now, there're only nine dominoes in the set. Arrange the nine coloured cubes domino-style to match SOUNDS at the edges of words. Cubes say their name when left-clicked. Here's the list (in alphabet order): apricot, cereal, cream, ketchup, lettuce, milk, pork chops, spoon, T-bone steak.

Phonetic dominoes: correct order

---

apricot (red)  
T-bone steak (dark blue)  
cream (dark green)  
milk (orange)  
ketchup (yellow)  
pork chops (violet)  
cereal (light blue)  
lettuce (light green)  
spoon (grey)

## 2. Phonetic synesthesia game (ver. 1), December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008

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Synesthesia is a neurologically based phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway (Wikipedia).

Blocks are lying around in large quantities. They vary in colour, shape and size. Each object attribute correlates with one phonetic attribute, e.g.: (a) number of syllables/sounds, (b) contains a specific sound, (c) begins/ends in a specific sound, (d) main stress position, etc. Objects say their name when touched (left click). The aim of the game is to guess the correlation between object attributes and phonetic properties. The smaller the number of touches the better. For example, all of "ankle, elbow, overcoat" and "umbrella" might be blue - they begin with a vowel; all of "apple, butter, chicken, cider, cucumber, kettle, liquor, liver, pickle" and "sugar" might be cubes - they all end in a syllabic sonorant (in American English). Answers are listed at the bottom of this notecard.

Here are the 21 objects rezzed for this game:

---

1. apricot
2. blueberries
3. cantaloupe
4. cereal
5. cheese block
6. cherries

7. coconut
8. corn
9. eggplant
10. grapes
11. ketchup
12. lettuce
13. lime
14. milk
15. orange juice
16. pear
17. pork chop
18. rice
19. toast with butter
20. watermelon
21. yogurt

Answers:

-----

yellow (contains the sound /l/): blueberries, eggplant, lime, lettuce, milk

green (contains the sounds /tS/ or /dZ/): cheese block, cherries, ketchup, orange juice, pork chop

red (contains a diphthong): apricot, cantaloupe, cereal, coconut, grapes, rice

orange (contains the sound /r/ in AmE): corn, pear, toast with butter, watermelon, yogurt

cube (1 syllable): corn, grapes, lime, milk, pear, rice

sphere (2 syllables): cereal, cheese block, cherries, eggplant, ketchup, lettuce, pork chop, yogurt

pyramid (3 syllables): apricot, blueberries, cantaloupe, coconut, orange juice

cylinder (4 syllables): toast with butter, watermelon

big (compound or phrase): blueberries, cheese block, coconut, eggplant, orange juice, pork chop, toast with butter, watermelon

small (simple word): apricot, cantaloupe, cereal, cherries, corn, grapes, ketchup, lettuce, lime, milk, pear, rice, yogurt

apricot: small red pyramid

blueberries: big yellow pyramid

cantaloupe: small red pyramid

cereal: small red sphere

cheese block: big green sphere

cherries: small green sphere

coconut: big red pyramid

corn: small orange cube

eggplant: big yellow sphere

grapes: small red cube

ketchup: small green sphere

lettuce: small yellow sphere

lime: small yellow cube

milk: small yellow cube

orange juice: big green pyramid

pear: small orange cube

pork chop: big green sphere

rice: small red cube

toast with butter: big orange cylinder

watermelon: big orange cylinder

yogurt: small orange sphere

### 3. Proverbs halved, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Fourteen English proverbs have been cut in half and the halves mixed up. Reconstruct the original proverbs from these parts. While there is only one correct form of each proverb, some incorrect splices

may have interesting senses, for example "An hour in the morning is better than none at all". Feel free to experiment with these. Always read aloud the result of your work. Notice the rhythm, also in those proverbs which are not rhymed. Correctly spliced proverbs are listed at the bottom.

Five of the 14 proverbs have been rezzed in my Virtlantis launchroom<sup>57</sup>. They are indicated with an asterisk below. They are in the form of ten red domino blocks 0.5x0.5x0.1 meters. Each block contains one half of one proverb: click on it and you'll hear. Your task is to move the blocks around so that they snap in with the other half of each proverb. Do experiment with 'invented' proverbs in exactly the same way as in this textual notecard version. Have fun!

#### Proverbs halved

-----

\*A bad excuse...  
...all would be wise.  
\*An hour in the morning...  
...and he'll hang himself.  
...and rise with the lark.  
\*Books and friends...  
...bring forth May flowers.  
Can't make an omelette...  
...come when you're called.  
...drink with measure.  
Eat at pleasure...  
Fortune favours...  
Give a fool enough rope...  
Go to bed with the lamb...  
\*He that is born to be hanged...  
If things were to be done twice...  
\*...is better than none at all.  
\*...is paved with good intentions.  
\*...is worth two in the evening.  
March winds and April showers...  
Never put off till tomorrow...  
\*...should be few but good.  
Speak when you're spoken to...  
\*The road to hell...  
...those who use their judgement.  
...what you can do today.  
\*...will never be drowned.  
...without breaking eggs.

#### Correct proverbs:

-----

\*A bad excuse is better than none at all.  
If things were to be done twice, all would be wise.  
\*An hour in the morning is worth two in the evening.  
Give a fool enough rope, and he'll hang himself.  
Go to bed with the lamb, and rise with the lark.  
\*Books and friends should be few but good.  
March winds and April showers bring forth May flowers.  
Can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.  
Speak when you're spoken to, come when you're called.  
Eat at pleasure, drink with measure.  
Fortune favours those who use their judgement.  
\*He that is born to be hanged will never be drowned.

---

<sup>57</sup> All fourteen were rezzed for an activity on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

\*The road to hell is paved with good intentions.  
Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.

Some 'invented' proverbs:

-----  
A bad excuse, and he'll hang himself.  
A bad excuse is paved with good intentions.  
A bad excuse is worth two in the evening.  
An hour in the morning is better than none at all.  
An hour in the morning is paved with good intentions.  
Books and friends bring forth May flowers.  
Can't make an omelette and rise with the lark.  
Eat at pleasure without breaking eggs.  
He that is born to be hanged is better than none at all.  
March winds and April showers should be few but good.  
Never put off till tomorrow those who use their judgement.  
The road to hell will never be drowned.

#### 4. What am I? (ver. 1) March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009

-----  
Listen to a variety of RL sounds and guess what their source is. To give you a hint, the first letter is provided of the standard word to refer to the sound, for example: [c-] for [creak] (like a door hinge not oiled). Correct answers at the bottom.

1. B...
2. B...
3. B...
4. B...
5. C...
6. C...
7. C...
8. D...
9. K...
10. L...
11. S...
12. W...
13. X...

Correct answers

- 
1. Bell
  2. Bird
  3. Boing
  4. Bubble
  5. Car engine
  6. Crackling fire
  7. Cricket
  8. Doorbell
  9. Knock
  10. Locust
  11. Slidedoor
  12. Water flowing
  13. X-mas

## 5. Word stress block game, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009

---

In this game you will learn the correct stress pattern of some English words. There are 19 cubes of two sizes: big and small. Each cube represents a syllable of one of the seven words, which you can listen to when you touch the cube. Big cubes are stressed syllables, while small cubes are unstressed syllables. Walk among the blocks, touch the cubes to listen to the words, feel the changes of stress. Then drag the cubes to snap them together in such a way that they make up the entire word, with cube size matching the stress pattern of the word. Thus, "apricot" should now look like this: [Ooo]. Each word is composed of cubes of one colour, to help you.

In this notecard the seven words are listed below in standard orthography, accompanied by their respective sound files<sup>58</sup>. You can do the activity by writing the correct stress pattern, like in this example: "apricot" [Ooo]. The correct patterns are listed at the bottom of the notecard.

cantaloupe  
cherries  
coconut  
ketchup  
lettuce  
watermelon  
zucchini

Correct answers:

-----  
cantaloupe [Ooo]  
cherries [Oo]  
coconut [Ooo]  
ketchup [Oo]  
lettuce [Oo]  
watermelon [OoOo]  
zucchini [oOo]

Other [Ooo] words:

-----  
decimal  
energy  
exercise  
family  
general  
history  
melody  
natural  
numeral  
paragraph  
possible  
temperature

---

<sup>58</sup> In the in-world notecard.



