

**“BOŞ YAPMAYIN, KEEP FIGHTING”:
CHARACTER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH
LANGUAGE IN THE GAME VALORANT**

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Abstract <p>Tämän maisterintutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää, kuinka kieltä ja koodinvaihtoa hyödynnetään videopelihahmojen identiteetin rakentamiseen ja representoimiseen <i>Valorant</i>-nimisessä videopelissä. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostui pelistä otetuista ääninäytteistä, joissa esiintyi englannin lisäksi muita kieliä.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisen tutkimuksen keinoin, hyödyntäen sisällönanalyysin ja diskurssintutkimuksen metodeja. Tutkimusaineisto käytiin manuaalisesti läpi, jonka jälkeen ääninäytteet luokiteltiin koodinvaihdon muotoja vastaaviin kategorioihin: ääninäytteet muulla kielellä kuin englanti, extra-, inter-, ja intra-sentetiaalinen koodinvaihto, sekä toistuva kielenkäyttö. Aineistosta poimittiin lisäksi kaksi yksittäistä pelihahmoa tarkemman analyysin kohteeksi. Fokuksena oli tarkastella yksityiskohtaisemmin, kuinka hahmojen identiteettiä rakennettiin kielenkäytön avulla.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa selvisi kielenkäytön ja koodinvaihdon olevan tärkeässä asemassa videopelissä olevien hahmojen identiteetin ja representaation rakentamisessa, sekä immersion luomisessa ja ylläpidossa. Hahmojen sanavalintojen ja kielenkäyttötapojen avulla pelissä kuvattiin hahmojen moniulotteisia identiteettejä, sekä ylläpidettiin ja toteutettiin autenttisia representaatioita. Tutkimuksessa kävi ilmi myös koodinvaihdon tapahtuvan yleisimmin yksittäisen sanojen tai fraasien tasolla.</p>	
Keywords code-switching, language use, identity, video games, linguistic identity, representation	
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Additional information For my family and friends, thank you <3	

TABLES

Table 1. Character information. *Beta 7.4.2020 to release 2.6.2020..... 26

Table 2. Categorized data table with character names. 27

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	BACKGROUND	3
2.1	Code-Switching.....	3
2.1.1	Approaches to Code-Switching.....	4
2.1.2	Types of Code-Switching.....	6
2.1.3	Social Functions of Code-Switching.....	7
2.2	Language and Identity.....	9
2.3	Representation.....	11
2.4	Video Game Research.....	12
2.4.1	Immersion, Presence and Flow.....	13
2.4.2	Language in Video Games.....	14
2.4.3	Representation in Video Games.....	15
3	PRESENT STUDY	17
3.1	Aim and Research Questions.....	17
3.2	Data.....	18
3.2.1	Valorant.....	19
3.2.2	Character Introductions of Fade and Gekko.....	21
3.3	Methods.....	23
3.3.1	Set-up of Analysis.....	24
4	ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	25
4.1	Overview of Data.....	26
4.1.1	Elaborating on the Categories.....	29
4.1.2	Categories through the Characters.....	30
4.2	Fade.....	32
4.2.1	Analysis of Fade’s Voice Lines.....	33
4.2.2	Fade’s Character Identity.....	34
4.3	Gekko.....	36
4.3.1	Analysis of Gekko’s Voice Lines.....	36
4.3.2	Gekko’s Character Identity.....	38
4.4	Discussing the Findings.....	39
5	CONCLUSION	42
	REFERENCES	44

1 INTRODUCTION

The video games of today have not always been what they are now. To get a better understanding of the undoubted evolution of video games, I will briefly glance through the history of them. The first video games were created for minicomputers in the 1950s and 60s. There were breakthroughs in the video game industry in the early 1970s as the popularity of arcade games increased, and the first home video game console, *Magnavox Odyssey*, became commercially available. Although the initial endeavour into first-person shooter (FPS) games was in 1973, through *Maze War* (Karthikeyan, 2022), it took nearly two decades for the genre to become established. In the early 1990s, the video game developer, *id Software*, defined the foundation for FPS games with *Wolfenstein 3D* in 1992, and *Doom* a year later in 1993, which set the basis for future FPS gaming. Merely 30 years later, in 2020, *Riot Games* released *Valorant* – a tactical FPS that will be discussed more in depth in the present study.

Whilst the history of video and FPS games is long, my personal journey is much shorter, and a lot more recent. I had first seen content surrounding *Valorant* appear on various social media platforms around its release in 2020, and the game piqued my interest then. However, it took me three years to be able to play it myself due to not having the necessary gaming equipment. In January of 2023, I was finally able to start playing, and the game has been the first and only FPS that I have enjoyed playing thus far. As of making this study, I have spent close to 500 hours on the server exploring the different game modes available and trying to get better at the game. Besides playing, I have spent countless hours watching various contents surrounding the game. This includes live streams, videos produced by other players as well as official content, such as the annual tournament series, *Valorant Champions Tour (VCT)*, organised by the creators of the game, *Riot Games*. Throughout my time playing and watching *Valorant*, I always thoroughly enjoyed seeing and hearing the different languages promoted in the game.

What is particularly dear to my heart, has been seeing myself and my background be represented as *Valorant* includes a Turkish character.

The aim of this paper is to explore identity representation and construction through the use of language in *Valorant*, specifically examining how code-switching occurs and is utilised. By taking a language-centric approach, I am going to investigate the ways in which language is used and in what capacity, as well as what role it serves in the representation of identities in the game. While analysing the use of linguistic tools through qualitative methods of discourse and content analysis, I will also be investigating how language is being utilised to construct the identities of the characters within the context of a video game. To do this, I will be considering the characters themselves as individuals, and pay close attention to the practise of code-switching.

The research on video games is a vastly growing field with a plethora of perspectives to be explored. Several studies on video games have their focus on the players: how they perceive the game and/or its characters or how games can be utilised in education and development of graduate skills (see Alexander et al., 2010; Barr, 2017; Wiklund & Ekenberg, 2009). I found that the majority of research focusing on identity and video games looks at the player identity and identification through characters (see Gallelli & Fanelli, 2010; Tichon & Makaresz, 2019). As for representation in video games, there have been many previous studies on the topic, especially focusing on the perspective of gender representation (Kondrat, 2015; Shell, 2021; Süngü, 2020). In regard to *Valorant*, even if the game amasses a whopping approximate of 28 million monthly users (D’Anastasio, 2023), there has been little research on *Valorant* – this could possibly be due to it being a fairly recent release, only being published under four years ago in June of 2020. The research focus regarding *Valorant* has been on the player base and their interactions (see Huffman, 2023; Ide & Hosobe, 2023; Saputra & Sawitri, 2023), instead of what happens inside of the game world. The present study intends to fill this gap of research, and additionally contribute to research focusing on game character identity, and language as a tool for constructing identities in a video game setting; specifically, in regard to *Valorant*.

The findings of this paper can be used to examine the relationships between video games, language, and identity as well as how they interact with each other in attempts to construct and represent identities.

2 BACKGROUND

In this chapter, the present study will be grounded to existing research by presenting and defining previous studies regarding code-switching, language and identity, multilingualism, as well as representation. These concepts will be discussed in the context of video games. I will be introducing the definitions of various key terms and concepts present throughout the paper that will dictate the way in which this research will be concluded.

2.1 Code-Switching

Originally emerging in the 1950s, code-switching (sometimes typed as *code switching*, *codeswitching* or abbreviated as *CS*, but in this paper, I will be referring it to as *code-switching* excluding citations) remained as somewhat of an invisible phenomenon.

After the work of Gumperz and his associates in the late 1960s and early 1970s, code-switching gained increasing popularity in its respective fields (Gardner-Chloros, 2009, p. 9). It was additionally situated as “a product of local *speech community identities*” (Hall & Nilep, 2015, p. 598), referring to the language and communication practices of the speech community members being influenced through exposure, thus appearing frequently amongst those individuals. Speech communities will be introduced further in the study in more detail. The interpretation of code-switching can change based on the theoretical framework and context in which it occurs, albeit the general consensus of the definition seems to be that code-switching refers

to the process of mixing more than one language or lect (a specific form of language, language cluster, or dialect) when communicating. In order to have a better understanding of the multi-dimensionality of code-switching, it is important to visit these other definitions of code-switching to see the latitude of interpretations available out there, and to find one that the present study can utilise.

Additionally, code-switching has been historically tied to bilingual and multilingual language use – both of which have different definitions as to what level of proficiency and language knowledge is required to be considered one or the other. This study, when referencing to bi- or multilingualism, will follow Pavlenko's (2006, p. 2) definition, where speakers who use two or more languages in their daily lives – regardless of respective levels of proficiency – are considered as bi- or multilingual. This definition is the most comprehensive as it does not exclude speakers based on their language competence, but rather has an all-encompassing view of who is considered a bilingual or a multilingual speaker.

Hymes (1974, as cited in Ayeomoni, 2006, p. 91) refers to code-switching as “a common term for alternative use of two or more languages, varieties of a language or even speech styles”, whereas Myers-Scotton (1993a, p. 47) suggests it to be the “use of two or more languages in the same conversation, usually within the same conversational turn, or even within the same sentence of that turn”. Auer (1998, p. 1) defines code-switching as “the alternating use of two or more “codes” within one conversational episode”. As evident in the different definitions, the overall idea of code-switching referring to the alternating use of two or more language varieties remains similar.

As for the present study, I will be using the definition provided by Gardner-Chloros (2009, p. 4), where code-switching is described as “the use of more than one language or lect, such as dialect, sociolect or jargon, in the course of a single sentence or in the same conversation”. This definition is revised and refined, while still containing all the prior descriptions that were introduced. I found it to be broad with a clear idea of code-switching and its dimensions, as well as being supportive of the analysis of the diverse multilingual data used in this paper.

2.1.1 Approaches to Code-Switching

Due to the variety that exists within code-switching practices, the field is ever-changing and in an on-going process of attempting to establish a set of disciplines to follow when it comes to

analysis. This has culminated into three distinctive approaches to the study of code-switching. These approaches, introduced in Boztepe (2003, p. 3) and Gardner-Chloros (2009, p. 10), are the structural, the pragmatic or conversation analytic, and the sociolinguistic approach.

