Misunderstandings during gameplay of Dungeons and Dragons

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to locate misunderstandings, their causes and ways of resolving them during the gameplay of Dungeons and Dragons, in hopes of discovering what causes misunderstandings that disrupt the game and make it less enjoyable for players. Along with a short history of the development of the game, key terminology, core of gameplay, and the three main aspects of gameplay were also introduced. Dungeons and Dragons was inspected as a game and a co-operatively constructed narrative, thus narrative theory was included in the theoretical framework of this study, in addition to theory of miscommunication. The study was conducted by analysing extracts of a video recording of a single gameplay session of Dungeons and Dragons. The extracts under analysis were categorised under one of the three aspects of gameplay (combat, exploration, social interaction). The extracts were then presented with an amount of context, after which the causes of misunderstandings present in the extract were analysed and discussed. Collective discussion of the extracts and linguistic elements that caused misunderstanding followed the analysis section. During the discussion, the extracts were comparatively discussed and related to the specific elements that seemed to cause misunderstanding. Finally, the results of the study were summarized in the concluding section of the study. Most of the misunderstandings that were present in the data occurred during the combat aspect of the game and were caused by, or closely related to rules of the game. Misunderstandings that occurred during exploration and social interaction were found to be less disruptive, as they could occasionally be tied to the surrounding narrative, which would arguably reduce their disruptiveness. The misunderstandings that occurred were most commonly resolved by negotiating an understanding between the communicants, or by way of repair. Because of the small sample size, generalizable ways to counteract or avoid misunderstandings were not discovered. Nevertheless, tentative speculation of ways to avoid misunderstandings was provided on occasions where possible. Further research of role-playing games might be directed towards the effects that a dungeon master's actions have on a game. Alternatively, focus could be directed towards the functions that table-top role-playing games might have outside of entertainment, such as educational functions for example.

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimuksen kohteena olivat väärinymmärrykset Dungeons and Dragons pöytäroolipelissä. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli paikallistaa mikä aiheuttaa väärinymmärryksiä, miten väärinymmärrykset ratkaistiin, sekä miten väärinymmärryksiä voidaan välttää, jotta peliä häiritsevien elementtien syyt saataisiin selville ja siten häiriötekijät voitaisiin minimoida. Pelin kehityshistoria sekä sen terminologia ja perusteet esiteltiin lyhyesti tutkimuksen yhteydessä. Perusteista tärkeimpinä mainittakoon pelin toimintaperiaate sekä sen kolme peruspilaria (taistelu, tutkinta, ja sosiaalinen kanssakäynti). Dungeons and Dragons –peliä analysoitiin yhteisesti luotuna narratiivina, minkä takia kommunikaatiovaikeuksien teorian lisäksi tutkimuksen viitekehykseen kuului myös narratiivintutkimus. Tutkimuksen aineistona toimivat otteet yhden kokonaisen pelisession videonauhoitteesta. Otteet lajiteltiin pelin kolmen peruspilarin mukaan, jonka jälkeen ne esitettiin lukijalle ja analysoitiin yksitellen, keskittyen väärinymmärrystä aiheuttaviin tekijöihin. Analyysia seuraavassa osiossa keskustelu keskittyi otteita yhdistäviin tekijöihin ja väärinymmärrystä aiheuttaviin elementteihin kollektiivisesti. Tutkimuksen päätteeksi analyysin ja keskustelun pohjalta esitettiin yhteenveto. Suurin osa väärinymmärryksistä tapahtui taistelujaksojen yhteydessä ja johtui säännöistä. Säännöistä johtuvat väärinymmärrykset haittasivat pelin etenemistä myös eniten, verrattuna väärinymmärryksiin pelin kahden muun aspektin aikana. Muiden peruspilarien aikana tapatuvat väärinymmärrykset sidottiin usein pelin narratiiviin, mikä vähensi niiden haittavaikutusta ainakin säännöistä johtuviin väärinymmärryksiin verrattuna. Väärinymmärrykset ratkaistiin useimmiten neuvottelemalla yhteisymmärrys keskusteluun osallistuvien osapuolien kesken. Yleistettäviä keinoja torjua ja välttää väärinymmärrystä ei kyetty johtamaan tutkimusmateriaalin rajatusta koosta johtuen. Siitä huolimatta muutamia hypoteettisia keinoja esiteltiin silloin kun niitä kyettiin johtamaan analysoitavista otteista. Pöytäroolipelien tutkimusta voitaisiin tulevaisuudessa suunnata kohti vaikutuksia, joita pelinjohtajan roolia täyttävällä pelaajalla ja hänen teoillaan on peliin kokonaisuudessaan. Tulevaisuudessa tutkimus voisi myös suuntautua pöytäroolipelien eri tarkoituksiin viihteen lisäksi, kuten esimerkiksi pöytäroolipeleihin opetustyökaluna.

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1   Introduction

The goal of this study was to discover what caused misunderstandings, and how instances of such miscommunication were resolved during gameplay of the table top role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons. The study was conducted by examining a recording of a single session of Dungeons & Dragons, during which misunderstandings and confusing moments occurred. Moments clearly indicating misunderstanding or confusion were extracted from the data and transcribed to be used as research material for this study. The extracts were then categorised according to the aspect of gameplay they occurred during, after which the causes of the misunderstanding were discussed. Not all extracts that emerged from the data were presented in the study, however. Only few of them were chosen to represent their category and to act as discussion points. The extracts were discussed with the following questions in mind: What causes misunderstanding during a gameplay session? How are misunderstandings resolved during gameplay? What can be done to counteract or avoid misunderstandings? These three questions guided analysis throughout the paper, and they should be considered the research questions for this study.

Dungeons and Dragons is a co-constructed narrative, created in unison by the players and the dungeon master. Narratives and storytelling serve multiple functions in human interaction; among other functions, storytelling can be used to transcend the confines of the present (Quasthoff & Becker, 2005, p. 1), which is one of the functions that Dungeons and Dragons serves as a game. I would argue that a lot can be learned through study of role-playing games, interactively, culturally and pedagogically among other fields of research. In order to learn from the game, it needs to be played; furthermore, for the game to be played, it must be enjoyable and entertaining. Interruptions in the gameplay—such as those caused by miscommunication—make the game harder for the players to enjoy, which is why miscommunication during gameplay should be studied. So, with this study, I hoped to gain an understanding of what caused breaks in gameplay—breaks especially in the form of misunderstandings. Additionally, by discovering how the misunderstandings were resolved, I hoped to highlight the processes of overcoming misunderstandings, which could provide insight into what could be done to quickly overcome interruptions. Reducing the time that interruptions consume should leave more room for other, more enjoyable elements of the game to be explored and thus improve the gameplay experience. So, it could be said that ultimately the goal of this study was to discover methods of improving the

gameplay experience by minimising the amount of time consumed by misunderstandings and confusion during gameplay.

The paper is structured as follows. First, in order to gain a rudimentary understanding of the game, the reader is introduced to Dungeons and Dragons along with its core concepts and terminology. Detailed accounts of the rules and methods of gameplay will, however, not be provided as they are not mandatory in the context of this study. In other words, an understanding of the extracts and of the discussion that follows can be reached without deep analysis of the game. After introducing the game, a framework of the discussed concepts will be presented. The most important concepts—i.e. misunderstanding, miscommunication, and narration—will be presented, along with repair, which was discovered to be an excellent tool for locating misunderstandings as well as resolving them. After introducing the framework for the study, the research material will be briefly presented along with the method of conducting the study. The extracts under discussion are presented in section 5 with an amount of context to give a reader a better understanding of the events of the extracts. The causes of misunderstandings will then be discussed in section 6. Finally, the findings of the study will be summarised in the concluding chapter of the paper. The goal of this structure was to provide a reader with the information they need before presenting the research material and discussing it in length. Hopefully, this study will encourage further research on the subject and will ultimately have a positive effect on the development of Dungeons and Dragons as a game.

2   Dungeons and Dragons, history and gameplay essentials

Information about Dungeons and Dragons will be presented first, for it will be in the centre of discussion throughout the other sections of this paper. A reader will have to have an idea of what the game is about, so they can understand how the game is connected to the theoretical framework and understand the terminology used when discussing the game. Wizards of the Coast's (WotC) volumes containing the rules of the game (2014a; 2014b) will be referred to throughout the section for they are mandatory for playing the game.

The rules of Dungeons and Dragons have undergone countless overhauls, minor adjustments and readjustments throughout its multiple versions. This study will focus on the basic fifth edition ruleset, which consists of the rules designed by Wizards of the Coast (WotC) in Player's Handbook (WotC, 2014b), and Dungeon Master's Guide (WotC, 2014a). As of this day, there are several additional volumes that provide supplementary resources for dungeon masters and players alike. These resources will not be included in the study, as they were not utilised during the campaign under study.

2.1 Brief history and context

To give context on how Dungeons and Dragons has established itself as one of the most prominent role-playing games to date, a brief history of the development of the game will be provided. The history presented here is based on a timeline article published by Peterson (2014) on the fortieth anniversary of the publication of the first edition of Dungeons and Dragons.

The saga of Dungeons and Dragons started in the 1970s, when Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson published the first edition of D&D, which was based on an earlier table-top game *Chainmail*, following an apparent growing interest in medieval war games. Dungeons and Dragons was well received, and supplementary products, such as additional rules and adventure modules, were published and sold out within the first two years. Growing interest in the game caused it to be divided into basic and advanced versions, perhaps foreshadowing the multiple different iterations to come. By the 80s, Dungeons and Dragons had become a cultural icon, appearing in numerous mainstream media, such as the film E.T. (Peterson, 2014). The success of the game eventually

resulted in the second edition of Dungeons and Dragons being published around the 1990s, followed by the third edition in the early 2000s. The addition of new editions did not mean the abolishing of the previous ones; instead, all the different versions co-existed, some more popular than others. Several third-party products emerged at the turn of the millennium, including video games, table-top games and others. Around 2010, the fourth edition of the game was published, and steps were taken to streamline the game, eventually leading to the publishing of the fifth and latest edition of D&D on the fortieth anniversary of Dungeons and Dragons in 2014.

The history of Dungeons and Dragons displays constant development and refinement of the game to meet contemporary standards for role-playing games. The most apparent signs of continuing development are the supplementary materials that are still being produced. Interest in the game has remained through the decades of its existence, even among researchers. The many editions of Dungeons and Dragons, as well as role-playing games in general, have been researched in a variety of contexts. To mention a few interesting examples, claims on D&D's alleged effects on crime, suicide, and devil worship among players were examined by Lancaster (1994). Additionally, role-playing games have been examined from angles ranging from pedagogics and didactics (see Cook, Gremo, & Morgan, 2017; Francis, 2005; Byers, 1979) to social and gender studies (see Daniau, 2016; Borah & Schaechterle, 2006; Zayas & Lewis, 1986).

2.2 Key concepts and terminology

In this sub-section, I will present key concepts and essential terminology that is required for understanding the aspects of Dungeons and Dragons present in this study. The aforementioned elements will only be presented to the extent that is required for reaching a rudimentary understanding of the concepts; a thorough analysis of rules or the various other aspects of the game will not be provided for the purpose of this study.

Dungeons and Dragons sports an immense amount of game terminology, some of which is essential for being able to play or understand the game. The terminology that will be presented in this study will be limited to the concepts that are mandatory for understanding the basics of the game and the content of the extracts that are presented in the analysis section.