## 6. Find objects whose name..., April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009

---

In this scavenger hunt you should find objects in the indicated area whose names meet certain pronunciation criteria. Right-click the object, edit it, go to the [General] tab, look at the [Name:] field -- if the name meets the criterion, copy it to this notecard, which you'll hand back at the end of the hunt. Be ready to pronounce the names of the objects copied.

Find objects whose name...

1. contains the /N/ sound, like in the word <sing>: ...
2. contains the /r/ sound at the end or before a consonant, like in the word <bar> or <bark>: ...
3. contains the dark /l/ sound, like in the word <ball>: ...
4. contains the /ʌ/ vowel, like in the word <sun>: ...
5. contains a word with three syllables and this stress pattern: oOo (middle syllable stressed): ...
6. contains an aspirated consonant, like in the word <cat>: ...
7. contains a voiced consonant at the end, like in the word <dog>: ...
8. contains the /@/ vowel, like in the first syllable of the word <ago>: ...
9. contains a word which is pronounced differently in British and American English, such as <news> or <problem>: ...

## 7. Phonetic dice game, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009

---

Two dice are rezzed with six names on each, one on each face of the dice. Each player tosses the dice by clicking on the 'master' cube, the one with the "toss me!" hover text (this is the limitation of the dice script). There are now a few different versions of the game, first simple ones:

1. The player simply reads the two names which show on the top face of each piece. Feedback is provided.
2. The player decides what the two names have phonetically in common, and explains the best s/he can.
3. The player decides if the two names have the same number of syllables. If yes, a point is scored.
4. The player decides if the two names have any identical sounds. If yes, a point is scored.

Now, a more complex version:

5. The player constructs a date from the two dice like this:
  - (a) month: the top face of either of the two dice,
  - (b) day number: add the two month numbers,
  - (c) year: add the number of either dice to 2000.

Example: the dice show March and September. The month is March or September. The day is 12th (March=3 + September=9). The year is 2003 or 2009.

Player says:

- March 12th 2003, or:
- September 12th 2003, or:
- March 12th 2009, or:
- September 12th 2009.

By virtue of 5b the day numbers will always fall between 8 (January+July) and 18 (June+December). Similarly, by virtue of 5c, the years will be between 2001 and 2012. You can easily change this using other permutations of the originally tossed two month numbers, of course :-). Imagination is the limit. Whatever you do, the main goal of the game is phonetic. In version 5.: pronouncing dates like this is difficult because of difficult sounds in the names of days, month and numbers, but also because one must do it quickly and without paying too much attention to pronunciation itself (because the brain is crunching the numbers :-).

Now, an even more complex version:

6. The player constructs a date from the two dice like this:

- (a) day name: take the number of the month on the top face of the master dice, convert to day name (start week with Monday)
- (b) month: the top face of either of the two dice,
- (c) day number: add the two month numbers,
- (d) year: add the number of either dice to 2000.

Example: the dice show March and September. The day name is Wednesday (March=3, third day of week is Wednesday). The month is March or September. The day number is 12th (March=3 + September=9). The year is 2003 or 2009.

Player says:

- Wednesday, March 12th 2003, or:
- Wednesday, September 12th 2003, or:
- Wednesday, March 12th 2009, or:
- Wednesday, September 12th 2009.

By virtue of 6a only working days (plus Saturday) will come out, no Sundays... :-) Enjoy!

## 8. Phonetically augmented virtuality, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009

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Phonetically augmented virtuality (PAV) has come to Wlodek Barbosa's launchroom and house in Virlantis! A number of objects have been tagged with phonetic information, such as info on pronouncing difficulties, phonetic transcription of hard words, sound files and short quiz questions... All you need to do is to <edit> the object of your interest and go to the <name> and <description> fields. Alternatively, to spare yourself the constant <edit>ing, you may like to go to the <View> menu, select <Hover Tips>, then <Show Tips> (=Ctrl-Shift-T), finally <Tips on All Objects>. This will show the <name> and <description> info of any object over which you hover your mouse cursor.

Now, go and explore the environment:

- (i) collect the phonetic information in a notecard,
- (ii) listen to built-in sound files,
- (iii) answer questions about them which you'll find in the <description> field, like this: [Dance Ball / Q: which <dance> is American English?]
- (iv) think about the pronouncing problems in object names, briefly identified in the <description> field,
- (v) bring back your list with you to be discussed.

Beware: not all objects in my house and launchroom have been tagged (mostly because I have no perms to some of them). My domino blocks and walk-through grid have not been tagged, as it might confuse players using them. Also: this is a beta version of PAV really... :-) The mechanism of looking up the information is a bit unwieldy... a HUD would be much better (anyone would like to help me adapt one, like the Salamander or Slatelt huds?). All these improvements will come real soon now :-). Please experiment, and let me know about unavoidable problems, OK? With time and resources, I plan to add audio files to \*all\* objects, as well as build in automated phonetic quizzes.

Below is the list of objects PAVed, with their phonetic information. Please DO NOT LOOK THERE before we're through with this activity!

List of Wlodek Barbosa's PAVed objects, as of July 5th 2009<sup>59</sup>  
(objects with built-in sound are marked with \*)

---

<sup>59</sup> This list was added two weeks after the activity proper.

# <name> field - <description> field

0. Apple\* - what's wrong with this pronunciation of <apple>?
1. Banana Plant in Pot - vowel /a:/ in <banana> and in <plant>
2. beachgrass meadow - <beachgrass> = /'bi:Cgra:s/; <meadow> = /'med@u/
3. blowball meadow - <blowball> = /'bl@ubo:l/; dark /l/ at the end
4. Chalk Noteboard - the /o:/ vowel in <chalk> and in <board>; no /l/ in <chalk>
5. Cookies on plate - vowel /U/ in <cookies>
6. Dance Ball\* - which <dance> is American English?
7. Danka Aichi - <Aichi> = /'aiCi/ (that's how she pronounces it :-)
8. EVO VW&LL 2009 Scrapbook - vowel /U/ in <book>
9. Fern\* - which word is <fern>?
10. Floor Lamp with Shade - <floor>=/flo:/
11. Fruit Plate\* - which is the correct pronunciation of <fruit>?
12. Hanging Potted Pothos - no /g/ in <hanging> = /'h&NIN/
13. Hanging Tube Light\* - which is the correct pronunciation of <hanging>?
14. Height detector - diphthong /ai/ in <height>
15. Launchroom Platform - vowel /o:/ in <launch> and in <form>
16. Library Chair - <library>=/laibr@rl/; diphthong /e@/ in <chair>
17. Mug of Coffee - vowel /ʌ/ in <mug>
18. Picture Frame - vowel /l/ in <picture>
19. Popcorn - vowel /o/ in <pop> and vowel /o:/ in <corn>
20. Potted green plant - <potted> = /'potld/ - 2 syllables
21. red rug - vowel /ʌ/ in <rug>
22. red wine - no phonetic problem :-)
23. Relaxing Rug - the <ing> ending; vowel /ʌ/ in <rug>
24. Sia FirePlace - triphthong /ai@/ in <fire>
25. SLEnglish Conversation Pyramid\* - which is the correct pronunciation of <pyramid>?
26. SLEnglish Quiz Tool (w/notecards) - syllabic dark /l/ in <tool>
27. Table & Chairs\* - what's wrong with this pronunciation of <table and chairs>?
28. Tropical Plant - in <plant>: /a:/ in British English, /æ/ in American English
29. White Roses - potted - diphthong /@u/ in <roses>
30. WhiteBoard (w) - the /o:/ vowel in <board>
31. Wlodek Barbosa - <Wlodek> is /'vlodek/
32. Wlodek Barbosa's helper robot - <robot>=/r@ubot/; full vowel in the second syllable

List of Wlodek Barbosa's PAVed objects with built-in sound, answers to questions

1. Apple - 'clear' /l/.
2. Dance Ball - second: (i) /da:ns bo:l/, (ii) /d&ns bo:l/.
3. Fern - third: (i) /fln/ = <finn>, (ii) /f&n/ = <fan>, (iii) /f@:n/ = <fern>, (iv) /f^n/ = <fun> (pending...).
4. Fruit Plate - first: (i) /fru:t/, (ii) /frUt/, (iii) /fruit/.
5. Hanging Tube Light - second: (i) /'h&NgIN/, (ii) /'h&NIN/, (iii) /'h&NgINg/.
6. SLEnglish Conversation Pyramid - third: (i) /'pair@mld/, (ii) /'plr@mi:d/, (iii) /'plr@mld/.
7. Table & Chairs - 'clear' /l/ in <table> and no diphthong in <chairs>.

