Abstract

The paper deals with the use of visual stereotypes in virtual pedagogical agents and its potential impact in digital electronic environments. After an analysis of the concept of visual stereotypes, affordances as well as drawbacks of their use in the context of traditional media are analyzed. Next, the paper explores whether virtual pedagogical characters introduce anything novel with respect to the use of visual stereotypes – as compared both to real life interaction between humans and to the use of visual stereotypes in traditional non-interactive media such as magazines, film, TV and video. The answer is that novel affordances, as well as novel drawbacks, indeed are being introduced with the use of visual stereotypes in virtual characters. Finally, we suggest some future directions of research, and from an educational and societal perspective we argue for the imperativeness of such research.

Keywords: pedagogical agent, virtual character, visual stereotype, learning, gender.