

"I'll just make sure we're all on the same page": Talking fictional worlds into being

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INTRODUCTION

Tabletop roleplaying games, such as Dungeons & Dragons, involve collaborative storytelling as a part of gameplay. This poster presents emerging results from a study of information practices in tabletop roleplaying games. Cox (2013) has introduced the concept of "information in social practice" to bring attention to information behaviours that are a part of social activities where information seeking or use may not be the primary focus. In tabletop roleplaying games, there are many aspects that could be considered information behaviours and information seeking as the players create and locate themselves within a fictional space. However, these behaviours occur in the context of ongoing gameplay, of the in-the-moment interactions of the social and conversational practices of gaming. The focus for this study is on the ways in which players inform one another by talking the world into being during the course of play, and it is influenced by work on discursive approaches to information (e.g., Tuominen & Savolainen 1997).

Discursive approaches to the study of information and informing have been applied within the LIS field; for example, McKenzie (2009, 2010) and McKenzie and Spoel (2014) use discursive methods to examine information exchanges in midwifery care. In an interaction what comes before can be treated as a knowledge base to inform later parts of an interaction (McKenzie 2010), and groups may have shorthand references to recontextualize past stories for use in current conversations (Georgakopoulou 2007). This study uses these types of discursive methods to examine ways information is created, shared, and used in the moment-by-moment discourse of the social practice of tabletop roleplaying games, specifically with a focus on the ways in which the fictional world is created and engaged with during interaction.

METHOD

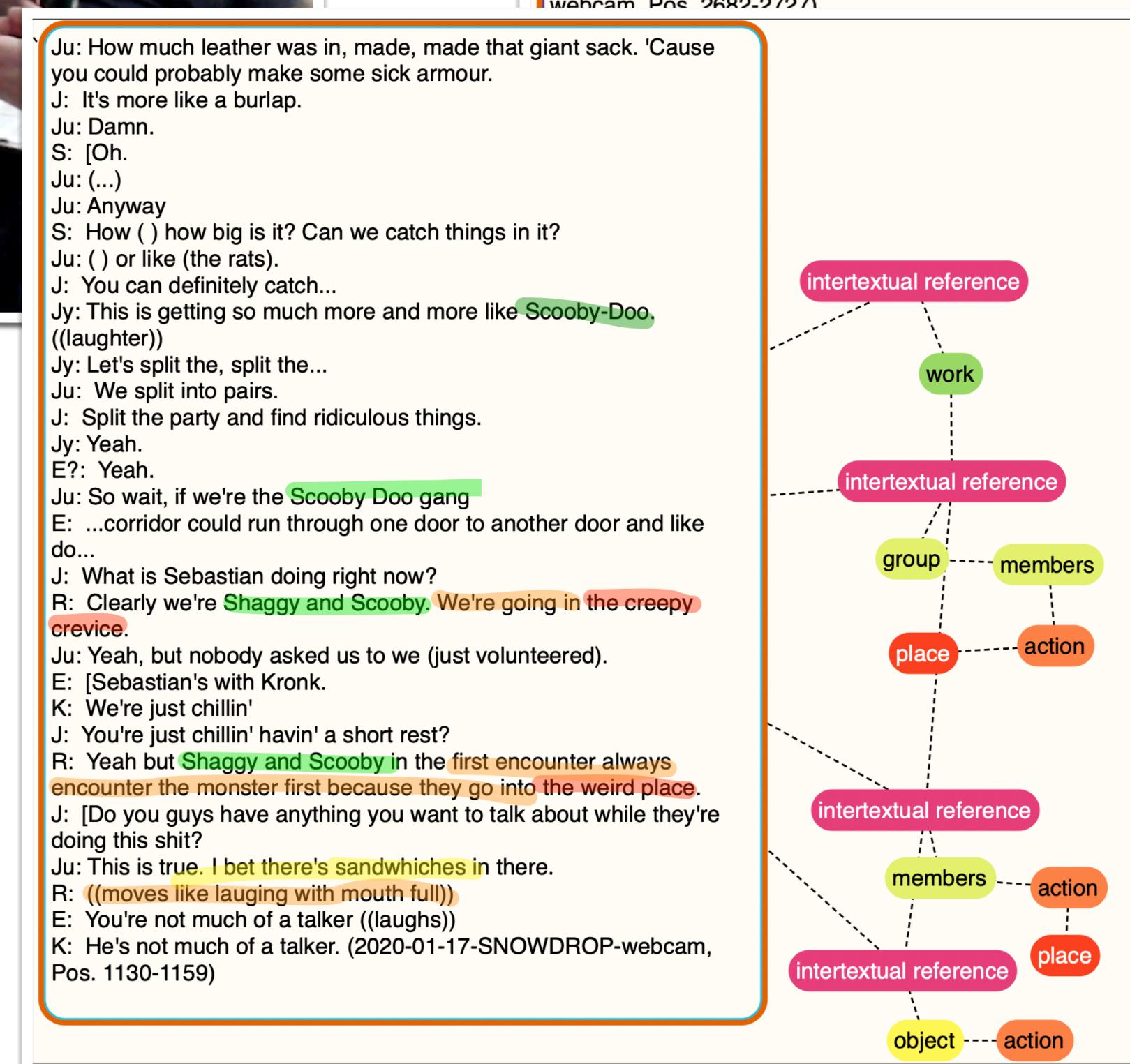
Data was collected from three different groups of players who were video recorded during actual gameplay. Each group was recorded on a minimum of two separate occasions. After gameplay had been recorded, interviews were conducted with the game masters (the game master is the person who runs the game and all of the characters that the other players meet) to gather further insights into how they build their worlds for play. The research was designed with a "big and small story" approach (e.g., see Oak 2013), where big stories are the types of interaction found in oral history and interview-style research, when narratives of past events are elicited and retold; and small stories are a part of in-the-moment interaction (for debates on narrative methods and big and small stories see: Bamberg 2006; Freeman 2006; Georgakopoulou 2007). Conversational methods used to inform and intersubjectively create a setting for the on-going play of each tabletop roleplaying game are the focus of the analysis presented herein.