The approach that has evolved the most as its own distinctively separate practice is the structural approach. Focusing on the grammatical qualities of code-switching, the structural approach focuses on finding explanations and establishing rules for the identified patterns discovered in samples of code-switching. The advantage of the structural approach is that it provides frameworks that enable the discovery of patterns and “properties of the languages under analysis” (MacSwan, 2012, p. 346). On the other hand, the structural approach runs the risk of losing the variability of language use in code-switching practices. As noted in Gardner-Chloros (2009), several of the structural theories aim to impose a set of universal rules that dictate language alternation, but this becomes difficult due to the nature of language practices being creative, unpredictable, and context-driven.

Offering different viewpoints, the other two approaches take on the task of looking at code-switching practices through the eyes of the speakers and the context. The second approach, regarded as the pragmatic or the conversation analytic approach, tries to identify the meanings in conversations produced by code-switching (Gardner-Chloros, 2009, p. 10). It looks at the specific interactions from the perspective of the conversationalist, investigating the reasons as to why certain language choices are negotiated, and what functions they serve within the context of the conversation. The idea is to determine the meaning of code-switching, not purely from the level of grammatical or societal structures, but rather from the level of conversational structures and patterns.

Finally, with the aim of examining the broader social factors and their influence on code-switching practices, there is the sociolinguistic approach that additionally utilises ethnographical descriptions in its study. It explores “how social meaning is created in CS and what specific discourse functions it serves” (Boztepe, 2003, p. 3), as well as investigates the roles of societal structures and contexts. Identity becomes central for the sociolinguistic approach as it looks at the ways in which code-switching is used to indicate the social identity of the speaker (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Furthermore, Panhwar and Buriro (2020, p. 266) refer the sociolinguistic approach to “explore code-switching as a social language behaviour that reflects the linguistic, social and cultural norms of a speech community”. Since the use of code-switching in the data

will be studied through the perspective of identity construction, the sociolinguistic approach is used in this paper as it aligns with the perspective of the present study.

2.1.2 Types of Code-Switching

To understand how code-switching might appear in actual language use, and to help categorise the data of this study, it is important to look at different types of code-switching in addition to the previously discussed approaches. In this chapter, I will be introducing the three distinct categories of code-switching – extra-, inter-, and intra-sentential – as proposed by Poplack (1980), and further discussed and defined by others, including Fanani and Ma'u (2018) and Adi (2017). In order to demonstrate these different types of code-switching, I will be using examples retrieved from Poplack (1980) and Fanani and Ma'u (2018), presented how they originally were in their respective texts.

The extra-sentential type, sometimes referred to as tag-switching or emblematic switching, refers to the act of introducing units of words or slang (tags) in another language into discourse that is otherwise monolingual. These tags can be singular words, slang, or tag phrases. The tags usually serve the purpose of being a marker of linguistic capabilities as well as acting as sentence fillers or discourse markers (Fanani & Ma'u, 2018, p. 69). Examples of these markers are expressions and tags, such as '*no way*', '*oy*', and '*you know*'.

The inter-sentential type of code-switching is used to describe instances, where complete clauses or sentences are uttered in a different language after certain clause or sentence boundaries (Adi, 2017, p.42). The switch happens between sentences with a presence of two or more sentences. This can be noted in the following sample from Fanani and Ma'u (2018, p. 69): "That is the book. *Aku mau membaca buku itu besok*. (That is the book. I would like to read it tomorrow.)" (Bahasa Indonesia). The third category is the intra-sentential type, which refers to code-switching that occurs within a single utterance with little to no interruptions or hesitations indicating a switch. The switch can happen at different levels, such as clause, phrase, or unit. An example of this practice as demonstrated by Poplack (1980, p. 589): "Why make Carol SENTARSE ATRAS PA'QUE (sit in the back so) everybody has to move PA'QUE SE SALGA (for her to get out)?" (Spanish).

2.1.3 Social Functions of Code-Switching

Code-switching practices can serve different purposes as mentioned before, but first and foremost, comes the social functionality. As Boztepe (2003) notes, code-switching functions “primarily as a symbol of group identity and solidarity among members of the speech community” (p. 17) as it acts as a tool of identification and demonstration of membership to certain groups and communities. Speech communities are a central part of the theories emerging from the study of identity in relation to code-switching and will be discussed in this section.

Blom and Gumperz (1972) proposed code-switching to be categorised into situational and metaphorical code-switching based on their functionality in social situations, as well as introducing three different social constrains that can affect the type of code-switching used. Situational code-switching refers to a change in the situation with the assumption that another available language (variety) is appropriate, thus the switch occurs as a means of remaining appropriate. According to Blom and Gumperz (1972, p. 424), “a direct relationship between language and social setting” is assumed. On the other hand, metaphorical code-switching implies a switch in choice of language when the situation remains unchanged and there is a need to convey special social meanings.

The three social constrains are setting, social situation, and social event. The physical environment of the speakers’ social lives is described as the setting, whereas social situation refers to the “particular constellations of [speakers], gathered in particular settings during a particular span of time” (Blom & Gumperz, 1972, p. 423). Social event is a specific definition of the same social situation at a certain point in time. When examining code-switching, these social constrains might influence and help determine the type of code-switching that emerges as a result of the social circumstances. Gumperz (1982) later suggested adding the concept of ‘*we-code*’ and ‘*they-code*’ to categorise code according to their primary function. We-code refers to in-group and informal relations, often through minority language, whereas they-code is associated with the majority language and more formal, out-group activities. The approach offered by Blom and Gumperz (1972) has been subject to criticism though, as it fails to consider the dynamic nature of language by having a taxonomic outlook to code-switching (Myers-Scotton, 1993a, p. 52-55).

In an attempt to build upon some of the aforementioned ideas, to counter the criticisms of the Blom and Gumperz model, and to see how identities are negotiated through code-

switching, Myers-Scotton (1993a, 1993b) introduced the highly influential “Markedness Model”. The model takes a more situational approach to code-switching, suggesting speakers to be aware of markedness in regards of linguistic codes available for all interactions. However, the selection of these codes is based on what kind of persona the speakers hope to convey and/or what relationships with others they want to assert. Additionally, it proposes the speakers to operate through rights-and-obligations sets (RO sets), which are abstract structures stemming from situational circumstances. The model consists of four maxims introduced in Myers-Scotton (1993b) that are used to explain the social motivation for code-switching:

(a) *The Sequential Unmarked Choice Maxim*: [italics in original] Switch from one unmarked code to another when situational features change during an interaction such that the unmarked choice changes.

(b) *The CS as an unmarked Choice Maxim*: Maintain a pattern of switching between codes when the unmarked rights and obligations balance for participants is that indexed by both codes, not one alone.

(c) *The Marked Choice Maxim*: Switch to a marked choice in order to negotiate a different rights and obligations balance than the one indexed by the unmarked choice.

(d) *The Exploratory Choice Maxim*: In the less conventionalized exchanges where an unmarked choice is not obvious, use CS to propose one or more codes, each the unmarked index of possible rights and obligations balance for the interaction. (p. 480)

The Markedness Model operates based on the assumption that the conversationalists have an innate knowledge of linguistic varieties, and the links between code choices and RO sets; however, as Auer (1998, p. 159) highlights, it is rarely so that the conversationalists have an unambiguous definition or understanding of the situation. Instead, social meanings are being actively created and produced in the interaction rather than knowing what linguistic choice would be the normal, expected RO set. Nilep (2006, p. 12) additionally notes that due to the way the model operates, the analyst is also required to “make assumptions about each

individual speaker's knowledge and understanding of the speech situation", thus explaining code-switching practices based on the analyst's assumptions.

2.2 Language and Identity

Identity is a multi-dimensional concept that has been defined in numerous ways across various research fields and has evolved from the essentialist idea of a fixed core self to the poststructuralist notion of identity being something fluid and ambiguous (Virkkula & Nikula, 2010). It has also been proposed that people have multiple identities instead of just one, with all further emerged terms sharing the notion of a plural identity. Individuals are therefore considered to have various, fluid and overlapping identities, as noted by Laakso et al. (2016, p. 23).

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) offer an extensive and negotiable definition, where identity is viewed as "the social positioning of self and other" (p. 586), being tied to language and emerging in interaction. In the same paper, they incorporate previous research traditions in order to propose a collective framework for "the analysis of identity as produced in linguistic interaction" (p. 585). The framework consists of five principles they consider essential to the study of identity: (1) the emergence principle, (2) the positionality principle, (3) the indexicality principle, (4) the relationality principle, and (5) the partialness principle. The emergence principle considers identity to be constructed actively in social action through language within the speaker, instead of being predetermined. Conversely, the positionality principle considers identity to be temporary. It examines the macro and micro details of identity, and how social actors are positioned in interaction. The indexicality principle looks at how identity positions are created through the use of context-dependent linguistic units. Identity formation is thought to be multilayered, meaning it occurs on several indexical levels, including the following:

- (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels;
- (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position;
- (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles;
- and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are

ideologically associated with specific personas and groups. (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 594)

The relationality principle is interested in the construction of identity through the means of several relations as it is noted identities are not independent, but rather reliant on other identity positions and social actors. It suggests identities to be constructed through multiple intersecting relations, working at many levels, and emerging in relation to other identities. Lastly, the partialness principle which considers identities to never be complete, but instead partial, perpetually fluid, and shaped through interaction and context (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

In terms of language identity more specifically, Block (2009, p. 43) defines it as the “relationship between one’s sense of self and different means of communication, understood in terms of language, a dialect or sociolect, as well as multimodality”. It alludes to the comprehensive role of language in identity construction, whereas linguistic identity means considering oneself to be a member of certain groups that speak the same language (Siebenhütter, 2023, p. 5). Referring to the reworked formulation by Leung et al. (1997), Block (2009) notes language identity to be comprised of three types of communication relationships: language expertise, language affiliation, and language inheritance. Expertise implies the speakers’ language proficiency. Affiliation indicates to the attachment or identification speakers feel regarding a language, whether they belong to the social group typically associated with it or not (Leung et al., 1997, p. 555), focusing on attitudes, and identification with particular forms of communication. On the other hand, language inheritance refers to an individual being born into a specific social setting regardless of their affiliation to a certain language or dialect. Aligned with the post-structuralist view of identity is Block’s (p. 40) idea of language identities to be similarly ever-shifting.