Dice and skill checks

Rolling dice is a big part of the game; often a single die is the determining factor between failure and success. The amount and type of dice that need to be rolled depends on the situation, so for the sake of conciseness, an abbreviation system has been created. The system consists of two numbers, the number of dice that need to be rolled, followed by the type of dice to roll, for example '3d6'. In the previous example, a player would roll three of the standard six-sided dice.

The iconic twenty-sided die (d20) of Dungeons and Dragons is the dice that is most often used to determine the outcome of an attempted action. The outcome of such an action is determined by rolling 1d20 and adding appropriate modifiers. Modifiers are numbers that are determined by an individual character's strengths and weaknesses, and the advantages/disadvantages that might be imposed by the character's surroundings. Added together, the d20 roll and the modifiers yield a number, the dungeon master takes into account when determining success or failure. These d20 rolls with added modifiers are called *skill checks* or *saving throws.*

Critical success or failure

As mentioned, twenty-sided die rolls are used to determine the outcome of a multitude of scenarios. Occasionally, a player may end up with a die roll from either end of the spectrum, which might lead to disastrous, outstanding, or otherwise entertaining outcomes. According to the default rules of the game, rolling a twenty or a one on the twenty-sided die does not have a special effect outside of critical hits in combat (WotC, 2014a, p. 242). However, the Dungeon Master's Guide provides an optional rule on critical successes and failures. According to those rules stated by WotC (2014a, p. 242), a dungeon master may choose to consider die rolls of one and twenty as exceptional and provide extraordinary outcomes. How these outcomes manifest in-game is at the dungeon master's discretion.

Dungeon master

In addition to a group of players, every Dungeons and Dragons campaign needs a dungeon master, often abbreviated as *the DM*. Typically, there is only one DM, who acts as a lead storyteller and a referee (WotC, 2014b, p. 5). In some campaigns, the role of the DM might be passed around from one player to the next. However, like most campaigns, the campaign under study only had one person filling the role of the DM. The dungeon master creates small adventures and entire game worlds for the players to explore and enjoy. During sessions, a DM gives players leads to follow if they choose to, listens to what the players want to do, where they wish to go, and narrates their

surroundings and the outcomes of their actions as the game goes on. Thanks to the concept of dungeon masters, Dungeons and Dragons is uniquely flexible when considering what can be done in the game. Whatever the players may decide to do, a dungeon master is capable to react to and improvise if necessary, which leaves the players with a seemingly infinite amount of actions to take and paths to follow.

Metagaming

WotC (2014a, p. 235) define *metagaming* as going out of character to think about the game as a game. Dungeons & Dragons is a roleplaying game, which means that most of the time the players are assumed to take roles and act according to them. The roles are usually those of their characters, who have a set of skills and defining characteristics. However, sometimes players tend to step outside their character roles and look at the game from their own point of view instead of their character's. For instance, a player might draw attention to the time a dungeon master spent on describing a door, and urge the party to keep trying to find something special about it, or when facing a frightening monster, a player might doubt that the dungeon master would oppose the party with an overwhelmingly powerful foe and urge the party to engage it (WotC, 2014a). This form of metagaming is most usually discouraged as it goes against the role-playing nature of the game. However, discussing the game as a game cannot always be avoided, most typically when negotiating the rules, or when resolving misunderstandings and other forms of miscommunication. It can be said that the separating difference between mandatory and disruptive metagaming is the motivation behind it; in one case, an understanding is negotiated in order for the game to continue, while in the other, players are attempting to gain an edge by exploiting the way the game is played.

PC and NPC

Like most stories, Dungeons and Dragons is built around characters and their actions. These characters can be categorised into two groups, player characters, and non-player characters, or PCs and NPCs. Some might consider a third group for non-sentient creatures, or monsters, but seeing as they too are piloted by the dungeon master, one can argue that they can be grouped together with other dungeon master piloted creatures. PCs are characters that the players themselves create and control throughout the game. The players often interact with creatures and people that they encounter over the course of the campaign. These characters are called non-player characters, or NPCs, and they are piloted by a dungeon master, who portrays them in a

fashion they deem fit. Some characters require an intricate account of characteristics, while others only call for a general description.

Race and class

The multiple worlds of Dungeons and Dragons contain many intelligent races in addition to humans; Elves, Halflings, Dwarves, Tieflings, Half-Elves, Half-Orcs and other races all have unique features with some benefits and some disadvantages. When creating a character, especially when creating a PC, in addition to choosing their race, the source for their exceptional skills will be chosen. This source might be rigorous training, a blessing from a deity, an exceptional connection to nature, or other. These sources of power are the cores of what are called characters' classes. To name some classes, both fighters and monks achieve their power and martial prowess through rigorous training; druids and rangers, on the other hand, both draw their power from nature. Each class has its strengths, weaknesses, and a role in an adventuring group. There are plenty of classes and sub-classes to choose from, but details will be omitted from this study.

Details of the specific traits that certain races and classes pertain have been altered multiple times throughout the many versions of Dungeons and Dragons, which occasionally causes confusion, especially to those players who have played multiple versions of the game, as displayed in extract 6 in section 5.1.

2.3 Gameplay core and aspects of gameplay

A basic understanding of how the game is played will be required to understand the extracts and the discussion in this study. That being said, the goal of this study is not to teach how Dungeons and Dragons is played, but as an understanding of the gameplay is required, an introduction to the core elements should be provided. So, in the following, I will introduce how the game is played, and the three aspects of gameplay that Dungeons and Dragons is built on—exploration, social interaction, and combat. Knowledge of the three aspects of gameplay is also important since the extracts of this study will be presented in accordance to the aspect of gameplay they occurred during.

2.3.1   Core of gameplay

Nobody wins or loses a game of Dungeons and Dragons (WotC, 2014b, p. 5). By working together, the players and the dungeon master create an engaging story in which everyone involved gets to participate in the narrative. The gameplay core of Dungeons and Dragons can be condensed into three steps, as done by WotC (2014b, p. 6).

The first step is the dungeon master describing the environment. During this step, the dungeon master provides the players with information on their surroundings, describing everything from people to scenery, weather and anything else in proximity. The specificity of provided descriptions depends on the dungeon master and his preferences, as well as the situation in which the environment is described. For instance, during combat, it is vital to know where a character stands in relation to their adversaries, while during a roleplaying scenario it might be worthwhile to know which people's portrait is hanging on a wall to give the players a topic for small talk to distract an NPC.

During the second step, the players state what they wish to do. Players do not take turns in a traditional board game fashion, but rather all separately state what their character wishes to accomplish, or the players make a single decision for the whole group. For example, a player might decide that their character wishes to sit down and talk to the patrons of a tavern, while another player in the same tavern might want to try and amuse the patrons by playing a song. Alternatively, the players might decide to all head upstairs as a group. The DM's role is to listen to what the players wish to accomplish and resolve their actions. Some tasks might be easy to resolve, such as opening an unlocked door. On other occasions, actions may require an amount of skill or finesse. Actions requiring special attention are most often resolved by die rolls that determine the results of said actions. Using the previous examples, the dungeon master might ask the player who decided to chat with a patron to roll 1d20 to see how the NPC receives their approach, and the player performing for the crowd might be asked to make a similar roll to see how well they manage to perform.

The third and final step is resolving the players' actions. After hearing their requests, the DM resolves the players' actions either by narrating what happens or by requesting the players to make a skill check, saving throw or other kind of die roll. To give an example of possible outcomes, a bad roll of a die might lead to the conversing player to appear as rude or hostile, while an

excellent roll might lead to the performing player receiving applause or being hired to perform for profit. The dungeon master narrates the consequences of the players' actions, which most often leads back to the first step, keeping the game going in a structured manner.

As mentioned earlier, players don't usually take turns while performing actions. However, when tracking the order in which actions transpire becomes imperative, players will follow a more structured way of resolving actions, each of them acting in their own turn (WotC, 2014b, p. 8). Combat and chase sequences are the most common situations where action becomes turn-based instead of the regular free-flowing action.

2.3.2 Aspects of gameplay

In order to achieve an understanding of the basics of the game, its most important aspects should be introduced. Furthermore, defining the central gameplay aspects of the game is necessary, since the extracts of this study are categorised according to the aspect of gameplay during which they occurred.

Dungeons and Dragons has three main gameplay aspects, which WotC call "the three supporting pillars": social interaction, combat, and exploration (2014b, p. 8). Different players and DMs focus on different aspects of the game; some players might enjoy the combat aspect of the game while disliking the social interaction, which naturally directs the campaign to be combat-oriented and light on social interaction. There is no 'correct' way to play the game, so a group of players may choose to focus on what is most enjoyable to them. Ultimately, it is the DM that decides what to focus on during a campaign.

Exploration
Exploration, in essence, is moving around and interacting with the world around them from urban environments to treacherous dungeons. Dungeon masters may provide their players with maps, blueprints or other kinds of visual representations of their surroundings, but for the most part, players rely on their DM's descriptions to perceive their surroundings. As with all in-game micro-narration, the specificity of narration depends on the DM and the narrative situation. However, the players are always free to ask for additional information on their surroundings. Varying levels of specificity and individual interpretations of descriptions leave room for misunderstanding. If

confronted with each other, differences in the conceptions of the surroundings of the characters may cause conflicts to arise.

Social interaction

The worlds of Dungeons and Dragons are filled with creatures of varying degrees of intellect. One of the core aspects of D&D consists of interaction between these creatures. Social encounters can occur between PCs, NPCs, and PCs, or even between NPCs. There are multiple ways of performing social encounters. Some social encounters are 'acted out', others might be summarised by the DM, or bypassed with a die roll. Acting out an encounter means that the social interaction is carried out as an actual conversation between the discussants, be they PCs or NPCs. Acted out encounters are performed in character, and they are the main form of role-playing in many campaigns; campaigns that focus on social interaction tend to act out many of the social encounters that occur, while those focusing on other aspects tend to handle the encounters in other manners.

DMs do not have to exclusively select a method of performing social encounters, the approach might be chosen, for example, based on the goal of the encounter. Players might wish to talk to a generic guard that stands at a gate or a simple shopkeeper, which in some campaigns might call for a summarization of the discussion or resolving the discussion quickly with a roll of a die. As for the goals of the discussion, players may seek to extract information, defuse volatile situations, coerce characters to do something, etc. The different goals might prompt for the DM to use different approaches when facing a social encounter.

Combat and turn-based play (initiative order)

Normally, action becomes turn-based once combat ensues or when PCs or NPCs decide that they will take actions that are deemed hostile by others, and when said actions require special steps to resolve. Such actions include but are not limited to physical assault, intervening to stop or hinder a character's actions, and actions that require temporal or sequential precision. When the DM deems it necessary to enter turn-based play, they ask the players to roll *initiative* by rolling 1d20 and adding the appropriate modifier. The players, as well as the NPCs that the DM control, then act in the order from the highest score to the lowest.

Each PC and NPC turn corresponds to six seconds of in-game time. During turn-based play, much like in regular free-flowing gameplay, characters suggest actions to the DM, which are then

resolved. However, unlike during regular gameplay, the actions are performed on each character's turn. During a turn, a character can perform an action, a bonus action, and move. Actions that can be performed during a single turn are limited to those that can be conceived to be performed during six seconds of time. However, magical items, a character's race, or their class might allow for characters to perform additional actions. Keeping track of all the options and abilities that a character has is often not a simple task and can occasionally cause confusion and slow the game down.

