

**FROM DICE ROLLS TO DISCOURSE - A LINGUISTIC
ANALYSIS OF FRAME SHIFTING IN TABLETOP
ROLEPLAYING GAMES**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on tutkia pöytäroolipelien (englanniksi lyhennettynä TTRPG) pelaajien käyttämiä kielellisiä keinoja, joita he hyödyntävät viestimään siirtymistä kahden eri kehystyyppin, pelikehyksen ja fantasiakehyksen, välillä. Goffmanin (1974) kehysteoria toimii pohjana tutkimukselle tarjoten näkökulman siihen, miten ihmiset navigoivat erilaisten sosiaalisten todellisuuksien välillä kielellisin keinoin. Finen (1983) mukaan myös pöytäroolipeleissä on erilaisia sosiaalisia todellisuuksia, joista tämä tutkimus keskittyy kahteen pöytäroolipeleille uniikkiin kehykseen. Pöytäroolipeleissä siirtymät kehyksien välillä tapahtuvat ajoittain hyvinkin nopeasti, ja yleisesti ilman ongelmia. Sitä, miten tämä saavutetaan pelaajien kesken ei ole kuitenkaan vielä paljoa tutkittu. Täten tutkimus pyrkii täyttämään aukkoa nykyisessä kielitieteellisessä tutkimuksessa vastaamalla kysymyksiin siitä, kuinka pelaajat ja pelinjohtaja viestivät toisilleen kehyksestä toiseen siirtymistä.</p> <p>Aineistoa kerättiin noin 17 tunnin edestä YouTube-alustalta kuvatuista pöytäroolipelisisioista. Ensiksi aineisto litemoitiin ja sitten analysoitiin keskusteluanalyysin keinoin. Analyysissa keskityttiin erityisesti siirtymäkohtiin. Näistä kohdista analysoitiin tarkemmin yleisesti käytettyjä kielellisiä keinoja, joita pelaajat hyödynsivät siirtyessään pelikehyksestä fantasiakehykseen ja päinvastoin. Tutkimus tarkastelee myös tämän lisäksi kielellisten keinojen eroavaisuuksia pelaajien ja pelinjohtajan välillä; ja tutkii näiden kahden roolin ilmentymistä keskustelussa.</p> <p>Tuloksista ilmenee, että osallistujat käyttivät säännönmukaisesti useita kielellisiä keinoja, kuten pitkiä taukoja ja nousevaa intonaatiota ennen siirtymistä, kun taas rakenteita muodostavia diskurssimerkkejä, kuten 'niin', käytettiin uuden kehyksen alussa. Näitä kielellisiä keinoja hyödynnettiin usein sekä yhdessä että erikseen. Pelaajien puheessa havaittiin samanlaisia tapoja merkitä kehystenvaihdoksia, vaikka yksittäisten pelaajien kielivalinnat vaihtelivat tilanteen ja pelin kulun mukaan. Pelinjohtaja hyödynsi suureksi osaksi samoja kielellisiä resursseja, vaikka eroavaisuusiakin ilmeni esimerkiksi diskurssimerkkien moninaisuuden muodossa.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus lisää tietoa vuorovaikutuksesta roolipelien kontekstissa, syventäen samalla ymmärrystä kehysteoriasta ja sen soveltamisesta. Tutkimuksen tulokset tuovat esiin roolipelien kielellisen monimutkaisuuden ja osoittavat, miten pelaajat käyttävät kieltä navigoidessaan onnistuneesti pelimaailman ja pelin välillä yhdessä. Tulevaisuudessa vastaavaa tutkimusta olisi hyödyllistä laajentaa eri ryhmädynamiikkoihin, jotta aihetta ymmärrettäisiin laajemmin.</p>	
Keywords Conversation analysis, frame analysis, tabletop roleplaying games, TTRPGs, discourse marker, intonation	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Despite being perceived as a demonic activity in the 1980s, tabletop roleplaying games, from this point forward TTRPGs, have experienced a resurgence in popularity. They have become a vibrant form of entertainment that blends storytelling, improvisation, and social interaction, and have influenced various forms of media such as movies, comics, and cartoons on their way. Within these immersive worlds, anyone can take the role of a heroic soldier or a cunning rogue if they so wish. Players of TTRPGs engage in collaborative storytelling and are guided by a referee who orchestrates the game's world, story, rules, and inhabitants. Central to the TTRPG experience is the interplay between the game participants and the language they utilize to navigate fantasy worlds. Therefore, language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a means of playing the game, shaping players' experiences, and enhancing their engagement with the game world. Through gameplay, players navigate multiple social worlds, often in rapid succession, solely relying on verbal and non-verbal language. This is achieved with little to no trouble among participants, yet the question of how this is achieved remains largely unexplored (Fine 1983 ; Williams, Hendricks and Winkler 2006).

While the rising popularity of TTRPGs has led to an increase in research focusing on these games, the linguistic study field remains underexplored, leaving room for further investigation (Williams et al. 2006). This study aims to contribute to this field by exploring the linguistic resources and strategies of TTRPGs through the lens of frame theory, introduced by Goffman (1974). Fine's (1983) contribution to the theory in the context of TTRPGs lays the groundwork for the current study. The focus, then, is on linguistic resources the game's participants utilize to mark shifts between the game's different frames during gameplay, specifically the gaming and the fantasy

frames which are unique to the activity of TTRPGs. Although unique, different frames of meaning are juggled in everyday life as well, and by examining this phenomenon through the lens of TTRPGs, the present study also contributes to the broader field of frame theory. Furthermore, this study seeks to discover differences between the two parties of these games, the referee and players, and in the ways in which they use language. Through a detailed conversation analysis of participant interactions, this study highlights how language facilitates the mechanics of the game through various resources, including discourse markers, silence, intonation and lexical choices.

The thesis is divided into different sections. Section 2 delves into the theoretical background of the current study, providing an overview of TTRPGs and the role language plays in them. Frame theory and its inclusion in TTRPGs alongside relevant studies in the field are also explored in this section. Following this, the purpose of the present study is discussed in more detail in addition to exploring the collected data, methodology and ethical considerations in section 3. Next, analysis of the collected data is presented in section 4 alongside multiple examples, highlighting the main linguistic resources signaling frame shifts. Both initiating and accomplishing resources are analyzed. Additionally, this section provides information on the main differences between how these linguistic strategies are utilized between players and the referee. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to previous studies and frame theory, leading to the conclusion of the study. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the linguistic resources of TTRPGs and the collaborative processes that take place in them. Further, this study seeks to bridge the gap in understanding how players linguistically navigate frames successfully. These insights may contribute to optimizing the use of TTRPGs in other surroundings, such as language classrooms, where they have already been adapted.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section serves as the foundation for the present study. By drawing on existing theories, frameworks, and concepts, this section provides a comprehensive overview of tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) and previous studies on them. Additionally, this section provides an overview of the topic of frame analysis and its adaptation to TTRPGs. Through an exploration of these perspectives, this section aims to contextualize the study within broader academic discussion and highlight TTRPGs as complex social phenomena. The theoretical background, then, provides a theoretical lens through which to interpret the findings. In addition, this section lays the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of the role of language and social interaction in TTRPGs and their implications for broader areas of study. First, the historical background and core principles of TTRPGs are examined, followed by an exploration of the role of language in gameplay. Next, the concept of frames and their adaptation to TTRPGs are discussed, along with a brief overview of previous linguistic research on the topic.

2.1 Tabletop Roleplaying Games

People learn to play when they are young, often first with their parents and then with their peers. Playing is not only a way to have fun and socialize, but also a way to learn (Madej 2016: 2). One type of play is to play games, be it board games, card games or video games. One notable definition for games is provided by Suits (1978), who identifies goal-orientation as a key characteristic of games. By his description, games offer

means of achieving the goal, yet they have rules, which often prohibit the use of the most efficient ways of reaching the said goal. Suits (1978) adds that a crucial element to games is then the lusory attitude of players, meaning that players must possess a certain attitude to be able to adapt to rules, which offer worse rather than better means of reaching the goal. Games have existed for a long time and have evolved alongside technology, expanding into various categories. One such category is tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs), which are discussed next.

The history of TTRPGs is often traced back to the late 18th century when miniature war games were first invented (Williams et al. 2006: 3). However, the emergence of fantasy roleplaying is frequently credited to the publication of Tactical Studies Rules for Dungeons & Dragons in 1974, making this publication a crucial moment for TTRPGs (Mason 2004: 1). Dungeons & Dragons, regarded as the first contemporary fantasy tabletop roleplaying game, introduced elements such as fantasy worlds, cultures, races, character classes and the importance of player characters and their story progression (Williams et al. 2006: 3). This transition from a strategic war game to immersive roleplaying elevated the gaming experience, allowing players to delve into imaginative worlds and identify with various characters (Mason 2004: 3). TTRPGs began to gain popularity in the 1970s and despite a rough beginning with their association to satanic messages, TTRPGs have evolved into a significant subculture of their own in modern society (Williams et al. 2006: 1; Mason 2004: 2).

TTRPGs are typically played in small groups in indoor settings. However, in recent years they have also garnered attention as a form of entertainment online. Additionally, they have as of late inspired various forms of media, including movies, books, comics, TV series, and live performances for audiences. Despite their newfound popularity and recognition as valuable tools for analysis, resource management, and psychological therapy, systematic research on TTRPGs and their social implications remains limited (Williams et al. 2006). Thus, understanding TTRPGs and their social constructs requests exploration. Next, what TTRPGs are and how they function, including the basic rules of the games, are explored to provide better understanding of

the present study. However, when talking about TTRPGs, it should be noted that there are various settings and rules that can be used, and the above-mentioned Dungeons & Dragons is just one of them. Therefore, the next section explores the general principles of TTRPGs.

2.1.1 Settings and Rules of TTRPGs

TTRPGs in their simplicity consist of players and a referee who sit around a table for a gaming session to discuss together for hours at a time (Williams et al. 2006: 3). In TTRPGs players assume the roles of fictional characters which are often created by players themselves while other times decided by the referee or other means. In any case, these characters have their own personalities, though at times inspired by players' own personalities, abilities, backgrounds, strengths and weaknesses which the characters use to navigate through the fantasy world created by the referee. The referee, who is often referred to as a game master or a dungeon master depending on the setting, then creates scenarios, including storylines, environments and inhabitants of the fantasy world, for players to interact with. Concretely the referee describes verbally the environment, the looks and behaviors of non-player characters and speaks as every other character who players interact with, creating the setting for players. Players as their characters, also referred to as player characters, then react to what the referee has created and build upon that through their actions, which again are conveyed verbally to others at the table (Fine 1983: 72). Consequently, players and the referee have distinct roles during the course of the game (Williams et al. 2006: 44). TTRPGs are heavily interactive in nature, as players can influence the world and characters created by the referee and vice versa. The outcome of the mixture of creative ideas and inspiration gathered from popular literature, and collaboration of players and the referee, is a fantasy world with its own politics, societal issues, rules et cetera - a complex world, which in its fantastical elements is realistic in its own right (Fine 1983: 73-76).

