Reconciling layers of discourse in *Dungeons & Dragons* through the Discourse Viewpoint Space

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This paper analyzes instances of unexpected merging of player and character discourse spaces that arise in sessions of the roleplaying game *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*).The question I seek to answer through this paper is: How are the viewpoints needed to inhabit the mental spaces of *D&D* understood and reconciled from the perspective of the Discourse Viewpoint Space? Looking at campaigns from two YouTube series, *Critical Role* and *High Rollers*, I identify the network of interactions required by the performers, including "in-character" performances, "out of character" interactions, and liminal components of the game, such as rolling dice to determine in-game events. After establishing the boundaries of these mental spaces, I focus on instances where these spaces blend, such as pop culture references being used in-game, to demonstrate the necessity of a Discourse Viewpoint Space, a "higher-level discourse space" within which multiple viewpoints can be reconciled (Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2017, p. 570). Understanding the flow of multiple discourse spaces in a setting such as a role-playing game is driven by complex viewpoint networks, and can partly be identified through the features of speech (such as using an accent when in character). By focusing on instances of unexpected merging of character and player, my paper analyzes the means by which players integrate multiple viewpoints when playing *D&D*, and how this integration is necessary to strengthen what Banks et al. (2018) refer to as player-avatar relationships.

To obtain my data, I chose one episode from each YouTube channel; a 100th episode special, and an episode performed in front of a live audience respectively. These episodes would be more likely to include instances of players blending the viewpoints of their characters and themselves, and as both take place in the second half of their respective campaigns, players will have spent enough time developing their characters and community that inside jokes are more likely to appear. The selected excerpts from these episodes are analyzed to determine how metonymy and blending work across player and character mental spaces to allow for the recognition and processing of various levels of discourse and viewpoint. Examples include identifying elements of the scene that contribute to frame metonymy, such as a player invoking a voice or gesture indicative of their character, or the blending of both player and character viewpoints via a pop culture joke. As a hypothetical example, if the characters are eating at a tavern, and one quotes the McDonald's "I'm Lovin' It!" jingle, players must take a number of steps before responding to the situation, beginning with recognizing the jingle out-of-game and metonymically linking it to their in-game action of eating at the medieval equivalent of a restaurant. The clashing viewpoints between their identities as characters and players must then be resolved to blend the spaces together and consider what out-of-game information, if any, can inform their character's response. In analyzing how this blending of viewpoints across mental spaces is achieved in this unique setting, this paper proposes an approach to the construction of character identity in interactive fiction.

References

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