Once everyone has taken a turn, the first round is concluded and another one begins, using the same initiative score that was rolled earlier. Players take as many rounds as it takes for the temporal and sequential sensitiveness to pass, and then return to normal free-flowing gameplay.

3 Approaches to studying Dungeons and Dragons

As briefly stated in section 2.1, role-playing games—one of the more prominent of which is Dungeons and Dragons— have been examined from a variety of perspectives as briefly mentioned in section 2.1. My goal, however, is to examine Dungeons and Dragons as a co-operatively constructed narrative and game with specific mechanics in hopes of discovering causes for misunderstandings during gameplay and methods in which they are resolved. In this section, I will present the theoretical framework of the study. The topics of miscommunication, misunderstanding, and narration will be discussed as they are the central focus of this study. Repair will also be briefly discussed, for it is one of the prominent methods of counteracting miscommunication, as well as a good tool for locating it.

3.1 Narration

Theory of narration must be examined, for, at its very core, any game of Dungeons and Dragons is a co-operatively constructed narrative between the players and the dungeon master. Many of the works pertaining to the study of narration that are examined in this study draw from Labov's and Waletzky's (1967) work on narrative structures, which has arguably become one of the more important works on narrative theory. Narrative has been widely researched across several fields of academics including sociology, psychology, and ethnography, among others (Thornborrow & Coates, 2005, p. 2). Quasthoff and Becker (2005, p. 1) even dubbed narration a prototypical form of human communication. Structural analysis of narrative is largely based on Labov's and Waletzky's (1967, 1997). They introduced a rigid structure to be used in narrative analysis, and which was said to be one of the founding works of linguistic narrative research (Quasthoff & Becker, 2005, p. 2; De Fina & Johnstone, 2015, p. 152).

3.1.1 Narrative form and function

Study of narrative is influential and meaningful, as narration can be considered an intrinsic part of human interaction. Narration has a multitude of functions in communication, such as those listed by Quasthoff and Becker (2005):

In [telling a story] language is used to,

- transcend the mutually accessible here-and-now, by referring to a past event,
- share emotions and attitudes with respect to this past event and its participants,
- display and negotiate the narrator's/character's concept of self,
- fulfil cognitive, communicative, and interactive functions such as sense-making, informing, amusing, "unburdening", positioning (p. 1).

Furthermore, as Thornborrow & Coates (2005, p. 7) stated, stories can be told to entertain, explain, instruct, or to establish social norms. I will argue that games, especially role-playing game such as Dungeons and Dragons, fill most, if not all these functions. Most of the functions are filled every session by interacting with the game world and other players. In Dungeons and Dragons, the self is portrayed and negotiated via the characters that the players create and control throughout the game; in the case of the dungeon master, the NPCs and the world that they create all display their concept of self. Dungeons and Dragons—I would argue—is a unique narrative medium and should be inspected closely in order to further understand the functions that narration has.

To analyse narration and accurately pinpoint what causes misunderstanding and confusion, it is vital to study the elements of narration. De Fina and Johnstone (2015, p. 153) introduced two prominent researchers from the mid-20th century, Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who researched narrative structures before Labov's (Labov & Waletzky, 1967) model was presented. Propp and Lévi-Strauss, both had theories on narration and its limitations. Propp highlighted the limitations in the structures of narration, while Lévi-Strauss claimed that though seemingly different, narratives deal with a limited number of themes. According to De Fina and Johnstone (2015, p. 153), the theories of Propp and Lévi-Strauss have since then been adopted expanded upon by a number of philosophers and literary theorists. Structural approaches to the study of narration that were based on Lévi-Strauss' and Propp's earlier work all shared two assumptions (De Fina & Johnstone, 2015):

One was that there are abstract levels on which structures and meanings that seem different superficially are really the same. The other was that narrative analysts should distinguish between the story as a series of events (the fabula) and the story as told by the author (the syuzhet). (p. 153)

While the latter of the assumptions lies somewhat outside of the focus of this study, the former is meaningful to inspect in the context of narration and its form. Considering the number of structural elements in narration limited allows for them to be inspected separately and conclusively, which serves the purpose of this study. Additionally, categorisation of narrative elements may ease the process of discovering what it is that confuses or leads players to misunderstandings during a game.

Labov and Waletzky (1967; 1997) examined the structures of oral narrations of personal experiences and conceptualised the core structures. The narrative structures presented by Labov and Waletzky, and discussed in this study, are the abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. The function of an *abstract* is to initiate a narrative by both claiming a narrator's right to proceed with their story, and by summarizing the story to come. *Orientation* introduces the characters, physical and temporal setting, and overall situation of the narrative; orientation most often occurs during the beginning of narration; however, it can be interjected at a later point if needed. Occurrences leading to the conclusion of the story are considered to be *complicating action*. Structures that underline interesting and unusual elements of the story, such as interjected exclamations, are regarded as *evaluation*. Evaluation often occurs right before the resolution but can also take place during throughout narration. *Resolution* releases the tension that may have built during the narration and marks the end of the story. Finally, the narration is concluded with the narrator returning to the present time via *coda*. In-game narration, especially the micro-narration that a dungeon master uses to describe the events as they unfold, seldom includes coda unlike everyday narration but it is occasionally included.

The structural model presented by Labov and Waletzky does not explicitly consider all forms of narration, such as co-operative storytelling, and has been widely criticised by researches for its other deficiencies as well. Georgakopoulou (2007), argued that Labov's model was not particularly compatible with analysing all kinds of narration:

More specifically, the heart of the problem seems to be that the model is ill-suited to work with an increasing emphasis on contextualized, dynamic approaches that view narrative as a situated activity rather than a detachable and autonomous unit. (p. 64)

She brought special attention to the fact that the "Labovian" model does not treat narrative as an integrated part of discourse, but rather views it as separate from other kind of discourse. On one hand, the isolated nature of the Labovian model hinders its usability for inspecting co-constructed narrative, such as Dungeons and Dragons. On the other, the game can safely be argued to be rather isolated from regular day-to-day interaction, and that it should be viewed as separate from other kinds of discourse. So, despite the functional differences between oral narration of personal experiences and in-game narration of Dungeons and Dragons, it can be argued that both forms of narration share the same core structures. Thus, Labov's and Waletzky's concepts can be seen to apply within the context of this study as well.

Thornborrow and Coates (2005) sought to clarify the form of narration by questioning, what it is that defines "a stretch of talk" as narrative. They stated that many of the suggested definitions of a "well-former story" shared two qualities:

The first is that, to count as a narrative, there has to be a sequence of narrative clauses (clauses containing a verb in the simple past tense or, sometimes, the historic present tense) whose order matches the real time order of the events described in those clauses. These clauses constitute the heart of the story, or the narrative 'core'. The second is that a story has to have a beginning, a middle and an end (Aristotle's definition) (p. 3).

While all levels of narration that are present in Dungeons and Dragons fulfil the criteria of Aristotle's definition of a story, the events occurring during a session are most usually narrated in the simple present or present progressive (e.g. 'You notice now that there's a familiar scent—a smell of wood burning.'). As indicated by Thornborrow and Coates (2005, p. 3), stories tend to be told in the simple past tense. Arguably, this might be due to stories being often temporally situated in the past, and even if the situations are fictional and not rooted in any actual temporal point specifically, narrative sentences tend to refer to the past. In the case of Dungeons and Dragons, however, the story is unfolding as the game goes on, and is constantly affected by decisions, die rolls, and requests made by the players. The structure differs from the pre-planned nature of most stories in the sense that no single person knows what is going to happen during the

story. Naturally, the dungeon master has the most control over what occurs during a game session, but no matter how much planning is invested into a gameplay session, there is no telling where the story goes before the session is complete. The continuous narration that is performed by the dungeon master throughout the session is unique in the sense that it is a story that is not being shared later, but rather one that is currently taking place can be interactively influenced. Despite the linguistic form—namely the simple present or progressive—that the in-game narration takes it is indisputably a narrative and will be treated as such for the purpose of this paper.

According to Thornborrow and Coates (2005, p. 3) a minimum of two events form the core of a narrative, and the relationship of those events is what makes the story. Unlike the core in a regular narrative in everyday interaction, a narrative core in a game of Dungeons and Dragons is completed in unison by the players and the dungeon master, rather than either party alone. The Dungeon master provides the players with the premise, and the players complete the core by stating the action that pushes the narrative in a direction, or vice versa. Coates and Thornborrow (2005, p. 3) provide an example of a narrative core, "John had two whiskies and fell into a river". Regularly, the short narrative would be told by a single speaker during one turn. However, in a co-operative structure, the player(s) would be the speakers to state that John drinks two whiskies, and the dungeon master would be the one to voice the consequences of the action that the player(s) had John take. Thus, the story of a Dungeons and Dragons campaign is formed co-operatively.

3.1.2   Narratives in gameplay

Undoubtedly, there are several ways of discussing and classifying narratives. However, I found that dividing narrative layers into three (micro-, small-, and wide narrative) served the purpose of this study the best. Most usually a *wide narrative* is present during a Dungeons and Dragons campaign. A wide narrative could be described as a general course for the campaign, which might include a goal that the players can keep slowly working towards while not being forcefully bound to it. Along with the general course of a campaign, there are *small narratives*; these individual events or adventures inside the game world may fit in the wide narrative and push it forwards, or they may remain separate from it. Small narratives that do not affect the wide narrative act as independent

side paths that the players might choose to take. Reasons to stray from the wide narrative are plentiful; small narratives can break patterns, act as a means for gathering resources, or for passing the time in the game world while waiting for a temporally-bound event to take place. In addition to wide and small narratives with complete story arcs and plots, a dungeon master provides the players with *micro-narratives*: descriptions of the results of the players' actions, and their surroundings. These micro-narratives are inseparable parts of the gameplay experience.

Although the dungeon master is mainly responsible for the creation of the wider narrative, the players are sometime involved. In the campaign under study, the players actively participated in the world creation that took place during the first session of the game, and thus got to affect the wide narrative as it was being created.

3.2 Discussing communication problems

Dascal (1985) stated, "A significant part of understanding speech has to do with misunderstanding" (p. 442) and seeing as the focal point of this study is on issues in communication, theory of misunderstanding and miscommunication in general should be examined. Allott (2016, p. 485) claimed that no dominant theory of misunderstanding as such existed. He suspected that the lack of a theoretical base might be due to causes of misunderstanding being dissimilar from each other, or due to the differences in methodologies between research traditions. Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles (1991, p. 1), as well as Dascal (1985, p. 441), allotted the absence of existing research on the subject to researchers' bias towards the 'good' communication; communication problems were considered "bad" or "aberrant behaviour" and dismissed as such. I will begin by discussing miscommunication, which will be presented as an umbrella term that encompasses various problems in communication, including misunderstanding. Consequently, misunderstanding and miscommunication have a lot in common, and since the goal of this study is to locate and inspect misunderstanding, miscommunication will only be discussed to highlight qualities that apply to misunderstanding as well.