While TTRPGs provide a setting in which players have freedom to do and explore to their heart's content, their actions are still rooted in rules and game mechanics.

Characters' strengths and weaknesses are realized in the game as different numbers typically on a paper, also known as a character sheet, where all the necessary information regarding the player character is written down. For instance, these numbers describe how fast the character is, which determines how far the character can move in a certain amount of time, and how defensive they are, which influences how hard it is for an enemy to hit them. Furthermore, TTRPGs are heavily characterized by dice rolls, which determine variable outcomes and consequences of most actions, such as attempts to charm other characters, or attacks described earlier (Williams et al. 2006: 24). The referee often has guidelines on how much players need to roll in certain situations to succeed, while other times they come up with the needed number on the spot. However, in its simplicity, the higher the roll in a 20-sided dice, the higher chance of success there is. Therefore, even though a character is strong, they might fail in their attempts occasionally, as dice rolling adds an element of randomness to the gameplay. While rolling the dice is important for the gameplay, the character strengths and weaknesses can affect the outcome of a dice roll. For instance, a physically strong character receives additional bonuses when attacking an enemy with a weapon, whereas a wizard-like character, characterized by intelligence, might be physically weaker and receive penalties when using a weapon to attack to their dice roll. Thus, some simple mathematical skills are needed for players to be able to play TTRPGs.

TTRPGs also have rules, many of which are described in books meant for players of these games. For example, *Dungeons & Dragons* has over 100 pages of rules (Fine 1983: 111). However, it is typical for TTRPGs that the rules are discussed and decided in the group of players, which allows the participants to modify rules to suit their wishes and wants (Fine 1983: 111). Although players have a lot of freedom in their settings, which are often fantasy-like in nature, they are both bound by the physical laws and logic of their worlds, and their characters' abilities and characteristics. For example, it would not make sense for a lawfully good character to constantly break rules and steal from the innocents without guilt nor would it make sense for a character to go for a swim in a world where all water is poisonous. However, as stated above,

the settings created by the referee vary significantly from one another, so what is achievable in one setting is not in another.

Unlike many other games, as discussed earlier, TTRPGs do not have a goal per se nor are they competitive in their nature (Williams et al. 2006). There are no winning or losing terms and instead of one specific goal, the goals are often more arbitrary, such as character development and general survival (Williams et al. 2006). The sessions can thus be seen as consisting of temporary goals, such as finding a guarded treasure in a trapped dungeon or finding out who was behind the murder of the city's mayor. Therefore 'losing' conditions often have to do with character deaths or failures to pursue a certain storyline. The multiplicity of varying goals is due to the session-like way in which TTRPGs are played. While TTRPGs can be played once, player groups often gather to play as the same characters in the same fantasy world over extended periods of time, which leaves room for various developments and storylines.

Although TTRPGs have general settings, rules, and mechanics, the worlds, stories, and characters can be highly diverse, resulting in unique experiences for the participants. For instance, one campaign may unfold in the wild west, with plotlines inspired by western folklore, while another might be set in a fantastical island overrun by mythical creatures, where wizards struggle to maintain control. Additionally, the relationship between the player's personal identity and the role they adopt in the game can vary: some players choose to portray themselves with their characters, while others embody entirely different personas (Fine 1983: 206). This dynamic can result in a blend of the player's own characteristics with those of their player character (Fine 1983: 208). The experience of TTRPGs also varies due to differences in playing styles. Since what happens within the game is realized through the use of language, so are the different playing styles. While it would not be relevant to list all possible playing styles, some examples are given. Some players create specific voices and accents for their characters, taking more of an acting approach, whereas many speak as their player character as they normally do. In addition, some players refer to other participants' characters by their real, personal names, even if they were talking as their

character whereas others refer to other characters by their characters' names (Fine 1983: 201). Depending on how the participants address each other and characters, they must negotiate and interpret meanings at various levels. However, speech style is not crucial for successful roleplaying in TTRPGs (Fine 1983: 214).

While TTRPGs share many similarities with acting or improvisational theater, they possess distinct characteristics that set them apart from each other. As Williams et al. (2006: 41) explain, TTRPGs in their nature have longer duration as they often consist of hours of long sessions, which can create a campaign that consists of tens or even hundreds of sessions. There are also pre-game preparations which are often necessary for the referee to make to prepare for gaming sessions, such as memorizing important story lines and creating possible enemy encounters. Additionally, TTRPG sessions include various out-of-game interactions, such as casual chit-chat and eating, which are not part of the game in itself. Lastly, they add that playing TTRPGs, unlike acting, improv or not, often does not involve physical acting, as everything the player does is done through discourse. This does not imply that body language is absent in TTRPGs, however, all in-game actions and events must be verbally communicated.

Given the immersive and linguistic nature of play styles and identities inherent in TTRPGs, there is growing interest in adapting them to other settings, such as language classrooms (Fine 1983: 2). Roleplaying has been adapted as educational exercises and TTRPGs have been studied as tools for language classrooms (see e.g. Williams et al. 2006; Torres-Rodriguez and Martínez-Granada 2022; Waluyo 2019; Henriksen 2004). This intersection of roleplaying and language use is the focus of the following section.

2.1.2 Tabletop Roleplaying Games as Language Games

As established earlier, gaming in TTRPGs is grounded in communication and shared experiences, since playing relies on verbal interaction rather than physical acting (Fine 1983: 3). If a player wants their character to do something, they have to verbally express what they want to do, and how to do it, be it a course of action or an order they want to give to another player character. Even the gaming elements, which include

the rolling of dice and writing down how much damage a character takes, must be communicated to others in order to make them into a reality within the gaming world. Therefore, the importance of language in TTRPGs cannot be overstated; without it, gameplay or the game itself would not exist. Although most of the communication takes place orally, players also utilize alternative forms of language, including handwritten notes and books, particularly for conveying rules and clarifications. Additionally, scholars have recognized the importance of other semiotic resources in TTRPG interaction, including gaze, paralinguistics, and gestures, which participants can use to negotiate events and roles successfully (Williams et al. 2006: 59, 73). These non-verbal cues strengthen verbal communication, enhancing the dynamics of social interaction among players, for which they are to be recognised as crucial components of the gaming experience (Williams et al. 2006: 73). Therefore, language in its many forms serves as the primary medium through which players interact with the game world and each other, facilitating the exchange of information and the coordination of actions within the game.

While the characters and fantasy worlds within TTRPGs are explored through the use of language, the sessions also consist of out-of-game interactions, which do not take place in the fantasy world. Despite this, out-of-game discussions are a big and at times even important part of TTRPGs. Players can use out-of-game talk strategically to modulate the pace of play by asking clarifying questions regarding the game from the referee, to negotiate rules and to collaborate with the other participants (Corbitt 2024). Therefore out-of-game talk is frequently used by players, and it can be used as a resource to negotiate fairness in the game within which the referee has the most control over (Corbitt 2024). Therefore out-of-game discussions are tightly associated with the negotiation of rules. Conclusively, different levels of discussions occur during TTRPG gameplay often simultaneously or in rapid succession and participants have to both negotiate and interpret constantly in what context each statement is to be taken in.

Although the player characters are different entities from the player itself, characters in TTRPGs are always limited by their players. Players portray their characters

through verbal representation, and therefore the character's vocabulary is limited to the player's vocabulary and can shape character's actions based on their own subjective experiences (Fine 1983; Williams et al. 2006). This means players inevitably know some things that their character does not. For example, a player can recognize an enemy and know its weaknesses, even if a player character has never encountered one before, leaving it up to the player to decide whether to utilize the information as their character or not. In contrast, a character can possess information that a player does not have (Fine 1983: 186). An example of this is a magician character that knows a lot about rituals and ingredients needed to perform them due to their upbringing, while the player playing that character does not have this information or experience. Consequently, Corbitt (2024) claims that research on roleplaying games and language often considers epistemics. Epistemics, as Heritage and Pomerantz (2012) explain, is a concept that is used to describe how individuals negotiate their knowledge and ensure their actions are understandable to others in sequences of interaction. Therefore, players often must ask questions regarding their characters and what they know about the fantasy world during the gameplay to help with their roleplaying and to negotiate their character's knowledge accurately (Corbitt 2024). However, players do occasionally fail to keep their information as a player separate from their character's knowledge. While this can be accepted by the group and the referee, it can also be corrected by other participants through repair (Breland 2022: 2540). Either way, the degree in which out-of-character knowledge can be utilized within the game needs to be communicated within the group.

Unlike traditional forms of storytelling such as films or novels, TTRPGs lack a separate author and audience; instead, they offer a flexible structure in which a person can first be the author and the audience the next second. This structure accommodates various contexts and content (Kim 2004: 33). Therefore, TTRPGs are characterized by storytelling that unfolds collectively among players and the referee (Fine 1983: 3). Players contribute to the shared universe of discourse through their interactions, weaving together narratives and co-creating the game's reality (Fine 1983: 136; Stevanovic, Lindholm and Arminen 2016: 18). This includes collaboratively creating cultures, social

structures and shaping the norms and values of the imagined world (Fine 1983: 122). As the shared world is constructed through interaction, the communication itself is grounded in the collaborative creation of that same world (Stevanovic et al. 2016: 16). Therefore, the co-creation of the fantasy world in which the game's events take place serves as a shared reference for the group (Fine 1983: 2). However, the line between the conceived story and perceived reality is often blurred, as players continually revise and reinterpret the narrative based on their interactions and experiences (Kim 2004: 35). Each individual has a slightly different picture of this fantasy world and understanding of its social and historical context, which adds to the communicative element of TTRPGs as the shared understanding needs to be communicated continuously (William, Hendricks and Winkler 2006). Hence TTRPGs serve as dynamic social worlds and universes of discourse. These social worlds and their dynamics are explored in the following section.

2.2 Frame Theory

People are constantly interpreting their surroundings, and the understanding of events is highly dependent on the context (Huang 2015: 13). For instance, hateful words and physical altercations are typically understood as negative, often indicating a fight. However, the same actions in theater are not a cause for concern, as the viewers can contextualize them as part of the theatrical performance. Although this is an extreme example, similar events are continuously juggled in everyday lives, for example in TTRPGs. Goffman (1974) introduced the concept of frames to explore how people interpret and organize their experiences and interactions in everyday life. The exploration of frames forms the focus of this section of the text. The following section briefly outlines the basics of frame theory. This is followed by Fine's (1983) adaptation of frames to TTRPGs, and then by discussion of previous research on the topic of frames and their linguistic resources.