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) introduce ‘*acts of identity*’, referring to linguistic behaviour, in which personal identities and pursuit for social roles are revealed (p. 14). Their framework also considers identity to be fluid, and for the social action of identifying to happen through linguistic choices. Acts of identity are considered to be a process of indexing in a multidimensional manner, occasionally being linked to speech communities as Block (2009, p. 41) observes.

Speech communities (Morgan, 2005) refer to groups of people with a shared set of norms along with expected language behaviours and systems that are constantly negotiated. The

concept considers the prolonged interactions in the community to signify and construct meaningfulness in participation and across social contexts. It assumes there is a communally understood system about meaningfulness across social contexts existing among the speech community members. As Morgan (p.3) reflects, the identity, ideology, and agency realised in society occur and exist within speech communities. Regarding the expected language behaviours, it is suggested that the awareness of how language selection, variation, and discourse represent different socio-cultural dimensions, is included in the speech community membership (p. 4). As the concept of speech communities can be linked to the many ideas regarding the relationship between language and identity, it holds a fundamental position in how code-switching is understood as an identity-based phenomenon (Hall & Nilep, 2015, p. 599).

What remains visible in most of the aforementioned concepts, is the notion of identity being fluid. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) suggest approaches based in discourse (such as the ones introduced) to generally consider identity as a “dynamic and shifting process, capable of both reproducing and destabilising the discursive order” (p. 34). The ways in which identities are understood are subject to change, as they both uphold and challenge existing communication patterns by being constantly constructed and negotiated through speech and interaction. The entire idea is well summarised by Virkkula and Nikula (2010, p. 2) noting: “language and discourses shape people but people also constantly shape discourses”.

2.3 Representation

Representation has various definitions, but the consensus can be summarised as representation to be the notion of quoting a presence of something that is not there yet assumed to be authentic and present.

Webb (2009, p. 7) writes representation to be the processes of how people experience, communicate, know, and handle themselves, others, as well as the world. It is something that becomes apparent through interaction with others and the world, constructing meaning and making meaning present. The act of ‘*standing in for*’ is also principal to the concept as Suppes et al. (1994, p. 517) note representation to be “an image, model, or reproduction of that thing”.

Importantly, it defines what reality is as well as shapes the understanding of reality (Webb, 2009, p. 14), meaning that representation covers many areas, such as ethnicity, gender, and age.

One of the key aspects of representation is language. Hall (1997, as cited in Balela & Mundy, 2011, p. 5) showcases the intertwining of language and representation by arguing representation to mean the use of language in a way that is meaningful to represent or say something about the world meaningful to others. Language is used to construct humans as “the language we speak, how we speak it, with what accent, what fluency and what content, determines who we can be in the world, and sets in motion a series of ideas, knowledges and attitudes about and for us” (Webb, 2009, p. 39). The ways in which individuals construct themselves and make sense of others happens in and through language, as it is a tool for upholding and inventing the world through interaction. I mentioned the act of standing in, and that is where language becomes vital as it enables something to make present of something else.

As representation occurs in interaction, there is the added aspect of self-representation, meaning the act of representing self to others. It refers to an individual’s own view of self, and sometimes also to how an individual hopes to be perceived (Thagard & Wood, 2015), drawing on socially available and priorly significant discourses (Pietikäinen & Dufva, 2006, p. 212). Noted by Cramer (1998, p. 336), self-representation occurs in reference to an accumulation of identity-creating factors, such as roles or images, and shows identity representation and construction to additionally occur through the individual’s actions instead of solely through others.

2.4 Video Game Research

As the present study investigates a video game, I will be briefly discussing the field of video game research, with the focus being on language, identity, and representation within the context of video games.

Regardless of the recency of video game studies as a field, video games have been studied and defined time and time again. Gee (2014, p. 42) argues that they share the syntax and semantics of the real world, despite being perceived in terms of spaces, objects, actions, and what their affordances are. Affordances refer to what value objects have and offer based on the innate use they have (Gibson, 1979). Gee (2015, p. 25) also mentions the *‘probe-response-reflect-*

probe again cycle’, which he considers to be a type of conversation that is fundamental to the real world and video games. This idea can be simplified to there being a goal to forward an action (probe or question), which gets a response from the world. This is then followed by a reflection on the result, and acted (probe) upon again. Additionally, there has been a long-lasting debate regarding whether games fall under ludology, meaning they are dynamic and rule-based, or under narratology, where they are considered static and immutable (Koenitz, 2018, p. 2).

The consensus for the present study is that, instead of separating ludology and narratology, I will be taking a ludonarrative approach where both are present. The comprehensive description for games I will be using comes from Juul (2005), where the concept of a game is defined as systems organised through a certain set of rules with outcomes that may vary. The players have an impact on the outcome as well as some level of emotional attachment, making the outcome negotiable. This means that, while participating in a game, the players influence the outcomes by playing according to the rules.

2.4.1 Immersion, Presence and Flow

Immersion, specifically in video games, is described by Grimshaw et al. (2008, p. 3) as “the feeling of being encapsulated inside the game world and not being in front of a monitor anymore”. It aims to completely surround the player in the reality of the fictional world through different means.

Ermi and Mäyrä (2005, pp. 7-8) distinguish three different forms of immersion, which are as follows: (1) sensory immersion, (2) challenge-based immersion, and (3) imaginative immersion. Sensory immersion is focused on the audiovisual execution, whereas challenge-based immersion relates to challenges in the game. This includes the use of motor skills and mental skills, for instance, problem-solving or strategising. Imaginative immersion combines characters and storylines, aiming to have the player live through the characters and/or experience the game world (pp. 7-8).

Emerging from interactions is presence, meaning the sense of being in the world. Presence is defined by Lombard and Ditton (1997) as “the perceptual illusion of nonmediation” as well as “a mediated experience that seems very much like it is not mediated”. There is also the concept of flow, coined by Csikszentmihalyi (1991), that refers to the player’s total immersion

with a heightened state of mind, suggesting simultaneously high levels of concentration and attention. This is in addition to proficiency when in the process of facing challenges (Jin, 2011, p. 114).

Michailidis et al. (2018, p. 3) argue immersion and presence to be indistinguishable from each other as terms, making presence the core of immersion. Moreover, they suggest flow to not appear conceptually distinct enough from immersion and presence to be set apart, but rather for these terms to be used interchangeably (p. 5). Although I acknowledge the similarities and overlapping qualities between the three terms, I disagree with the notion of them being interchangeable and indistinguishable. I argue immersion to be relevant to the present study based on the depicted definitions as I will explore if and how voice lines contribute to immersion. The other terms are irrelevant as they are focused on different aspects of the game.

2.4.2 Language in Video Games

Both written and spoken language in video games can serve a variety of purposes, such as being narrative or informative. Most of the language in games occurs in relation to the game mechanics, which refers to “what you can do with things in game” (Gee, 2014, p. 42). Since the present study focuses on voice lines, I will focus on speech and language as a spoken medium in this section.

Although video games are created with many components, language is particularly important as it has different functions, and can be utilised in various ways to create the game world. As noted by Domsch (2016, p. 197), sound – including spoken language, can offer communicative feedback on the actions of the game, and be used to augment immersion. Ng and Nesbitt (2013) write similarly, with a focus on speech to be feasibly used to relay instructions, signals, and other information about the events of the game quickly; instead of also having to type or use other tools available in the game.

Besides language being a tool for actual gameplay, it can also be used for immersion by using specific terminology. This means vocabulary related to certain themes, such as military jargon, can be utilised for immersion as well as for the construction of the game world, the game character identities and personalities.

Brusk and Björk (2009) note the communication between the players and between the game characters to emerge from performed actions receiving feedback, which in turn triggers

new actions. Gee (2014) further proposes video games to be turn-taking conversations, where the game responds to the actions of the player, making the nature of games communicative. He argues that talking happens through actions, as all conversations are considered to be actions and responses to actions (p. 62). In the game, this can be noted as the players speaking through actions, and the game responding “in terms of affordances for actions” (p. 43). The approach Gee (2014) introduces is rather distinctive, as it considers video games to act similarly to conversations. Although not directly comparable to human interaction, he equates actions happening in the game to speech acts. More often than not, games are designed to act in this way – responding somehow to the actions of the player, rarely through dialogue, but via provoking new actions.

To assign meanings to game events, Gee (pp. 44-45) introduces the game’s universe of discourse determined by the story in the game, including everything associated with the game. This includes, for example, the characters, places, and objects. He notes that “the story keys us into what exists in the game world, what properties each thing has, and how they relate to each other” (p. 44). The game’s universe of discourse helps create immersion along with building the game world, thus furthering the notion of video games being turn-taking conversations as the game events become meaningful to the player and within the game world.

2.4.3 Representation in Video Games

Gee (2014, p. 21) states “life mimics games and games mimic life”, highlighting the significance of representation in video games. Similar to how video games emulate the real world through interaction, they also reflect and act as effective tools for representation. Video games have established their position in media, being able to shape people’s comprehension of the world through varied representations (Šisler, 2008, p. 203). Both map and sound designs can contribute to representations, especially with the idea of mirroring the real world into the game world. However, since my focus is on characters, I will omit further discussions on this. I will instead explore some of the ways in which representation in video games can be established and discuss the importance of it.

Hoping to captivate and engage their audiences, video games might utilise representations to achieve that goal. This can occur through numerous ways, such as game mechanics as Pérez Latorre (2015) notes them to be able to “contribute substantially to the representation of

the character/player” (p. 422). This refers to what the characters are made able to do within the game, and how – such as what kind of abilities they might have in addition to the general game mechanics, like walking or jumping.

Another way of achieving representation is with ‘*avatars*’, which in the game world act as secondary or surrogate bodies for the player (Gee, 2014, p. 17). Frequently the term avatar refers to customisable characters; however, it can be used to describe any playable character. Gee (2014, p. 17-18) discusses avatars as determining what the players manage to achieve in games based on what the avatars can or cannot do. They act as toolkits that, based on their various abilities and affordances, grant the player a certain set of tools enabling the player to reach desired outcomes. He adds avatars to be inhabitable identities, giving importance to representations.

