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Rainbow Six Siege: A Small Ethnography

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege (R6S) is a tactical first-person-shooter (FPS) released by Ubisoft in 2015. The game launched as a niche in the FPS genre, but now has over 40 million players across Playstation, Xbox, and PC. On average, 65,000-70,000 players play each day on PC alone. The game has an international community, a professional gaming scene where the grand prize has gone to 2 million dollars, and a unique game-specific linguistic style.

My guiding question going into this research was asking how R6S players change their language (if at all) to fit the nature of the game. After exploring this question I've concluded that the player base does change language by shortening phrases and speaking in fragments, a sort of language efficiency. This is the main claim of my research, with a secondary claim that the shortening isn't dumbing down the language because it's all still very complex. Players are fitting as much information in a phrase in as few words as possible. This is because R6S is a tactical game that is both fast paced *and* slow paced.

R6S games are 5v5 team-based rounds where each team is trying to achieve a certain objective. The attacking team of 5 is tasked with either securing an objective room uncontested for a time, planting a bomb defuser, or rescuing a hostage based on the game mode. The defending team of 5 must reinforce their objective rooms against the attacking team and protect the objective room, prevent the bombs from being defused, or protect the hostage from being taken. In the 'casual' game mode, the first team to win 3 rounds wins the game. In 'ranked' the first team to win 4 rounds (unless tied) wins the game. Attackers and defenders swap positions after each round is finished, so attackers will become defenders the next round and vice versa.

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      Everything about R6S is tactical, beginning with the in-game character selection. As of now, there are 23 attacking characters (called operators) and 23 defending operators. The full list can be seen in **figure 1.**
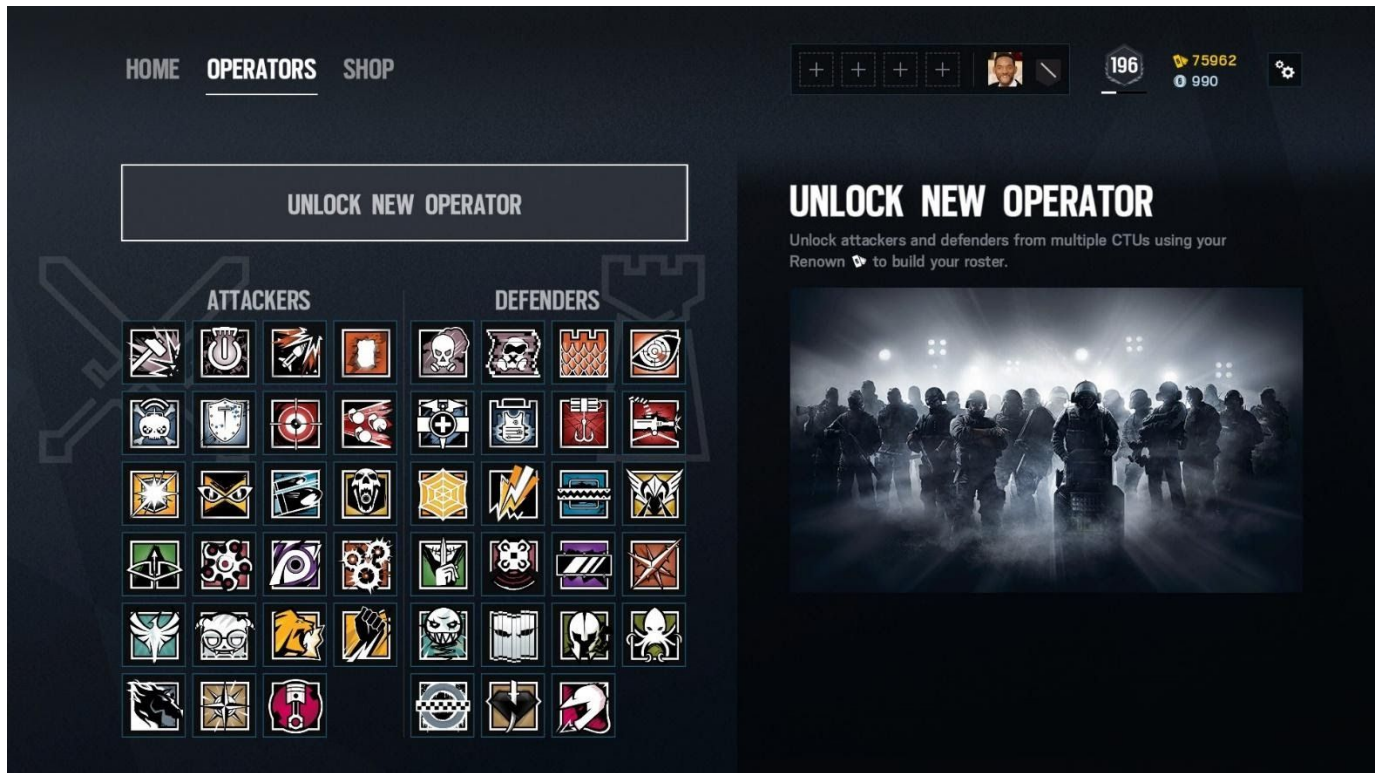
Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1 The complete operator selection screen in the main menu. Each operator has a unique ability, and this creates deep layered strategy.