2.2.1 Frame Theory in Interaction

In short, a frame is a perception of reality people share with each other (Goffman 1974). These frames help individuals to categorize and understand what is happening in a given situation, guiding them to behave accordingly. The interactive notion of a frame, then, refers to a definition of what is going on in interaction, and without them utterances could not be interpreted (Tannen and Wallat 1987). While multiple frames constantly exist and operate, Goffman (1974) names the framework individuals naturally inhabit as the primary framework, which is shaped and generated by culture. The primary framework is the ultimate event of reality, in which all other frames take place. He splits this framework into natural and social frameworks, first of which includes purely physical experiences. Social primary frameworks are built on natural frameworks, including mechanisms controlled by humans, such as laws, rules, power, culture, institutes and organizations. For example, one euro coin would be a round, metallic piece without social frameworks at play, whereas with the social context it gains the meaning of currency used for exchanging goods and services. Other, often multiple, frames are embedded within and connected to the primary framework, with people frequently shifting from one frame to another (Goffman 1974: 21). Some everyday frames include the work frame, which is evoked in workplaces, and the education frame which shapes how people engage in learning environments. Fine (1983) emphasizes, and as demonstrated at the beginning of this section, that context is crucial in guiding participants' interpretation of current events and frames. Frames, then, affect how utterances are understood at any given moment, with a frame serving as a shared definition of a situation (Persson 2018: 65).

Since its introduction in 1974, frame theory has been applied to various perspectives, such as sociology from which the theory originates from. Frames have also been explored through a linguistic lens, using methods such as conversation analysis (CA) to discover how frames are managed in the moment. Through exposure to different kinds of settings and situations, people not only develop frames suitable for those contexts but also continuously interpret those of others. Additionally, frames help to

convey different categories and identities, enabling individuals to express roles or relationships specific to each context (Sacks 1972). Therefore, people are continually tasked with interpreting their surroundings and understanding utterances within the appropriate frame (Tannen and Wallat 1987: 206). People identify frames in interaction by association with linguistic and paralinguistic resources, giving emphasis on how words are said in addition to what is said (Tannen and Wallat 1987). As meaning making in general, social worlds and their corresponding frames are socially constructed and require continuous negotiation (Persson 2018: 65). This is facilitated by speakers' orientation to producing talk with the recipient in mind, which is also called recipient design in natural talk (Heritage and Pomerantz 2012: 211). Framing, then, is a collaborative effort, requiring both the speaker and the listener to signal understanding about the frame in which utterances are to be interpreted (Goffman 1981: 15). Therefore, shifts between frames need to be communicated as well.

Some specific contexts, mainly classrooms and healthcare interactions, have been studied to identify the linguistic resources associated with frame shifts, which are points in which the frame for interpretation changes. For example, Park (2021) found that frame shifts within microteaching are often marked by laughter and smiles. Furthermore, teachers often use shift-implicative tokens, such as 'okay' to signal a shift in the frame of events. Okada (2010), on the other hand concluded that different frames contain category-bound activities, from which listeners can interpret in which frame an utterance is to be interpreted in. Therefore, certain categories are linked to certain activities and thus make it apparent who the speaker is (Sacks 1972). Thus, lexical choices play a huge role in constructing meaning and moving from one social reality to another. For instance, the way people describe themselves is a rhetorical practice, which reveals information about their relationships and perceptions of each other (Abell and Stokoe 2013). Skidmore and Murakami (2010) focused on prosody in frame shifting between different kinds of pedagogical activities and determined that faster interaction pace, increased volume, stressed syllables, vowel lengthening, and pauses are often utilized in frame shifts inside classrooms. Instruction-giving was specifically

marked by increased volume and stressed syllables, whereas teacher-led IRF discussions were characterized by a rapid pace of interaction (Skidmore and Murakami 2010). Medical examinations have also been studied by Tannen and Wallat (1987), and in their study they identified that frame shifts are often realized in different registers. For example, in the examination frame the paediatrician used drawn out vowels, shifts in pitch, long pauses, whereas in the videotaping frame flat intonation patterns were common. These studies highlight linguistic strategies as crucial in marking frame shifts in various contexts. Whether through prosody, register shifts or laughter, the resources facilitate frame shifts, allowing smooth and meaningful transitions in interaction. Now having discussed the basic premise of frame theory and its connection to interaction, the next section focuses on how they can be applied to TTRPGs, placing frames into a context crucial to this study.

2.2.2 Frames in TTRPGs

Fine (1983) argues that games in general are suitable for the application of frame theory because games have logical structures and clearly defined social conventions. He further claims that the application of frame analysis to TTRPGs is especially relevant on account of the high levels of engrossment players often experience during gameplay. Fine (1983) describes engrossment as players voluntarily cutting themselves off from other realms of experience, resulting in a clear distinction of the fantasy world from primary frameworks that individuals naturally inhabit. While engrossment is typical for other games as well, in roleplaying games this feeling is especially shared with other participants, who cocreate the social world of the game. As earlier discussed, in TTRPGs there is a shared vision, a set of beliefs and understandings, about the fantasy world which is interacted and agreed upon among players during gameplay, although all the events are grounded in the physical world (Williams et al. 2006: 42). Understanding these framing processes within TTRPGs is crucial for analyzing the social dynamics of TTRPGs and the shifts in frames that the current study is analyzing. Those frames are briefly explored next.

2.2.2.1 The Three Frames

Fine (1983) names three frames that are at work during TTRPG sessions. The first of these is the primary framework which has been explained in the previous chapter. As other activities, the gaming activity is also grounded in that framework (Fine 1983: 186). In the context of TTRPGs, the primary framework entails elements such as the friendships between players and the interaction with the space in which the act of playing occurs. Although this frame is not technically part of the game experience and its structure, in reality the primary framework significantly influences the gaming experience. The level of influence depends on each group and playing session and is therefore variable.. For instance, if players are close friends, their in-game interactions might be influenced by jokes and references specific to their personal relationship, whereas a group of players who have recently met through the game may have a different dynamic. In addition, the surroundings might pose different obstacles for players. For example, playing at one of the player's houses might include their child barging into the room, resulting into interrupted gameplay.

The second frame that Fine (1983) names is the gaming frame. The actor in this frame is the player, whose actions are governed by a set of rules and constraints of TTRPGs (Fine 1983: 186). Therefore, players possess information about the game and its structures and operate in the light of this knowledge. The gaming frame includes activities, such as rolling the dice, writing notes, and marking down damage their character took on the character sheet. Within these first two frames, participants of the game are strongly connected to the role of a player, whereas in the third frame the role is different. The participant is no longer just a player, but a character (Fine 1983: 205). Fine (1983) names this third frame as the fantasy frame, which is the social reality created by players, whose characters inhabit the fantasy world. Actions within this frame consists of character interactions and actions they take. Therefore, everything that occurs in the fantasy world, happens within the fantasy frame. Consequently, the fantasy frame is imaginary and exists solely in the minds and interactions of the participants of TTRPGs. It could be argued that the gaming frame operates as the bridge between

the fantasy frame and the primary framework, as it juggles gaming elements that influence the fantasy frame in the light of the primary framework. However, its role is so distinct from the other two, which requires it to be its own frame of interpretation.

While these frames, introduced by Fine (1983), form the focus of the present study, it should be noted that similar perceptions about the social structure of TTRPG have been made outside of frame theory as well. Waskul and Lust (2004) used the following terms to explain a similar phenomenon: the person (the primary framework), player (the gaming frame) and the persona (the fantasy frame). While the concept of frame analysis was not used by Waskul and Lust (2004), these terms carry similar meanings to frames, indicating the notion of their existence in different research perspectives.

2.2.2.2 Frames of TTRPGs in Action

The stability of the three frames is often influenced by the events in the game. For example, when the group is facing a monster, participants' engrossment typically increases, keeping the fantasy frame more stable as players are focused on the survival of their characters (Fine 1983: 196). However, in TTRPGs players regularly shift between these frames to navigate between in-game and out-of-game contexts, dynamically adjusting their roles. Therefore, frames within TTRPGs are not stable, and shift constantly due to several reasons (Fine 1983: 197). For instance, the fantasy frame is often interrupted by the primary framework if a phone is called, or if one needs to react to biological needs. Despite the continuous shifts in frames, these occurrences usually pose no problems to the participants. Fine (1983) suggests that this is due to the participant's ability to perceive what is happening in the game at the given moment from the content of participants' interaction, emphasizing the importance of context. Understanding the rapid shifts in frames is also enabled by Heritage and Pomerantz' (2012) notion of recipient design in interaction. Despite these notions, questions of how or why consensus is achieved in these rapid shifts is left mainly explored.

Although it is uncommon for players to be confused about which frame a statement belongs to, misunderstandings occasionally arise. Fine (1983) observed that confusion

often occurs when elements within the fantasy frame overlap with topics that have a counterpart in the primary framework, such as age, name, time, and place. For example, if a participant asks for time from the referee, the referee might answer with the time of the real world instead of that of the fantasy world. Misunderstandings might also occur due to shifts in playing styles (Breland 2022). If a player who has created a distinct speech style for their character suddenly speaks in their own voice as the character instead, it may cause confusion among players. Therefore, the participants must identify who the speaker is at all times and have a dynamic consensus on altering and restoring frames (Fine 1983: 204). This is, however, not only specific to TTRPGs, as people toggle between various frames in their daily lives as well (Williams et al. 2006).

As discussed above, players jump in and out of the different frames in various situations without many issues. However, how these shifts are successfully achieved is mostly left unexplored, even when the interactive nature of the shifts is acknowledged (Fine 1983; William, Hendricks and Winkler 2006). Nonetheless, some studies do address this topic. Corbitt's (2024) study on TTRPGs examines how metagame talk is employed to negotiate fairness among players. The study also touches on how players communicate in and between different frames. For instance, he noticed, alongside Williams et al. (2006), that players often use first person pronouns, refer to other characters by their character's names and sometimes use stylized language while speaking within the fantasy frame. Although these have been noted as common features of fantasy frame talk, especially the last notion should not be generalized, as people play in unique styles (William, Hendricks and Winkler 2006: 48). Nonetheless, discussions taking place in the fantasy frame often include specific terms to that world, sometimes even using specialized language that only exist within the fantasy world (Williams et al. 2006).

In contrast, the gaming frame is frequently communicated through a third person perspective of the player's characters, by using phrases such as 'did my character', whereas discussions taking place in the primary framework often consist of various inside jokes and references to popular culture (Corbitt 2024; William, Hendricks and

Winkles 2006). Corbitt (2024) highlights that the referee often steers the focus back to the fantasy frame, which highlights their role in guiding the game's narrative and characters, despite the collaborative nature of TTRPGs. In addition, he observed some linguistic strategies participants utilized when transitioning from the fantasy frame to the gaming frame. Out-of-game talk is noted to be initiated with discourse markers, such as 'oh!', and followed by turn-initial phases such as 'wait' (Corbitt 2024). While this study provides valuable insight into the linguistic resources used to negotiate frames within TTRPGs, its focus on out-of-game talk and the lack of other studies in similar nature in general leaves much to be researched.

Although the frames of TTRPGs have been explored in the previous sections, the various existing identities at play during gameplay of TTRPGs have also been briefly mentioned. The common identities emerging within TTRPGs are the player and the character identity, which have been emphasized by Waskul and Lust (2004). However, the concept of frames is utilized instead of the concept of identity in the current study for simple reasons. While the player identity is separate from that of a character, and therefore players do not only manipulate characters as players but are characters, it can be argued that these identities consist of even further identities (Fine 1983: 186). The character identity entails other identities such as race identity, family identity and class identity, which are invoked in discourse within the gameplay when necessary. To simply refer to the multifaceted character creation with the term character identity could take away from the complexity of character identities, all of which are communicated differently just as any situated identity in the real world (Zimmerman 1998). Furthermore, frames emphasize how meaning is co-constructed among players, which aligns with the inherently collaborative nature of TTRPGs. Additionally, frame analysis is well-suited to study the fluidity of interaction, whereas identity-focused approaches might struggle to account for rapid transitions. And finally, the study is not interested in understanding the multiple identities that emerge within the gameplay, though this is another interesting topic of discussion for further research.