Referring back to ludonarratology, video game designer and creative director Hocking (2007) introduced the concept of ludonarrative dissonance. The idea notes to inconsistencies between ludic and narrative themes, which in practice means engaging in gameplay that contradicts the game narrative. An example of ludonarrative dissonance given by Koenitz (2018) is “a character that is portrayed as mild-mannered and considerate in the narrative and yet kills hundreds of virtual characters in the gameplay” (p. 3).

However, as Critchley (2005, p. 58) writes: “the world is what you make of it”, which emphasises how even an idea deemed as positive, such as representation, can become something negative due to the creators’ actions or through the perceptions of the audience. Šisler (2008, p. 204) also mentions video games to be exploitative of negative “stereotypes and clichés”. As mentioned before, representation in its truest form is purely the act of standing in. With the presumption of innocence, I assume that is how representations are operated – or at least aimed to be operated, in the data.

3 PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, I will be discussing the aim of the study and the research questions I intend to answer. Following will be the introduction to data, data collection and the methods of analysis. I will be introducing the game, *Valorant*, with the help of context building blocks provided in Ferndandez-Vara (2014), as well as the two characters that were selected for the detailed analysis.

3.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the present study is to explore the ways in which language is utilised in video game character identity construction and representation in the game *Valorant*, with an additional emphasis on code-switching practices emerging from the data.

Having my focus on language in relation to constructing and representing identities, I aim to uncover how these linguistic tools are used, and what kinds of meanings are created or conveyed. I will be examining in what capacity language is used, as well as what role it serves in the construction of identity and representation. Furthermore, code-switching practices will be highlighted due to the prominent position of code-switching in relation to identity and representation, as apparent in the previously introduced studies.

With this research, I aim to broaden the research field concerning language and identity in a video game context. It can also expand the research made on *Valorant* as of writing this paper, the game remains understudied.

The following research questions will be guiding the analysis and the discussion:

RQ1: How is language used in identity construction and representation in *Valorant*?

RQ2: How are code-switching practices utilised in character design in *Valorant*?

Both research questions aim to figure out how linguistic tools are used in the processes of identifying, constructing, and representing. RQ1 is aimed at assessing the general use of language appearing from the data, in order to evaluate how language is used in construction and representation of identities. The first question remains somewhat broad, whereas RQ2 narrows the focus of the analysis onto code-switching practices, to specifically explore what kind of applications of code-switching might surface.

3.2 Data

The present study will be focusing on in-game voice lines, which are audio snippets delivered by the game characters and triggered by events or actions within the game. In *Valorant*, there are voice lines that are automatically triggered by completing different actions in-game, and some which the players can trigger themselves. The voice lines in *Valorant* can be either interactive, reaction-based, commands, or responses.

As this study has its primary focus on language, I will be using audio versions of the voice lines in addition to transcripts to analyse the voice lines. This will allow the most accurate representation of what kinds of language varieties can be found in the data, such as different tones, dialects, word choices, and frequency. The data I will be using comes from the English language version of the game, where English and its varieties remain dominant, acting as the primary base language for all interactions. In addition, there is a presence of other languages besides English, thus making the data multilingual. Lastly, when assessing the data, I will take into consideration the time of release for each character as *Riot Games* has generally been releasing new characters every three to four months. On account of this release schedule, I will

explore whether the time of release plays a role in what ways language is used – and at what frequencies.

I have compiled the data from VALORANT Wiki (valorant.fandom.com/wiki/VALORANT_Wiki), which is a fan-made encyclopaedia containing articles and files extracted from the game files, including voice line recordings. Both the source and the game are publicly available for everyone with internet access. The data was originally collected from v8.01, which became accessible on the 23rd of January 2024, and was later revised to include updates from v8.07, which was released on the 16th of April 2024. The data includes all the 24 playable characters that are currently available in the game.

To narrow down the vast data pool, I have omitted informative voice lines tied to the gameplay since they are the same for every character, as well as grunts and other expressions alike. The focus will be strictly on the multilingual voice lines, which span across the categories I have mentioned. Since the focus is on multilingual characters, the seven monolingual English-speaking characters will be excluded from the data. Additionally, due to the volume of characters and voice lines, I will only be looking at two selected characters from the remaining 17 when conducting the in-depth analysis. The characters I have chosen for the analysis are Fade and Gekko, who will be introduced later in this chapter.

Finally, when discussing the selected characters and their backgrounds, I will be referring to and utilising content released by *Riot Games*. This includes video and text presentations as well as voice actor interviews – all accessible through their official website (playvalorant.com) and YouTube-account (youtube.com/@valorant). By doing this, I will attempt to give as accurate of a presentation of the character design as possible, drawing from the official materials and descriptions released by *Valorant/Riot Games*. Any supplementary information on the characters will be provided in Table 1.

3.2.1 Valorant

The description of the game that follows is based on the information retrieved from the official website of *Valorant* (playvalorant.com) as well as from their official social media account (twitter.com/VALORANT).

Valorant, as described on its official website, is a “5v5 character-based tactical FPS”. Developed and published by *Riot Games*, the game was released on the 2nd of June 2020 to

most of APAC (Asia-Pacific), EMEA (Europe, Middle East, and Africa), and the Americas. Later in 2023, it became accessible in China as well. *Valorant* is free-to-play online, but as of writing this paper, it is only available for Windows. The base version of the game is in English with the presence of other languages, and it is also available in 16 other languages and language varieties.

All the 24 currently available characters are unlockable through playing, with five of them being immediately accessible when starting the game. The characters each have their own kits, meaning a specific set of abilities, giving them their unique contribution to the gameplay. Depending on these abilities, the characters are assigned one of the following four roles: (1) Controllers, (2) Duelists, (3) Initiators, and (4) Sentinels. Controllers refer to the six characters, whose designated abilities focus on taking map control by visually blocking areas. The largest group with seven characters, is the Duelist-role, which is set on seeking out engagements, getting kills, and entering different areas of the map efficiently. Initiators, another group with six characters, are concerned with getting information on areas of the map, and clearing out hiding spots as well as corners. Finally, Sentinels, with five characters, are centred on defensive gameplay and anchoring down different areas with their utility. The kits for each character can bleed into other roles, making them playable in a way regardless of what their appointed role is – especially if the player or the team are competent in utilising the kits. The characters in the game are referred to as agents and/or *Radiants*, but for clarity reasons, I will refer to them as characters in this study.

There are multiple different game modes available, all of which can be divided into two distinct categories based on their goals. The first category would be deathmatches, where the goal is to kill the other players as many times as possible within a specified time limit. The second category includes the “normal” game modes, where the goal is to get a certain number of round-wins first. This is either by attacking or defending a specific part of the map, or alternatively, by eliminating all of the opposing team within the round’s time frame. Each of the teams consist of five players, who try to work together to get round-wins by effectively utilising the different tools available for gameplay.

Valorant has intricate lore behind it, spanning from character background stories and relationships to the universe it is located in. To summarise the main idea, the game takes place in near-future Earth, named the *Alpha Earth*, which is reflective of our real, physical world. In this world, there exists a mysterious substance called *radianite* that by exposure gives people

inhumane powers. These people become the playable characters in the game. Shortly after the discovery of *radianite*, a global event known as the *First Light* occurs. The characters then create an international operation called the *VALORANT Protocol*, which is set to keep the world safe. All these events occur on *Alpha Earth*; however, there is an alternate version named *Omega Earth*. This version mirrors its counterpart almost perfectly, with the main differentiation being that *Omega Earth* is on the brink of a total climate collapse. The same people and companies exist there, though are referred to with different names; for example, *VALORANT Legion* instead of the *Protocol*. I would argue this to be the general core idea of the lore; however, it is greatly extensive and multidimensional.

Currently, although some of this is reflected in the gameplay motive, the players do not actually have influence in the storyline, nor are there story events in the game that would be canon to the lore. The game remains playable even without any knowledge of the elaborate storyline. There are references made in the map designs, voice lines, and other in-game cosmetics, but most of the lore remains as something beyond the game, becoming visible through the cinematics.

As mentioned, the game is set on Earth, meaning the 3D map spaces in *Valorant* are located and created to represent different real-life locations. These can be seen in the game with places resembling, for example, Lisbon, Portugal, or Thimphu, Bhutan amongst many others. This immersion is created through multimodal means, such as architecture, music as well as both audible and visible language.

3.2.2 Character Introductions of Fade and Gekko

In this section, I will explain why Fade and Gekko were selected for the in-depth analysis as well as describe the two characters drawing from content available on *Valorant*'s official website (playvalorant.com) and YouTube-account (youtube.com/@valorant).

When making my decision and deliberating on the characters, my primary goal was to cover as much ground as possible with my two choices. Considering how diverse the character backgrounds are, I wanted this paper to reflect that. I took into account how large the respective data pools were for each character as well as when they were released. The final factor influencing my decision was looking at which characters I felt I could relate to, and who I have enjoyed playing in the game itself. With all these considerations, I selected Fade and Gekko

for my character analysis. Both characters fall under the same assigned role of Initiator, but I thought this can serve as a connecting point between the two as they have distinctively different backgrounds and almost completely opposing personalities.

I will first discuss Fade, whose description by *Valorant* is as follows:

“Turkish bounty hunter, Fade, unleashes the power of raw nightmares to seize enemy secrets. Attuned with terror itself, she hunts targets and reveals their deepest fears—before crushing them in the dark.” (playvalorant.com)

Originating from Istanbul, Turkey, Fade (Hazal Eyletmez) is an Initiator who became available to play on the 27th of April 2022 in v4.08. Her character is described as “the embodiment of fear” (playvalorant.com) with her general theme being living nightmares. Her visual character design implements many characteristics drawing from Turkish culture, for example, the *nazar boncuğu* (evil eye) symbolism and henna which can be seen on her hands. Fade’s theme being nightmares is intertwined with the position of dreams in Turkish culture and superstition as there is a profound respect towards them.