Repair will also be briefly discussed in this section. Repair within the context of this study will be discussed from two main viewpoints: repair as an indicator of misunderstanding, and repair as a

general means of attending to problems in understanding. For this reason, inspection of repair will be superficial at most, since in-depth analysis of the topic is not needed for the specific purposes of this study.

3.2.1 Miscommunication and misunderstanding

Despite being a rather common a phenomenon, miscommunication has been found to lack a conclusive definition. Miscommunication as a term covers a variety of communicative errors such as misrepresentation, misunderstanding, inaccuracy, distortion, misreporting, problematic talk, and communication breakdown, as listed by Bell (1991, p. 259). He also stated that even in works in which miscommunication plays a central role, the definitions of the term can be found lacking. He (1991) then provided two examples for what he deemed the best efforts at defining miscommunication: "a mismatch between the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation" or "the term reserved for those occasions when there is reason to believe that what is communicated (perhaps registered and absorbed as knowledge) is somehow false, inadequate, distorted, etc." (p. 259). Of these two presented definitions, the former represents the model according to which miscommunication—and more specifically misunderstanding—is discussed in this study.

Miscommunication does not necessarily mean that communication between the communicants has failed altogether. Allott (2016, p. 486) presented a contrast between communication failure, understanding, and misunderstanding; He separated misunderstanding from communication failure by arguing that while there is an error in understanding when an utterance is misunderstood, an understanding of some sort is implied—unlike when communication fails altogether. He (2016) further stated that "to misunderstand is to think, or assume, that one understands, while not doing so, i.e. to come to a wrong understanding" (p. 486). This definition, along with Bell's (1991, p. 259), corresponds with the conception of the term that is used throughout this study.

Communicative disruptions are bound to happen; Coupland, Wiemann and Giles (1991) even went as far as to say that language use and communication themselves are intrinsically flawed and problematic, stating that "communication is itself miscommunicative" (p. 3). Truly, disruptions in

communication are bound to happen, regardless of how carefully communication is constructed and carried out, furthermore—as noted by Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles (1991, p. 3)—clear and concise language use is as often the cause to difficulties as the solution. They also (p. 5) underlined that perfect representations of meaning are unlikely to exist, at least within a context where speaking between communicants happens in real time, and within the lexical and syntactic rules of a given language.

Since miscommunication is inevitable, it is important to study it in order to recognise the functions that it has and to identify the problems it might cause during interaction. Errors in processing the semantic structures of utterances might have multitudes of effects, as Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles (1991) stated, "Miscommunication may be a matter of transient annoyance, or it can inhibit life-satisfaction, health, and healing" (p. 3). That is to say, sometimes, misunderstandings or other kinds of breaks in communication lead to amusement and might serve to alleviate pressure or lighten the mood of the discussion; on other occasions, misunderstandings might lead to a person receiving incorrect medical treatment. In the case of this study, the most significant risk that misunderstandings carry is the halting of gameplay until the confusion is cleared, which can be argued to be at least somewhat serious since interruptions arguably make the game more difficult to enjoy. Further examination of the subject is imperative for gaining knowledge on cases in which miscommunication can be considered to have negative effects on interaction, and for discovering ways to avoid those effects or compensate for them.

In order to analyse misunderstanding, meaning and understanding must also be examined. Dascal (1985) discussed meaning and *significance* in communication. He made a clear distinction between the two and declared that utterances carry more layers than what was typically considered the meaning of a sentence:

> "Any utterance of, say, an English sentence, conveys to its hearer or, more generally, to its interpreter a 'significance' that goes far beyond what is commonly described as the 'meaning' of the sentence." (p. 443)

He defined the *significance* as the combination of all the layers that an utterance contains. These layers include, for example, the propositional content of the utterance, the motivation behind the utterance, intentional indirect messages, and unintentional information about the speaker. To briefly introduce said layers, propositional content refers to the informational content that is

being conveyed with a sentence, which—according to Dascal (1985, p. 442)—is commonly described as the meaning of an utterance. The motivation of an utterance refers to the reason that the utterance was said in the first place. Intentional indirect messages consist of information that is not being said but is being implied by the speaker by way of tone, body language or other means. Unintentional information is conveyed in a similar fashion to intentional indirect information, but the conveyed information is not meant to be communicated to the receiver, rather it is something that the receiver perceives and interprets on their own. Dascal (1985, p. 443) further stated that misunderstanding can arise on any of these layers of significance, which is also visible in the extracts in this study. Significance and its layers are discussed throughout sections 5 and 6.

Allott (2016, p. 486) noted that one method of categorising misunderstandings is dividing them into accidental and intentional misunderstandings. Accidental misunderstandings are more conventional, and they are unwillingly caused by the speaker as in the vast majority of cases in this study as well. Intentional misunderstandings, on the other hand, are utterances deliberately crafted to mislead the receiving party. Allott (2016, p. 486) also highlighted a conceptual difficulty considering intentional misunderstandings. According to him (2016, p. 486), since the purpose of a misleading utterance is to lead the listening party to a certain conclusion, it can be argued that the intended understanding of the utterance has been reached, even though the listening party may have been deceived. Within this study, intentional misunderstandings are shown to occur in different, less deceptive ways as well, as in extract 1 in section 5.1.

Allott (2016) also separates misunderstandings *in* communication from misunderstandings *of* communication:

> "We could say that misunderstanding in communication is broader than misunderstanding of communication– because not all misunderstandings in communication are misunderstandings of something that the speaker aimed to communicate." (p. 487)

Not everything that can be extracted from communication is being said out loud or meant to be communicated to the receiving person in the first place, as also stated by Dascal (1985, p. 442). Several factors may contribute to communicating information to the receiving party, such as body language, the tone of one's voice, and their dialect or accent. Sometimes these contributing factors can be misread by the recipient, which might lead to misunderstanding *in* communication

even though the misunderstood information was not meant to be communicated and is, ultimately, the product of the recipient's interpretation of their own observations.

3.2.2 Repair

Repair is one of the tools that can be used to avoid or resolve misunderstandings in interaction. Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) first outlined the organisation of repair. They claimed that the pre-existing concept of "correction" was limited to replacing erroneous elements in speech, whereas repair considered a wider variety of trouble in communication. In this study, repair will be examined as a tool for locating misunderstanding as well as a general means for resolving misunderstanding. The organisation of repair, or specific repair functions will not be closely examined or expanded upon. So, for this study, repair as a concept is only going to be examined to the extent that is necessary in order for it to be identified as an indicator of miscommunication and a method for resolving misunderstanding.

Kitzinger (2013) defined repair as a "set of practices whereby a co-interactant interrupts the ongoing course of action to attend to possible trouble in speaking, hearing or understanding the talk" (p. 232). She presented two types of repair, self-initiated repair and other-initiated repair—originally defined by Schegloff et al. (1977). Most usually, repair is initiated and completed by the person whose utterance requires repair (Kitzinger, 2013, p. 230). However, as noted by Schegloff et al. (1977, p. 364), the repair process may be initiated or completed by others as well. Therefore, a distinction has been made between self-initiated and other-initiated repair. Kitzinger (2013, p. 230) further divided self-initiated repair into repair occurring within the same turn and repair occurring later. She (p. 231) argued that self-initiated repair is less disruptive and hinders the progression of the discussion less than other-initiated repair, stating that while self-initiated repair interrupts the progression of the turn, other-initiated repair halts the progress of the discussion. Kitzinger (2013) also highlighted that self-initiated repair can be used for ends other than avoiding and resolving misunderstanding:

> Self-initiated repair is used not only to correct obvious 'errors' but also to 'fine-tune' the turn with reverence to the action the speaker means to be doing and to the recipient of that action. (p. 233)

Fine-tuning can be argued to mainly serve the purpose of changing the tone of a turn, but it may also be seen as a means to avoid miscommunication, for example by increasing the amount of detail in a speaker's turn for the sake of clarity. A case of self-initiated repair used to fine-tune a speaker's turn is also present in extract 7 (line 3) of this study.

Traditional conversation analytical transcription conventions allow for accurate analysis of trouble in communication and the exact timings and turn-locations of repair initiations (for details and discussion, see Hepburn & Bolden, 2013 and Jenks, 2011). However, since the research material of this study is presented in a more general format, the accuracy of the transcription differs from the traditional transcription conventions of conversation analysis. Still, the transcription method of this study allows for repair to be examined in a degree that is necessary. That is, repair can be located and examined even though the method of transcription may be less specific that that of the traditional conversational analytic method.

4 Introducing research material and collection method

The data used in this paper consists of a single session of Dungeons and Dragons -roleplaying game. The session was recorded at Oulu University with the consent of all the participants; most of whom were participating a course aimed at studying interaction in a gaming environment. Out of the six participants of the session under study, four were playing as player characters, one was filling the role of the dungeon master, and one was observing, taking notes and logging the events that occurred during the session. For the purpose of this research, the observing participant and their actions will not be studied, for they did not actively participate in the gameplay.

The session under study was the second one in a three-session campaign and was chosen for this study due to the session's focus on gameplay, especially when compared to the first recording, which included character creation and an extended period of necessary preparations. It can be argued that breaks and pre-game preparation activities are just as valuable as other aspects of gameplay experience. However, the focus of this study is directed more towards in-game elements, such as role-playing, combat, and metagaming during gameplay, therefore out-of-game sections of the session will not be analysed during this study.

The chosen recording was reviewed, and sections that clearly indicated misunderstanding, confusion, or miscommunication of other sort were extracted as research material for this study. The research material was then categorised according to the three aspects of gameplay presented in section 2.3.2, and the cause for the misunderstanding was discussed. If a singular extract was deemed to fit in more categories than one, it would be placed in all the corresponding categories and considered as belonging to each of them. Since the scope of this study is limited and analysing extensive amounts of extracts where the cause of misunderstanding is the same is arguably redundant, the number of presented extracts was cut down to a minimum.

The data collection method of this study conforms to the criteria of conversation analytical studies, as presented by Mondada (2013), who highlighted CA's aim for inspecting naturally occurring interaction:

> CA aims to discover the natural living order of social activities as they are endogenously organized in ordinary life, without the exogenous intervention of researchers imposing topics and tasks or displacing the context of action. (p. 33)

Mondada (2013, p. 33) compared the analysis of naturally occurring interaction and its goals to other methods of data analysis. To summarise Mondada's (2013, p. 33) arguments, conversation analytic approach differs from introspection by way of researcher role. In an introspective analysis method, a researcher may "consult his or her own competence" in analysing the data, whereas in a CA approach, the researcher's role is to discover instead of interpreting or judging. Ethnographers' method of consulting field notes that they make while collecting research material also differs from the CA approach. Mondada (2013, p. 33) argues that field notes as "post hoc recollections" are subject to errors of memory and interpretation, unlike recordings that are typically used in the CA method. Interviews, when compared to the conversation analytic approach, are topically limited and format-wise constrained. Lastly, experiments—such as those used in cognitive sciences and psychologists—aim at controlling the subjects to test hypotheses, which heavily contradicts the goals of the CA method of analysing and collecting data, where presuppositions are rare, as noted by Wooffitt (2005, p. 72), and efforts are made to not affect the subjects' interaction.

Unavoidably, the research material selection process left some room for researcher bias, since the selection process was performed by the researcher and was not reviewed or consulted by other parties. To avoid excluding extracts of possible relevance while including other similar extracts, only the extracts which—to the researcher—clearly and undoubtedly showed signs of misunderstanding and confusion were chosen for study. After categorisation, the extracts were analysed discussed in accordance with the theoretical background presented in earlier sections.