Frame analysis and linguistic research on TTRPGs are valuable for several reasons. As discussed above, TTRPGs have been adapted into language classrooms as tools for language learning, despite the limited research on their linguistic aspects. This gap is noteworthy given the linguistic nature of TTRPGs, which is frequently recognized in literature. Moreover, while TTRPGs represent a specific setting that does not spontaneously occur in everyday life due to its various rules and preparations, people constantly juggle between different frames of existence in their daily interactions. Through TTRPGs, these simplified yet exaggerated dynamics can be examined. Therefore, TTRPGs work as an example setting to study phenomena that occur in everyday life constantly. This concludes the discussion on TTRPGs, the role of the language in them and frames, while the next section delves into the focus of the study, discussing methodology, data collection and ethical considerations.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology section addresses the objectives and research questions regarding the ways in which players communicate the shift of frames within a specific context, namely TTRPGs, which offer a unique environment for such exploration. The focus of this Chapter is on considerations regarding the selection and analysis of data, the application of an appropriate analytic framework, and ethical considerations regarding the use of online data as sources for research. First, the aims and research questions guiding the study are discussed.

3.1 Aims and Research Questions

TTRPGs are played through discourse, which results in unique demands for interaction and makes these games an attractive site for linguistic analysis. As discussed above, people take on distinct roles during the gameplay and navigate through various social realities, or frames as Goffman (1974) names them. There have been multiple mentions on how people navigate through these frames often without an issue, yet there is a lack of research explaining why that is or how this is achieved (see e.g. Fine 1983 and Waskul and Lust 2004), even when research regarding the failure of recognizing current frames within TTRPGs has been conducted (Breland 2022). Therefore, the aim of the study is to contribute to this gap in research and to understand the ways in which players linguistically navigate the TTRPG frames in English. The focus of the study is the gaming and fantasy frames for a few reasons. First, these frames are unique to TTRPGs. Second, upon gathering the data, these two frames were noticed

to be the most frequent and relevant ones. Third, due to the scope of the present study, not all the frames and their intricate details could be included in the analysis. Additionally, acknowledging the different roles of players and referee, this study is also interested in exploring if the frames are invoked differently between these two groups. The purpose of this study can be summarized to the following research questions.

1. What linguistic resources are used to indicate shifts between the gaming frame and the fantasy frame during TTRPG sessions?
2. What differences are there in the ways in which players evoke these frames compared to the referee?

Based on my experience with playing TTRPGs, I hypothesize that the referee and players invoke different frames due to their distinct roles. The referee leads the game, managing its world and plot, whereas players typically react to the referee's directives or questions. My personal experience is echoed by Corbitt's (2024) research, who noticed the different roles these two groups play in metagame talk - where players invoked the gaming frame by asking clarifying questions from the referee, the referee used the characters names to guide the attention back to the fantasy frame.

3.2 Data

As TTRPGs have grown in popularity, they have also become a form of entertainment. Many player groups livestream their gaming sessions and upload them on various social media platforms. The data for the study were obtained from one of those social media platforms, namely YouTube, from a group called *Critical Role*. While the data was collected from YouTube, the same material can also be accessed through other media platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts. This group is composed of eight players and the referee (GM), therefore nine players in total. All the players are American voice actors and actors from various video games and series. While the group consists of nine players, all participants are not present in each recording, so there is often eight to nine people present in each recording. The group started playing together at the end of 2012, the first two years of which were played outside of cameras.

In 2015 the group started to livestream its gaming sessions in the middle of the first campaign on a live streaming service called Twitch, recordings of which were later uploaded on various social media platforms mentioned above. The game system used by *Critical Role* is one of the most popular TTRPGs Dungeons & Dragons, the rules of which the group has adapted and changed to fit its playstyle and worldbuilding.

The data was collected during the summer of 2024 from the YouTube account *Geek & Sundry*. The videos from which the data was collected were published on the platform during the summer of 2015. Almost seventeen hours were listened for the purposes of the study. To better understand the data, a few points are addressed. The campaign from which the data is collected consists of over 115 sessions, in addition to the 2 prior years played together, allowing the players to have a lot of time to familiarize themselves with their own and others' fantasy characters and playstyles. In contrast, players who have just started may not yet be fully adapted to their characters, leading to different gameplay behaviors, in addition to varying individual play styles (Williams et al. 2006). Therefore, the players of *Critical Role* are relatively experienced in TTRPGs and familiar with its conventions, having likely created certain, group-based routines. Additionally, the players in this group are friends outside of the TTRPG environment, which probably influences their interactions. Moreover, all players are voice actors and actors with experience in voicing fantasy characters, though this detail is countered by the variability in TTRPG playstyles. Different groups, with varying levels of familiarity and experience, would likely exhibit different gameplay dynamics as players adapt their styles to different environments, contexts and people. This consideration highlights the need for further research to understand how frames are invoked in a broader range of TTRPG contexts. Next the analytic framework utilized in the study is discussed.

3.3 Analytic Framework

As the present study focuses on the smaller units of used language, the method of analysis employed is conversation analysis (CA) which studies the structures of talk-in-interaction and intricate details of interaction (ten Have 2007). He, alongside many other researchers including Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), further notes that the focus in CA is on natural interaction instead of researcher-provoked interaction, under which the data fall. However, data in CA are often approached with unmotivated looking, meaning that a researcher should not have any preliminary ideas for research and instead approach the data with an open mind, constructing the study around what is found in the data (ten Have 2007: 121). However, while an open mind was kept to a degree, the interest on frames within TTRPGs guided the study, serving as the foundation for data collection and analysis. Nonetheless, motivated approach facilitated the data collection by allowing concentration on specific points in the data. Furthermore, many researchers of CA argue that context is not necessary for CA, as all essential context is embedded within the discourse itself. However, contemporary views recognize that ethnographic data can enhance, clarify and complement findings (Stevanovic et al. 2016; Abel and Stokoe 2001). Given that the present study focuses on the language of TTRPGs, contextual understanding is crucial and therefore acknowledged in the analysis.

While listening to the recordings, notes were made when points of interest occurred, which were later transcribed by repeatedly listening to the episodes and then later analyzed. Following ten Have's (2007) suggestion for CA, first turn-taking, then sequences and lastly repairs were focused on during the analysis and recognized in the transcribing process. Only the most recurring instances are discussed in the findings to generate general formulations of different linguistic devices used in TTRPGs (ten Have 2007: 149). However, it should be noted that CA focuses on explicating locally used resources rather than establishing permanent and absolute structures (Fine 2007: 222). The transcription model first introduced by Jefferson (1989) was utilized in the transcribing process. The used conventions and markers can be found in Appendix 1.

This research focuses exclusively on spoken language, excluding body language from the analysis. Although body language is crucial for meaning making and understanding, it is beyond the scope of this paper. Additionally, the players' positioning on camera can lead to misinterpretations of body language, possibly resulting in unreliable conclusions. Ethical considerations are discussed next.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

As the data for this study has been collected from a social media platform, a few ethical considerations need to be discussed before moving on to the findings. In recent years, the collection of data from online platforms has been a topic of debate, particularly due to the rapid evolution and updates of these platforms and their terms and conditions. There are many questions a researcher should consider when approaching data collection online, such as anonymity of the people involved, how vulnerable they are, how easy they are to recognize from the data and questions of copyright. In discourse studies, one important question should be considered - is the study about texts or people (Markham and Buchanan 2012).

While it could be argued that creators of online content should be aware that their texts are public and therefore could be used for research purposes, many social media users remain unaware that researchers utilize the content they have created (Fiesler and Proferes 2018: 2). However, the data is collected from YouTube, where accounts publish videos for a global audience, and not from the comment section where anyone can contribute. *Critical Role* publishes its content in an episodic format, with each episode distinctly titled and containing multiple direct addresses to the audience, indicating that the content is intended for public viewership. In addition, the participants of the TTRPG in *Critical Role* are voice actors known from various shows and video games, making their identities public beyond the platform and the context of TTRPGs. *Critical Role* actively markets itself by highlighting its 'popular voiceover actors,' naming the players, and featuring their pictures in their marketing (Critical Role n.d.).

Therefore, the use of data respects the public and well-known status of the participants. Regarding copyright issues, the content policy of *Critical Role* allows people to use, display and create works based on its intellectual property for non-commercial use, under which the study falls (Critical Role n.d.). Despite this, a certain type of anonymity has been given to the players by changing the names of the players in the analysis section, even though their real names are readily available online. In addition, a permission for the study was given by the Open Science Centre team of the university.

Additionally, ethical considerations must address the researcher's position. As a researcher, I could be perceived as an insider rather than an outsider. Although I did not participate in the creation of the data used in this study, I have both personal experience in playing TTRPGs and listening to *Critical Role* prior to the research process. This familiarity with TTRPG conventions and specific terminology, as well as prior exposure to the structure and playstyles of the *Critical Role* participants, provides me with a contextual understanding of the data (Mondada 2013). While *Critical Role* has evolved over years, leading to changes in playstyles, my prior knowledge may have an influence on the analysis and findings. Nonetheless, I believe that the familiarity with both the TTRPG system and *Critical Role* makes the data gathering and analysis more effective.

Finally, the players' awareness of being recorded is discussed. While it is possible that the players behave differently on-camera compared to off-camera, this cannot be confirmed due to inaccessibility of off-camera gaming. Nonetheless, the players of *Critical Role* are aware of their gameplay being recorded for online viewing. This awareness may influence their behavior similarly to how participants in research might alter their behavior when they acknowledge their interaction is being recorded. Although the *Critical Role* cast occasionally addresses the presence of the camera and viewers, similar effects can also occur in private sessions where players are aware of the recording. Furthermore, the data was collected from when the group had just started recording their sessions for online viewing. As mentioned earlier, the group had been playing

for approximately two years prior to streaming and uploading their gaming sessions online, making them inexperienced with being recorded in comparison to their current uploads. Furthermore, the group had not yet achieved the level of popularity they have today. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the presence of cameras can influence participant behavior (Labov 1972). With these ethical considerations addressed, the following section discusses the findings.