## 9. Phonetic walk-through grid (word-stress version), June, 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009

In this game you walk through a grid of 16 stones (4x4) in such a way that you find a path of seven stones which contain words of three syllables, with the [Ooo] stress pattern. Other stones contain words with either a different number of syllables, or with three syllables, but with a different stress pattern. When you step on a stone, it will glow and speak its name. Start with "Saturday" (red stone). You may walk horizontally, vertically and diagonally until you've heard all seven words. Below you'll find the correct order of steps through the grid.

Correct order of steps through the phonetic walk-through grid:

Włodzimierz Sobkowiak: *Five years in Second Life*

150

or: *Phonetically Augmented Virtuality in Second Life English as a Foreign Language*

1. Saturday
2. blueberries
3. cantaloupe
4. coconut
5. apricot
6. January
7. February

## 10. Phonetic transcription game, July 8<sup>th</sup> and September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009

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Ten wooden cones have been rezzed in Wlodek Barbosa house and launchroom in Virtlantis. Their names are given below, but the contents of their [name] fields is given in phonetic transcription. A finder<sup>60</sup> has been rezzed in the launchroom, which points its particle stream to the object or avatar if [#find x] is typed in local chat, and x is the exact [name] of the object or avatar (the detection range is 96 meters). Ordinarily, then, typing [#find chalk] will locate the object with 'chalk' in its [name] field. But in this game, in order to locate the object the player must type the correct phonetic transcription in its [name] field. To find chalk, the player must type: [#find Co:k].

Once located and touched, the object will <give> the player its content object or notecard, full perms (possibly no mod with some). Below is the list of cone names in ordinary spelling. To play the game you must type their precise phonetic transcription after [#find ]. Correct transcriptions are provided at the bottom of this notecard. Good luck on your phonetic transcription treasure hunt!

0. chalk
1. cookies
2. potted
3. chairs
4. rug
5. fire
6. library
7. banana
8. picture
9. pyramid
10. fern

### Phonetic transcription game - correct answers

---

0. chalk - /Co:k/
1. cookies - /'kUklz/
2. potted - /'potld/
3. chairs - /Ce@z/
4. rug - /r^g/
5. fire - /fai@/
6. library - /'laibr@rl/
7. banana - /b@'n&n@/
8. picture - /'plkC@/
9. pyramid - /'plr@mld/
10. fern - /f@:n/

---

<sup>60</sup> I am grateful to *The Magicians* (<http://themagicians.us/index.php>) for a gratis copy of their Finder.

## 11. 10 most common 4-syllable words in English and their stress patterns, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009

---

Ten wooden cones have been rezzed in Wlodek Barbosa house and launchroom in Virlantis. Their names are given below, but their [name] fields contain their stress patterns. "O" stands for stressed syllable, "o" stands for unstressed syllable. A finder has been rezzed in the launchroom, which points its particle stream to the object or avatar if [#find x] is typed in public chat, and x is the exact [name] of the object or avatar (the detection range is 96 meters). Ordinarily, then, typing [#find chalk] will locate the object with 'chalk' in its [name] field. But in this game, in order to locate the object the player must type the correct spelling AND stress pattern found in its [name] field. To find 'ability', for example, the player must type: #find ability oOoo

Once located and touched, the cone will <give> the player its content object or notecard, full perms (possibly no mod with some). Below is the list of cone names in ordinary spelling. Correct answers are provided at the bottom of this notecard. Good luck on your phonetic transcription treasure hunt!

Words to find:

-----  
community  
dictionary  
equivalent  
experiment  
individual  
necessary  
ordinary  
particular  
television  
variety

Correct answers:

-----  
community oOoo  
dictionary Oooo  
equivalent oOoo  
experiment oOoo  
individual ooOo  
necessary Oooo  
ordinary Oooo  
particular oOoo  
television Oooo  
variety oOoo

## 12. Phrase stress finder game, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009

---

A number of objects in Wlodek Barbosa's launchroom and house in Virlantis have been tagged with phonetic information, such as info on their stress pattern, pronouncing difficulties, phonetic transcription of hard words, sound files and short quiz questions. The player's first task is to locate the object using the finder, by typing in public chat the correct spelling of its name AND its stress pattern. To find "Table & Chairs", for example, the player must type: #find Table & Chairs OooO.

The second task, once the object is located, is to <edit> it and go to the <name> and <description> fields. Alternatively, to spare yourself the constant <edit>ing, you may like to go to the <View> menu, select <Hover Tips>, then <Show Tips> (=Ctrl-Shift-T), finally <Tips on All Objects>. This will show the <name> and <description> info of any object over which you hover your mouse cursor.

The third task is to copy information, or answer the question about the located object, which is found in the <description> field, like this:



- name field: [Table & Chairs OooO]

- description field: [what's wrong with this pronunciation\* of <table and chairs>?]

\* This is one of five audio-enhanced objects with sound-files built-in; these are marked with \* below; click on the object and listen to the recording.

The fourth task is to bring back the list of located objects/pronunciations/problems to be discussed in class.

The fifth task of the player in this game is to do the follow-up activity with phrase-stress patterns below.

Find these objects by typing their names and stress patterns in public chat

Spell them exactly as you see them spelled below!

(Example: #find Table & Chairs OooO)

- 
1. Banana Plant in Pot
  2. beachgrass meadow
  3. blowball meadow
  4. Chalk Noteboard
  5. Cookies on plate
  6. Dance Ball\*
  7. Danka Aichi
  8. Floor Lamp with Shade
  9. Fruit Plate\*
  10. Hanging Potted Pothos
  11. Hanging Tube Light\*
  12. Height detector
  13. Launchroom Platform
  14. Library Chair
  15. Mug of Coffee
  16. Picture Frame
  17. Popcorn
  18. Potted green plant
  19. orange rug
  20. red wine
  21. Relaxing Rug
  22. Sia FirePlace
  23. SLEnglish Conversation Pyramid\*
  24. SLEnglish Quiz Tool
  25. Tropical Plant
  26. White Roses
  27. WhiteBoard
  28. Wlodek Barbosa's helper robot

Follow-up activity: make phrases fitting these stress patterns

(All of them appeared above, some more often than once).

- 
1. Oo
  2. OO
  3. OOo
  4. OoO
  5. OoOo
  6. OooO
  7. OoOO
  8. oOoO
  9. OoOoo
  10. oOoOoO
  11. OoOoOo
  12. OoooOoOoo

### 13. Phrase stress block game (ver. 1), November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009

---

I HEAR AND I FORGET, I SEE AND I REMEMBER, I DO AND I UNDERSTAND

In this game you will learn the correct stress of English phrases. There are ten sculpted blocks of various shapes. They are all made of cubes of two sizes: big and small. Each block represents one phrase, and each cube represents a syllable. Big cubes are stressed syllables, while small cubes are unstressed syllables. For example: "play with him": ■■■. Walk among the blocks, touch the big cubes to listen to the phrases, feel the changes of stress. Some blocks are identical: they have the same number of cubes and the arrangement of the cubes is the same. These are phrases which are stress-wise identical.

Drag the blocks (ctrl-drag by any of the small cubes; be careful or you may lose them underground!) to move them against each other and see if they match. As follow-up, provide other words and phrases with stress patterns like the ones rezzed, for example starting from "play with him" [Ooo] you may obtain: animal, government, ready to, come to me, and many others. A contest version: prepare a few words/phrases for each pattern, read them aloud one by one and challenge your partner to touch the block matching the stress pattern.

In this notecard the ten phrases are listed below in standard orthography, accompanied by their respective sound files. You can do the activity by writing the correct stress pattern, like in this example: "play with him" [Ooo]. The correct patterns are listed at the bottom of the notecard.