      R6S has no respawns until the next round begins. Once you die in a round, you resort to controlling available cameras or drones to help give information to your still living teammates. This ensures that everyone is always involved, and it also highlights the main focus of the ethnography—language. R6S is a language heavy game, and the patterns and style of speaking inside of this community is unique to the game itself.

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Going into this research, I wanted to highlight the fact that many R6S players, including professional players and shoutcasters, 'dumb down' or fragmentize their language when playing. Based on the research, I've concluded that the speech isn't necessarily dumbed down, it has just become incredibly efficient. Thus, the term language efficiency was used during research.

So, what exactly is language efficiency? In the R6S community it is defined as giving as much information as possible in as few words as possible. In the game, gunfights break out and happen within seconds. The time-to-kill (TTK) is very fast in R6S, which means a few bullets, or a single headshot is enough to eliminate a player from the round. A typical gunfight lasts about 8 or less seconds, depending on cover and how many people are shooting. R6S is tactical, but that doesn't mean it's slow. In fact, I'd describe *Rainbow Six Siege* as the fastest slow game I've ever played. This is where the idea of language efficiency comes in.

Callouts—or short bits of information shared between teammates—are common in competitive online games. Callouts can be seen in other FPS style games and are a common way of team members sharing critical information with each other. R6S is unique because of its complex language and steep learning curve. It brings the variety and sheer amount of information from a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) style game and shoves it into the FPS genre. What does this mean?

R6S has 46 current operators, and that list is growing. Each operator does something different, and unique callouts need to be made for all of them. So, when I hear something like, "Jager lit, he's rotating, on flank," I know exactly what it means, and why. To me, this means that the defending operator known as Jager has been hurt, but he is rotating back, probably trying to flank, and he is a 3-speed operator, which means he can run faster than other ops in the game. I also know in the back of my mind that Jager has one of the best guns in the game, so I need to

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be extra careful. All of this information came from a simple six-word callout. This is an example

of language efficiency in use. My teammate doesn't have time to explain Jager's speed and all of

that background information to me. I need to know this and be able to react based on his/her

callout.

"Spotted us, watch the runout."

This probably would mean nothing to most people, even people familiar with FPS games

and competitive games in general. For a member of the R6S community though, this means a

lot… And it's usually bad news. This simple phrase saved several teammates I was with from

walking into a runout (where a defender runs outside to kill attackers who haven't entered the

building yet).
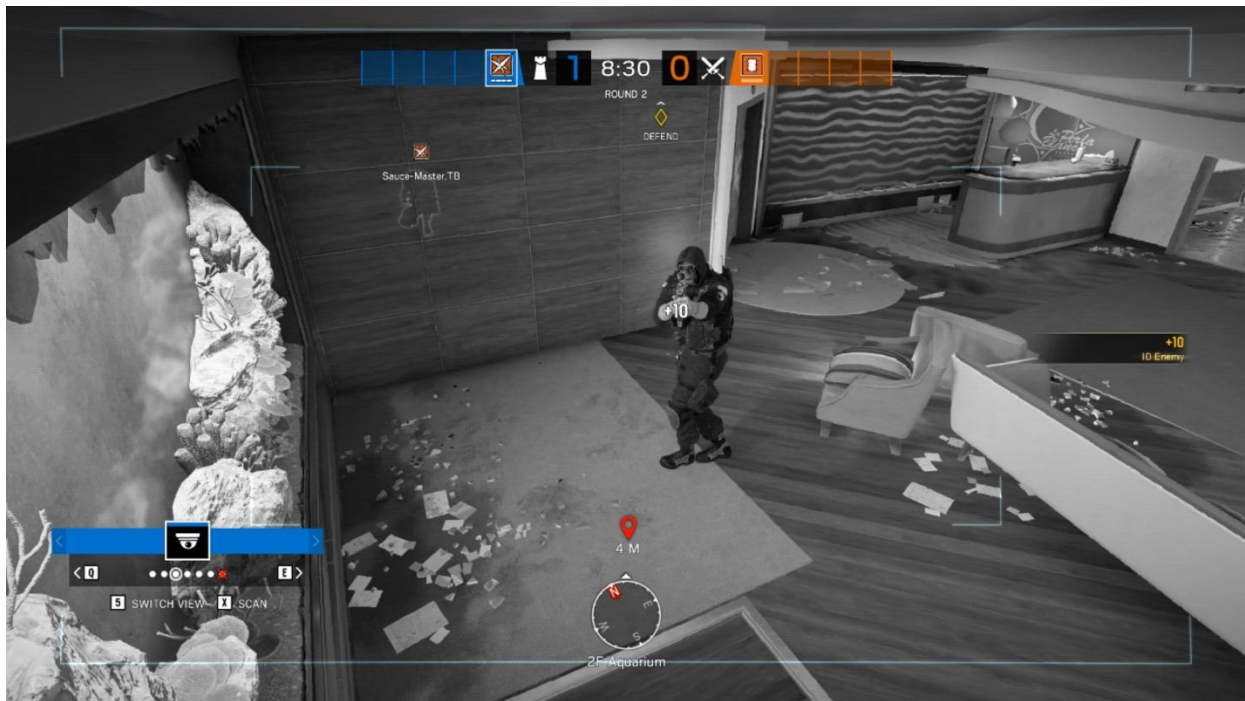
Figure 2 An enemy being spotted by a defender camera. Being spotted highlights your last known position for the entire team to see, and usually spells danger for the spotted individual.