Alternative approaches to data collection and research material selection were considered as well. The video material was found too extensive and cumbersome to present to people besides the researcher himself, so peer reviewing the selection process was excluded. Other alternative methods included focus groups which would converse the possible situations and reasons misunderstandings would occur, closed or open interviews of players and dungeon masters, and surveys. The impact of selecting to study recordings of the research material was clear: the method would be close to authentic material collection but separating the segments that the study focuses on would undoubtedly leave room for bias. However, I found that identifying miscommunication, confusion, and misunderstanding left little room for argument since in the vast majority of the cases, the game would essentially come to a halt whenever confusion arose. This aided in the selection process, and also conformed to what was stated when discussing other-

initiated repair and its effect on the discussion as a whole instead of the effect that self-initiated repair has on a speaker's turn. Still, however little room there was, the selection method left some room for researcher bias and error, which might have led to some segments of the examined data to be excluded from the research material, even though miscommunication occurred in said segments.

5   Misunderstanding during gameplay

In this section, I present the segments that have been retrieved from the data and seek to display what causes confusion and misunderstanding during the game. Six individuals participated in the game that was used as the research material; of these six participants, five—i.e. the players and the dungeon master of the second session–were examined in this study. In the presented extracts, these people will be referred to with the names of their characters to preserve a degree of anonymity, with the exception of the dungeon master, who will be referred to as 'DM'.

A total of 34 extracts were examined for this study; they were collected from the research material and each inspected separately. The extracts were then categorised according to the aspect of gameplay they occurred during (see 2.3.2 in this study). Out of all the extracts, 10 were chosen for discussion. In the following section, the chosen extracts will be introduced and analysed within the theoretical framework set for this study. An amount of context will be given when presenting the extracts in order for the reader to gain an understanding of what is happening in the extract. The segments will then be discussed to identify the cause of miscommunication. Additionally, when possible, the method of resolving confusion or misunderstanding will also be highlighted.

5.1 Misunderstanding during combat

The majority of the misunderstandings that occurred during the recorded session happened during combat sequences. This was not unexpected, since combat requires knowledge and discussion of the rules and game mechanics, which can at times prove complex, even to experienced players.

As noted in section 3.2 in this study, misunderstandings can be categorised in multiple ways. One of the ways, as mentioned by Allott (2016, p. 486), is separating intentional and unintentional misunderstandings, extract 1 was chosen for this study as an example of such a misunderstanding. Whether or not intentional misunderstandings are misunderstandings at all is under discussion (Allott, 2016, p. 486); however, for this study, intentional misunderstandings will be considered misunderstandings.

During a combat sequence, Lucas sought to move closer to an enemy, in hopes of attacking it with his melee weapon. He enquired the distance between his character and his target to determine if it was possible for him to get close enough to attack his target during the same turn.

(1) Making amends

1   Lucas: How far away am I from him?

2   DM: 30 feet, you can make it.

3   Lucas. Okay I'll make it up to him.

4   (laughter)

5   Lucas: I swear, I'm sorry! So, I'll run to him.

Answering Lucas' query (line 1), DM informed him that he could get within striking distance with the movement speed available to his character. Lucas then confirmed his intention to 'make it up to him' (line 3), which caused a humorous moment as the phrase could be understood in multiple ways.

The context provided by the surrounding discussion was enough for Lucas' phrase to be understood correctly without elaboration. However, on line 5, Lucas chose to elaborate, using the 'incorrect' meaning for the purpose of humour. In this instance, the receiving party most definitely deduced the correct meaning of the phrase, but Lucas chose to enforce the alternative meaning by making a remark that indicated that Lucas supposedly meant that his character intended to make amends with the enemy, instead of approaching with malicious intent. Allott (2016, p. 486) noted that in some cases, intentional misunderstandings leave the receivers with the understanding that the speaker intended, even though it might leave the receivers feeling deceived. In this case, however, the speaker attempted to 'deceive' the receivers into believing that his intended meaning was not the one that they reached, by providing a remark that indicated that the 'incorrect' meaning of the phrase "make it up to him" was the one he intended to communicate. Arguably, no misunderstanding took place here, since the speaker's actual message was correctly understood, despite the playfully deceptive remark. However, this extract showcases intentional misunderstanding on the speaker's part, since Lucas intentionally insinuated that the receivers misunderstood the meaning even though the correct meaning was deduced by the receivers.

In extract 2, unspoken information that was conveyed by Balthazar lead to problems in communication.

An NPC that the party was battling had just summoned an elk to aid it in battle. As Balthazar's turn in combat began, he carefully considered the options that were available to him.

(2) Careful consideration

1   Balthazar: Um (pause), so is the elk right past me?

2   DM: Yeah, it's wheeling about wildly.

3   Balthazar: So that's probably drawn my attention. (pause) Yes, I will eldritch blast the elk.

4   DM: By the way, if at any point you feel like the thing is too chaotic, and you want a map,
go 5 right ahead and say it.

6   Lucas: No, I've got a picture in my head.

7   Balthazar: Yeah, I'm juggling the actions I have available to me.

8   DM: The curse of the spell caster.

Balthazar considered his options as his turn began, and he took a few brief moments to reflect (lines 1 and 3), one before determining his character's position on the battlefield, and another after receiving the information he asked for. DM interpreted the pauses in Balthazar's speech as him having difficulties in conceptualizing the description of the battlefield and proceeded to re-evaluate the adequacy of his description of the battlefield, which led to him offering to provide clarification (line 4) in the form or a map. Then again, the offer could also be argued to be DM's attempt to determine if he was the reason for the delay in the progression of the game. Still, Lucas declined the need for a map by stating his contentment with the current situation. Balthazar agreed and provided reasoning for the extended pauses in his speech: to give him time to select a course of action from the options available to him. Balthazar's answer revealed that DM's narration was not the cause of the deceleration, for his struggle did not concern DM. The pauses in his speech were, nevertheless, interpreted by DM to concern his performance despite Balthazar not necessarily wanting to communicate anything. After the cause of the decelerated pace was clear, DM acknowledged Balthazar's reasoning (line 8) and prepared to move forward with the sequence.

The contrast between communication failure and misunderstanding presented by Allott (2016) is apparent in this extract. Pauses in Balthazar's speech are interpreted by DM, who understands them to be signs of Balthazar having difficulties to correctly place his character onto the battleground in relation to other characters. So, an understanding was reached by interpreting the unspoken information that was present in the utterance, even if it was an incorrect one. Therefore, communication between the communicants did not fail as such, but rather resulted in an unexpected outcome. Additionally, this extract is a good example of misunderstanding *in* communication rather than misunderstanding *of* communication, as also previously discussed by Allott (2016, p. 487). Whether a speaker intends to or not, information besides the spoken message is conveyed. In the case of this extract, the pauses convey hesitation, which was interpreted by DM, who then provided commentary according to his understanding of the situation. So, the misunderstanding that arose was a result of a misunderstanding *in* communication rather than *of* communication, since information was not explicitly communicated, but was extracted from the speaker's way of delivering the propositional content of his turn. DM noticed the extended pauses in Balthazar's speech, interpreted them, and ended up with an incorrect understanding of the situation. So, an understanding was reached from the information that was conveyed, despite Balthazar not intentionally conveying such information.

Although the transcription method chosen for this study does adequately present the cause for misunderstanding in extract 2, the disadvantage of the inaccuracy of the method is visible. In this instance, the conversation analytical transcription method could benefit the reader, since structures for accurately communicating extended pauses during a speaker's turn exist within the system. The transcription conventions would provide a means for displaying the exact lengths of each pause, which could make their function clearer to a reader. However, I would argue that—in this specific case and considering the focus of the study—the lengths of the pauses do not matter, as long as it is clear that they are considerably longer than naturally occurring pauses in people's speech.

Not much can be done proactively to avoid misunderstandings caused by misinterpretation of unspoken information, at least by the speaker. The interpreter, on the other hand, could counteract misinterpretation by attempting to refrain from drawing conclusions from unspoken information. However, not all unspoken information is inadvertent, and refraining from making interpretations from any form of unspoken information may result in the receiver not receiving a

meaning that a speaker is attempting to communicate. So, whether refraining from interpreting unspoken information helps or hinders the progression of the game cannot be deduced from the research material of this study.

In extract 3, mismatches in understanding the terminology of the game that Flyndall presents (line 2) lead to a misunderstanding between Flyndall and DM.

Flyndall was attempting to climb out of a pitfall that he had fallen into. DM had asked him to make a skill check to discern if he managed to scale the wall of the pit. The result of the skill check was poor, and Balthazar sought to comfort him.

(3) Luck in times of misfortune

1   Balthazar: At least you didn't join the one-train.

2   Flyndall: I wish I had because I'm also lucky. I could've re-rolled it.

3   Balthazar: True!

4   DM: You're lucky, you can [re-roll].

5   Flyndall: Just on a one.

6   DM: Oh, oh right, I was thinking of the feat.

After Flyndall received a poor result from a skill check, Balthazar comforted him (line 1) by saying that at least his roll did not result in a critical failure as other players' skill checks had previously. Flyndall mentioned (line 2) that he would have preferred a critical failure, since his character had a racial trait, which allowed him to re-roll critical failures once. Flyndall referred to this racial trait by saying that his character was lucky. "Lucky" also happens to be the name of an additional feature that characters have the option to choose (WotC, 2014, p. 167). The conflict between the understandings became apparent when DM began to instruct Flyndall (line 4) on how to utilize the feature. DM's utterance (line 4) reveals that he had understood Flyndall's utterance as Flyndall telling the group that he had selected the "Lucky"-feature, which is altogether different from the racial trait that Flyndall was actually discussing. The misunderstanding lead to DM beginning to explain (line 4) how the character feature could have assisted Flyndall in the situation he was in. Flyndall detected the misunderstanding and clarified briefly (line 5) by stating how the halfling racial ability functions (critical failures may be re-rolled once), thus communicating what he meant

by saying his character was lucky. The moment of confusion was lifted, and DM and stated what caused the misunderstanding.

The propositional content of Flyndall's utterance (line 2) was misinterpreted by DM, which led to a break in communication and halted the progress of gameplay. The problem in this instance was the overlap in game terminology. The large amount of terminology Dungeons and Dragons contains occasionally leads to overlaps in term usage, as some of the skills, racial traits, and character features have similar, or even the same names. In this case, both the racial trait of halflings, and the optional character feature that any character can choose were referred to with the term "Lucky", and since the trait and the feature function differently, confusion ensued. Flyndall noticed the misunderstanding from DM's utterance (line 4) and initiated repair, clearing the confusion. To avoid further confusion, DM asserted what Lucky means to him (line 6), which could be argued to serve the function of instructing the players which meaning of the term to use when using it in the future.

In the following extract 4, misunderstandings were caused by the rules as well as the propositional content, and the motivational content of a turn.

A discussion between the party and an NPC had escalated to combat between the participants. Kaley decided to shoot the NPC with her bow and stated the score of her attack roll. However, as her character had just levelled up, Kaley was unsure if she has made all the necessary adjustments which affect the score of the roll, and thus the result of the attempted attack.