Phrases:

-----

1. go slow
2. a beautiful one
3. in spite of it all
4. it's necessary
5. a spoonful of salt
6. the best in the class
7. he can't pay it back
8. finishing today
9. dirty underneath
10. up above the clouds

Correct answers

-----

1. go slow [OO]
2. a beautiful one [oOooo]
3. in spite of it all [oOooo]
4. it's necessary [oOoo]
5. a spoonful of salt [oOooO]
6. the best in the class [oOooO]
7. he can't pay it back [oOooO]
8. finishing today [OoooO]
9. dirty underneath [OoooO]
10. up above the clouds [OoooO]

#### 14. Pronunciation treasure hunt in Virlantis (a word- and phrase-stress version), November 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009

---

This complex game has three parts.

In part one players collect pronunciation treasures in the form of names of objects/prims found in Virlantis. In the given time each player collects as many names as possible, by right-clicking and [editing] objects, and copying their names to a notecard (please DO NOT change spelling in any way, even for typos!). The point of this hunt is to gather many different stress patterns and many object names for each stress pattern: the more variety, the better. Collecting only names of two syllables with the [Oo] stress pattern does not count, for example. The stress pattern should be added to each object name in the notecard, for example: [Table & Chairs OooO]. At the end of the collection phase all objects should be arranged by their stress patterns in the notecard, for example:

Dance Ball [Oo]  
Chalk Noteboard [OOo]  
beachgrass meadow [OoOo]  
blowball meadow [OoOo]  
Cookies on plate [OooO]  
Floor Lamp with Shade [OooO]  
Potted green plant [OoOO]

...

In part two of the game players come back to class and work in pairs. The task of each pair is to make a pronunciation activity/exercise/game/task for the other players, involving the object names and stress patterns collected in part one. Only time and players' imagination is the limit here! The activity may be anything, from a simple notecard-based matching exercise to a complex task involving prims rezzed by the makers or requiring in-world or out-world searches and hunts. The activity must, of course, be doable within the limits of the time we have in our Wednesday sessions, as well as knowledge/ skills/ resources required from the students.

In part three of the game the tasks proposed in part two are attempted by all students, discussed, and pronunciation feedback is provided by Wlodek Barbosa. In an open-ended free-style activity of this sort it is hard to control everything and predict the outcomes, including problems, so it is essential to keep an open mind and be ready to flexibly change many parameters of the game. The general objective of the game should remain in sight at all times, however: (i) learning and practice of English pronunciation (stress patterns in particular), and (ii) fun!

#### 15. Word-final (de)voicing Virlantis scavenger hunt activity – feedback, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009

---

This notecard contains words and sentences which you submitted as result of your scavenger hunt on Dec 9th 2009. The idea was to collect object names which contain at least one word with a final voiced consonant which is prone to incorrect devoicing, for example "pyramid" /'plɹ@mɪd/ ---> /'plɹ@mɪt/. Many learners of English pronunciation have this kind of devoicing problem. Of course, some voiced consonants, such as /m, n, r, l/ do not have this tendency: a voiceless /m/ is not possible, for example.

In this notecard you'll first find your submitted lines with the words prone to final devoicing, in the order in which I was getting your submissions in-world. Then, at the bottom of the notecard, I collected all those lines which contain words ending in consonants which do not devoice, such as /m/, or in consonants which are already voiceless, such as /t/. This list is arranged alphabetically. Where necessary I edited your text slightly correcting some errors. I also normalized the lines so that [the name] of the object is [bracketed] and followed directly by the sentence. On the whole this was a very fruitful task. You can now make it even more useful to you by going through this notecard, finding the words prone to final devoicing, and reflecting about those which are not (at the bottom).

Enjoy!

[Material cut here]

## 16. Phrase generator, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010

---

Do you remember the recent speech rhythm game? No?! It was: English speech rhythm: from "clearly high time" to "particular professional responsibilities". Cindy<sup>61</sup> has it under "English Speech rhythm 2 (master)". Now, I used the same idea to make another phonetic cocktail, to be found on my launchroom table: "Does this make sense?". Click on it, and you'll have a phrase to read made from randomly drawn words: adv+adj+noun. Read it aloud rhythmically and decide if it makes sense :-). Enjoy!

Here're the first 100 examples generated by the device:

- 
1. recently similar community
  2. absolutely individual policy
  3. suddenly particular example
  4. certainly popular relationship
  5. increasingly individual area
  6. necessarily necessary department
  7. finally international operation
  8. especially financial activity
  9. finally important activity
  10. increasingly significant institution

...

[Ninety deleted here]



Snapshot 51. Barbosa with Cindy, the robot

## 17. Common phrases in English (ver. 1), June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010

---

The following is a list of about 200 common phrases in English. They have been selected from the British National Corpus (<http://pie.usna.edu/explorepg.html>) to meet the following criteria:

- (i) they make independent sense (which excludes very common phrases like "at the end of the" or "as a result of")
- (ii) they appear at the top of the rank list for each word-length bracket
- (iii) they contain between 5 and 8 words
- (iv) there are no near-duplicates like "for the rest of his life" and "for the rest of her life"

These phrases can be used in a variety of ways. From the point of view of our sessions in pronunciation what is most interesting that they illustrate the very rhythmical flow of English speech, and can be used to practice word stress, speech rhythm and weak syllable reduction. Read the phrases aloud remembering to: (a) place stress in roughly equal intervals of time, (b) reduce unstressed syllables. The order of phrases in this list is alphabetical. The frequency with which each phrase appears in the BNC is given in brackets.

You'll also find this list in one of my phonetic cocktails. When you click on it, it will serve you one phrase at random to read. Enjoy!

a breach of the peace (135)  
a change in the law (49)

---

<sup>61</sup> Cindy was a human-shaped robot which I used at that time to offer notecards and information to my students and passers-by. She was not an AI-enabled chatbot (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chatterbot>), however. In the snapshot Cindy is on the right ☺.

a contract for the sale (56)  
a fellow of the royal society (48)  
a great deal of effort (43)  
a great deal of information (44)  
a great deal of interest (45)  
a great deal of money (108)  
a great deal of time (133)  
a great deal of work (60)

...

[Rest deleted here]

## 18. Common phrases in English (ver. 3), June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010

---

The following is a list of 44 common phrases in English. They have been selected from the British National Corpus (<http://pie.usna.edu/explorepg.html>) to meet the following criteria:

- (i) they make independent sense (which excludes very common phrases like "at the end of the" or "as a result of"),
- (ii) they appear at the top of the rank list for each word-length bracket,
- (iii) they contain between 5 and 8 words,
- (iv) they do not contain duplicates like "for the rest of his life" and "for the rest of her life",
- (v) they begin with a "function" word.

All the so-called "function words" in the list (prepositions, pronouns, articles, etc.) have been replaced with [...]. Notice that these are the "weak" words which are normally completely unstressed in English. Your task is:

- to fill them back in to make a meaningful/sensible phrase,
- to read it aloud, remembering to: (a) place stress in roughly equal intervals of time, (b) reduce all unstressed syllables,
- to explain the meaning of the phrase in your own words, especially if the phrase is an idiom,
- and/or to make your own phrase with the same or similar meaning.

For example, the phrase "[...] breach [...] [...] peace" probably is "the/a breach of the peace", and means "when peace ends and war begins", more or less :-)

You'll also find this list in one of my phonetic cocktails. When you click on it, it will serve you one phrase at random to read. Enjoy!

[...] breach [...] [...] peace  
[...] fellow [...] [...] royal society  
[...] great deal [...] effort  
[...] great deal [...] time  
[...] great deal [...] work  
[...] hole [...] [...] ground  
[...] knock [...] [...] door  
[...] light [...] [...] end [...] [...] tunnel  
[...] long period [...] time  
[...] quarter [...] [...] century

...

[Rest deleted here]

## 19. Phonetic walk-through grid (Am-Br version), September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010

---

In this game you walk through a grid of 16 stones (4x4) in such a way that you step only on British-pronounced stones. When you step on a stone, it will speak its name. Start with "Four bottles of beer" (red stone). You may walk horizontally, vertically and diagonally until you've heard all eight words. Below you'll find the correct order of steps through the grid.

Correct order of steps through the phonetic walk-through grid:

---

1. four bottles of beer (red)
2. autumn (dark blue)
3. December (dark green)
4. January (orange)
5. September (yellow)
6. summer (violet)
7. Thursday (light blue)
8. winter (light green)

## 20. PAV treasure hunt of Virlantis, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010

---

This is an intro notecard to the PAV treasure hunt of Virlantis, a game activity whose idea is to collect as many as possible object names from all over the sim containing some pronouncing difficulties. These words/phrases will then be used in PAVing the sim, i.e. augmenting the objects with phonetic information (sound files, transcription, tasks/quizzes), thus making them EFL learning and teaching resources.