4 ANALYSIS

This section presents the analysis of the collected data. First, the transitions from the gaming frame to the fantasy frame are examined. Then, the reverse transition is explored, including the linguistic resources used in shifting from the fantasy frame back to the gaming frame. Upon reviewing the data, recurring patterns were identified, and the most common conversational strategies emerging during frame shifts in TTRPGs are highlighted in the following paragraphs, with several examples provided. The analysis explores cues initiating shifts and the following actions, which accomplish the change. In addition, the analysis provides insight into the differences between the ways in which the players and the referee achieve frame shifts, providing information on how these two roles realize in interaction. Although it would have been possible to categorize the different linguistic resources employed, many occur simultaneously, making such categorization less effective for a study of this scale. Therefore, the linguistic resources are discussed in relation to the specific examples. It is important to note, however, that this analysis does not encompass all the ways in which participants navigate frame shifts in TTRPGs. Instead, it focuses on the most frequent linguistic resources, which will be summarized later in concluding discussion.

4.1 From the Gaming Frame to the Fantasy Frame

Participants of TTRPGs utilize many strategies to communicate shifts into the fantasy frame. The main ones include long pauses, preceding rising intonation, discourse markers, especially 'so', and specific tokens such as acknowledgement tokens and

hesitation markers. To delve into these linguistic resources, let's begin with an example from the data. In the following example, the players are in the middle of attacking two guards, who have now noticed the attackers. One of the players, Ron, wonders if they should be rolling the dice to determine the order of events, which starts the extract from line 1. This example illustrates the role of a long pause in communicating frame shifts.

EXAMPLE 1

1 Ron do we roll for initiative? >↑at ↑this ↑point?<=
2 Ref =this point you guys roll for initiative to see who goes
3 first.
4 (2.1)
5 Tony uh- I turn to Pike and say. (0.3) >what the fuck is going
6 on?<
7 Eve [heh heh [heh
8 Ron [heh heh
9 Tony [where are they.

In line 2, the referee confirms that the players should roll the dice and produces his turn with a falling intonation. At this point, the conversation is on the gaming frame, as the player and the referee discuss gaming mechanics, in this case the rolling of dice to determine the order of action. After a long pause (2.1 sec) in line 4, the frame is shifted to the fantasy frame as Tony acts as his character after a short hesitation 'uh': he uses the first-person singular pronoun 'I', to address another player's character named Pike (lines 7-8). This shift is evident from the use of fantasy character's name and the narrative way of describing an action, in this case turning to and conversing with another character. Referring to the fantasy character's name instead of the player's name indicates the relationship between the speaker and the interpreter, that being the relationship of roleplaying characters (Abell and Stokoe 2013). Along with the lexical choices, the frame shift is marked by a long pause, defined as more than one second of silence (Hoey 2017: 51) and an 'uh'. According to Wennerstorm and Siegel (2003), pauses of .5 or longer are linked to the probability of turn shift. Although frame shifts do not always involve turn shifts, the two actions appear to share similar features when a turn shift occurs during a frame shift. In addition, hesitation markers, such as 'uh' used by Tony, at the beginning of his sentence in line 5, have been noticed

to begin new frames (Park 2021). Therefore, in the example, the shift is characterized by a long pause and a hesitation marker in addition to lexical choices. Furthermore, the shift is achieved by a single speaker, although the silence of other participants contributes to it.

The next example contains a situation where the participants are in the middle of combat. Ron's character has just attacked an enemy and Ron is rolling the dice to determine if his character hits or not. He later does the same to determine the amount of damage dealt. This example introduces the use of acknowledgement tokens and discourse markers as indicators for frame shifts, demonstrating the use of intonation as well.

EXAMPLE 2

1 Ron first one ↑hits it- it's eighteen, [plu:::s.]
 2 Ref [°it is° a critical
 3 because it does not ↑see ↑you and has not acted yet this
 4 combat.
 5 (0.6)
 6 Ron ↑yeas it is:? so I just take <my u:h keen, dagger.> and I
 7 shove it in his ↑eyeball. (0.6) to::? (0.5) oh one d four.
 8 (0.3) is two. (0.4) plus
 9 (1.0)
 (lines 10-13 have been omitted)
 14 (2.2)
 15 Ron °fourteen?°=
 16 Eve =it's n(h)othing we ↑c(h)an't handle.
 17 Ron nineteen:: (.) twenty↑eight plus,
 18 (1.8)
 19 thirty- (.) thirtysix is the first dagger into his eyeball?
 20 Ref o↑kay

In line 1, Ron tells that he rolled eighteen on a die, meaning that the conversation is on the gaming frame. The referee mentions a gaming mechanic fitting for Ron's character, continuing in the same frame in lines 2-4. Ron agrees to this notion in line 6 with an acknowledgement token 'yeas', which is common preceding a topical shift (Jefferson 1981: 6; Beach 1993). Huq and Amir (2015: 63) discovered this feature to be also common with turn shifts, connecting turn shifts further to frame shifts. The same word is also an indication of agreement with the referee's prior statement. The

acknowledgement in line 6 is said with a rising intonation and a short but prolonged sound. In the same line, shift to the fantasy frame occurs, starting with a ‘so’ as Ron starts explaining how his character is going to attack the enemy. ‘So’ is a discourse marker, which often describes causal connections between the preceding and following utterances, segmenting discourse (Youn 2023: 3). In this instance, ‘so’ links the gaming frame feature – a critical hit, which means the attack will deal double the usual damage – to the way the character attacks the enemy to inflict a significant amount of damage. Further, Goffman (1981a) describes that discourse markers often appear in transition-relevance places, where ‘so’ is located in the utterance. Hence, ‘so’ transitions the focus on the fantasy frame. Additionally, the player uses the first-person singular pronoun ‘I’ once again to speak as his character within the fantasy frame. Corbitt (2024) shows similar findings regarding pronoun usage in his research about TTRPG interaction in the fantasy frame. The frame is shifted back to the gaming frame in line 7, but that is the focus of the following section. However, rising intonation and the use of discourse markers are linguistic resources that signal a frame shift. Where rising intonation precedes it, discourse markers mark the beginning of a new frame.

Both examples 1 and 2 include frame shifts that are initiated by the players instead of the referee. In addition, the frame shifts have been achieved by a single speaker. The given examples demonstrate the typical devices used by the players, including discourse markers, ‘so’ being common one, a preceding rising intonation and pauses. The referee employs similar cues, and the following example demonstrates this. In this extract the characters have encountered a closed door and Ron’s character decides to inspect it. The example begins with the referee’s explanation of what Ron’s character hears through the door (lines 1-4).

EXAMPLE 3

1	Ref	you put your ear to the side? (.) an:d (0.4) you:
2		(2.2)
3	Lana	heh heh heh heh
4	Ref	↑hear nothing.
5		(1.1)
6	Joan	[.HHH]

7 Ron [°okay,°
8 (2.1)
9 Ron u:h do I (.) ↑sense any kind of uh- I am
10 checking for traps on the door?
11 Ref okay,
12 (1.3)
13 Ref °yup.°=
14 Ron =°s::: fifteen::.. uh::° (.) trap's perception right?
15 twentysix?
16 (1.2)
17 Ref so uh the door itself does not appear to be ↑trapped, (.)
18 uh:: it (.) >does appear to be ↓locked though.<=
19 Ron =all right, well I pull out my picks,?
20 (1.2)
21 Ron [uh::: and I get a three: (1.0) on that so.
22 Joan [and uh you do-
23 (.)
24 Ref ↑that's okay. it's a >really, really, really,< crappy
25 lock.

Ron rolls the dice to determine if the door is trapped (lines 9-10), which is indicated by the abilities within the game—specifically perception (line 14). He tells the result he obtains from the dice in line 15. The discussion here is on the gaming frame, from which it is shifted to the fantasy frame in line 16. Line 16 shows a long pause, which is followed by the referee's 'so uh' and a description about the door Ron's character is inspecting in line 17. As noticed in the previous examples, demonstrating shifts initiated by the players, the fantasy frame initiated by the referee is achieved with similar markers. Ron ends his turn in line 15 with a number related to the gaming frame, using rising intonation which makes the utterance sound like a question. This indicates that the player tries to see if the number is enough to determine if the door is trapped. After this utterance the frame is shifted, which is marked by a long pause (1.2) in line 16. Line 17 begins with a discourse marker 'so' and 'uh' which were also present in examples 1 and 2 and used similarly here. Although 'so' helps structure the conversation, it also signals the relation of the referee's response to Ron's utterance, in this context providing clarification based on the result ('twentysix?'). Therefore, the discourse marker implies causal relationship between the number and the information the character gains about the door. While the players this far have referred to their fantasy characters with first-person singular pronoun, the referee does not do the same when initiating the fantasy frame. Instead, he uses 'it', a third-person subjective singular

pronoun, demonstrating narrative description of an object in the fantasy frame. Unlike in examples 1, 2 and 3, the frame shift is achieved by the collaboration of two participants. While Ron initiates the frame shift in line 15 with a question-like phrase, the referee completes the shift in line 17 by giving him an answer through narrative telling. In line 19, Ron continues in the fantasy frame, as he explains his characters next actions, which is relevant to the referee's prior utterance.

Example 4 demonstrates how the referee utilizes the same resources as the players again, this time with discourse markers and acknowledgement tokens. The extract is taken from another fight, and Ron's character has just hit an enemy, the damage of which is still undetermined until line 1.

EXAMPLE 4

```

1 Ron      nine, points of poison (.) uh: on him.
2          (0.3)
3 Ref      o↑kay
4          (1.3)
5 Ref      so.
6 Joan     heh heh heh
7 Ref      >an arrow spoof! into his chest< just as the poison blade
8          makes contact. uh (0.7) you can see him ↓ugh. >kinda
9          double over for a second< (0.8) but (.) uh the hardy (.)
10         duergar (0.2) [once dwarven ↑form seems to shrug ↓off a lot
11 Joan           [.hh]
12 Ref      of the poison's impact.
```

Ron tells the amount of damage his character deals to an enemy in line 1. This is followed by an 'okay' from the referee, a longer pause (1.3) and another 'so' (lines 3-5). With these devices the referee shifts the interaction from the gaming frame to the fantasy frame, as after the 'so' in line 5, he begins narrating the attack of Ron's character hits the enemy (lines 7-12). Unlike in example 3, the 'so' in line 5 is characterized by a falling intonation. In addition to the lengthy pause and the use of 'so', the referee says 'okay' before transitioning to the fantasy frame in line 3. By this the referee acknowledges the previous answer given by the player. 'Okay' is also observed to act as a shift-implicative token, indicating both orientation to the initial topic, and paving the way for the next one (Beach 1993). Beach (1993) points out that especially the combination

of okay and silence often leads to a topic shift. These resources are combined in the current example for a similar effect: to change the frame back to the fantasy frame. In addition to the use of an 'okay', the referee also speaks faster at the beginning of his narration within the fantasy frame. This cue is also employed in the following example. The extract is taken from combat, and Tony's character has just tried to charm an enemy with a spell. To determine if the spell takes an effect, the referee requires information from the players, which begins this extract.