(4) Making adjustments

1   Kaley: It's a twelve.

2   DM: Twelve.

3   K: It's a fourteen.

4   DM: Fourteen, then that's a hit!

5   Kaley: I guess. I haven't added that to that. (Pointing at numbers on character sheet)

6   Balthazar: Oh yes, you should. Yay, level two bonus.

7   DM: Yay! Roll damage.

8   Kaley: Nine.

9   DM: Nine points of damage.

10   (Kaley gestures to Balthazar, who then begins inspecting Kaley's character sheet with her.)

11   Balthazar: Um, yeah [the adjustment on line 3 was justified].

12   Kaley: Really, you sure?

13   Balthazar: Oh, wait.

14   Kaley: Yeah, because it might not be [correct to adjust the score from 12 to 14].

15   Balthazar: Two plus… (audibly calculates the modifier) So, you already had it updated.

16   Kaley: Okay, good then it's nothing.

17   DM: So, nine points of damage?

18   Kaley: Hm? Oh, no.

19   Balthazar: Her attack [roll] was twelve, not fourteen.

20   DM: Oh, okay. Then, no points of damage.

21   Kaley: We've been doing this in pieces.

22   Balthazar: We thought we had not updated the attack number on her sheet, but she actually 23   had, so yeah.

24   DM: Yeah, so for a moment you think you've hit him

25   Kaley: (laughter)

There are two causes for misunderstanding present in this extract. Firstly, misunderstanding the rules of the game—more specifically, misunderstanding how the attack modifier is formed using the numbers on the character sheet—caused an incorrect adjustment to be made (line 3) and for the gameplay to halt. Kaley told DM the score of her attack roll (line 1), then shortly after (line 3) made a correction and adjusted the score, which affected the outcome of the attack. However, Kaley was left uncertain whether she had acted according to the rules, which is visible on line 5 when she asked Balthazar to check the numbers on her character sheets. Balthazar validated Kaley's adjustment (line 6) of the attack roll, while providing her and the rest of the party with the

reason for the adjustment. Kaley proceeded with the attack (lines 7–9), discerning the damage it did to her opponent and relaying it to DM, who began to adjust his notes. During a brief pause in the round progression (lines 9–10) as DM adjusts his notes, Kaley turned to Balthazar for reaffirmation. That time, Kaley audibly contested Balthazar (line 12), who then recalculated the modifier (line 15). The process resulted in a conclusion (lines 15–16), according to which the adjustment to the roll on line 3 was not justified, marked by Kaley stating "Okay, good then it's nothing". Arriving to this conclusion marked the end of the misunderstanding caused the rules of the game, since both Kaley and Balthazar achieved an understanding that they deemed to be in accordance with the rules.

A secondary misunderstanding was caused by Kaley's utterance on line 16. DM interpreted Kaley's utterance as her having concluded the discussion she was having with Balthazar (lines 10–15). However, Kaley's concluding remark left DM in the belief that the information he had received before Kaley's and Balthazar's discussion was still accurate, which became visible to Kaley as DM confirmed the amount of damage one last time (line 17). Kaley noticed that she had been misunderstood and rejected DM's confirmation (line 18).

DM's misunderstanding of Kaley's utterance "Okay, good then it's nothing" can be approached from two angles; considering Dascal's (1985, p. 443) layered structure of significance in communication, the misunderstanding of Kaley's utterance can be argued to having occurred both on the motivational layer and the layer of propositional content. The motivation behind Kaley's utterance was to have DM undo the damage he just applied to the monster in his notes. However, DM incorrectly interpreted Kaley's motivation; he seemed to think that Kaley's motivation was to move the game along instead of making further corrections, which resulted in a conflict in understanding between Kaley and him.

The misunderstanding can also be considered to having occurred on the layer of propositional content. By "it", in her utterance of "Okay, good then it's nothing" Kaley referred to the amount of damage that was being applied to the monster at the time of the conversation. What she attempted to communicate was that instead of nine points of damage, no damage should have been applied to the monster. DM, however, understood that by "it" Kaley referred to the reaffirmation conversation that was happening during the time he was making notes, and by saying "it's nothing" Kaley meant that the conversation didn't yield new information, which lead to him trying to move on with the combat sequence (line 17). After the misunderstanding became

apparent, it was quickly resolved by way of repair (lines 17–20). As an understanding had been seemingly reached, DM returned to micro narration (line 24) with a structure that—using Labov's and Waletzky's (1997) structures for narrative—could be described as an abstract followed by orientation. He claimed his right to move on with the story and shifted the focus from metagame back into narrative, while providing the players with information on what occurred in-game. He also included the mishap into the narrative (line 24), saying that the extensive out-of-game discussion showed in-game as Kaley's character having been sure that her attack had hit her opponent, even though it ended up missing.

Misinterpretations of rules, and breaks in gameplay that occur because of them are hard to avoid and are even considered a part of the game by a number of players. In this instance, the rules of the game caused confusion to a significant extent, which affected all the three people participating in the discussion. In addition to that, Kaley's attempt to undo the adjustments she made was misunderstood, but ultimately resolved by the communicants. One of the factors that could have affected the understanding of her attempt at correcting herself could be that the information Kaley was referring to had happened too long ago in the discussion, which might have led to difficulties in understanding.

In extract 5, inaccuracy during micro narration lead to Balthazar not receiving all the information he needed to complete his turn.

During a combat sequence, Flyndall fell into a pitfall, which was magically concealed by a monster. Balthazar witnessed Flyndall's fall, which prompted DM to ask Balthazar to make a skill check to discern if his character was intelligent enough to deduce what had happened.

(5) Detail pitfalls

1   DM: Actually, you (addressing Balthazar) had a good viewpoint. Roll intelligence to see if you

2   can-

3   Balthazar: Check or a saving throw?

4   DM: Saving throw. Well, actually, it's an investigation roll isn't it? Yes, you can actually roll

5   investigation if you'd like.

6   Balthazar: Nineteen.

7   DM: Yeah, it's an illusion.

8   (…)

9   Balthazar: Actually, did the illusion fade for me, or do I realise that it's there?

10   DM: You realise that it's there, you can see through it now that you've noticed it.

During the first round of combat (lines 1–7), Balthazar made a skill check to see if his character managed to discern that an illusion spell was covering up a pit in the ground. After some discussion (lines 4–6), DM acknowledged that the skill check was successful simply by stating that Balthazar was aware that an illusion spell was covering the pit (line 7). On his next turn after this occurrence (line 9), Balthazar realised that he was unaware if his character could see into to the pit, or if he was merely aware of the fact that an illusion spell was covering it, and he asked DM to clarify. DM then made a ruling (line 10), resolving the situation.

As noted in section 3.1. Dungeons and Dragons has multiple layers of narration from the wide narrative of the whole campaign to the micro-narratives caused by the players' actions every session. Misunderstandings on the wide layer of narrative might not be apparent immediately and can be more difficult to detect especially in the case of this study, where only a single session of the campaign was examined. Misunderstandings on the micro-narratives, on the other hand, were easier to detect, as portrayed by this extract. The misunderstanding of was caused by inaccuracies on the micro level of narration. DM narrated the events that followed Balthazar's successful skill check but failed to describe them accurately enough to give a conclusive picture of the situation. As discussed in section 2.3, when discussing the core of gameplay, the specificity of provided descriptions varies according to the situation. In this extract, DM incorrectly assessed the situation, and the level of detail which was required. The brevity of the description of the events ("Yeah, it's an illusion.") aided in keeping the turns short and thus helped progress the action at a faster pace, albeit at expense of accuracy and attention to detail. The inaccuracy only became apparent once the missing information was needed by Balthazar in order to decide a course of action on the following turn.

The following extracts acts as an example of a misunderstanding that was caused by the rules of Dungeons and Dragons. Although only one extract was chosen for this study, the vast majority of

the misunderstandings in the research material were caused by the rules of Dungeons and Dragons. In the following extract, differences in the conceptions rules, more specifically the attributes that are allotted to halflings in the fifth edition of Dungeons and Dragons, cause a misunderstanding.

The party was engaged in combat with a monster, and Flyndall's careless approach caused her to step into a pitfall. DM began to describe Flyndall's fall but had to quickly confirm if he correctly recalled the rules regarding Flyndall's racial traits.

(6) Losing sight

1   DM: You find yourself falling. You have night vision, don't you?

2   Flyndall: I don't, I don't think halflings do, do they?

3   DM: No, you do.

4   Balthazar: No halflings don't.

5   DM: Oh yea, not in this edition.

Flyndall's plunge made him lose sight of any light source, which was significant as light has a function within the game mechanics. DM attempted to confirm (line 1) that Flyndall's character had the ability to see in the dark in order to decide the degree of detail to which he would narrate the events that were unfolding. Flyndall declined DM's confirmation (line 2) and claimed that his character could not see in the dark, which revealed a conflict between the Flyndall's and DM's understanding of the halflings' features. After the conflict was made apparent, Balthazar participated in the discussion (line 4) by confirming the statement that Flyndall made previously (line 2), according to which his race did not have access to night vision. DM recalled the information after being reminded of it and agreed, stating that he confused the rules of the fifth edition with the rules of another version of Dungeons and Dragons (line 5). The conflict was resolved, and DM proceeded to describe the events in accordance to Flyndall's ability to perceive his surroundings.

As noted, before, confusion and misunderstanding caused by the rules of the game can be argued unavoidable. Dungeons and Dragons has a long history, containing multiple editions of the game

each with their own set of rules. While it can be argued that one version of the game is more popular or prominent than another, multiple versions are still being played by the player base around the world; players might even participate multiple campaigns at the same time, each using a different ruleset. So, for a player to confuse the rules of one version with another's, as was the case in this extract, is not uncommon.

From a narrative perspective, discussing rules can be especially disruptive. Stopping the game to discuss the rules breaks immersion and removes the game from the narrative. As most types of misunderstandings, it also halts the progression of the current in-game activity. After participants exit the narrative to discuss a misunderstanding triggered by a misconception of the rules, the misunderstanding must be thoroughly resolved before the game can continue. One of the ways of resolving rules-related misunderstandings is visible in this extract (lines 3–4), where the misunderstanding was rapidly resolved via confirmation by a third party. Another effective method for conflict resolution was for DM to use his position as the overseer of the game to make a ruling, i.e. a final decision on the interpretation of the rules that is to be used for the duration of the campaign. Additionally, on occasions where the misunderstanding concerned a character and their properties, the confused party and a second party negotiated an understanding, as visible in extract 4. After an instance of miscommunication was resolved, DM as the dungeon master reclaimed his right to continue telling the story via an abstract in the form of a signal phrase, after which the game continued.

Miscommunication regarding to the rules seemed to occur for the following reasons: a) one or all of the discussants could not recall the rules as written (RAW), b) the discussants' conceptions of RAW differed, c) the terminology that communicants used to discuss RAW differed. In all the aforementioned cases, gameplay effectively stops until the misunderstanding is resolved. Consequently, misunderstandings relating to the rules were arguably more disruptive than those of other categories presented in this study. For comparison, misunderstandings caused by narrative inconsistencies could occasionally be bypassed by working them into the narrative with in-character dialogue or otherwise. Confusion that related to rules, however, always had to be resolved thoroughly and instantaneously, since the game could not continue until the rules of the game had been restated and an understanding was reached between all participants.