The task of each player is to collect, in the time given, as many such words/phrases as possible. These should be entered in a notecard, each one with a short explanation why it is phonetically difficult to the player. At the end of the game the notecards are handed over to the teacher. Feedback and the announcement of the winner will follow in due course.

Technically, in order to find out about the name of an object it is best (in Viewer 1) to go to the <View> menu, select <Hover Tips>, then <Show Tips> (=Ctrl-Shift-T), finally <Tips on All Objects>. This will show the <name> and <description> info of any object over which you hover your mouse cursor.

Below are a few examples of actual Virlantis objects whose names could be collected in the game.

- Half-Circle Seating - how should "circle" be pronounced?
  - Rattan Multipose Lounger - is it /au/ or /ou/ in "lounger"?
  - Banana Palm - is the <l> pronounced in "palm"?
  - small juniper - what is the first vowel of "juniper"?
  - Pier Jamaica - is it /ei/ or /ai/ in "Jamaica"?
- 

This is a list of Virlantis object names identified as difficult phonetically by participants of Wlodek Barbosa's pronunciation session on Wed Sep 29th. These objects will be PAVed in due course, i.e. equipped with phonetic information, such as audio files, phonetic transcription and phonetic quizzes. Whereupon they will be offered free of charge as EFL learning resources in Virlantis, for the benefit of the SLEnglish community and all visitors.

- Activity calendar (first vowel of "activity" and of "calendar")
- Black Sparrow hull (vowel of "hull")
- Coco palms with lily vines (is the <l> in "palms" pronounced?)
- Conference chair (which syllable of "conference" is tressed?)
- Dancing skeleton (which syllable of "skeleton" is tressed?)
- Deluxe golf cart (first vowel of "deluxe")
- Dispenser (which syllable of "dispenser" is tressed?)



Diving bell (the last sound of "diving")  
 Druid holodeck (pronunciation of "druid")  
 Elite water tiki (pronunciation of "elite")  
 Fishing penguin (pronunciation of "penguin")  
 Georgian telescope (pronunciation of "Georgian")  
 Golden oak (the vowel of "oak")  
 Hammock (the second vowel of "hammock")  
 Hanging chair (the last sound of "hanging")  
 Incense (the second vowel of "incense"; which syllable is stressed?)  
 Jetski (the second vowel of "jetski")  
 Jetty pier on water (pronunciation of "pier")  
 Juniper (the first vowel of "juniper")  
 Patch surreal coral with bubbles (pronunciation of "surreal")  
 Pirate crate chair (pronunciation of "pirate")  
 Pirate sword (pronunciation of "sword")  
 Rainbow metallic sea (the diphthong of "rainbow")  
 Rubix cube (the first vowel of "Rubix")  
 Sahara tent (pronunciation of "Sahara")  
 Sanctum tower (pronunciation of "Sanctum")  
 Sconce (pronunciation of "sconce")  
 Ship rear (pronunciation of "rear")  
 Testament (which syllable of "testament" is stressed?)  
 The moth orchid lilly set purple (pronunciation of "orchid" and "purple")  
 Vase (pronunciation of "vase")  
 Wooden bench (the first vowel of "wooden")  
 Wooden candle luster (the first vowel of "luster")  
 Zombie shovel (pronunciation of Zombie; first vowel of "shovel")

## 21. Phrase stress block game (ver. 2), January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011

---

There are 31 cubes of two sizes: big and small. Each cube represents a syllable of one of the seven phrases, which you can listen to when you touch a cube. Big cubes are stressed syllables, while small cubes are unstressed syllables. Walk among the blocks, touch the cubes to listen to the phrases, feel the changes of stress. Then drag the cubes to snap them together in such a way that they make up the entire phrase, with cube size matching the stress pattern of the phrase. Thus, "play with him" should now look like this: [Ooo]. Each phrase is composed of cubes of one colour, to help you.

As follow-up, provide other phrases with stress patterns like the ones rezzed, for example starting from "play with him" [Ooo] you may obtain: "come with me", "ready to", and many others.

In this notecard the seven phrases are listed below in standard orthography, accompanied by their respective sound files. You can do the activity by writing the correct stress pattern, like in this example: "play with him" [Ooo]. The correct patterns are listed at the bottom of the notecard.

## Phrases

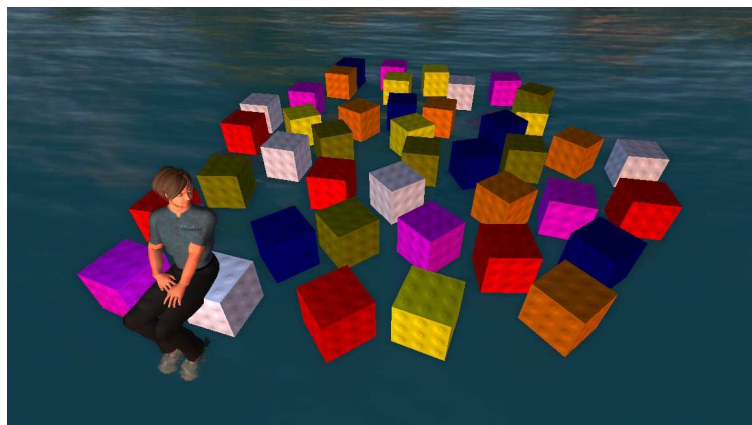
-----

1. go slow
2. it's necessary
3. a spoonful of salt
4. the best in the class
5. he can't pay it back
6. finishing today
7. dirty underneath

## Correct answers

-----

1. go slow [OO]
2. it's necessary [oOoo]
3. a spoonful of salt [oOooO]
4. the best in the class [oOooO]
5. he can't pay it back [oOooO]
6. finishing today [OooooO]
7. dirty underneath [OooooO]



Snapshot 52. Barbosa with phrase-stress blocks

## 22. Limericks - weak forms, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011

-----

"A limerick is a kind of a witty, humorous, or nonsense poem, especially one in five-line anapestic or amphibrachic meter with a strict rhyme scheme (aabba), which intends to be witty or humorous, and is sometimes obscene with humorous intent" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerick\\_\(poetry\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerick_(poetry)))

Fifteen coloured magnetized cubes are lying around, each containing a recording of one line taken from one of three different limericks. Your task is to drag and snap them together in groups of five to recreate the three limericks. Only cubes belonging to the same limerick will attract each other. Each limerick is composed of cubes of the same colour, to help you. The cubes have no hovertext, so you need to LISTEN to the recorded lines, which is part of the rationale of the game. In case you wanted to do the tasks with a notecard only, below are the 15 recordings in alphabetical order. You can rearrange them in the notecard to reconstruct the three limericks. At the bottom of the notecard you'll find the original spelling and recordings of the three limericks. Have fun!

3 limerics = 15 lines in alphabetical order

-----

1. And all things nice,
2. And found it was perfectly true.
3. But the other won several prizes.
4. He awoke in the night
5. In a terrible fright
6. Sugar and spice
7. That's what little girls are made of.
8. The one that was small
9. There was a young man of Devizes
10. There was an old man of Peru
11. Was no use at all
12. What are little girls made of?
13. What are little girls made of?
14. Who dreamt he was eating a shoe.
15. Whose ears were of different sizes;

3 limericks; original texts and recordings

Włodzimierz Sobkowiak: *Five years in Second Life*

160

or: *Phonetically Augmented Virtuality in Second Life English as a Foreign Language*

-----  
What are little girls made of?  
What are little girls made of?  
Sugar and spice  
And all things nice,  
That's what little girls are made of.

There was an old man of Peru  
Who dreamt he was eating a shoe.  
He awoke in the night  
In a terrible fright  
And found it was perfectly true.

There was a young man of Devizes  
Whose ears were of different sizes;  
The one that was small  
Was no use at all  
But the other won several prizes.

### **23. Make yourself a pronunciation game!, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011**

-----

This time it's YOUR task to make a pronunciation game! Exercise your creativity and implement a functioning manipulative game of your design. The mechanics of the game should be based on movable cubes which attract each other (if they have the same name) and play a built-in sound file when touched. The phonetic goal of the game is entirely your own idea: it may be about particular sounds, or word-stress, or spelling problems; anything goes (as long as it is about pronunciation, of course :-).