EXAMPLE 5

```

1 Ref    okay, heh heh heh (0.3) what's your dc?
2        (0.9)
3 Tony   uh:: nineteen.
4 Ref    °all right.° >this is through still the hand cone?<=
5 Tony   =through the hand cone. °through the hand cone.°
6        (1.2)
7 Ref    okay. (0.3) that will be:: a: twenty. [unfortunately.
8 Tony                                       [.HH
9        (1.4)
10 Ref   [makes his saving throw >as you- you- you- he- he- he- ↑he
11 Tony  [oh::]
12 Ref   glances back towards you with a look of confusion for a
13       a second.< (0.5) looks at this feet, and (0.3) >like begins
14       to reach forward, and then< (0.5) steels his ↓mind and
15       looks up at you a::ngrily.
```

The example begins with the referee's question in the gaming frame about the player character's spell difficulty class (DC) to determine whether the enemy fails or succeeds against the spell (line 1). After Tony's answer in line 3, the referee acknowledges the prior turn with a quiet 'all right' and asks a further question, which may influence the situation (line 4). Following the player's answer in line 5, the referee rolls the dice on line 7, telling the result of it. Eventually, in line 11 the referee shifts into the fantasy frame as he begins explaining how the enemy reacts to the failed spell. Line 11 starts with the referee's utterance 'makes his saving throw', saving throw being a reference to the gaming mechanic which determines if certain effects take place. The following narration starting in the same line, then, is the referee's way of narrating the mechanical outcome of the dice roll mentioned in line 7 (twenty). Therefore, the utterance in lines 10-15 provides an in-game explanation for what happens next in the narrative.

The frame is shifted to the fantasy frame with '>as you...'. While there is no pause during the shift, as observed in previous examples, the referee instead increases their pace when entering the fantasy frame in line 10. Park (2021) identifies similar findings in a study of frames in a microteaching context, where a shift is marked by a faster pace alongside lower volume. Additionally, the referee uses the word 'as' in a manner similar to 'so' in both examples 3 and 4. Here, again, the frame shift is achieved by a single speaker with the use of discourse markers and sped up pace.

Slower pace is also utilized at the beginning of a new frame. In the next example, the players are discussing a strategy to persuade enemies to their side, and part of that strategy is for one of the characters to imitate their enemies' god. One of the characters has the ability to transform into animals and has asked the group's cleric if she knows anything about a duergar god's animal preferences. The referee asked Lana to roll the dice to determine if her character knows anything about the subject, which begins the extract.

EXAMPLE 6

1 Eve what kind of animals he might like? (0.6) you know. (0.4)
 2 check out. (0.5)°you know. ° (2.1) ↑animals.
 3 (4.0)
 4 Lana fourteen?
 5 (1.1)
 6 Ref fourteen. .hh <you have no idea.> you know the- >you know
 7 the< deity exists. you don't know of any sort of animal.
 8 (.) beasts, or creature, symbolism. (0.2) that would befit
 9 a duergar god.
 10 (0.7)
 11 Lana I have no idea.

Lana tells the result of her dice roll in line 4 with a rising intonation like the example 3 line 11. This is followed by a little bit over a second long pause and then the referee's repetition of the previously said number, this time with a falling intonation (line 6). After this in the same line, the referee shifts to the fantasy frame by addressing Lana's fantasy character with an emphasized 'you', explaining what the character knows regarding the subject. The way speakers refer to others is a strong rhetorical tool, and it

is intriguing to note how both the player and their characters are referred to in similar ways (Abell and Stokoe 2013: 424). However, the words the referee uses are linked to the activities of one's fantasy character instead of the player. Lana accepts the new frame in line 11, talking about her character with the first-person singular pronoun 'I', answering Eve's character's initial question about animals. This example does not include any cues discussed this far, other than the use of pronouns. Where the players utilize 'I' plentifully, the referee uses various pronouns thorough his narration, 'I' emerging seldom. While pace was briefly mentioned in the previous examples, in this one the referee slows down rather than speeds up. This is yet another finding echoed by Skidmore and Murakami (2010), who noted slow pace being a sign of a frame shift in a classroom context. A new take from this example is the use of repetition, in this case with a falling intonation, which are used in the collaborative closing of sequences of talk (Curl, Local and Walker 2006). In line 6, the repetition acts as a closing to the discussion regarding the failure of Lana's dice roll, from which the referee can easily introduce a new frame, which is still linked to the previous roll.

The next example demonstrates many of the points already made in the analysis, but demonstrates a new resource for managing frames, namely laughter. The extract is taken from combat again, and the participants discuss a successful attack Jack's character made to an enemy. Prior to the extract, Jack asked a question regarding the attack from the referee, which the referee answers. Jack's reaction to the answer begins the example.

EXAMPLE 7

1 Jack =exc(h)ellent. heh heh [heh]
 2 Lana [He rolled really high.
 3 (0.3)
 4 Jack fifteen, heh heh
 5 (0.8)
 6 Ref okay, (0.2) uh:: so (.) after you thr(h)ow him onto the
 7 ↑hook (.) his axe clatters? to the ground, and he reaches
 8 up with his hands to grab you and it looks like he is
 9 pulling back to try and bring you in for a headbutt. this
 10 kind of angry look of burning rage in his white eye:s.

In line 2, another player comments on how Jack rolled a die, and the result of the roll is seen in line 4. This statement is followed by a short pause in line 5 and then a shift-implicative token 'okay' in line 6, which initiates a shifting point between the gaming and fantasy frame. The fantasy frame is invoked with a prolonged hesitation marker 'uh', which gives the referee more time to decide what to say next. This is followed by a common discourse marker 'so'. The referee then begins explaining how the attack unfolds in the fantasy world (lines 6-10), which is accompanied by laughingly uttered verbal phrase ('thr(h)ow'). While many of the devices used to indicate the shift in the example have already been mentioned, it should be noted that in each case 'okay' has been said with a rising intonation. In addition to the above discussed cues, the shift is also marked by laughter on behalf of both the player in line 4 and the referee in line 6. Again, in Park's (2021) study she confirms both laugh and smile to indicate a shift in frames in her studied context. Laughter has also been implied to precede topical shifts in previous studies (Jefferson 1981: 6), which lines with the findings here regarding frame shifts.

The main findings from analyzing instances where the participants of TTRPGs shift from the gaming frame to the fantasy frame suggest that both the players and the referee often use similar linguistic resources to mark starting shifts. While sometimes they are used on their own, usually they are used in various combinations. Acknowledgement tokens such as 'okay', 'yes' and 'all right' often precedes the shift, whereas vocabulary such as 'so' and 'as' are used to begin the fantasy frame. The hesitation marker 'uh' is also often placed at the beginning of the fantasy frame. Preceding the frame shift, the players often utilize a rising intonation. Although often not a question, the rising intonation creates an effect of one. In addition to intonation, pauses longer than a second are common when the shift takes place, but not always present. Additionally, prolonged sounds, and the different paces of speech at the beginning of the fantasy frame are common, alongside laughter. Frame shifts from the gaming frame to the fantasy frame are mostly self-initiated, although statements in the fantasy frame are often an answer to what happened in the gaming frame.

Overall, the referee guides the players back to the fantasy frame more than the players do and with various devices, one of them being repetition of the player's previous statement. The referee also utilizes acknowledgement tokens more often, whereas the players use preceding rising intonation regularly. This aligns with the roles of the two different parties. Where the players do not know what the actions they take in the gaming frame will result in, explaining the preceding rising intonation, the referee knows and decides what happens. Therefore, the players get the answer through the referee's narration. This requires the referee to acknowledge the prior information given to them with various resources. These devices also reflect the cooperation that is needed to convey meanings and thus frames in TTRPGs. The frame shifts often occur between two participants, who work together to move forward with the shift – where the player regularly initiates the possible change, the referee picks up the cues and continues with it, producing aligning actions. However, frame shifts can happen within the same turn as well, as seen in example 7. Furthermore, it could be argued that other participants' silence contributes to the emergence and maintaining of a frame. Now that the linguistic resources indicating shifts from the gaming frame to the fantasy frame have been discussed, the opposite is explored next.

4.2 From the Fantasy Frame to the Gaming Frame

Within the data frame shifts from the fantasy frame to the gaming frame occur in many of the same ways as discussed in Section 4.1, where the opposite shifts were discussed. These similarities include pauses, the use of discourse markers, acknowledgement tokens and rising intonation. Differences, on the other hand, arise in the way in which these resources are used – pauses in this context are usually shorter, specific discourse markers are used less and questions often initiate the transition. In addition, these shifts are more commonly achieved in cooperation with other participants. These differences are discussed after exploring some similarities first.

The first example is from an extract discussed before, example 2. The example illustrates the utilization of pauses, rising intonation and prolonged utterances, which were common in the shifts explored above. The relevant part of the transcript is given below.

EXAMPLE 8

6 Ron ↑yeas it is:? so I just take <my u:h keen, dagger.> and I
7 shove it in his ↑eyeball. (0.6) to:::? (0.5) oh one d four.
8 (0.3) is two. (0.4) plus

The player is attacking an enemy in line 6 and in the middle of Ron's sentence in line 7 he shifts from the fantasy frame to the gaming frame on his own. First, he is explaining with what and where he is attacking the creature in lines 6-7. After the word 'eyeball' the shift occurs, preceded by his falling intonation, a short pause of 0.6 seconds and a highly prolonged 'to' with rising intonation (line 7). This is again followed by a short pause, this time of 0.5 seconds, and gaming terminology 'oh one d four'. This indicates a die (often pronounced 'd' within TTRPGs) with four sides, which determines the amount of damage the attack does. From here Ron continues to count, saying different numbers aloud while other participants go on talking (lines 10-18), finally concluding to the damage of 36 points in line 19. The player utilizes similar resources to prepare for the shift from one frame to another. These resources include a prolonged word, a rising intonation, and a short pause. However, the pause here is significantly shorter than in the opposite shifts. As later discussed, this is a reoccurring phenomenon. Gaming related terms, in this case numbers, on the other hand mark the beginning of the gaming frame, and the shift is achieved by a single speaker. However, the conveyed message is later acknowledged by the referee in line 20 with an 'okay'.

Another illustration of the similarity between these two frame shifts is seen in example 3, where frames are managed again in rapid succession. The relevant part of the transcript is given below.

EXAMPLE 9

9 Ron u:h do I (.) ↑sense any kind of uh- I am
 10 checking for traps on the door?
 11 Ref okay,
 12 (1.3)
 13 Ref °yup.°=
 14 Ron =°s::: fifteen::.. uh::° (.) trap's perception right?
 15 twentysix?
 16 (1.2)
 17 Ref so uh the door itself does not appear to be ↑trapped, (.)
 18 uh:: it (.) >does appear to be ↓locked though.<=
 19 Ron =all right, well I pull out my picks,?
 20 (1.2)
 21 Ron [uh::: and I get a three: (1.0) on that so.