Ultimately, misunderstandings relating to the rules seemed to be the result of participants' lack of knowledge of the rules, or differences between the participants' conceptions of the rules.

Differences in the communicative conventions of the group also seemed to affect the effectiveness of communication; the better the players knew each other's communicative conventions, the better they could interpret each other, and thus avoid misunderstanding before it occurred. This deduction leads to one of the more obvious ways of counteracting and avoiding misunderstanding considering rules: in order to avoid miscommunication concerning the rules one should learn them, and to avoid misunderstanding people discussing the rules, one should discuss rules with them. Arguably, the best way to do both is to play the game with the same group of players.

5.2 Misunderstanding during exploration

Exploration as a "supporting pillar" (WotC, 2014b, p. 8) and a game term—as discussed in section 2.3.2—encompasses in-game moments during which the players interact with their surroundings and navigate the game world. In the following, misunderstandings that occurred during exploration will be presented.

Role-playing is one of the key elements of Dungeons and Dragons, and not an exception when it comes to misunderstandings. Among other factors, misunderstandings can occur due to in-character and out-of-character talk mixed together as portrayed in the following extract.

The party was approaching the origin of the forest fire that they were seeking. As the party moved closer towards their target destination, DM provided them with additional information, which tied to Kaley's character's backstory.

(7) Exciting scent

1   DM: Actually, Kaley, you notice now that you've been sniffing for a while that there's a

2   familiar scent. A smell of wood burning. You've smelled this in your dreams.

3   Kaley: Oh, I like this! Me, not the character. (*laughter*)

Even though a possible misunderstanding was seemingly avoided in this extract, it portrays one of the ways in which in-character and out-of-character moments can cause confusion during gameplay, and therefore is significant within this study. DM presented (line 1) the group with a

description that seemed to insinuate that they were approaching the mysterious fire that the group is seeking. After hearing DM's description of unfolding events pertaining directly to her character, Kaley responded with a pleased exclamation (line 3). The exclamation was quickly followed by her elaborating that the reaction was hers and not her character's, since the reaction would not suit her character's background, who would consider the fire threatening instead of exciting. Although in this case Kaley might have elaborated mostly for the purpose of humour, the utterance (line 3) also served an important secondary function of guiding the group's roleplaying. If misunderstood, Kaley's exclamation could lead to in-game actions, such as the rest of the group questioning the motives of Kaley's character; at the time of the exclamation, the group considers the mysterious forest fire a threat, and Kaley's character stating that she likes the situation could spark conversation or conflict. However, the threat of misunderstanding was quickly dismissed by Kaley who initiated repair in the transition space between speaker turns.

Misunderstandings caused by role-playing (RP) elements had the fewest entries of all the categories. However, RP related misunderstandings are important when considering Dungeons and Dragons; role-playing is one of the core aspects of the game, so misunderstandings relating to it should be examined. RP misunderstandings were tied to the narrative rather easily and did not necessarily break immersion or halt the gameplay as such. In this sense, RP misunderstandings were less disruptive than most other kinds of misunderstandings. Furthermore, as previously stated, not all misunderstandings should be considered harmful or unwanted. Some misunderstandings might even help progress the game, teach players how to use terminology, and bring about humorous moments. I would argue that misunderstandings during in-character discussion between characters are often easily acted out without halting the gameplay, even though sometimes the misunderstanding can obstruct the players from getting what they want out of the conversation. For example, if a player slips out of character and speaks as the player rather than the character and a DM fails to discern this, it might result in the discussion taking an incorrect course for a moment until the misunderstanding is cleared. This sort of occurrence could be tied to the narrative as a misunderstanding that happened in game, which–I would argue–is a measure for trying to uphold immersion and keeping the game going without breaks in narrative.

In extract 7, the misunderstanding was caused by character voice or the lack thereof. In-character moments can be difficult to separate from out-of-character moments, as was the case in this extract. As portrayed by this extract, players' and their characters' reactions to gameplay might

differ from each other, which makes it important to clearly separate the two in order to avoid misunderstandings. To differentiate the two from each other, some players vary their mannerisms, accents or other aspects of their speech while role-playing. The result of the variation can be referred to as a character voice. Character voices which perceptibly differ from a player's regular manner of discourse can help avoid confusion and misunderstanding during role-playing situations. In this extract, Kaley either found her character lacking a specific character voice, or she found it to be too similar to her natural manner of speaking and determined the best course of action to be to elaborate who it was that spoke out.

It could be argued that confusing the character's voice with the player's might be categorised as misinterpretation of unspoken information because what was being misunderstood were the signals that signified the shift from the character's speech to the player's. A misunderstanding that is caused by the transition between voices signifies that the receiving party has either misinterpreted or failed to receive the unspoken information that was conveyed either intentionally or unintentionally. However, I would argue that the misunderstanding presented this extract is more closely related to the roleplaying elements surrounding it rather than the unspoken information that might be attempted to convey. The simplest way to avoid misunderstandings caused by character voice might be to simply clearly implicate the transition between roles.

In extract 8, the motivation behind Kaley's query is misunderstood, which decelerates the progression of the game momentarily. Near the end of the first session, the players were assaulted by rabid dogs, which they successfully repelled. Getting back into the game after a week-long break, Kaley sought to re-orient herself and to gain additional information on the animals in the near vicinity.

(8) Dangerous or domestic?

1   Kaley: (…) there are pigs and cows and no other dogs?

2   DM: No, nothing seriously dangerous. Nothing threatening seems to be around.

3   Kaley: Yea, not like something smarter than a chicken.

Kaley's query (line 1) was answered by DM, who provided her with an assessment of nearby hostile creatures and other dangers (line 2), stating that there were no further threats that Kaley

could perceive. Kaley recognised from DM's utterance that the motivation behind her query was misunderstood, and initiated repair in order to attempt to correct this misunderstanding (line 3).

Communication between the participants of the discussion did not fail as such, rather the misunderstanding in this extract should be considered "a mismatch between the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation" as per Bell's (1991, p.259) definition of miscommunication. DM is communicating (line 2) that combat and turn-based play have ceased for now, and that the players are now expected to act in accordance with the rules and norms of the exploration or social interaction aspect of gameplay. However, what Kaley sought to inquire was whether there are intelligent creatures in the area, as made apparent by her next turn (line 3). The conflict between the interpreted motivation of Kaley's question and its actual motivation results in DM responding 'incorrectly'. Incorrect in this instance refers to the fact that while DM's reply does answer the query in accordance with the propositional content of Kaley's question, the motivation behind the question is not correctly understood, and therefore the focus of the answer not placed correctly. The misplaced focus results in Kaley not receiving the information she was trying to acquire and being made to repeat her question. This extract too highlights the presence of the layers of significance in communication, and how errors in understanding in any of the layers of significance may lead to misunderstanding of the whole turn.

5.3 Misunderstanding during social interaction

Finally, misunderstandings during conversations and other interactions between players and NPCs will be presented in the following. Social action in the context of this chapter refers to in-game discourse between PCs and NPCs.

In extract 9, inconsistencies in the small narrative layer cause Balthazar to misunderstand the direction and location of a place that an NPC is discussing. The party was talking with an NPC—portrayed by DM, as per usual— in hopes of discovering where the parental figures or the guardians of the NPC were. The NPC responded, providing the group with new information about the NPC's family ties and the game world, and revealing to Balthazar that he did not possess all the information that he needed.

(9) Narration and navigation

1   DM: They're up at the village right now.

2   Lucas: Hm?

3   DM: My brother and sister.

4   Balthazar: Which… Did we come from a village?

5   DM: No, it would be in the other direction.

DM, piloting a child NPC, gave the party two pieces of new information (lines 1 and 3); the first piece was that the guardians of this NPC were elsewhere, the second one that the guardians of this NPC were her brother and sister. Having received this information, Balthazar was attempting to recall the events of the first session of the campaign (line 4), during which the characters and the game world was created, and the party set out for their adventure. He asked if the village that the NPC mentioned was the place from which the group's journey started in the previous session (line 4). DM then reverted to his role as the overseer of the game world to correct Balthazar, saying that the village was in fact in the opposite direction.

Balthazar's misunderstanding of the location of the village and the party can be argued to be caused by several reasons. One of the possible reasons is that the previous session took place a week prior to the one under study, which might have led to Balthazar being unable to accurately recall that it was not a village but a port city in which the group's adventure began. The confusion may also be caused by the lack of a sense of direction, which in turn might be due to the dungeon master not managing to provide the players with a detailed description of the game world during narration. Another possible reason for confusion could be that the NPC's statement "…up at the village right now" (line 1) doesn't provide the players with a direction, or a name to work with, which prompts Balthazar to ask for additional information in order to situate themselves in the world in accordance to the events that are occurring. So, considering the structures of narrative as presented by Labov and Waletzky (1997), it can be argued that inaccuracies in orientation led to players being confused when faced with additional information on their surroundings. As discussed by Labov and Waletzky (1997) and reiterated by De Fina and Johnstone (2015), orientation is not limited to the beginning of the narrative but can be inserted at a later point as well. In this case, the orientation was not automatically provided by DM around the time of the NCP's turn, but rather it was asked for by Balthazar. More specifically, when Balthazar revealed that his conception of the game world did not correspond with DM's conception of the world (line

4), DM determined that it was appropriate to include additional orientation in the narrative (line 5). This extract serves as an example of the importance of the accuracy, consistency, and presence of orientation in a story. Furthermore, orientation is not the only element of narrative structure that should be paid closed attention to when playing, as portrayed by the following extract 10.

In extract 10, inconsistencies in the complicating actions (see 3.1.1 for discussion on narrative form) lead to a misunderstanding. When the group began to travel towards the source of the smoke, DM asserted that there were no panicked animals or other indicators of the fire spreading or turning into a wildfire. Shortly prior to the extract presented above, the party conversed with an NPC they encountered, and it revealed that a tree was lit on fire by someone in the forest they were traversing. This extract was situated after a combat sequence following that discussion. In the following, Kaley was discussing the fire and the culprits behind starting the fire with an NPC.

(10) Bonfire or wildfire?

1   DM: I didn't like the look of those elves. Or what they did to the place.

2   Kaley: The tree? Or the place?

3   DM: Uh, to the, they did something to the air around the place…

In this extract, another NPC engages the group in conversation and tells them that elves have done something "to the place" (line 1). Hearing this, Kaley is confused, as according to all previous information, only the tree was on fire, whereas after listening to this character it seems that something has been done to the surrounding environment as well. DM then, staying in character, addresses the misunderstanding (line 3), stating that something was done to the surrounding air, rather than anything else nearby. With the statement, DM reasserts the narrative set earlier on, according to which the fire is not spreading but remains localized, despite being a sizeable fire in the middle of a thick forest.

In this instance, inconsistencies in the complicating actions that progress the narrative—namely, the narrative clauses that stated that the fire is not spreading, and a clause that was interpreted to mean that the environment had caught fire as well—lead to Kaley seeking clarification to the information that she has received earlier on in the session. Throughout the session, DM has kept the party under the assumption that the fire is not spreading. Maintaining this conception may serve the purpose of eliminating the feeling of urgency, so that the players would take time

exploring and interacting with what they face in the forest instead of rushing towards the apparent threat. The conflict that arose is resolved without breaking the flow of the game, as DM manages to work Kaley's query into in-character dialogue.