The second character is Gekko, whose description on the official site is:

“Gekko the Angeleno leads a tight-knit crew of calamitous creatures. His buddies bound forward, scattering enemies out of the way, with Gekko chasing them down to regroup and go again.” (playvalorant.com)

Gekko (Mateo Armendáriz De la Fuente) was released in v6.04, which rolled on the 7th of March 2023. He is an Initiator from Los Angeles, USA; however, he has Mexican immigrant parents, making him a first-generation immigrant (youtube.com/@valorant). Gekko is described as outgoing and family-oriented with a bubbly personality, which is reflected in his appearance as the character design is colourful and vibrant, drawing from LA’s fashion scene. The family-oriented nature of Gekko is displayed in his toolkit, as it comprises of various little creatures to whom he interacts with in a caring manner.

Fade being of Turkish origin implies the character can cover EMEA, and depending on the wider context, APAC as well due to the Eurasian position of Turkey. Although Gekko is considered American, his immigrant background bridges together both North America and LATAM, thus covering the Americas-region. Both of these characters then able this study to cover a decent geographical area.

3.3 Methods

In this paper, I will be featuring a qualitative study to assess the data. Qualitative content analysis will be used to approach the overall data, which is comprised of all the available voice lines. Both discourse analysis and narrative approach will be used throughout the study, with a specific focus when presenting the in-depth analysis of the selected characters.

Qualitative content analysis, as defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1278), is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. It is effective in discovering themes, categories, and/or meanings emerging from the data in addition to helping understand social reality (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative content analysis is also used to reduce data (Schreier, 2012); despite taking all relevant material into account, it reduces the data through limitation on the basis of relevancy. Schreier (2012, p. 80) offers three strategies for approaching the data: the concept-driven strategy, the data-driven strategy, and a combination of both. With the concept-driven strategy, the focus is on basing the work on previous knowledge, whereas by using data-driven strategy, it is possible to identify and describe categories emerging from the data (Schreier, 2012, p. 84). In this study, the qualitative content analysis and a combination of the mentioned strategies will be utilised when analysing the data as a whole to reduce the amount, and to observe whether any patterns arise from it.

With a focus on language and language use, I will utilise the broad framework and toolkit of general discourse analysis. Discourse as a term can mean a variety of things, however, is commonly defined as language use as social practice, implying “anything beyond the sentence” (Tannen, 2015, p. 1). Discourse analysis, on the other hand, focuses on language use, on language beyond the sentence, and how language “enacts social and cultural perspectives and identities (Gee, 2010, ii). Gee (2014, p. 37) writes it to be concerned with the analysis of language use, and how it aims to reveal how culture and society are represented, as noted by Antaki (2008, p. 432). By looking at syntax, which refers to sentence design and structure, it examines how contextually specific meanings in certain contexts of language use are created (Gee, 2014, p. 37). Antaki (2008) introduces four central features of discourse analysis, which are: (1) naturally found data, (2) understandable words in their co-text and wider context, (3) the analyst’s sensitivity towards non-literal meanings of words, and (4) the reveal of social actions and consequences achieved through language use (p. 432). Aiming to uncover

underlying themes and meanings, discourse analysis explores language as a tool for understanding the world and allowing ‘being’ through language use.

Continuing on discourse analysis, Gee (2014, p. 19) elaborates on ‘*situated meanings*’ to be “the meanings words, phrases, sentences, and sequences of sentences take on in actual contexts of use”. They are determined by shared cultural knowledge as well as what is considered as pertinent aspects of context. Gee (2014) adds that semantics look at the meanings of utterances.

3.3.1 Set-up of Analysis

At the beginning of the analysis process, I utilised qualitative content analysis to reduce the data based on its relevancy to the present study. The analysis process began by manually scanning through the data to exclude voice lines that were the same across all characters. This meant narrowing down grunts, instructions, and other commands alike. These voice lines were omitted due to the volume of the data and the irrelevancy they had to the specific character identity construction as they were the same across each character. I noted down every instance where a language other than English was present, including voice lines with singular words or tags, or longer utterances.

After every instance was marked down, I began establishing what kinds of patterns and categories appeared from the design of sentences. Through the use of data-driven strategy, I created the tentative categorisation, which was purely based on the categories emerging from the data. This was followed by the concept-driven strategy, as I found out the tentative categories to be aligned with the types of code-switching discussed earlier in the present study (Poplack, 1980). The data was then reorganised based on the code-switching types.

When analysing the data more closely, I utilised discourse analysis methods to identify themes in the ways in how language was used. Due to the data being retrieved from a video game, it is not necessarily considered natural; however, I approached the data as if it occurred naturally since the characters themselves were considered as real individuals. I analysed the data through the lens of identity building, in which the aim is to investigate how discourse is used to construct identities. I also paid attention to the situated meanings to note in which contexts specific language practices appeared, and how those then relate back to identity construction, as well as to other concepts relevant to the present study.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will contain an overview of the data, followed by a detailed analysis of the selected characters, Fade and Gekko.

The data is organised based on Poplack's (1980) types of code-switching, with two additional categories to include voice lines that were fully in a language other than English as well as voice lines that repeated what was said in two different languages. I made the decision to mark voice lines where the same word or tag was repeated as one singular instance only, instead of marking each instance as a unique one. However, the repeated voice lines are included in the data table (Table 2) by having the number of voice lines as unique instances in parentheses under their respective categories, marked next to the number of voice lines noted as singular instances. On the far-right column, both numbers are counted together to get an understanding of the total sum of voice lines in addition to being excluded from the singular instance count. Despite having both numbers available, I will mainly refer to the singular instance count in my analysis.

It is important to note regarding the categorisations is that, although I used qualitative content analysis methods to identify the themes in the data, my language proficiency is lacking. This might alter how the voice lines could or would be organised by other people. The voice lines were arranged with the use of written translations along with how the audio samples were designed, and then interpreted by me. I considered Gee's (2014) situated meanings when assessing the data and selecting the most appropriate translations I could find. Furthermore, some of the voice lines do not have direct translations as they were expressions native to their respective languages.

4.1 Overview of Data

In this section, I will go over the data as a whole, noting out my findings, and presenting the general themes of the data. The voice lines had both ludological and narrative use with some referring to the lore, and some being responses to the events of the game. In addition to this, there were voice lines which were neither tied to the lore nor directly to the game events, but instead casual interactions among the characters. Some instances of ludonarrative dissonance were visible in the data; where characters were portrayed in a specific way through the voice lines, but due to being situated in an FPS game, their actions were dissociated from the narrative.

Table 1 shows background information on the characters; including their names, version of game as well as the date the character became available to play. It also shows what their assigned role is, country of origin, and what language they speak in addition to English. The six beta characters were marked with an asterisk (*) as they were playable in the closed beta, which opened on the 7th of April 2020, and then officially released alongside the game on the 2nd of June 2020. The roles in the third column refer to the roles introduced in 3.2.1.

Table 1. Character information. *Beta 7.4.2020 to release 2.6.2020.

Character name	Release date	Role	Country of origin	Region	Language
Breach	Beta*	Initiator	Sweden	EMEA	Swedish
Cypher	Beta*	Sentinel	Morocco	EMEA	Arabic (Darija)
Jett	Beta*	Duelist	South Korea	APAC	Korean
Raze	Beta*	Duelist	Brazil	AMER	Portuguese (Brazilian)
Sage	Beta*	Sentinel	China	APAC	Mandarin Chinese
Sova	Beta*	Initiator	Russia	EMEA	Russian
Reyna	V1.0 / 2.6.2020	Duelist	Mexican	AMER	Spanish
Killjoy	V1.05 / 4.8.2020	Sentinel	Germany	EMEA	German
Yoru	V2.0 / 12.1.2021	Duelist	Japan	APAC	Japanese
Astra	V2.04 / 2.3.2021	Controller	Ghana	EMEA	Twi
Chamber	V3.10 / 16.11.2021	Sentinel	France	EMEA	French
Neon	V4.0 / 11.1.2022	Duelist	Philippines	APAC	Tagalog
Fade	V4.08 / 27.4.2022	Initiator	Turkey	EMEA	Turkish
Harbor	V5.08 / 18.10.2022	Controller	India	APAC	Hindi
Gekko	V6.04 / 7.3.2023	Initiator	USA	AMER	Spanish
Deadlock	V7.0 / 27.7.2023	Sentinel	Norway	EMEA	Norwegian
Iso	V7.09 / 31.10.2023	Duelist	China	APAC	Mandarin Chinese

I marked the regions similar as to how *Riot Games* does for official events and releases: EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa), APAC (Asia-Pacific), and Americas (North and South America). As seen in Table 1, approximately three characters are released yearly,

spanning across all different regions and subregions. There are only two pairs of characters who speak the same language: Sage and Iso (Mandarin Chinese), and Reyna and Gekko (Spanish). The roles of the characters do not necessarily become visible through their voice lines, but since I mentioned them in 3.2.1, they were included in Table 1 to offer broader background information of the characters.

Table 2, on the other hand, shows how the data was categorised. It includes the character names, organised in order of release, as well as four categories for the voice lines – which will be discussed further in this section through samples retrieved from the data. The categories will be expanded upon in this section as well as in 4.1.1, but I will briefly introduce them here. The non-English voice lines refer to voice lines in a language other than English. The extra-sentential category means voice lines that had singular words or tag phrases and included a language other than English. The inter-sentential category refers to voice lines that had a clear distinction between the clauses in two different languages. The intra-sentential category had voice lines that were more unpredictable in syntax. The repetition category included voice lines that repeat the same word in two different languages. There are two other sections to mark the sum of voice lines: *total for character(s)* refers to the sum of voice lines for each character, whereas *total for voice lines* refers to the sum of each category of voice lines.

Table 2. Categorised data table with character names.