The acknowledgement in line 13 is followed by a shift to the gaming frame in line 14, where Ron is counting numbers from the dice and the character sheet aloud. This shift is accompanied by the player's initial phrase with a rising intonation (line 10), the referee's acknowledgement tokens (lines 11 and 13) and then prolonged sounds of 's' and 'fifteen' presumably to avoid silence (line 14). After finding out that the door is not trapped (lines 17-18), the character tries to picklock the door instead (line 19). Here he initiates and completes the frame shift back to the gaming frame with familiar devices. The phrase in line 19 ends with a rising intonation and is followed by a pause of 1.2 seconds in line 20. This is followed by another prolonged 'uh' and an 'and', shifting the conversation to the gaming frame with a telling of what he rolled with his dice in line 21. This statement is commented by the referee in line 24 with a 'that's okay'. The comment refers to the low number Ron rolled, maintaining the gaming frame. The utterance in lines 24-25 is also an answer to the player, conveying succession with lockpicking the door. Alike to the discourse marker 'so' in Example 2, 'and' here functions similarly and segments discourse. The word demonstrates the interconnectedness of the two frames, connecting the events taking place in these different frames, one action resulting in another in the other frame. Here the action of pulling out lockpicks is linked with the dice roll resulting into a three. Therefore, 'and' works as a bridge between the two frames in this instance alongside the preceding rising intonation, hesitation and a pause. As can be seen this far, the frame shifts from the

fantasy frame to the gaming frame are conducted similarly in linguistic terms than the opposite action. This, however, is not always the case.

While rising intonation has been mentioned repeatedly in the analysis this far, in shifts from the fantasy to the gaming frame questions occur often. Let's take a look at another example, where one is utilized to indicate a frame shift. The extract precedes the conversation seen in example 1, and a fight is about to begin for Ron and Joan's characters. Their characters had sneakily attacked the enemy prior to this point, and the referee is explaining the enemy's behavior after being hit in line 1.

EXAMPLE 10

```
1 Ref      =he (.) is ↑still dribbling.
2          (0.8)
3          a very heavy amount of (.) deep crimson from his mouth. but
4          he's still this like (0.6) gh! looks over and sees you both
5          in the hallway. (0.5) and goes to reach for his warhammer.=
6 Jack     =°get him°
7          (0.4)
8 Ref      and (.) turn around >towards the door behind him.<
9          (1.5)
10 Joan    can I throw another arrow at him?
11 Ref     a:h heh
12 Ron     do we roll for initiative? >↑at ↑this ↑point?<=
13 Ref     =this point you guys roll for initiative to see who goes
14         first.
15         (2.1)
```

In lines 1 to 8, the referee is narrating how one of the enemies is behaving. In line 10, Joan asks the referee a question, which does not get properly answered (line 11), as another player, Ron, asks another question in line 12. Joan's question is the starting point for the gaming frame, as the question is not about the character's ability to shoot another arrow, as she has done so successfully plenty of times before, but more so if the game rules allow her to do so. Nevertheless, Ron's question continues the conversation in the gaming frame, as he names the game mechanic Joan hinted at previously, 'initiative'. In line 13, the referee answers and acknowledges the frame shift, giving an answer regarding the rules of the game with a reworded repetition of the prior question. Alongside a long pause of 1.5 seconds in line 9, the questions act as an indicator

for the beginning of the gaming frame as the question concerns gaming mechanics. Questions are asked so the players can receive necessary information to determine their character's next course of actions. While the players do most of the questioning, also the referee breaks of the fantasy frame to ask questions from the players, so he can adapt the effects within the fantasy world correctly. An example of this is given below (example 11).

Within this example, the role of questions in indicating frame shifts is further highlighted. The TTRPG participants are in the middle of combat once more, and Ron's character has just hit an enemy. The referee is narrating this event, beginning the example.

EXAMPLE 11

1 Ref [okay. so >so the ↑first strike< (0.5) hits (0.5) second
 2 Eve [oh no]
 3 Ref one slams and you- the poison- >you se- you feel the the
 4 uh poison energy pulse< through the blade,? (0.3) what's
 5 the dc on that again?
 6 (0.2)
 7 Ron a tw- (.) ta ta ta ta ta ta ta ↑ta::?=
 8 Eve =a taa?=
 9 Ron =it's twe:- fif↑teen.

The referee is narrating how Ron's character is attacking the enemy in lines 1-4. However, in the last line there is a shift to the gaming frame, as the referee suddenly asks Ron for his character's DC – a number standing for difficulty class in a character sheet, which determines if an effect succeeds or not (lines 4-5). This question is again preceded by rising intonation (through the blade,?) and a short pause of 0.3 seconds. Ron answers this question in lines 7 and 9, though with a small difficulty which can be seen from his repetitions of 'ta's, but nonetheless recognizes the gaming frame and continues the discussion in it. Therefore, he produces a relevant next action, which is an answer to the referee's question. Consequently, the frame shift is realized through the referee's question, which is prefaced with a brief pause and a rising intonation once more. The last two of the listed resources precede the shift itself, whereas the

question alongside game related terminology itself marks the beginning of the gaming frame.

While not as common as in frame shifts to the fantasy frame, acknowledgement tokens and discourse markers also mark the points of frame shifts in this context. The following example demonstrates this. The extract is taken from the middle of yet another enemy encounter, where the characters are determining which enemies they are attacking.

EXAMPLE 12

1 Ref o↑kay a:nd you are:.
2 (0.4)
3 Joan and I was gonna shoot at the other one. [()]
4 Ref [>o↑kay< (.) so.
5 go ahead and roll for: (.) this guy [here?]
6 Ron [that guy.
7 (1.1)
8 Eve heh heh ↑heh
9 Ron that is uh:::: s::::even?- seven↑teen for me.
10 (0.2)
11 Ref seventeen ↑hits=
12 Joan =twentyseven.
13 Ref twentyseven? all ↑right=

In line 1, the referee is trying to determine the player character's actions. In line 3, Joan states that her character, again with a first-person singular pronoun 'I', is going to attack a specific enemy. Although the rest of her sentence is not clear in the recording, while she is talking the referee brings the conversation to the gaming frame. This is achieved with first acknowledging the player's prior statement with a sped-up acknowledgement token 'okay' (lines 4-5). There the referee continues with a stressed 'so', and a command for the player to roll the dice. This is done to determine if Joan's character hits the enemy or not. 'So' here is used similarly to the other examples where it has appeared, connecting previous actions in the fantasy frame to the following actions in the gaming frame. In line 12, Joan follows up on the order, providing the number she received from the dice roll, maintaining the fantasy frame alongside the other

player Ron, who is also rolling the dice for similar reasons. Although not as common as in the shifts from gaming frame to fantasy frame, acknowledgement tokens and discourse markers are also utilized in these shifts. However, the referee usually uses these resources.

To conclude the analysis section, a deviant case is briefly explored. Many common linguistic resources such as discourse markers, acknowledgement tokens and intonation have been discovered and discussed in the examples above. However, they are not always present. When this is the case, lexical choices hold a crucial role in determining frames, and this role is discussed next. In example 11 Tony's character is talking to the enemies' queen, whom they have captured after a successful fight.

EXAMPLE 13

1 Tony [and uh: (0.2) >↑we were on a mission.< we're (0.3) a ↑bit
 2 Ron [heh heh heh]
 3 Tony of- I don't want to brag. but we're a- a- a bit of an
 4 elite task force? (0.3) sent in by (0.7) kingdoms and
 5 kings that (0.5) y- you probably haven't heard of way down
 6 below. >but any way< (0.4) I'll spare you.
 7 Ref hold that thought just for a second? (0.2) uh (.) Percy:?
 8 (0.4) go ahead and roll a perception check?
 9 (1.5)
 10 Eve heh heh [heh
 11 Jack [↓oh ↓shit (0.2) when it's out of the blue like
 12 that it's [always bad.
 13 Joan [Oh no:::]
 14 Ian uh ↓ten.
 15 Joan [o:h no.]
 16 Ref [okay. °continue.°
 17 Jack [hah hah hah]
 18 Joan [oh no!
 19 Ron wait dm? dm? (0.4) Vax is creeping along the back of that
 20 tent and curving around?
 21 Ref all right?
 22 Ron ↑thank you.

Tony's character explains the group's mission from line 1 to 6 to the queen portrayed by the referee. The referee, however, does not continue the discussion in the fantasy frame and instead calls for another character named Percy, ordering them to roll the dice to determine if he notices something (line 7). The frame is realized with TTRPG vocabulary, by producing a 'perception check'. This shift to gaming frame is

accompanied by another order from the referee, 'hold that thought' (line 7). This implies the leading position the referee possesses in TTRPGs, as was the case in example 12. Besides the imperative, no other linguistic resource discussed earlier is used to indicate the shift. This, however, excludes the prior falling intonation in line 6 to indicate the end of the speaker's turn, which indicates that someone else can take the floor. After this, the other players discuss the referee's call (10-13), and Ian gives the result of his roll in line 14. This continues the discussion in the gaming frame, as he produces a relevant next action to the order. In line 16, the referee attempts to shift the focus back to the fantasy frame, with an 'okay' and a request for Tony to continue. Ron, however, pulls the conversation back to the gaming frame for a short while in line 19, and calls for the referee by using the abbreviation 'dm' for dungeon master, which is a common name for referees. After gaining the referee's attention, the player quickly shifts back to the fantasy frame by starting his phrase with his character's name Vax, describing what he is doing while the preceding conversation is happening. Therefore, the gaming frame can also be evoked with the name of the referee, alongside requests and commands.

Although frame shifts from fantasy frame to the gaming frame are realized in many of the same ways as the shifts from the gaming frame to the fantasy frames, there are some differences as well. Similarities include rising intonation patterns preceding the shift itself, initiating prolonged sounds and words, the use of pronouns to indicate who is speaking or being spoken to, acknowledgment tokens, pauses, and discourse markers. While the last two of these, pauses and discourse markers, are used in both shifts, there is a difference in how much they are used. In this context, pauses are usually shorter than in the previous context, although the lengths are not consistent. In addition, discourse markers are less commonly present in the shift to the gaming frame. Furthermore, in these shifts questions frequently indicate the change. Though the referee asks questions as well, as seen in example 11, the shifts are more often initiated by the player's questions. As briefly mentioned above, this reflects on the roles the participants of TTRPG have. Since the referee orchestrates the world and its

characters, they possess information the players do not. Therefore, the players need to acquire relevant information to decide on how to proceed in the fantasy world. Corbitt (2024) reports similar findings, suggesting that questions are players' way to mediate fairness and gather knowledge, associating the act strongly to epistemics that is at play in TTRPGs.

Now that several examples of frame shifts between the two frames within TTRPGs have been examined, it can be concluded that the participants often utilize pauses, intonation, discourse markers and lexical choices such as pronouns and gaming terminology to display attunement to a new frame. Both the players and the referee use similar resources, but often to a different amount to reflect their roles in the game. The findings are further discussed in the next section.

5 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the linguistic resources used by players and referees in TTRPGs as they transition between the gaming frame and the fantasy frame (Fine 1983). Fine's theory, grounded in Goffman's (1974) frame theory which examines the concept of social realities, served as the foundation for the present study. The data was collected from YouTube videos, with the interactions transcribed and then analyzed using conversation analysis as the method. Overall, the players continuously demonstrated awareness of which frame was active during the conversation, with no errors in either producing or understanding utterances within the appropriate frame.