EMERGING RESULTS

Players use a variety of techniques to communicate game settings. This poster focuses on the analysis of portions of talk where the game master is introducing the players to the game-world, resuming play, or starting a scene. These points in the game contain accounts and descriptions that communicate details of the world as they are needed in the moment. Settings in spoken narratives can be analyzed as emergent (for an example see Ochs & Capps 2001, chapter 4), as details, descriptions, and retellings of events are used to orient players to the world and to continue the collaborative storytelling involved in gameplay. In the course of conversation, intertextual references and internarrativity (concepts from Georgakopoulou 2007, pp. 58-59) and category work (for examples see Housley & Smith 2011, Stokoe 2012) are used to build a sense of place. Examples of players using these methods are shared on this poster and implications for discursive theories of information practice and behaviour will be further discussed.

B: Um, Brooz always wears, um
L: [In the next room.
B: a full set of hover bike leathers. All the time.
((group chuckles))
B: School, all the time.
E: Like you're ruining my style, walking with me.
B: [Yes.
B: But he thinks it's cool.
M: I'm picturing like a motorcross, like, outfit almost.
L: [That's what I'm picturing too, yeah.
B: Like, sometimes, sometimes it's like, sometimes it's like bike leathers.
E: [Like a jumpsuit?
M: Like more biker?
M: Yeah, or yeah.
B: Like, sometimes it's like, looks like armour. It's not actually armour 'cause that's part of the game, and I don't wanna () (chuckles) (stop ...)
M: [No, yeah. Yeah, no, Yeah, no.
M: [There's gonna be armour. I gotta add that still.
B: So he's like, picking out his, like, he, like, he like opens his closest, like, he like
M: Yeah.
J: [I imagine he owns, like, nothing but Under Armour clothes.
M: ((breathy chuckling))
B: [Oh, absolutely, and like, Axe body spray.
M: ((laughs))
E: (...)
B: (...)
L: [Classic Chad, yeah.
((chuckles))
E: Don't spray that Axe stuff near me. No, in this universe it should be Hammer instead of Axe.
M: ((chuckles))
((group chuckles))
L: Yeah, or Sickle, something like that.
M: [Yeah ()
M: Yeah, totally. Well, the energy drinks in this world are called, there's two major brands of energy drink. There's Trigger and Panic, and those are the two energy drinks that everyone drinks. So, I imagine you crushin' one of those. ((chuckles))
B: But he, he waves a gesture by the wall
E: [But
B: and it, like, the wall, like, dissolves in a way
M: Yeah, yeah
B: and, and it's just like this long, like, it's this closet, and it's just like, like, bike suit, bike suit, bike suit, bike suit, bike suit, and they're all like arranged by colour.
((group chuckles))
M: [Right, 'cause you're rich. That's right.
L: Like Barney Simpson's suit closet.
B: Exactly, yeah. Yeah, it's just suit-jamas as well.
M: You guys, um haven't, haven't been to, you've never been to this spot, um
L: [That's () () suit jamas () (chuckling))
B: [[(chuckles))
M: And um, so you're gonna clear four stress. (...) (2019-08-22-MUSCARI-webcam Pos. 2692-2727)