Character name	Non-English voice lines	Extra-sentential	Inter-sentential	Intra-sentential	Repetition	Total for character(s)
Breach	11 (9)	2	0	1	0	14 (23)
Cypher	5	2	3	1	0	11
Jett	0	1	4	1	0	6
Raze	2	18 (4)	0	3	1	24 (28)
Sage	0	0	1	0	0	1
Sova	2 (2)	2	0	0	0	4 (6)
Reyna	8 (8)	7 (6)	4	2	0	21 (35)
Killjoy	3 (5)	3 (5)	1	1	0	8 (18)
Yoru	4 (2)	1 (2)	1	0	0	6 (10)
Astra	6 (3)	8 (14)	4	4	2 (5)	24 (46)
Chamber	9 (6)	7	5	2	0	23 (29)
Neon	3	10 (6)	2	3	2 (3)	20 (29)
Fade	7 (6)	8	2	2	1 (3)	20 (29)
Harbor	4	5	0	2	2 (3)	13 (16)
Gekko	8	12 (3)	5	3	0	28 (31)
Deadlock	6 (3)	7	8	2	0	23 (26)
Iso	7 (3)	6	1	0	0	14 (17)
Total for voice lines	85 (47)	99 (40)	41	27	8 (14)	260 (343)

The first number under each category signals the unique instances of the voice lines, and the number in parentheses has the number of singular instances. For example, the character called Breach had ‘11 (9) non-English voice lines’. This means that the character had eleven unique instances of non-English voice lines, and nine instances of voice lines that had some sort of repetition, thus making them not unique. The data categories (Table 2), with samples retrieved from the data to demonstrate how they were classified, are as follows:

1. Voice lines that were in a language other than English:

Breach: “*In i skärselden.*” [*Into purgatory.*] (Swedish)

Cypher: “*تعالى.*” [*Take care.*] (Arabic, Darija)

2. Voice lines that showed extra-sentential features, meaning voice lines that had singular words or tag phrases in a language other than English:

Iso: “*奶奶, I did this to make you proud!*” [*Grandma, I did this to make you proud!*]

(Mandarin Chinese)

Raze: “*Huh, sorry mano.*” [*Huh, sorry bro.*] (Brazilian Portuguese)

3. Inter-sentential category refers to voice lines where there was a clear distinction between the clauses:

Jett: “*Ew, is that me over there? 저리/꺼져.*” [*Ew, is that me over there? Go away.*]

(Korean)

Killjoy: “*Fwoof! Heiliger strohsack, this is crazy!*” [*Fwoof! Holy crap, this is crazy!*] (German)

4. Voice lines that had code-switching within a sentence with a more unexpected syntax fall under the intra-sentential category:

Reyna: “*Escúchame Gekko, I am with you. No tienes que hacer todo solo.*”

[*Listen to me Gekko, I am with you. You don't have to do everything alone.*]

(Spanish)

Astra: “*Equip yourselves-o. Money dey falaa, spend it!*” [*Equip yourselves-o.*

There's a lot of money, spend it!] (Twi)

5. The final category had voice lines that repeated the same word in two languages:

Neon: "*Tapos ka na! You're done!*" [*You're done! You're done!*] (Tagalog)

Harbor: "*शुक्रिया, thank you.*" [*Thank you, thank you.*] (Hindi)

As can be observed from Table 2, the voice lines were spread throughout all the categories with extra-sentential code-switching (99) and non-English voice lines (85) being the most prominent. Inter-sentential code-switching had 41 instances, with intra-sentential type being the smallest group (27) since voice lines categorised under repetition (8) could theoretically be relocated under other categories based on each instance. For example, the two samples introduced above could both be re-categorised under extra-sentential code-switching.

Finally, I will highlight a few samples regarding ludonarrative dissonance. The majority of the characters were aligned and harmonised through their ludonarrative design, for example, with Reyna referring to the enemies as "*insecto*" [*insect*] or "*criatura*" [*creature*] (Spanish). There were still few characters that showcased ludonarrative dissonance with their voice lines, one of them being Harbor, who remained somewhat nice or neutral, even when reacting in response to getting a kill on the enemy team: "*अलविदा!*" [*Goodbye.*] (Hindi).

4.1.1 Elaborating on the Categories

In this section, I will further discuss the categories shown in Table 2 through samples retrieved from the data.

The voice lines that were in a language other than English were most often either character reactions to getting a kill in the game, or replies and greetings which could be triggered by the player. Regarding getting a kill, Reyna, for example, refers to the killed enemy as "*insecto*" [*insect*] (Spanish), and Astra says: "*Akoa wei paa ara.*" [*Look at this dude.*] (Twi). When considering greetings, all of them can be translated to "hello", with examples such as Killjoy: "*Hallo!*" (German); Deadlock: "*Hei!*" (Norwegian); Iso "*你好。*" (Mandarin Chinese). The replies falling under this category were ways to say yes: "*Да.*" (Russian), or thank you: "*Merci.*" (French) and "*Tack, tack!*" (Swedish).

The largest category was extra-sentential code-switching, referring to the use of singular words, tags, or tag phrases in two or more languages, most often the tag being in a language other than English. The majority of the voice lines that were classified under this category used

tags to refer to other people, such as “*lillsyrran*” [*little sister*] (Swedish), “*minha familia*” [*my family*] (Brazilian Portuguese), and “*まこ*” [*minnow*] (Japanese). It also included multiple voice lines with expressions like “*meine Güte*” [*my goodness*] (German), descriptors such as “*incroyable*” [*incredible*] (French), as well as tags and interjections, for example “*hoy*” (Tagalog) or “*jada*” (Norwegian).

The voice lines marked under inter-sentential code-switching were generally longer in length in comparison to the other categories with a few exceptions. The voice lines were most frequently automatic responses to the events of the game, and more specifically to the events of the previous round played. In general, the voice lines were commending and encouraging towards allies, such as Jett saying “*폼 미쳤는데? Neon! Leave some for me, yeah?*” [*Are you insane? Neon! Leave some for me, yeah?*] (Korean) or towards themselves as allies; Astra: “*Hah, I end them, feeli feeli!*” [*Hah, I end them, see it with your own eyes.*] (Twi).

The following category of voice lines marked as intra-sentential code-switching were similar in nature to the inter-sentential category. They were automatically triggered reactions that were longer in length with similar general themes. The following voice line is an example of the intra-sentential category:

Breach: “*Hey Deadlock, we make a decent team, eller hur? They attack and you butcher them, they stay put and I turn them to mush. *laughs* Inte illa.*”

[*Hey Deadlock, we make a decent team, right? They attack and you butcher them, they stay put and I turn them to mush. *laughs* Not bad.*] (Swedish)

Repetition primarily occurred through the characters saying: “thank you”, with four voice lines marked under this category. This was continuously structured by having the non-English term come first, followed by the English translation, as can be seen in Astra’s voice line “*Medaase, thanks!*” (Twi), and Neon’s “*Salamat, thanks!*” (Tagalog).

Overall, the voice lines were diverse in length and syntax across all the categories with some certain emerging designs.

4.1.2 Categories through the Characters

In this section, I will focus more on the characters to highlight how prevalent code-switching and other language practices were. This section will refer to Table 1 when discussing the

backgrounds of the characters, while analysing the findings visualised in Table 2. All of the information in this section is visible in the tables.

Since the release of *Valorant*, *Riot Games* has updated and added more voice lines. However, the first six characters besides Raze (and later Breach) had notably less language-mixing, and only after the release of Yoru, they have had an increasing number of different languages presented. The increase is not consistent or gradual though. For example, despite being released during the same year in 2023, Iso had just 14 lines that have a presence of a language other than English, in comparison to Gekko and Deadlock, who both had over 20 lines.

The characters with 20 or more voice lines were Gekko (28), Astra and Raze (24), Chamber and Deadlock (23), Reyna (21), and finally, Fade and Neon (20). The characters with a Latin-American background: Gekko, Raze, and Reyna, were the most dominant in the volume of voice lines. The six characters originating from the APAC region had lower numbers of code-switching voice lines in comparison to other regions (see Table 1 for character regions).

Chamber and Deadlock both had the most inter-sentential code-switching as well as some of the longest non-English sentences, such as:

Chamber: "*Do not worry, with me this will be easy. C'est simple comme bonjour.*"

[Do not worry, with me this will be easy. *It's as simple as saying hello.*] (French)

Deadlock: "*Da var vi midt i smørøye, good stuff.*" [*We were right on the bullseye, good stuff.*] (Norwegian)

In addition to Chamber and Deadlock, Reyna had the longest monolingual non-English sentences, such as "*Bien hecho Gekko, *chuckles* ustedes también chiquitines.*" [*Well done Gekko, *chuckles* you too little ones.*], in which she replies to the other Spanish-speaking character, Gekko. Over half of the characters had one or more full sentences of varying lengths marked under the first category, with most of them being tag phrases, or shorter sentences in comparison to Reyna or the sentences prominent under other categories.

Nonetheless, the extra-sentential category mostly consisted of singular tags. Astra had the highest number of repetitive words; the character used the term "*chale*" [*buddy*] eleven times, and "*yawa*" [*disgrace*] thrice (Twi). Other characters had repetitive voice lines as well, however, to a much lesser extent.

I briefly mentioned that there were two pairs of characters sharing a language other than English, the pairs being Sage and Iso (Mandarin Chinese), and Reyna and Gekko (Spanish). The interactions between Sage and Iso that included Mandarin Chinese were limited in numbers, as Sage had just one voice line in total (see Table 2). Iso had a higher amount of total voice line data, of which three were directed at Sage – these were all of their interactions together. One of the voice lines was marked under extra-sentential as it was in fully in English, besides the word “火锅” [*hotpot*], while the other two were as follows:

"原谅我，前辈。" [*Forgive me, senior.*]

"逼不得已。" [*It was necessary.*]

Reyna and Gekko, on the other hand, had multiple interactions that included Spanish, eight in total. These varied across all the categories visible in Table 2. In addition to the example included earlier in this section, some other Spanish-language interactions between Reyna and Gekko were the following:

Reyna: "*Con cuidado, Gekko.*" [*Be careful, Gekko.*]

Reyna: "*Gekko, fuerte y feroz. They will not hesitate, you must not either.*"

[*Gekko, strong and fierce. They will not hesitate, you must not either.*]

Gekko: "*Hola mi Reyna! Make way for the queen.*" [*Hello my Reyna! Make way for the queen.*]

4.2 Fade

In this section, I will analyse the voice line data for the character Fade, as well as analyse and discuss the findings. I will begin with an overview of the data, including analysis of each category included in Table 2. This will be then followed by an in-depth character analysis and discussion based on the data.