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This sort of language efficiency is sometimes difficult to achieve in R6S, simply because of the sheer amount of information inside the game. For example: kill hole, rotation, Maverick hole, peek hole, and hole are all different kinds of callouts in the game. That's a lot of holes in walls, but they all mean different things. Even for seasoned veterans inside the community, things can get confusing.

"Rainbow is a little unique. It was a little overwhelming at first, not only because of the map size and amount of maps that the game has, but also because there are a lot of different operators in the game that do different things. So, you have to know that when someone says, 'there's a Jager or an Ash, or watch out for the Frost trap under the window'… Not only am I having to learn a locational callout or an enemy in this location, I need to know a type of trap or a gadget in the location. It made it overwhelming when I first started," Nathan, a friend of mine, explained.

The sheer number of callouts in the game emphasizes the importance of language in the R6S community. With 5-person teams, it can be easy to get mixed up in the number of callouts. Two players might be working together talking to one another, and I might need to focus on a different call because what the other two are talking about is not immediately relevant to me. This is the core reason why language is kept short and direct when in a game. There are also tons of nonverbal preconditions that the community expects players to know, and for new players, this isn't easy.

In every sense of the phrase, R6S is not user friendly. This game takes a long time to learn, but not simply because of the game mechanics. The sheer number of callouts and map specific strategies or features… Everything surrounding the language of it makes the game extremely hard to get into. New players and people new to the community are constantly

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assaulted with information, demands, and impatience from veteran players. When most players

play with people they don't know, they expect the other players on their team to know

everything that they know. This includes nonverbal preconditions and complete map/operator

knowledge. If this sounds like too much for a new player, it's because it definitely can be.

Something as simple as learning the difference between a reinforced wall and a soft wall (called

hard walls and soft walls in the community) can be a lot for a new player to take in, because

most games don't have the kind of destructibility that R6S has. Maps in R6S can be torn apart by

gunfire and explosions, and very few walls are truly 100% safe to hide behind.

Figure 3 A 'hard wall' (left) and a 'soft wall' (right) side by side. The wall on the right is completely destructible, but the hard metal wall to the left can only be breached by certain operators.

Watching professional games can help new players ease into the community, because the

shoutcasters who broadcast the games generally use the same style of speaking that is seen

in-game, although obvious differences exist due to them publicly broadcasting a game. For

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example, a shoutcaster saying, "They've breached moto hatch!" could help a newer player see what breaching is, what moto hatch is, where that hatch is, and why it is a good idea to breach that hatch. The professional players and shoutcasters act as linguistic guides and linguistic innovators in the R6S community, and many of the callouts are versions of what we hear in the pro scene.

It's easy to assume that players are simplifying their speech in the R6S community. That's how I generally described it, but after doing the work on this ethnography, I realized 'simplifying' was the wrong term. The callouts and in-game speech of the R6S community are incredibly unique because of the amount of information in the game. Players need to build an internal library of non-verbal queues and information to effectively understand and react to verbal callouts in-game. It takes a long time, and without help, it isn't easy. R6S is more than, "Hey there's a guy on the stairs, get him," it's more like, "Hey, Blackbeard on Cool Vibes, no shields." Even that was a bit long for a typical callout, but the essential discovery of this research is that the R6S community's speech isn't dumbed down or simple—it's deeply complex, while simultaneously extremely short.

When there are 5 people on a team talking over one another, it can be easy to mix up information. That's why callouts are kept short and direct. They give as much information as possible in as few words as possible, and they can mean the difference between life and death, winning and losing, or even 2 million dollars and nothing in the pro scene. Language is a critical component of the game, and the way it's used is different than any other FPS. This is what sets the *Rainbow Six Siege* community apart from other competitive gaming communities.