M: U:m (...) I'm going t:o just (...) ((gets up)) before we (...) make characters I'll just make sure ((sits again)) we're all on the same page as to \$what we're actually playing\$. So I'm gonna read, uh, just the intro to Slugblaster (...) just (as) sort of, get you guys, yeah, so you know what you're playing. So, um, ok, U::h, ((looks at screen, likely begins reading)) it's a game about bored small town teens sneaking into other dimensions. [Sauter up your ray gun, print some armour in= L: [Sweet
M: =your Dad's garage, grab your hover board, and watch out for metaterrestrials as you (...) try to make a name for yourself in the highly competitive punk rock world of interdimensional action sports. It's dangerous, it's stupid, it's got parent groups in a panic, and it's the coolest [thing ever.
?: (((some suppressed chuckles from more than one player)))

M: Yeah, you, you're think of yourself as like, like a skateboarding crew, right? Like your mission i(h)s to go find cool places and do (...) [and dick around (from) there. E: [Yes. [Like that's it.
J: [(joins chuckling)]
L: [((chuckles)) sick tricks on (it, yeah)
J: Clone yourselves, E: [(chuckles)]
M: [Yeah, exactly. Like that's sort of thing, like um, like, you know, exploration is part of something you might be interested in, but also just like (...) the teenagers in this world, just like other teenage pursuits, like, uh, like vaping and hhh Dungeons and Dragons and stuff (...) teenagers, ((chuckles))
B: they're, do they do these risky things 'cause that's how they blow off steam, right? And that's how they, like, they have lots of reasons, (They) form their identity. There's lots a reasons teenagers do risky things, but, and, and this is no different. In this world Slugblasting is the risky (...) it, i, it's the drugs and vaping and skateboarding, and, and, um, what's that thing where, it's the cinnamon challenge [and the (...) and the climbing (...) the, you, [those, did you= J&E: [((laughter)) Parkour?
J: M: =see (that) (thing (with))
E: [((chuckles))
M: Parkour but it was like, they took parkour and they just, just cut out just the insane part.
J: [Mm
M: So there was this thing where Russian teenagers were just going to the top of towers and just hanging off of them? E: [O::h, yeah
L: [((chuckles))
M: [Oh yeah, Russians hangin' off buildings [is like a whole= M: =subgenre.
M: [K, so yeah. [yeah
E: [And like (planking) and like weird things, same diff.
M: K, so you guys get the idea, [um
L: [They've, they've upgraded that [Mic now they're jumpin' off.

CONCLUSION

This poster is intended as a way to present examples of on-going analysis of information practices, particularly information sharing, in the context of tabletop roleplaying games. Recordings of talk in natural settings (or near natural, given the presence of the camera) provide the opportunity to closely analyze how information is constructed and exchanged moment-by-moment. It is our hope that the complex examples of multiple and layered methods for constructing a fictional setting presented on this poster will also spark discussion about methods for studying information practices and the social construction of information.

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