4.2.1 Analysis of Fade's Voice Lines

Fade's character had a total of 20 singular voice lines and 29 unique voice lines, spanning across all categories. Her biggest categories were extra-sentential code-switching, consisting of eight singular counts, and non-English voice lines with seven singular instances. She had two counts in both inter- and intra-sentential code-switching, and one under the repetition-category.

Five of the voice lines in a language other than English were automatically triggered reactions to getting a kill in the game:

1. "Ah be abi" [*Oh man.*] or [*C'mon man.*], not a direct translation
2. "Geber." [*Die.*], a more accurate translation [*Perish.*]
3. "Iyi geceler." [*Good night.*]
4. "Yat aşağı." [*Lie down.*]
5. "Rezalet." [*Disgrace.*]

The remaining two voice lines were player-controlled responses: "Selam." [*Hello.*] and "Pardon." [*Sorry.*]. A third player-controlled response was marked under repetition, it being "Teşekkürler, thank you!". All three samples had three variations in total with slightly different tones.

Fade's largest category numerically was extra-sentential code-switching. There were two instances of exclamation, "hop!" and "oy!", where 'hop' was used to get attention, and 'oy' to commend. 'Abi' [*big brother, bro/man*] made another appearance under this category as the word was used to address someone. This category also included tags used to mark encouragement or to commend, such as "güzel", which is an adjective used in many contexts that is translated to [*beautiful, nice, good*]. She uses the expression "helal", which refers to the Islamic term 'halal'; however, used as [*good job!*] in Turkish: "*Helal, Cypher. There is no hiding from you, is there?*" [*Good job, Cypher. There is no hiding from you is there?*]. The last two automatically triggered voice lines under extra-sentential code-switching were ones which appeared when a new round started, where Fade gave instructions to the ally team:

"Whatever happens, sakin, don't panic. Trembling is bad for your aim." [Whatever happens, *be calm*, don't panic. Trembling is bad for your aim.]

"*Hadi, again. Their fear is a track, and the track is fresh.*" [Let's go, again. Their fear is a track, and the track is fresh.]

Under inter-sentential code-switching, Fade had two voice lines, both of which were automatic reactions to the events of the game with the first one being "*Boş yapmayın, keep fighting. Rest is overrated.*" [Cut the crap, keep fighting. Rest is overrated.]. The second voice line was "*Yok ebesinin nikahı, we forgot the spike.*" [No midwife's wedding, we forgot the spike.]. Albeit having a literal translation, the Turkish expression is used to mark disbelief; in the voice line it was used as "*that's unbelievable*".

The expression "*lan*" appeared twice in Fade's data. Although there is no exact translation, it could be translated to a simple "yo", to "*dude*" when referring to a person, or as a curse word. Despite the context, it is considered to be a rude and vulgar informal slang word used between friends. In the data, it was used in the following voice lines marked under extra-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching:

"*Nice work lan. All of you.*" [Nice work, *dude*. All of you.]

"*They think they can steal from us? Hadi lan, this is funny.*" [They think they can steal from us? *Hey c'mon*, this is funny.]

Her final voice line, which was marked under intra-sentential code-switching, had another term without a literal translation: "*We must make the enemy afraid. Look at Viper, yani. Scary mask, scary voice. She understands.*". In this voice line, "*yani*" was used as [that is to say].

4.2.2 Fade's Character Identity

As discussed in Fade's introduction (see 3.2.2), she is intended to be nightmarish and fear-inducing in theme. The way in how *Valorant* uses language to support this design, can be seen from her voice lines. All of the following examples of language use contribute to the general immersion of the game as well as establishing Fade's character identity.

Although *Valorant* is an FPS game, Fade's voice lines are considerably darker than most of her counterparts. Her reactions to getting a kill have a disrespectful tone, for example, saying "*Geber.*" [Perish.] instead of using a neutral term, such as "*ölmek*" [die]. The way in which she

refers to her enemies is arrogant, and even when interacting with her allies, Fade's tone remains cool and collected. Regarding Hocking's (2007) concept of ludonarrative dissonance, Fade is rather harmonious as her character is depicted as fear-inducing and almost antagonistic through her voice lines. However, aligned with the post-structuralist notion of identity, reflected in Virkkula and Nikula (2010), Fade's identity is not fixed, but ambiguous and flowing. Besides being an intimidating bounty hunter, she is also depicted as someone calm and dependable. This is accomplished through voice lines in which she compliments allies and offers encouragement, for example: "*Güzel, we are doing very well.*" [*Beautiful, we are doing very well.*].

The authenticity of her character being Turkish is constructed by implementing colloquial terms such as "*lan*", "*hop*" and "*hadi*". As "life mimics games" and vice versa (Gee, 2014), having colloquialisms supports the representation and construction of Fade's identity. The developers were able to tap into Turkish culture on a deeper level with the use of "*yok ebesinin nikahı*" [*that's unbelievable*] since it is a proverb with a meaning deeper than its literal translation [*no midwife's wife*]. She additionally says "*Pardon.*" [*Sorry.*], which is a French term commonly used in Turkish when apologising for a small mistake. These language habits, by showing a presence of Turkish colloquialisms, ground Fade's character and make her more approachable. Fade's identity is further cemented by her character speaking English with a Turkish accent; Webb (2009, p. 39) notes this to be one of the ways in which representation is constructed through language. The colloquial terms, as well as her sentence syntax and design, are aligned with Webb's (2009) proposal on how language is utilised as a tool for representation, as Webb notes language to determine "who we can be in the world".

Being the sole Turkish speaker, Fade does not have an available speech community in the game. Her language habits allude to her linguistic identity as a Turkish speaker (Siebenhütter, 2023), as well as reflect on her overall membership to Turkish speakers as a speech community. On the other hand, she does demonstrate membership to the group in-game by using the first-person plural, referring to the team as a collective. By additionally saying "*lan*" and "*abi*", Fade's position in the community is established, and the relationships between the characters are constructed as well since these are terms used among friends.

Fade's language identities are reflected in her self-representation, as her linguistic choices mirror the dark image she has. Her character continuously upholds this notion with the use of bleak terminology and phrases, yet what is beneath the surface peaks through in interactions, giving glimpses into the various identities Fade possesses.

4.3 Gekko

Similar to how Fade's analysis was constructed, this chapter will first include an overview of Gekko's voice line data and the categories shown in Table 2. This will be followed by an in-depth character analysis and discussion based on the data.

4.3.1 Analysis of Gekko's Voice Lines

Out of all the characters, Gekko had the highest quantity of voice lines standing at 28 singular, and 31 unique instances. His data included a regular use of slang terms, and he was commonly among the highest numbers of voice lines for each category. He had eight voice lines fully in a language other than English; 13 instances marked as extra-sentential voice lines; five under inter-sentential voice lines, and finally two intra-sentential voice lines.

The non-English voice lines were diverse when it came to situations. All of them were automatic reactions, excluding "*¿Que onda?*" [*What's up?*], which gets triggered by the player. Gekko had two voice lines which were interactions either with his creatures: "*Sana, sana*" [*Heal, heal.*], or with the other Spanish-speaking character: "*Perdóname mi Reyna.*" [*Forgive me my Reyna.*]. Two of his voice lines were reactions to getting a kill in the game: "*Cállate.*" [*Shut up.*], and "*No chilles.*" [*Don't cry.*]. The last three voice lines occurred right at the start of the round:

"*Échele ganas!*" [*Give it all you got!*]

"*Ponte las pilas.*" [*Get it together.*]

"*Ándale.*" [*Come on.*]

Aligned with Fade's results and the general numbers, extra-sentential code-switching was Gekko's largest category. Besides the player-triggered commendation "*A huevo, nice!*" [*Hell yeah, nice!*], the voice lines were automatically triggered in response to the game events. He used four different terms when referring to other people: "*mi ama*" [*my mom*], "*chica*" [*girl*], "*jefa*" [*boss*], and "*cuate*" [*buddy*]. The other bigger group under extra-sentential code-switching was tag phrases and/or expressions:

"*Another? Órale.*" [*Another? Alright.*]

"*Guess they're gunning for us, huh? Ni modo, it is what it is.*" [Guess they're gunning for us, huh? *Either way, it is what it is.*]

"*You want KJ's shoes? Chale dude, you can't even wear shoes.*" [You want KJ's shoes? *No way dude, you can't even wear shoes.*]

"*Cálmate, hot shot.*" [*Calm down, hot shot.*]

Similarly to his non-English voice lines, Gekko had some phrases which occurred right at the round beginning. In these, he used the terms "*aguas*" [*watch out*], and "*vámonos*" [*let's go*]. Finally, there was one instance of an exclamation, it being "*oye!*".

The inter-sentential category had five voice lines with one of them being the first line Gekko said in the entire game during the character selection. In this voice line, "*Wáchale güey, my crew is coming through.*" [*Watch out dude, my crew is coming through.*], he addressed the enemy team as well as referred to his little creatures (and possibly the ally team) as his 'crew'. There was another interactive voice line which was with Reyna: "*Hola mi Reyna! Make way for the queen.*" [*Hello my Reyna! Make way for the queen.*]. The inter-sentential category was primarily compiled from expressions or reactions to a separate thing mentioned in the same voice line:

"*Qué padre! My little guy did it!*" [*How cool! My little guy did it!*]

"*Qué lindo! Can I take a picture? My mom loves flowers.*" [*How beautiful! Can I take a picture? My mom loves flowers.*]

"*Man, they brought Deadlock? Qué poca madre!*" [Man, they brought Deadlock? That's shameless.], not a direct translation, has a slightly vulgar connotation

The final category was intra-sentential code-switching as Gekko did not have any voice lines categorised as repetition. There were three instances of voice lines marked as intra-sentential, however, one of them could be argued to fall under extra-sentential. Because of how the voice line was designed, I decided to mark it under this category. The debatable voice line was the following: "*Let's get this radianite, head home then go mimis.*" [Let's get this radianite, head home then go *sleep*]. The word "*mimis*" is a variation from the slang term '*mimir*', which originates from '*dormir*' [*sleeping*]. The other two voice lines had a sandwich-like structure as they both followed the format of Spanish-English-Spanish. With "*No manches, do they ever*

quit? Como friegan.”, the literal translation to “no manches” would be [*don't stain*], however, it is used similarly to [*no way*] or [*stop joking*]. “*Como friegan*”, on the other hand, can be translated to [*they are annoying*]. The final voice line of Gekko’s was as follows: “*Pero like, why can't we just hug it out? Pinche radianite.*” [*But like, why can't we just hug it out? F**cking radianite.*].

