



Englishized?

**Polish Game Scholars' Responses
to the Anglophone Norm**

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“English is . . . a sort of bridge between us”

“It’s a colonizer’s language”

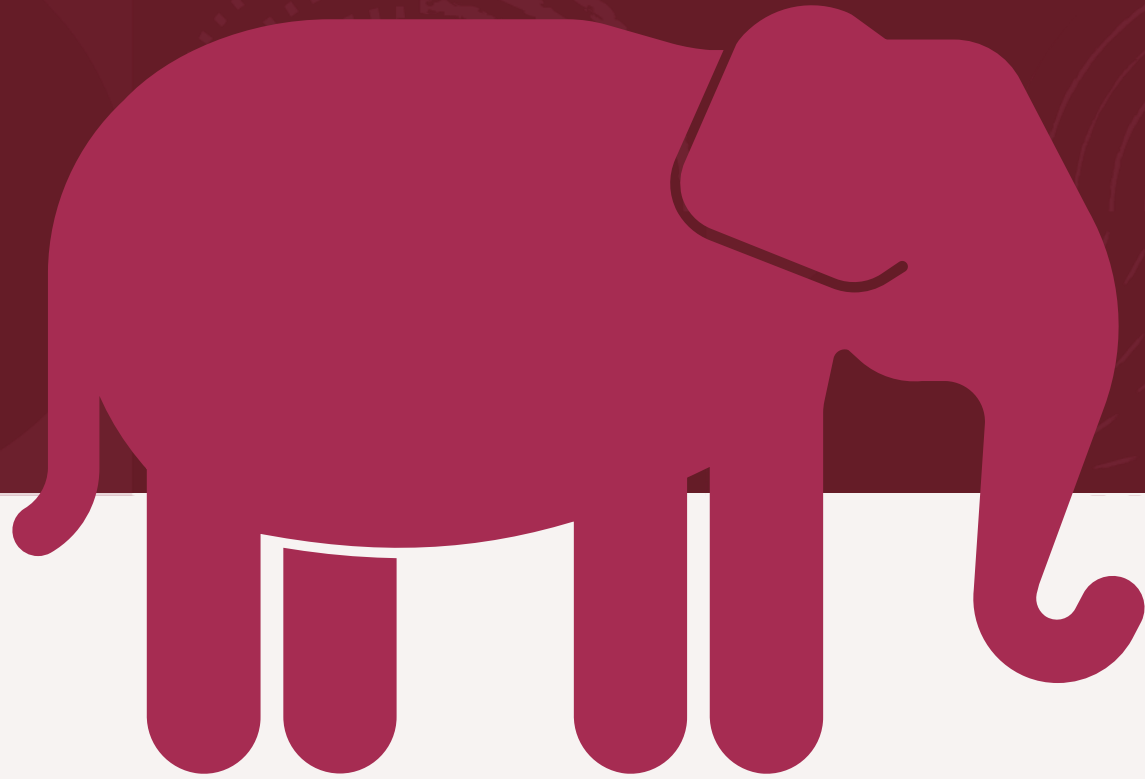
(from two different interviews)

Starting remarks

- I will be skipping some things in the talk,
but **the entire presentation can be found on my website:**

www.stanislawkrawczyk.pl

- This presentation is available under the CC-BY-SA-4.0 license,
so **please feel free to share, tweet, etc.**
(the interviewees have agreed to be quoted here)



Current research on game studies

Just in English since 2020...


- Mia Consalvo, Shira Chess, "The Future of Media Studies Is Game Studies" (2022) and other papers in the same issue
- Patrick Jagoda, Jennifer Malkowski, "Introduction: American Game Studies" (2022)
- Alex Gekker, "Against Game Studies" (2021)
- Rosa Núñez-Pacheco, "Divergent Theoretical Trajectories in Game Studies: A Bibliographical Review" (2021)
- Sofia Schöbel, Mohammed Saqr, Andreas Janson, "Two Decades of Game Concepts in Digital Learning Environments: A Bibliometric Study and Research Agenda" (2021)
- Marc Ouellette, Steven Conway, "The Game Studies Crisis: What Are the Rules of Play?" (2020)
- Amanda Phillips, "Negg(at)ing the Game Studies Subject: An Affective History of the Field" (2020)
- See <https://playhouse.wordpress.com/2020/08/17/histories-of-game-studies-as-field/> for earlier publications

There is little on English itself (though here's one exception)

Games and Empire - Special Edition

Feminist and Furious: Diversity Work(ers) Against Game Studies of Empire!

