In this paper, I will present the results of an investigation into identity and motivation on the use of Voki avatars by Brazilian undergraduate students of English as an additional language. In online language teaching, digital avatars can be used as a mask to protect identities and function as an alternative to reduce stress in the performance of certain learning tasks. Voki avatars allow students to record their messages and listen to them many times before publishing their final tasks. The hypothesis is that avatars can help students to develop oral skills and that they would probably feel less ashamed in virtual reality than in face to face interaction. The students were asked to create avatars to introduce themselves to their teachers and classmates in a course for the development of English oral skills. They published the links for their avatars in a Moodle platform and the researcher could observe the characteristics of the graphic design, listen to the introduction and take notes. The goals of the study were to verify (1) if the students reproduced their physical features when creating their avatars or if they played with their appearance and projected different identities; (2) if the avatars motivated students to speak; (3) if the avatars decreased inhibition and (4) if students would prefer avatar do video recording or face to face interaction. The methodology included participant classroom observation during the four initial weeks of a 60-hour online course for English oral skills, a forum discussion on the use of Voki for introductions, and interviews.

Keywords: voki avatars, motivation, identity.