4.3.2 Gekko’s Character Identity

Gekko is depicted as a bright, family-oriented, and outgoing character (see 3.2.2). Him being a bi-/multilingual individual is established through his background as a first-generation immigrant in an English-speaking country, originating from a non-English speaking country. His voice lines mirror and promote these descriptions, alongside constructing his identity representation.

Central to Gekko’s character is being family-oriented, which is noticeable from his voice lines. In multiple instances, he speaks to his little creatures showcasing a nurturing side of him. This is actualised in his voice lines, for example: “*Sana, sana.*” [*Heal, heal.*], which is a reference to a children’s nursery rhyme “*Sana, sana, Colita de Rana*” [*Heal, heal, little frog’s tail*], used to console someone who has been hurt. Gekko mentions his mother a few times as well, which adds to his family-oriented personality. This trait, along with him being considered kind, shines through in his interactions with the other characters. His voice lines include multiple automatically triggered compliments, in which he uses endearing terms, such as “*jefa*” [*boss*] or *queen*, to applaud his allies.

Similarly to Fade and the other characters, his identity is ever-shifting and overlapping (Laakso et al., 2016). Although described in generally positive terms, his character does respond to the actions of the enemy team with reactions that can be interpreted as patronising. For example, calling them “*cuate*” [*buddy*] or taunting them by asking if they want more: “*Another? Órale.*” [*Another? Alright.*]. With all this taken into consideration, Gekko’s character design supports Hocking’s (2007) concept of ludonarrative dissonance. Considering he is located in a shooter game, Gekko is disconnected from the neighbourly and welcoming portrayal described through his voice lines.

As previously mentioned, Gekko is one of the few characters that demonstrates his membership to a particular speech community. He is the second Spanish-speaking character with

the first one being Reyna. They are often engaged in interaction utilising different code-switching practices or completely monolingual discussions in Spanish. The relationship they have, based on how it is represented through their language habits, is aligned with Morgan's (2005) introduction to speech communities.

To further authenticate the identity of his character, Gekko uses colloquial and regional terms and phrases such as "güey" [*dude*] and "no manches" [*no way/stop joking*]. These language habits add to the immersion and the representation of his identity as well as strengthen the position of language as a tool of representation, as argued by Webb (2009). It also contributes to his language identity, considering a significant amount of Gekko's vocabulary is slang words and/or phrases. Due to his use of colloquialisms, the intra-sentential habits of Gekko come across the most natural and realistic. The voice lines marked under this category (see 4.3.1) are fluid and effortless showcasing well how code-switching can manifest.

4.4 Discussing the Findings

In this section, I will analyse and discuss my findings in relation to previous studies as well as my research questions. I will begin with a summary of the findings, followed by a brief discussion of the data overview.

The analysis found various forms of code-switching and language use in the data, as well as different uses and triggers for the voice lines. In total, there were 260 voice lines analysed ranging over the code-switching categories introduced by Poplack (1980) and others. The findings aligned with the notion of language and identity being intertwined, which will be further interpreted in this chapter. The analysis also aligns with Gee's (2014) idea of video games being communicative and replying to the player's actions as most of the voice lines were triggered automatically in response to events in the game. For example, after getting a kill or winning a round, the game responds with a voice line fetched from a specific set of voice lines.

The analysis shows the language use and code-switching practices in *Valorant* to be diverse, and language to have various ways to be utilised. Voice lines are used in both ludological and/or narrative ways, as noted by Ng and Nesbitt (2013). Additionally, there are a few instances of ludonarrative dissociation (Hocking, 2007); however, most of the characters were harmonious. The dissonance occurs through gameplay, as it is an FPS that is revolved around

killing your enemies with damage-causing abilities; contrasted with the characters being depicted as friendly or calm through the voice lines.

The majority of the code-switching in the game is extra-sentential, which can be due to wanting to keep the primary language in English as the data is from the English voice-over. By having most of the voice line samples in English with singular tags interjected, helps keep the context of the voice lines understandable for individuals without language proficiency in a language other than English. Additionally, as noted in 4.1.1, repetition happens most commonly with the “thank you”-voice line. I suggest this is an attempt to make it clear what is being communicated, as this is an interaction triggered by the player.

Language, and more specifically code-switching, are used to build immersion in the game through terminology, as well as to showcase the complex nature of linguistic practices. The variation in how each character uses code-switching is influenced by their intended character design, and their general background in the game. For example, Astra and Raze are both up-beat characters, which is visible in the way they have multiple instances of addressing other characters in endearing terms. On the other hand, Reyna, who is designed to be aggressive and bitter, has voice lines with a more condescending tone, especially when addressing the enemy team. However, none of the characters have just one way of existing through language: the multidimensionality of the characters is reflected in the voice lines, such as having variety in tone and the contents. As was discussed in 2.2, people have various and overlapping identities produced in linguistic interaction (Laakso et al., 2016; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This is actualised in the way that none of the characters have one static way of interacting with others, instead, their voice lines are diverse in the ways of communicating as well as what is being said, which showcases their personalities and identities. Character identity thus becomes visible and authentic through language use and code-switching practices, as it is communicated through interaction with others, and the positioning of self in the voice lines and language practices.

Code-switching is often linked to speech communities since its primary function, in regard to social functionality, is to symbolise group membership and identification (Boztepe, 2003, p. 17; Morgan, 2005). However, I did not note any cohesive notions of speech communities appearing from the data, possibly due to the lack of a shared language besides English between all of the characters. In fact, there are just two pairs who share a language: Sage and Iso, who speak Mandarin Chinese, and Gekko and Reyna, who speak Spanish. Sage and Iso had very limited interactions together; however, as Sage is an older character, it might be

because of that. *Riot Games* has yet to update and increase Sage's voice lines, so it is difficult to assess whether the interactions between these two characters will increase as well. As of making this study, I argue Gekko and Reyna to actively use code-switching as a tool for demonstrating group identity and membership as they frequently interact with each other in either Spanish only or a mixture of Spanish and English. Sage and Iso show some signs of demonstrating group membership as well, for example, Iso refers to Sage as his "*senior*". Due to having little data as of making this study, it is challenging to properly evaluate their relationship.

Finally, diverse voice lines act as a testimony to how powerful language is as a tool for identity construction and representation. In addition to becoming realised in interactions, the identities of the characters are constructed and represented through self-representation (Thagard & Wood, 2015). This refers to the ways in which the characters view and represent themselves with the toolkit of language use and code-switching practices, visible in their unique language practices.

5 CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to explore the various ways in which language use, and more specifically code-switching, are utilised in video game character identity construction and representation in the game *Valorant* in order to address the following research questions of this study:

- (1) How is language used in identity construction and representation in *Valorant*?
- (2) How are code-switching practices utilised in character design in *Valorant*?

By analysing the multilingual voice lines as well as the voice lines in languages other than English with the toolkit provided by qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis, various ways code-switching were identified. The code-switching practices emerging from *Valorant* are consistent with the types of code-switching introduced in Poplack (1980). Additionally, code-switching and other language practices appearing from the data were various and diverse in nature, as they varied in content, language, and syntax. Extra-sentential and inter-sentential code-switching were the most prominent categories across all of the data, highlighting the importance of clarity in a primarily English-language data. By utilising these code-switching categories, it is possible to include other languages while remaining generally understandable despite the language proficiency of the audience.

The characters are constructed to be multidimensional and to have overlapping identities through the ways in which they use language in the voice lines. Language use acts as one of the main tools in how character identities are constructed and realised, as the construction happens through the interactions and language habits of the characters. These factors additionally contribute to the immersion of the game, which is intertwined with the authenticity of the characters and the game universe as a whole. The representation and identity of the characters is constructed through various practices that, in return, authenticate their identities – this then

becomes a representation in itself, as Suppes et al. (1994, p. 517) note representation to be “an image, model, or reproduction of that thing”.

The two characters I analysed, Fade and Gekko, have distinctive language practices and ways of communicating which help promote the construction and representation of their unique identities. Through the use of colloquialisms and other language choices, both their language and linguistic identities become actualised in the data, meaning the identities become real and authentic. As identity is constructed in interaction with self, the others, and the world, the way in which the voice lines are designed offers a look into the minds of the characters. It shows how they self-represent as well as how they utilise their language proficiencies to identify and establish themselves and their positions in the game world. This is while showcasing the fluidity and overlap of their identities (Laakso et al., 2016).

The limitations of the present study were, most importantly, my lack of language knowledge and proficiency. This made me occasionally uncertain as to how to categorise the data based on direct translations, language use, and the general syntax of the sentences. Additionally, many of the voice lines were overlapped, making categorising difficult at times. To gain a deeper understanding of the language varieties available in the data, it would be interesting to interview native-speakers, and/or to have advisors, who could help with the language-specifications. If I were to conduct my research again, I would want to analyse each of the characters individually instead of limiting the analysis to only two. It would also have been interesting to see how English language was used outside the data, which comprised of only the voice lines including code-switching.

With the conducted research, this paper provides information and insight into how language is utilised in video games, and more specifically in *Valorant*. Additionally, it supports Gee’s (2014) proposal on video game discourse analysis as well as the general idea of the intertwining between language and identity. This paper can be helpful when discussing video games in relation to representation and language, focusing on language usage. Finally, it contributes to the study of code-switching by taking an unconventional approach as I studied the responses to the actions happening in a video game.

In future research, it could be further studied how language use and code-switching are utilised in other games and provide comparisons between different games. The study could be expanded to include other game genres as well as other languages to get a broader understanding whether different languages are utilised in other ways.

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