**Cody Mejeur¹ , Mahli-Ann R. Butt²
and Alayna Cole³**

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"Perpetuating Anglocentrism

The country of residence [of our respondents] represented a predominantly Anglocentric sphere . . . Our demographics reflect **the perpetuating Anglocentrism of game studies**. These demographics may also correlate with the countries holding institutional power for academic research for game-related disciplines and career opportunities" (p. 348; color & bold added)

(and here's another exception)

CRITICAL STUDIES IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION
2022, VOL. 39, NO. 3, 239–246
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2022.2080844>



RESEARCH ARTICLE



Decolonizing play

Aaron Trammell

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ABSTRACT

The past five years have seen the development of what Mukherjee, S. (2018. Playing subaltern: Video games and postcolonialism. *Games and Culture*, 13(5), 504–520) and Murray, S. (2018. The work of postcolonial game studies in the play of culture. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(1), 1–25) (amongst others) term postcolonial game studies. Postcolonial game studies looks at how games represent colonial and postcolonial environments in the story worlds they present, and also considers how these games are consumed by players in postcolonial nations. Fittingly, it is a critique both of how games reproduce colonial tropes. In this essay, I argue that the work of decolonizing games requires that we also decolonize play. Here I shall argue that the foundational theories of play that game scholarship is predicated upon are built upon a racist and xenophobic binary that pits civilization against barbarism. This binary is a consequence of a white European canon of game studies scholarship that has supported a grand theory of play apprehended only through an etic lens. If we are to consider the future of game studies, I think we should work to decolonize play. Crucially, we must attend to how Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) play globally and consider the many other ways—beyond merely games—that this play is articulated.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

Postcolonial theory; game studies; play theory; ritual communication; race

“It is a testament to both **the colonizing work of English** and the influence of Western European philosophy . . . on game studies that there is a critical focus on the English construction of games and play . . . Because of these colonial histories the conversation around postcolonialism and games has . . . centered around the ways that *games* . . . serve up and distribute European and American values on a massive global scale” (p. 240; color & bold added)

Some literature on internationalization and the use of English in academia in general

- Ayenachew A. Woldegiyorgis, Douglas Proctor, Hans de Wit, "Internationalization of Research..." (2018)
- Sharon Stein, Dale M. McCartney, "Emerging Conversations..." (2021)
- Robert Phillipson, "Linguistic Imperialism Continued" (2009)
- Mehdi Boussebaa, Janne Tienari, "Englishization and the Politics..." (2021)
- John A. Douglass, "Neo-Nationalism and Universities..." (2021)
- Emma Nordbäck, Marko Hakonen, Janne Tienari, "Academic Identities..." (2022)
- Leandro Rodriguez Medina, "A Geopolitics of Bad English" (2019)

My study: general idea

- **How do game scholars respond to the Anglophone norm** in game studies (and, increasingly, in academia overall) when English is not their first language?
- I have interviewed scholars from my own country to find one part of the answer
- **Game studies in Poland is quite internationalized** (see the number of Polish scholars at DiGRA conferences)...
- **...but there are also many publications in Polish** (about 10 books since 2021), often by internationally active scholars, so we can look at the use of both languages



Interviews with Polish game scholars (methodology)

Interviewees (I)

- **7 individual in-depth interviews**
 - 4 experienced researchers - XPs (more than seven years after PhD)
 - 3 early-career researchers - ECRs (2 PhD students + 1 recent PhD)
- **10 thematic areas prepared** (see the abstract)...
- ...but some detours allowed in questions and answers alike
- Pilot interview: December 2022
- The other six interviews: May and June 2023

Interviewees (II)

- **XPs: purposive sampling** (from a group of several people)
- **ECRs: random sampling** (from a slightly larger group)
- Relative gender balance, included in the sampling process:
4 men, 3 women

Interviewees (III)

- **For now, I focus largely on internationally active scholars**
 - All interviewees have published both in English and in Polish
 - All interviewees have published at least one paper abroad and/or participated in at least one international conference
- **I have done so to ensure some consistency** in my small sample
- However, this means that **more nationally oriented scholars are not represented**

Confidentiality

- **There are not many game scholars in Poland,** let alone internationally active ones
- **I will thus omit some information** (e.g., the interviewees' disciplinary backgrounds) for fear of breaching confidentiality

Method of analysis

- Thematic analysis / qualitative content analysis (ongoing)
- Research steps in this particular study
 - Read the interviews
 - Create thematic codes (e.g., “Game studies and other disciplines”)
 - Code all relevant interview fragments in a dedicated program (here: NVivo)
 - Export all fragments with the selected code to the same Word file
 - Create subcodes basing on the Word file...
 - ...while making an Excel file with key quotations concerning the subcodes
 - Sift regularities and other interesting things from the final Excel file



Interviews with Polish game scholars (findings)

Are we Englishized in Poland?