The raw materials which are provided are: (i) one ready-made cube, with the editable magnetize& speak script built in, (ii) thirty full-perm sound files with animal names, arranged alphabetically below. Have fun!

Some technicalities:  
-----

(i) In the state\_entry() section of the script you can set the object name (which is vital for the magnetizing script) and hover text (if you need any).

(ii) Take the provided cube to your inventory, then rez and copy as many times (edit --> shift --> drag) as you need for the game; remember to insert an appropriate name in the [!SetName("object name here");] line.

(iii) An example sound file is inserted in the cube provided; delete it and insert \*one\* file which you need; the script will automatically play this one file when the cube is touched. You will need to place the needed sound files in your inventory first, before you can drop them in the cube(s).

(iv) When the game is ready check to see if all its components have full permissions, so that you can give the game to others or leave it in Virlantis for others to enjoy.

Ready-made cube  
-----

[in world]

Animals - sound files  
-----

[in world]

## 24. Phonetic synaesthesia game (ver. 2): 18 animals, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011

---

Synesthesia is a neurologically based phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway (Wikipedia).

Blocks are lying around in large quantities. They vary in colour, shape and size. Each object attribute correlates with one phonetic attribute, e.g.: (a) number of syllables/sounds, (b) contains a specific sound, (c) begins/ends in a specific sound, (d) main stress position, etc. Objects say their name when touched (left click). The aim of the game is to guess the correlation between object attributes and phonetic properties. The smaller the number of touches the better. For example, all of "ankle, elbow, overcoat" and "umbrella" might be blue - they begin with a vowel; all of "apple, butter, chicken, cider, cucumber, kettle, liquor, liver, pickle" and "sugar" might be cubes - they all end in a syllabic sonorant (in American English). Answers are listed at the bottom of this notecard.

Here are the 18 animal prims rezzed for this game:

---

1. alligator
2. badger
3. boar
4. buffalo
5. camel
6. cow
7. crab
8. deer
9. dog
10. dolphin
11. donkey
12. ewe
13. frog
14. goldfish
15. horse
16. monkey
17. owl
18. pig

Answers:

---

light green (contains the 'dark' /l/): camel, dolphin, goldfish, owl

dark green (ends in /b/, /d/ or /g/): crab, dog, frog, pig

red (contains the sound /r/ in AmE): alligator, badger, boar, deer, horse

blue (ends in a vowel or diphthong, no /r/): buffalo, cow, donkey, ewe, monkey

cube (1 syllable): boar, cow, crab, deer, dog, ewe, frog, horse, owl, pig

sphere (2 syllables): badger, camel, dolphin, donkey, goldfish, monkey

pyramid (3 syllables): buffalo

cylinder (4 syllables): alligator

big (where # letters = # sounds): crab, dog, frog, pig

small (where # letters differs from # sounds): all the others

## 25. What am I? (ver. 2), May 18<sup>th</sup> 2011<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Help of Beatriss Resident is gratefully acknowledged.

---

Eighteen cubes are laid out to touch. Each plays a recording of female voice; each has a question in hovertext to answer. The questions range from ones about meaning ("What do I mean?") to ones about spelling or pronunciation ("Spell me!"). There's no one 'good' answer to any question; many recordings may have various senses, depending on the context and circumstances. You're encouraged to provide various answers and speculate about different versions. This is NOT a test, but a language awareness raising game :-). Below is the notecard-only version of the activity. Enjoy!

1. What do I mean? How do I feel?
2. What do I mean?
3. How many syllables do I have?
4. What do I mean?
5. What do I mean? How do I feel?
6. What do I mean?
7. What do I mean?
8. What do I mean?
9. What do I mean? Spell me!
10. What do I mean?
11. What do I mean? Spell me!
12. What do I mean? What is my melody?
13. What do you say to that?
14. What do I mean? Spell me!
15. What do I mean?
16. What do I mean?
17. Do I weep or laugh?
18. What do I mean? How many syllables do I have?

## 26. PAVing Virlantis, take 4, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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We've attempted to PAVe Virlantis a few times in the past, with little success so far (see below for the meaning and sense of PAVing). The failure was due to a number of reasons, some technological, some psychological (like WB's procrastination, for example). I decided to try once again, because I believe that one of the unique affordances of SL for foreign language learning (and beyond) is the ease of constructing resources 'augmented' with all kinds of language information and tasks. Theoretically, all of SL could be one big foreign language resource, really; there're no technical obstacles, and no additional technology is needed. But we'll begin on a much more modest scale: by trying to PAVe as much of Virlantis (=Knowingly) as possible.

Some tiny portions of Virlantis are already PAVed, for example the tree-house. Because the Knowingly primmage restrictions<sup>63</sup> apply, it might not be very wise to add PAVed objects, for example furniture to the tree-house or in other places of the sim. But adding resources such as audio files, scripts, notecards \*to existing objects\* costs nothing in terms of prims. Such a PAVed environment could become a useful resource for all Virlantis students and teachers, as well as a showcase for the language educators in SL. In principle the task is not very hard: we must decide which objects to PAVe, what tasks/info include in them, we must get/record the sound files, upload them, drop in the scripts, debug, and ... presto! Of course, there's no reason why we should stick to [P] in PAVing; there may be all kinds of language information built-in, including grammar, vocab, cultural info, translations, etc. We might like to keep the nice acronym, though :-)

I propose to start with the task of deciding what to PAVe and how -- to be attempted in our upcoming Wednesday pronunciation session on June 29th 2011. We'll take a tour of Knowingly, identify the objects best for PAVing, decide what kind of language info to use for PAVing, divide some labour to be done later (I'm ready to cover the file upload expenses and prepare the sound files). As there're bound

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<sup>63</sup> I.e. restrictions on the maximum number of simple objects (primitives=prims) which can be rezzed in the given area, for example an island, or a plot of land. This allowance is usually quickly exhausted by enthusiastic builders.

to be all kinds of technological issues (such as permissions to modify objects, etc.), we'll spend some time trying to solve these. A number of pronunciation points and topics are bound to come up in the process, so it'll not all be entirely about the technicalities of SL and its viewers. Otherwise, the plan is very flexible, so if you have your own ideas about PAVing, there'll be plenty of opportunity to voice and discuss them.

## 27. PAVe with a tweet !, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011

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Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, informally known as "tweets", and images. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>). Some examples of twitter stories: <http://twitter.com/VeryShortStory>.

Phonetically Augmented Virtuality (PAV) refers to "enhancing a virtual world with phonetic information in the form of sound files, text-to-speech synthesis, phonetic transcription, explanatory text, as well as exercises and tasks of all kinds. This phonetic information is built directly into objects in the virtual environment and can be interactively accessed by the student's avatar". ([http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/PAV\\_in\\_SL.pdf](http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/PAV_in_SL.pdf))

In this task each player writes a tweet-size story (140 characters = about 50 words) to PAVe a selected Virlantis object (see list below). The name of the object must be used in the story, and should be its subject. To enhance the pronunciation aspect of the story three more words should be used which share the phonetic difficulty with the name of the object. These words are provided for each object. Only those objects appear below which are to be found in the treehouse on Knowingly. Your tweets will be embedded in the objects during the session.

For example, PAVing this object [apple - able, local, people] with a tweet could result in a story like this: "An apple a day keeps you able all day. At least this is what some locals told me in that cider pub in Coventry. I wonder what those people may have had in mind?" (129 characters, including punctuation). The complete PAVing content which would be offered to a resident upon touch of the object would then include the audio recording and this sequence of lines:

apple: /'æpl/

apple: A hard round fruit that has red, light green, or yellow skin and is white inside.

apple: 'The apple trees are just beginning to blossom.'

apple: What is the last sound of <apple> like?

apple: 'An apple a day keeps you able all day'. At least this is what some locals told me in that cider pub in Coventry. I wonder what those people may have had in mind?

