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Abstract of the doctoral dissertation «Writing Interactive Fiction with Twine in the Context of Portuguese Foreign Language Teaching — in relation to Didactics, Texts and Perceptions. An exploratory study in the field of electronic literature with students in Luzo-brazilian Studies at Warsaw University»

The field of electronic literature has experienced a strong development over the last 25 years with an intense creative, critical, and theorizing activity. The establishment, in 1999, of the Electronic Literature Organization was a milestone for the institutionalization of literature which takes advantage of computational potentialities. The intensification of creative activity was driven, among other factors, by the appearance of writing tools that facilitated the production of digital texts, thus opening electronic literature not only to programmers but also to a much wider audience. Twine, an open-source tool created in 2009 by Chris Klimas, democratized the access to the creation of interactive narratives. The accessibility of Twine facilitates its use in different contexts and for different purposes.

Our exploratory research will answer the question: what are the potentialities of Twine interactive fiction (IF) writing for the teaching-learning of a foreign language in the context of a modern language course. The study will focus on the Portuguese language studied by Polish students as part of the Undergraduate and Master's degree courses of Luso-Brazilian studies at the Institute of Iberian and Ibero-American Studies at the University of Warsaw. The study has been divided into four research axes: (1) the feasibility of writing Twine interactive fiction in the above-mentioned context; (2) students' perceptions on their writing pleasure and motivation; (3) students' perceptions of the usefulness for language learning; and (4) the challenges of didactic operationalization.

The use of electronic literature as a creative digital writing exercise for language learning is a territory that is largely uncharted. For this reason, we opted for an exploratory qualitative research, according to the principles of the creative learning methodology, to conceive a polyhedral design based on the pillars of literary, linguistic and didactic studies. The research followed students from two classes: one class from the Undergraduate course, with a B2 language level, and another from the Master's course at the C1 level.

To answer our research question, we devised the «Fiagem» project, a didactic design to operationalize the digital creative writing challenges presented to the students. It was based on an in-depth study of the field of electronic literature, with special emphasis on interactive narratives. We collected data from three sources: the texts produced by the students during the project; the students' perceptions; and the teacher-researcher's perceptions which analysed both the student textualizations and the didactic design used.

The research allowed us to confirm the feasibility of Twine as a writing tool for writing practice of electronic literature texts in a university context of foreign language learning, especially with students at a more advanced level. The texts produced were digital-born, and the high fluency of written expression showed that the creative writing of interactive fiction with Twine opened a highly productive channel.

With regard to the pleasure of writing, to the motivation felt, and to the usefulness for language learning, the general positive perception of the students in both classes, but stronger among those in the MA class, is a promising sign for the future of the interactive genre in teaching. These results were also supported by the perceptions of the teacher-researcher in his analysis of the students' texts. However, the students also pointed out negative aspects, the main one being the counterproductive impact that the programming skills required by more advanced interactive features had on the act of writing.

The strengths and weaknesses of the «Fiagem» project were made evident in our study. Regarding the former, it was clear that students, in a university context and especially those at a more advanced level, have a greater capacity to respond to a digital creative writing challenge, and demonstrated narrative and linguistic enthusiasm. The didactic approach sustained in the CLIL methodology contributed to a clear communication of the contents and the creation of effective scaffolding strategies. However, at times, the students felt overloaded with too many tasks, which overcomplicated the writing process. The didactic design conceived was also more directed towards the linguistic and educational development of the students in the MA class, showing that the differentiation efforts were not sufficient.

Finally, although the research showed that the teacher needs to make a great personal investment, due to lack of suitable or sufficient class materials, writing with Twine has shown great potential to improve the students' relationship with writing, to learn a foreign language and to stimulate students' creativity and autonomy.

We close our thesis with a set of possible lines of research that aim to continue the mapping of the territory of the application of this genre of electronic literature in education.

Keywords: Twine, interactive fiction, hypertextual fiction, digital creative writing,
Portuguese as a foreign language, CLIL

Warsaw, January 2023

José Carlos A. C. Dias

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'José Carlos A. C. Dias', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.