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- Well, yeah, depends, dunno, man

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- Well, yeah, depends, dunno, man
- A one-word summary is **“ambivalence”**

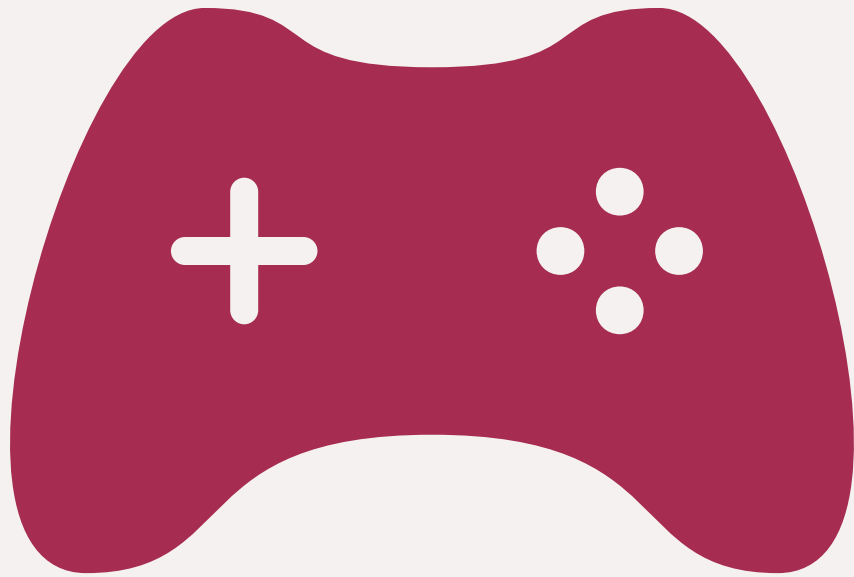
Two thematic areas

I will talk about just two thematic areas from the abstract (transcribed, the relevant interview fragments cover about 55 standard pages). They correspond to the following questions in the interview scenario:

- **What do you think about the role of English in game studies in general** (not just in Poland)?
- **What do you think should be the role of Polish and English in game studies in Poland:** in individual practices, institutional policies, or the national research policy?

How I quote

- **Each interview quotation is attributed...**
 - ...to an experienced researcher (XP 1, XP 2, XP 3, XP 4)
 - ...or to an early-career researcher (ECR 1, ECR 2, ECR 3)
- **I have polished the quotations a bit for readability**
(e.g., I have removed the “uhms” and “hms”)
- As a rule of thumb, the more authors are mentioned in a slide, the more frequently the topic in question appears in the interviews



The global role of English in game studies

1. English is global and it's here to stay

- **“Of course,** when we publish in English, our publications reach incomparably more people . . . English is a universal language, **let's not deceive ourselves”** (ECR 1)
- **“It is known** that English is a global language” (XP 2)
- “This hamburgerization or Americanization of language [in game-related terminology] is, I think, **irreversible”** (XP 4)
- **“There's this pressure** to publish exclusively in English” (ECR 2)
- **„It's a little like a full circle:** [Polish] journals accept more texts in English partly to be seen more broadly as such” (ECR 3)

2. English is a bridge

- “Researchers from different countries can write in this English and be available for the whole world . . . [Thanks to this, game studies] **includes . . . experiences . . . from more peripheral places** and places that wouldn’t otherwise have a voice” (ECR 2)
- “There are countries where people certainly create a lot of cool things but I don’t know, for instance, [language names], so I don’t know exactly what’s going on in these regions . . . **English is . . . a sort of bridge between us**” (ECR 3)

3. Colonialism

- “From my experience, [in some publishing houses] there’ll always be an American reviewer who’ll ask directly: what about a problem that we’re discussing in American academia and that is obviously the most important in the world now? . . . The United States is an academic hegemon and **the academic hegemon . . . is under the impression that everything about them is universal**, and everything not about them is some kind of scholarly margins, local studies” (XP 2)