The analysis revealed that participants systematically rely on specific linguistic markers to signal frame shifts within TTRPGs, including longer pauses between the frames, discourse markers (e.g., 'so', 'as') at the beginning of a new frame, and changes in intonation or pace both prior and after the shift. When it comes to rising intonation, they were placed prior to the shift, being one of the most common resources used to initiate frame shifts. Long pauses were also one of the most common strategies to communicate frame shifts, and they were placed in transition points. In addition, questions and acknowledgement tokens were common devices in invoking frames, whereas laughter was rarely, but at times, indicative of a shift as well. All of these preceded the shifts, although laughter was also utilized at the beginning of new frames. With lexical choices, together with linguistic resources and strategies, the participants of TTRPGs operate the frames and communicate changes in them to one another. While this is at times achieved by a single speaker, the frame shifts are also the result of cooperation

between other participants of TTRPGs, demonstrating the collaborative nature of TTRPGs.

The linguistic resources are often used simultaneously, yet at other times the shifts entailed the use of only one detectable resource. Different resources are used for a specific purpose allowing for smooth transitions between the mechanics of the game and the narrative immersion within the fantasy world. For instance, discourse markers often link the actions taking place in different frames together. Additionally, as mentioned above, shifts in and out of the fantasy frame are achieved in many of the same ways. However, there are some key differences. The main difference observed is that pauses are generally longer in shifts to fantasy frame than in shifts to the gaming frame. Pauses prior entering the fantasy frame often exceed one second, at times lasting over 2 seconds, as seen in examples 3 and 4, whereas pauses during shifts to the gaming frame are typically under one second. While this is not always the case, as noted in example 8, it was noted to be a recurring pattern within the data. The longer pauses in shifts to the fantasy frame may reflect the need for more time to attune to a world further removed from the primary frameworks, which represent the reality of things. In contrast, a shift to the gaming frame is in a way a step closer to the primary frameworks, for which the shifts may be easier for players to manage. This might be because the actions taken in the gaming frame are grounded in reality instead of imagination. For instance, many of the gaming elements have physical representations, such as rule books, character sheets, or dice, which are used to determine outcomes in the fantasy world.

Another key difference is the use of questions. While the gaming frame is frequently evoked with questions, the fantasy frame is not. Corbitt (2024) reports similar findings, suggesting that questions function as a means for players to negotiate fairness in TTRPGs. This is to be expected, as the referee holds valuable information to which players have access to only through questions. In addition, the extra information is often necessary for players to make decisions for their characters. The final key

distinction between shifts into and out of these two social realities is the use of discourse markers, especially 'so'. They are more common at the beginning of the fantasy frame, which may be partly due to one of the functions of discourse markers. Discourse markers often signal the beginning or continuation of narrative segments. Interaction in the gaming frame tends to be means to an end and once the matters in this frame are resolved, the results are reflected in the fantasy world, where roleplaying continues. Therefore, discourse markers play a vital role in maintaining continuity in TTRPGs and facilitating smooth transitions between the frames.

Both the players and the referee utilize many of the same resources, although often to different degrees. As to intonation, falling intonation patterns preceding the shifts were more common for the referee, whereas rising intonation was more common among the players. While the referee also employs prefacing rising intonation patterns, these are more commonly utilized when shifting to the gaming frame. In contrast, the players typically employ rising intonation before shifting to the fantasy frame. This pattern is also evident in the use of questions. Although the referee occasionally asks questions from the players, it is primarily the players who take the lead in asking questions. Additionally, discourse markers appear to be more frequently used by the referee in facilitating shifts between frames, especially when shifting to the fantasy frame.

Despite some differences in how the players and the referee evoke these two frames within TTRPGs, they ultimately achieve the same purposes through similar actions. Further, the frame shifts are often achieved by the cooperation between the players and the referee as seen in, for instance, example 11. As one party initiates the shift, the other party understands the preceding statement and takes control of the transition. However, frame shifts are at times rapid, and they can be shifted twice within a single utterance of one speaker. Therefore, other participants do not often continue in the same frame, which does not showcase if the same understanding is shared among participants. Nevertheless, co-participants' silence also contributes to the maintenance

of frames. However, it appears that the referee holds more power in this dynamic, as they ultimately decide the course of events both in the game at the table and within the fantasy world. This observation aligns with Corbitt's (2024) findings, where it is indicated that the referee directs the majority of game-related discussions.

Although the focus of the study is on the role of smaller linguistic units of language, lexical choices played a crucial role in establishing frames as well. For instance, there were differences in the way in which the players utilized pronouns compared to the referee. While the players often resorted to 'I' and 'we', rarely using other pronouns in both frames, the referee employed a wider variety of pronouns such as 'you', 'it', and 'she' in the fantasy frame. Corbitt (2024) discovered similar findings in his research regarding player's utterances in the fantasy world. This is to be expected, though. Due to the difference of roles among these two groups, the players are in control of their character and their character alone, whereas the referee acts as any other creature in the fantasy world and orchestrates the environment, widening their repertoire. Game related terms, such as saving throw, DC, and various numbers often mark the effect of gaming frame as well. These could also be called category-bound activities of the player (Sacks 1972). The language in the fantasy frame, on the other hand, is often more descriptive in nature, including narrations of actions and descriptions on surroundings. This frame also includes stepping into the role of the character and speaking as that character, occasionally including different speech styles and even voice. Therefore, the role of linguistic choices in evoking frames in TTRPGs cannot be overstated.

The findings of the present study echo the findings of previous studies on both TTRPGs and frames in general, though differences also emerged. One of these differences, identified by Corbitt (2024), is that the state marker 'oh' and turn-initial phrases 'um' and 'well' initiate the gaming frame. While these linguistic resources were also present in the collected data, they were not used systematically, and therefore not included in the study. However, there are other studies in which similar findings have

been made. Skidmore and Murakami (2010) in their study of frames in a classroom context reported that teachers use pauses to signify changes in framing, in addition to using lengthened vowels and increased pace in a specific frame. Park (2021) concluded similar findings regarding the change of pace in a new frame but adds that frame shifts are often accompanied by both smiles and laughter as well. All of these linguistic resources were also reported in the present study. Despite topic shifts differing from the concept of frames, previous studies suggest that the linguistic resources marking both phenomena share several similarities. For instance, Park (2021) shows that the word 'okay' is a shift-implicative token in the realm of frame theory, whereas Beach (1993) identifies the same word to be topic initiative term, preparing listeners for further matters. Within the collected data the word 'okay' was frequently used prior to the shift, acting as a shift-implicative token. In addition, Jefferson (1981) concedes 'yes' to be a token preceding topical shifts, alongside acknowledgement tokens. These tokens were shown to precede frame shifts within the study as well, as was in example 2.

While this study offers valuable insight, it is important to note that the data was drawn from a limited number of sessions, which may not capture the full range of linguistic strategies used across different campaigns. In addition, the data was gathered from one group of players, a group of which's participants are experienced roleplayers, who have played the same campaign and characters together for a long time. Therefore, the study does not account for different groups of players with varying levels of experience and relationships. Consequently, the study also overlooks other playstyles, potentially missing diverse ways of using language in TTRPGs. To gain better understanding of language use in TTRPGs and the ways in which frames are evoked, the data should be gathered from multiple different groups to gain a broader understanding of the subject. Gathering data from multiple groups would be especially beneficial in understanding the role and language use of the referee, as there is only one referee in a group, whereas the players are multiple. This would allow for comparison between many referees from which generalizations could be made.

In addition, the primary frame was not the focus of the study despite its crucial role in TTRPGs to manage friendships and game events around the game table (Fine 1983). While it was not examined within the scope of this study, the frame should be considered in further research to better understand the often rapid succession and negotiation of various frames in TTRPGs. Furthermore, the analysis focused primarily on the most common cues, leaving some subtle markers of frame shifts underexplored. Therefore, future research could expand on this study by examining a wider variety of TTRPGs and including all the frames within TTRPGs. Further exploration into how non-verbal communication contributes to frame shifts could also provide new insights into the subject as video footage was not analyzed in the study. Although TTRPGs do not involve acting in the traditional sense, movements and physical aspects play a crucial role in the games. For this reason, studying body language and paralinguistic cues could provide valuable insight into the topic of negotiating frames.

Although the frames in TTRPGs served their purpose in this study, there are several limitations to be considered. Theoretically, frames provide a clear distinction and offer a suitable framework that encompasses more than just the concept of topic. However, in practice, the boundaries are not so clear-cut. In many instances, it was left to me as the researcher to determine whether an utterance belonged to the fantasy frame or the gaming frame, which is a common methodological issue in CA as well. This issue was particularly evident when players asked questions regarding their characters' abilities, such as the ability to see. One could argue that this scenario occurs within the gaming frame, as all events in the fantasy frame happen within the fantasy world, where the character would inherently know if they see something or not. In this case, it is the player, not the character, who lacks information. However, Fine's (1983) description of the gaming frame includes events connected to gaming activities and mechanics, such as the use of dice and character sheets. Furthermore, the ability to see might be tied to a gaming mechanic, such as dark vision. Consequently, the situation described above was categorized as an occurrence in the gaming frame in the present study, as the player does not possess the information the character would. Ultimately, the

frames in practice are more fluid and challenging to distinguish from one another than the theoretical framework suggests. Therefore, it is for the researcher to decide how to interpret deviant cases, which should be approached with careful consideration. In addition, to counteract the methodological challenges posed by both the frame theory and CA, other method or data, such as interviews or insight from another researcher, could be used to complement the findings.

The findings of this study highlight the complexity of communication within TTRPGs, and the skill players possess to navigate between various frames. Additionally, the results reflect the different roles between players and the referee, in addition to the participants' ability to communicate and understand one another in rapid and multi-faceted situations. As TTRPGs continue to grow in popularity, further exploration of the linguistic resources of these games will only deepen understanding of collaborative storytelling and interaction. This insight could lead to more effective applications of TTRPGs in various contexts, particularly language classrooms.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Sequencing

- [Indicates the point of overlaps onset.
-] Indicates the point at which an utterance terminates.
- = Indicates no gap between the two lines. This is often called latching.

Time intervals

- (0.0) Indicates elapsed time in silence by tenth of seconds. For example, (1.1) is a pause of one second and one-tenth of a second.
- (.) Indicates a tiny gap within or between utterances.

Characteristics of speech production

- word Indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude.
- WORD Indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.
- ° Utterances or utterance-parts bracketed by degree signs are relatively quieter than the surrounding talk.
- :: Indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. Multiple colons indicate a more prolonged sound.
- Indicates a cut-off.
- . Indicates a stopping fall in tone.
- , Indicates a continuing intonation, like when reading items from a list.
- ? Indicates a rising intonation.
- ,? Indicates a stronger rise than a comma but weaker than a question mark.
- ↑↓ Indicate marked shifts into higher or lower pitch in the utterance part immediately following the arrow.
- < > Bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicate speeding up.
- > < Bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicate slowing down.
- .hh Indicates an inbreath. Without the dot, the *hs* indicate an outbreath.
- w(h)ord A parenthesized *h* or a row of them within a word indicates breathiness as in laughing, crying, etc.

Transcriber's doubts and comments

- () Indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said. In the speaker designation column, the empty parentheses indicate inability to identify a speaker.