Objects to tweet-PAVe:

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1. beer - clear, idea, nearly
2. chair - more, other, year
3. clock - body, long, problem
4. cushions - full, put, would
5. dance - after, last, rather
6. fireplace - afternoon, household, newspaper
7. fruit - group, school, too
8. grapes - always, because, use
9. mug - come, must, such
10. picture - member, number, over
11. popcorn - autonomy, corridor, orthodox
12. pyramid - miracle, mirror, spirit
13. wine - child, find, time



## 28. PAVed quest in Virtlantis, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011

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"Augmented Virtuality (AV) refers to the merging of real world objects into virtual worlds [...] It refers to predominantly virtual spaces, where physical elements, e.g. physical objects or people, are dynamically integrated into, and can interact with the virtual world in real-time".

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented\\_virtuality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented_virtuality))

Phonetically Augmented Virtuality (PAV) refers to "enhancing a virtual world with phonetic information in the form of sound files, text-to-speech synthesis, phonetic transcription, explanatory text, as well as exercises and tasks of all kinds. This phonetic information is built directly into objects in the virtual environment and can be interactively accessed by the student's avatar".

([http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/PAV\\_in\\_SL.pdf](http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/PAV_in_SL.pdf))

Some objects have been PAVed in Knowingly. Thirteen of them have additionally been equipped with Heimlaga's crazy tweets (see below). The other 15 have not. Your task is to use these fifteen objects to make a PAVed quest around Knowingly. The idea of this quest is the following:

- (i) the learner starts the quest with one of the 15 objects
- (ii) the object contains the beginning of a story (one or two sentences) with the name of the object in it
- (iii) to continue with the story the learner must TP to another PAVed object for which the slurl<sup>64</sup> is provided by the previous object
- (iv) this process continues for as many jumps (story parts, objects) as necessary to complete the story
- (v) at the end of the quest the learner has a complete story containing some phonetically difficult words
- (vi) to complete the quest the learner will listen to sound files and read the dictionary content of each object.

A simple example of a PAVed quest follows. The quest starts with "apple":

- (a) Apple decided she wanted to cross the river, but she needed some help. She thought Banana could help her...
- (b) If you want to know what happened next, go to Banana:  
(<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/215/182/31>)
- (c) Banana said: "I'm happy to help you, but we cannot swim across the river. We need a bridge"
- (d) If you want to know what happened next, go to Bridge:  
(<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/148/4/22>)
- (e) They found the bridge, but there was a fence around it...
- (f) If you want to know what happened next, go to Fence... [etc]

Remember:

- the quest should be rather easy and short
  - your imagination is the limit of the story
  - the story itself should have a coherent plot...
  - ... leading up to a climax.
  - you are in charge of the story; the scripting and other technicalities will be taken care of
- 

Here are the 15 PAVed objects to use in your story-making:

1. apple - What is the last sound of <apple> like? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/215/182/31>)
2. banana - One vowel is different from the other two; which?  
(<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/215/182/31>)
3. bridge - Is the last sound in <bridge> voiced or voiceless?  
(<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/148/4/22> and other places)
4. carnations - Is the <r> letter pronounced? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/247/77/41>)
5. fence - Is there any pronunciation problem in this word? (in many places in Virtlantis)

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<sup>64</sup> Many of these objects do not exist at indicated slurls anymore for a variety of reasons, so the reader is advised not to follow them from here.

6. fern - Which is the correct pronunciation of <fern>? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/239/47/62> and other places)
7. fireplace - Which syllable gets the main stress in this word? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/82/29/23>)
8. hanging - Which of the three is the correct pronunciation of <hanging>? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/210/196/32>)
9. lamp - What's wrong with this pronunciation of <lamp>? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/215/182/31>)
10. mug - What is the vowel in <mug> like? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/215/182/31>)
11. roof - Is the /u/ sound short or long? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/126/86/27> and <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/80/29/30>)
12. rug - What is the vowel like in <rug>? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/209/192/31> and <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/199/237/23>)
13. stairs - Is the recording American or British English? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/75/35/23>)
14. stone - Is the recording British or American English? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/146/22/21>)
15. VIRTANTIS Cup of Joe - What does the vowel sound like? (<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Knowingly/144/95/28>)

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 Heimlaga's PAVing tweets

"Cushions are just like men, they are full of themselves"

Thirteen of the treehouse objects in Knowingly have now been PAVed with Heimlaga's crazy tweets. Each tweet contains three words which share a certain pronouncing difficulty with the name of the object, for example: cushions - full, would, put. This difficulty is also targeted in the phonetic question asked by the PAVed objects upon touch, as in the below example:

cushions: /'kʌʃnz/

cushions: A cloth bag filled with soft material that you put on a chair or the floor to make it more comfortable.

cushions: Mina lay back, her arms draped lazily over the cushions.

cushions: What is the vowel in the first syllable: /ʊ/ or /ʌ/?

cushions: Cushions are just like men, they are full of themselves. It would surprise me if you believe otherwise despite all the evidence put in front of you. (Heimlaga's tweet)

1. Late breaking news from the local watering hole: They are going to test an unprecedented idea to see if it is nearly impossible to get a clear view through beer goggles.
2. Cheers to you! Chairman, chairwoman, chairbound the whole bunch, but I prefer my old wheelchair, though there are new chairs to fill more than one chair car every other year.
3. I have a perpetual problem with my clock. Although it's ticking all day long it doesn't produce any time and it's in discord with my body clock, which tells me I'm using time.
4. Cushions are just like men, they are full of themselves. It would surprise me if you believe otherwise despite all the evidence put in front of you.
5. I've just got back from Bellywood. After their last riveting spectacle I don't understand why the critics call their performance a prance rather than a dance.
6. Every household has bad news, loads of bad news laying around. In a chilly afternoon a newspaper comes in handy when you light a log fire in the fireplace.
7. Fruits are not vegetables, right? Is it too much to have the question answered why it is a "fruitless attempt to educate that group of vegetables at our school".
8. A question to my readers: "Is it always ok to describe grapes as berries from bacciferous shrubs just because they tend to grow in a bushlike style.
9. It's elementary when we come to the topic of drinking coffee. A mug of hot coffee must not be sipped in such a way that we burn our mouths.

10. If I correctly remember it was last September we made a number of attempts to take a picture of a member who's not exactly over the moon because he picked the wrong number.

11. Filmgoers have the autonomy to choose whether to buy their popcorn in the corridor of the cinema, as is the orthodox behavior, or make a more independent choice.

12. Entering a pyramid and expecting such a miracle as to form a clandestine relation with an ancient spirit does mirror a lost mind.

13. AA tip of the day: If you are on a toot and find a chilled child in time don't let it sip wine.

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[Follow-up on Facebook]

Mike McKay Question. What is the performance objective for this task?

Włodzimierz Sobkowiak 1. give learners an opportunity to write stories, 2. read them aloud, 3. react to the pronunciation diffs in the words, 4. produce a resource for other learners, 5. promote Virlantis as a place where lg quests are waiting, 6. flex their av muscles by walking/flying around the sim, 7. keep up the community spirit.

Martina Zeiner ..and last but not least...you elicit conversation with it. Allowing all participants to chime in, to have fun AND improvements of language and other wide spread skills (e.g. sl skills, collaboration skills..) just saying from a learner's perspective. :)

## 29. PAVed quest in Virlantis, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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These are quests in Virlantis (Knowingly) based on students' texts and on the Phonetically Augmented Virtual (PAVed) objects found during the quests. Your tasks are:

- to read the story
- to follow the landmarks
- to touch the objects in front of you at each landmark
- to listen to their names (wait for the sound to play)
- to read their definitions (in private chat channel)
- to read sentences containing their names (in private chat channel)
- to answer the phonetic questions displayed (in private chat channel)

As a result of this quest you will have:

- read a nice text about Virlantis and Second Life
- learned about the names of the objects touched during the quest
- practiced your pronunciation knowledge of the words
- discovered the Virlantis island (Knowingly), a great place to learn languages for free in Second Life!

Alf: Turn off your lamp  
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In my spare time I like \*hanging around in my hammock fixed to two trees close to my \*fireplace, which you can reach when you walk over the \*bridge that offers you a safe walk over the maelstrom of the raging river. Because there is no \*roof over my head I can see the sparkling stars in the sky and let my thoughts float through the universe. If you have time, feel free to drop by. Have a seat on the \*stone by the blazing fire, with the grass like a \*rug beneath your feet, surrounded by \*ferns and the scent of \*carnations which grow all around the place. Feel free to take some \*fruit from the basket which you can find on the \*stairs which lead to the tree house above your head. Among other \*fruit there you can find \*apples and \*bananas. Grab a \*mug of coffee or cold \*beer, turn off your \*lamp and enjoy life in nature not surrounded by any \*fence.