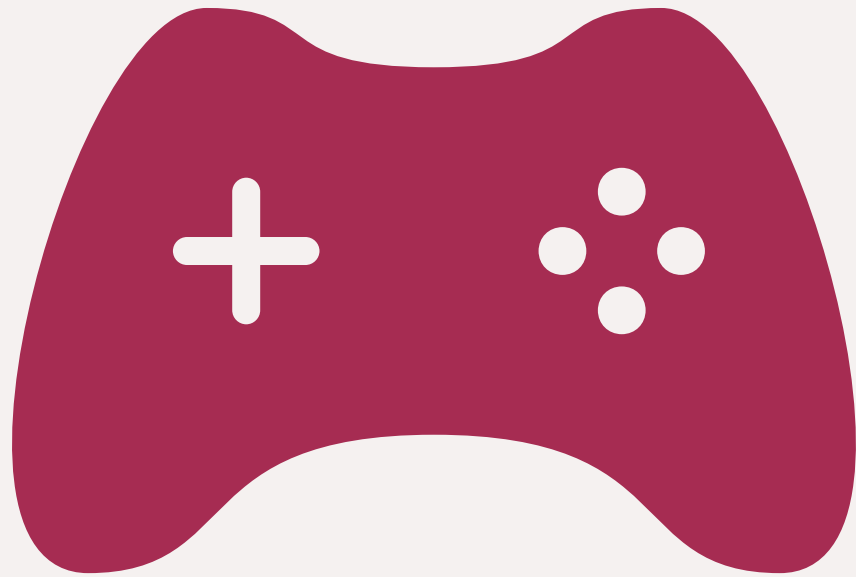
3. Colonialism

- “It’s happened many times: I tell someone I’ve published something, . . . **I tell them it’s in Polish, and oh, in this case they’ll never read it** . . . When you can use so many freely available tools . . . That translate from one language to another . . . Unfortunately this barrier, created by the users of English, is very frequent . . . **It’s a colonizer’s language**” (XP 4)

Colonialism is mentioned by (some) XPs but not ECRs

4. Other inequalities

- “It can be difficult for younger researchers to start publishing . . . on this international level . . . And of course **this threshold isn’t there for the people whose first language is English**, so here . . . there may be an inequality” (ECR 2)
- “I will partly agree, for instance, that . . . **The Anglo-Saxon culture of academic writing is killing essays** . . . Yes, it’s a problem: treating English as the . . . central language. The consequence is that everything gets unified in a way” (ECR 3)



**What role should
English and Polish play
in Polish game studies?**

1. English reaches more people

- “We all use **LibGen**, we all use **SciHub**, and . . . many game studies materials are **open access** after all . . . When someone publishes a book in Poland in 200 copies, it can be more difficult to reach than a paper in English, one click away” (XP 1)
- “[What’s in English] **will be read by more people** than is the case with other national, non-global languages” (XP 2)
- “I have the impression that these English publications are **more important in game studies**, because there’s this international circulation . . . My Polish things aren’t likely to reach this broader group of people” (ECR 2)

2. English is for specialist writing

- “I’m thinking **English is like Latin in the Middle Ages**, which means that specialists use English” (XP 1)
- “When you want to write something for specialists, get a good feedback and **it’s supposed to have the highest research quality**, then it’s known it’s better to write in English” (ECR 3)

3. Polish is needed for beginners

- “[International exchange is valuable] for game scholars who already are game scholars. **If we want to have more game scholars in Poland** . . . we need to translate texts” (ECR 1)
- “There are no [Polish] publications that . . . would be available. **Either for students or for unexperienced researchers**” (ECR 2)
- “Polish could just be **a kind of entry language**” (ECR 3)
- “Publishing in English . . . **creates a barrier to the entry of new researchers**” (XP 3)
- “[Right now] **I find it easier to tell [my students], ‘Listen, here’s an English-language handbook**, here are great explanations of concepts along with references’, than to refer them to some popular text in Polish, where there’s no . . . bibliography (XP 4)

This is noted by all ECRs but not all XPs

4. Polish game studies needs Polish terms

- “I believe that in Polish game studies it is our important role to ensure that the Polish language does not die out When we discuss some practice or phenomenon wholly in English, we don’t develop the local vocabulary . . . and **not all can be thought in English**” (XP 3)
- “For instance, if we . . . want to make games that are somehow unique, then the basis for that . . . [is] **the language in which games are made or . . . some symbols are construed**” (ECR 3)

This argument is notably less frequent than the beginner argument

5. Both languages are needed

- “Imperialism has its merits . . . and nationalism also has its merits” (XP 2)
- “I think the key thing is: to God the things that are God’s, and to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (XP 3)
- “It’s not the case that Poles writing about games in Polish write worse than . . . English people writing about games in English” (XP 4)
- “We have so many young people . . . interested in game studies . . . It’d be nice if there were publishing opportunities. In English, yes, but also in Polish” (ECR 1)
- „I suppose these languages should just complement one another . . . and of course it would be best if it was . . . made possible” (ECR 2)



Conclusions

Let's summarize

- Overall, internationally active game scholars in Poland (in my sample!) have ambivalent attitudes toward English
- Early-career researchers seem to be a little less ambivalent:
 - None of them talk about colonialism
 - They are more likely to present Polish as an entry language and English as an advanced one
- Is this difference just due to chance?
Or is there some deeper reason to be found?

TODO

- **Analytical ideas I have not verified (yet)**
 - What will the other eight thematic areas tell us?
 - What other comparisons could be made between XPs and ECRs?
- **Potential incoming interviews**
 - Interviews with more nationally oriented Polish scholars
 - Interviews with internationally active scholars from other countries
- **Broader research question**
 - How is game studies similar and different to other disciplines?