Angel: Christmas time again  
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The Kids are thinking of having a surprise for Santa. They are thinking what way Santa will take into the house. Tom says: He will land on the \*roof and walk down the \*stairs. He must be careful not to

stumble over this \*stone in the corner. Next to the \*fern is the door to enter the house - he will enter there. Belle asks: Why is he not taking the chimney? Tom says: because he is old and a bit too full round his hips to slide down. So Santa will come and we must pin stockings to the \*fireplace. Next to it we can leave the cookies and milk for him on this little table. Belle says: We must move mom's \*carnations to make more space and put a \*lamp there to make it more comfy. The \*rug will be soft and warm enough so he will not have cold feet. They put Virtlantis \*cup of Joe next to the milk, too, because he may like to have some coffee too - cause it's an long night for him. Belle wants to leave a \*banana and some \*apples for him too because he may need some for the reindeer. On leaving the house again Santa will have to watch mom's \*hanging laundry not to throw it on the floor. The reindeer will wait for him behind the \*fence next to the \*brigde. And so Santa will be having a pleasant stay and the kids will have a nice Christmas morning.

Time to learn some Polish (pronunciation)! This game has three parts. First you teleport around Virtlantis in a PAVed quest based on Angel's Christmas story. You get a notecard with embedded landmarks which take you to a number of PAVed objects. Each object you encounter has the usual English information built in, but the recording is in Polish. Touch the object and you'll hear the pronunciation of the name of the object. Compare it with the spelling of the name in the notecard; you'll need it later. In the second part of the game you try to pronounce correctly in Polish all the object names in the Christmas story in your notecard. In the third part of the game you use all your knowledge and skills of Polish to translate a few simple sentences from English to Polish. You get all the necessary words to do this (in the story and in a separate list below). Because Polish grammar is rather complex, you do not need to worry about it for the time being. Rather you concentrate on the correct Polish pronunciation of the translated sentences. Needless to say, in all stages of the game you have my full (native speaker's :-)) attention and assistance! Have fun!

Angel: Christmas time again (with Polish PAVed objects)

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 The Kids are thinking of having a surprise for Santa. They are thinking what way Santa will take into the house. Tom says: He will land on the roof (Polish dach) and walk down the stairs (Polish schody). He must be careful not to stumble over this stone (Polish kamień) in the corner. Next to the fern (Polish paproć) is the door to enter the house - he will enter there. Belle asks: Why is he not taking the chimney? Tom says: because he is old and a bit too full round his hips to slide down. So Santa will come and we must pin stockings to the fireplace (Polish kominek). Next to it we can leave the cookies and milk for him on this little table. Belle says: We must move mom's carnations (Polish goździki) to make more space and put a lamp (Polish lampa) there to make it more comfy. The rug (Polish dywan) will be soft and warm enough so he will not have cold feet. They put Virtlantis cup (Polish filiżanka) of Joe next to the milk, too, because he may like to have some coffee too - cause it's an long night for him. Belle wants to leave a banana (Polish banan) and some apples (Polish jabłko) for him too because he may need some for the reindeer. On leaving the house again Santa will have to watch mom's hanging (Polish wisieć) laundry not to throw it on the floor. The reindeer will wait for him behind the fence (Polish płot) next to the bridge (Polish most). And so Santa will be having a pleasant stay and the kids will have a nice Christmas morning.

1. biała - white (fem.) (see lampa, płot, jabłko)
2. chodzić - to walk (see dach, schody, goździki, paproć)
3. dobry - good (see kominek, schody, dywan)
4. musieć - must (see wisieć)
5. nowy - new (see dywan, schody, płot)
6. zmieniać - to change (see kamień, paproć)
7. źle - badly, wrongly (see goździki)
8. żałować - to regret (see jabłko, paproć, dywan, filiżanka)
9. jest - is (see jabłko)
10. ten - this
11. ja - I (see jabłko)
12. na - on

Using the Polish vocabulary above, translate from English to Polish:

Włodzimierz Sobkowiak: *Five years in Second Life*

168

or: *Phonetically Augmented Virtuality in Second Life English as a Foreign Language*

- 
- (a) White cup is good.
  - (b) Fern must hang.
  - (c) This rug is new.
  - (d) I must change this fireplace.
  - (e) Must I regret white carnations?
  - (f) New white lamp is badly hanging on fence.
  - (g) I walk on bridge.

Heim: Roaming banana

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I miss my red-cheeked mate, I wonder where he can be? Has he perhaps went for a coffee?

I can't see him. Where can he be? I don't think he has drowned, he's such a good swimmer. Well, he likes to roll about, probably he's lost in the carnations.

No, not here either, where can that simpleton be? I'm tired, I am going home.

Oh, there you are, I've been roaming the whole sim looking for you!

Answers to pronunciation questions PAVed into the objects in the Virlantis quest

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1. apple - What is the last sound of <apple> like? It is a 'dark' /l/ made with the back of the tongue, as opposed to the 'clear' /l/ in words such as "last", which is made with the front of the tongue.
2. banana - One vowel is different from the other two; which? The middle (second) one. The other two vowels are weak, so-called 'schwas'.
3. bridge - Is the last sound in <bridge> voiced or voiceless? Voiced.
4. carnations - Is the <r> letter pronounced? It is pronounced in American English, but silent in British English.
5. fence - Is there any pronunciation problem in this word? The word sounds /fens/.
6. fern - Which is the correct pronunciation of <fern>? The third. 1st word: fin; 2nd word fan; 4th word: fun.
7. fireplace - Which syllable gets the main stress in this word? The first syllable.
8. hanging - Which of the three is the correct pronunciation of <hanging>? The second: both [g]'s are silent.
9. lamp - What's wrong with this pronunciation of <lamp>? The vowel is too much like in the word "calm".
10. mug - What is the vowel in <mug> like? It's a short and weak vowel, also found in such words as: but, love, money, mother, much, must, other, some, such, summer, etc.
11. roof - Is the /u/ sound short or long? Long.
12. rug - What is the vowel like in <rug>? It's a short and weak vowel, also found in such words as: but, love, money, mother, much, must, other, some, such, summer, etc.
13. stairs - Is the recording American or British English? American (/r/ is pronounced).
14. stone - Is the recording British or American English? American (the vowel is /ou/).
15. VIRTANTIS Cup of Joe - What does the vowel of 'cup' sound like? It's a short and weak vowel, also found in such words as: but, love, money, mother, much, must, other, some, such, summer, etc.

### 30. Pronunciation help with Wlodek Barbosa: summary of 2008/2009 themes

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(games with objects, like dominoes, not listed here)

1. Br/Am accent differences, LFC/EIL, accent vs dialect
2. what is hard in pronunciation? needs analysis. stress placement in various languages.
3. silent letters, function words
4. word stress, Spelling Christian names
5. "Love is all around" - pronunciation tasks; Christmas Eve cuisine
6. Limerics activity, heterographic rhymes

Włodzimierz Sobkowiak: *Five years in Second Life*

169

or: *Phonetically Augmented Virtuality in Second Life English as a Foreign Language*

7. tongue-twisters (warmer), reading a passage from Grimm bro's tales
8. hard nuts notecard
9. 60 mispronunciations, /-s@r/ spellings
10. recap of past activities and notecards, finding object names in five phon categories
11. advantages of SL; notecard with errors discussed
12. 30 diff sentences, 30 easy sentences
13. devoicing story
14. sentences with velar nasal, call my bluff: which word did I mispronounce
15. sentences with aspiration, scavenger hunt for object name words with 9 phonetic criteria
16. [-ine] words notecard
17. phonetic 20 Qs
18. debriefing on last session: aspiration, word-stress, the [a] vowel; last-sound game
19. the [-ine] notecard, part 2: hard words, funny sentences; phonetic t-shirt game
20. phonetic t-shirt game (2nd round), phonetic dice game: explanation and testing
21. [-ism] notecard home
22. t-shirts advanced version (transitions)
23. Di\_V notecard, 60 mispronunciations activity: dictation -- in pairs
24. homophones/homographs notecard
25. transcription, notecards; reading 30 easy sentences transcribed