6   Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the causes of the misunderstandings in depth. I will make connections between the extracts in hopes of highlighting causes of misunderstandings and the ways in which they were resolved. Additionally, I will attempt to suggest ways to avoid or counteract misunderstanding by examining their causes and the ways in which they were resolved. The scope of this study is limited, and it must be established that the extracts in this study do not represent all the kinds of misunderstandings and miscommunication that exist, or all of those which happen during Dungeons and Dragons gameplay. Other kinds are sure to exist as well, but merely did not happen to emerge in the data that was reviewed for this study.

The objective of this study was to find what causes misunderstanding and confusion in the gameplay of Dungeons and Dragons, how the misunderstandings are resolved, and to discuss what could be done to avoid or counteract misunderstanding. The gameplay aspects inspected in this study were combat, social interaction, and exploration.

The research material in this paper allowed for accurate inspection of the causes of misunderstandings and the methods in which they were resolved. However, the ways in which misunderstandings could be counteracted could not be definitively deduced from the reviewed extracts, and efforts to do so presented in this study should be considered hypothetical at most. Moreover, as misunderstandings and negotiating understanding are both integral parts of the playing experience, it could be argued that avoiding misunderstandings and confusion altogether was undesirable. Nevertheless, an amount of speculation based on the theoretical framework of this study was presented if an obvious, generally applicable way to avoid disruptive miscommunication emerged from the extract. The primary focus, however, remained on locating the causes and the ways in which misunderstanding is resolved.

6.1 Narration and misunderstanding

As noted earlier in this paper, Dungeons and Dragons has multiple layers of narration from the wide narrative of the whole campaign to the micro-narratives caused by the players' actions every session. Misunderstandings on the wide layer of narrative might not be apparent immediately and

can be more difficult to detect especially in the case of this study, where only a single session of the campaign was examined. Misunderstandings on the micro-narratives, on the other hand, were to be easier to detect, as portrayed by the extracts chosen for this study.

Three extracts of narrative miscommunication were chosen for this study. Although they are similar to each other, the exact causes for misunderstandings were different in each one. Out of the three extracts, extracts 9 and 5 resemble each other the most. In extract 9, the misunderstanding was caused by inaccuracy in the narrative, more specifically a lack of direction and distance, which caused confusion amongst players. The confusion was caused by inaccuracies on the small and micro layers of narration, most significantly on the small layer. During the previous session, the party left from a port city that the adventure started in. Upon the party's departure, the direction of their journey was not explicitly discerned, at least intricately enough to leave the players with a sense of direction. This hole in the narrative became apparent when the NPC in extract 9 (line 1) provided the party with additional information and Balthazar was left confused. Likewise, in extract 5, the misunderstanding occurred because of inaccuracies in the narrative. However, the inaccuracies of extract 5 were primarily on the level of micro-narrative. More specifically, DM's description of the events (line 7) that occurred during a combat sequence was not accurate enough to provide the players with all the necessary information for them to make decisions and use their abilities. Much like in extract 9, the inaccuracy only became apparent once the missing information was needed in order to decide a course of action.

In extract 10, accuracy was not the problem; instead, inconsistencies in the small narrative layer implied that a change had happened in the state of the fire that was being discussed since the last time they received information on it. The implication of change (line 1) was not intended and was quickly corrected by DM (line 3). Extract 10 displays how well misunderstandings during in-character discussion can be resolved without interrupting the flow of the game. After Kaley is surprised and asks for the NPC (or DM) to elaborate (line 2), DM slightly alters the previously given information, while staying in-character (line 3) and thus avoids stopping the game to resolve the misunderstanding. Same cannot be said for extracts 9 and 5, since the progression of the game essentially stopped for the duration of the misunderstandings in both cases.

In all three extracts, after being left with too little information to assess the current situation, the receiver asks for further elaboration and additional information, which DM provides, effectively resolving the misunderstanding. The core of the gameplay is designed to work in this way, as

discussed in section 2.3, so providing additional information does not significantly slow down the progression of the game, as the players are accustomed to inquiring for more information.

Based on the extracts presented in this study, one might conclude that in order to avoid misunderstandings caused by inaccuracy, one must increase the level of detail provided. However, dungeon masters narrate extensive amounts of content during game sessions, and it could become cumbersome for both the players and the DM to play if everything was described to the most intricate detail. Greatly increasing the level of detail in all situations might even be more harmful than helpful, when considering the fluency of the game.

6.2 Misunderstandings in motivation and propositional content

Dascal (1985, p. 443) stated that misunderstanding on any layer of the significance of an utterance may lead to misunderstanding the whole utterance. Motivation in this context, as discussed by Dascal (ibid.), means the reasoning behind the utterance, i.e. why the utterance was delivered to begin with. There is a contrast between understanding the motivation of a speaker and understanding the content of their utterance. The contrast is easily visible when comparing extracts 3 and extract 8, one might even claim them to be the opposites of one another. To elaborate, in the case of extract 8, DM understood that Kaley wanted to know if there were other animals around; the motivation behind the query was what lead to the misunderstanding. In contrast, in extract 3, DM understood that the motivation behind Flyndall's utterance was to utilize a feature to improve the score of her skill check. However, DM discovered (line 5) that Flyndall was not discussing the added feature, but a racial trait. Unlike in extract 8, the motivation of the statement was correctly understood, the problem lied in understanding the information that was conveyed, or more specifically what specific rule Flyndall was referring to with the information she communicated. On the other hand, in extract 8 the propositional content of the utterance was delivered and understood correctly; the reason for the 'inaccurate' response (line 2) was that DM misunderstood what she sought to accomplish with her question. Comparing these two extracts and categories with each other further validates Dascal's (1985, p. 443) concept of significance, and the fact that a misunderstanding on any layer of significance might lead to misunderstanding the whole utterance.

Extracts 3 and 8 were both resolved by the way of repair; in both cases, the speaker of the first turn notices from the second turn response that they have been misunderstood on some level. That is, in extract 3 (lines 4–5), Flyndall notices that the term that he used was misunderstood, and in extract 8 (lines 2–3), Kaley notices that her motivation was misunderstood. So, even though the cause of the misunderstanding in each extract was different, the method of resolution remained the same.

I would argue that, out of the categories presented in this study, miscommunication caused by misunderstanding the motivation or the propositional content of an utterance is the most difficult to avoid. Not much can be done to proactively counteract such cases, even when compared to other categories presented in this study. For example, with misunderstandings relating to rules, one can prepare themselves by studying the rules and terminology, and with misunderstandings caused by narrative elements one can always attempt to better assess the need for detail while narrating or listening to narration. In contrast, there is little in the way of preparing that one can do to avoid mistakes caused by speaker motivation or the propositional content of one's speech. Using concise, precise language could be argued to help—along with becoming acquainted with a particular group of players—but as argued by Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles (1991, p. 3), clear and concise language tends to cause as many problems as it solves.

6.3 Intentional misunderstanding

Intentional misunderstandings are controversial in nature. Firstly, as mentioned by Allott (2016, p. 486), intentional misunderstandings can be argued not to be misunderstandings to begin with, as also portrayed by the extract present in this study; there was never a chance of the meaning that was attempted to be conveyed to be truly lost. For this reason, it is reasonable to argue that no actual misunderstanding took place. However, even if solely for purposes of humour, Lucas posed as though a misunderstanding had happened. I would argue that intentional misunderstandings serve a specific purpose in an interaction. As mentioned in section 3.2.1, misunderstandings can alleviate tension or pressure of interaction and should not be viewed as merely unwanted and unavoidable parts of discourse. Humour is a tool to relieve tension and shift the atmosphere of a discourse. Extract 1 was delivered in an attempt to amuse other players and can thus be argued to serve the aforementioned purposes of removing tension and shifting the atmosphere of the

interaction that is taking place. So, despite no actual misunderstanding taking place, I would argue that the extract should be considered worth examining in the context of this study.

The extract was also a good example of a misunderstanding that did not require much in the way of resolving. Additionally, I would argue that it was not the kind that should actively be avoided like most of the misunderstandings presented in this study. However, it could be argued that despite their positive effects on the discourse, intentional misunderstandings, such as the one presented in this study, are disruptive considering the flow of the game. Much like the other misunderstandings, these types of misunderstandings pause the progression of the game, if only for a while. In extract 1 (line 5), Lucas brings up the supposed misunderstanding before his turn is complete, thus slowing the shifting of the turn. This conforms to what was said in section 3.2.2 when discussing repair and its effect on a turn and on the sequence, i.e. self-initiated repair interrupts the turn, while other-initiated repair interrupts the sequence, as noted by Kitzinger (2013, p. 231). Nevertheless, the pace of the conversation slows, and attention is taken away from the narrative and the gameplay, which can be argued to negatively affect the fluency of the game. I would argue that the misunderstanding that is portrayed in extract 1 can be seen to affect the gameplay in a positive manner in addition to the obvious slowing in the turn progression. Relieving tension and introducing humour into the session can serve the purpose of freeing the atmosphere, which—I would claim—improves the flow of the game in a manner of speaking. So, as noted earlier, not all misunderstandings should be viewed as harmful and unwanted, some may even have a positive effect on the interaction as a whole.

7 Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to answer the following questions: what causes misunderstandings in gameplay of Dungeons and Dragons, how are misunderstandings resolved during gameplay, and what can be done to counteract or avoid misunderstandings. Causes for varying kinds of miscommunication and methods of resolving them were found in the research material and examined to an appropriate degree. However, ways to counteract or avoid misunderstanding were, for the most part, absent from the research material. Still, tentative speculation was provided on the ways in which it might be possible to counteract or avoid miscommunication. As the scope of study was rather narrow, it should be noted that the causes for miscommunication provided within the context of this study do not represent all the possible reasons for miscommunication during a Dungeons and Dragons campaign. For example, instances of misunderstanding on the wide narrative layer were not present in the study because the research material did not allow for the study of the wide narrative, since the examined material consisted of a single session of Dungeons and Dragons.

Most of the misunderstandings that occurred during gameplay happened during the combat aspect of the game. As mentioned, the result was to be expected since the rules of the game caused a lot of confusion and misunderstanding amongst the participants, and knowledge of rules becomes most relevant during combat sequences. Arguably, misunderstandings concerning the rules during the combat sequences of the game were also the most disruptive. In contrast, misunderstandings that occurred during social interaction or exploration were arguably less disruptive. Miscommunication during the aforementioned gameplay aspects was—at least in the extracts presented in this study—rather effortlessly resolved in-game, which eliminated the need to stop the natural progression of the game. In contrast, miscommunication and misunderstandings during combat almost always required stopping the progression of the game until the confusion was cleared. In total, all misunderstandings seemed to decelerate the progression of the game to some degree.

I would argue that though in most cases misunderstandings should be avoided, breaks in the progression of in-game events do not always have negative effects. Even though all

misunderstandings can be viewed as disruptive from a pure progressive standpoint, breaks in gameplay may relieve tension and alter the atmosphere of interaction, which in turn might make the game more enjoyable to all participants. Ultimately, the end-goal of any session should be for the participants to enjoy playing, so not all misunderstandings should be considered to have a negative effect. For example, intentional misunderstandings—such as extract 1—can be considered disruptive, but ultimately positive in effect when considering their function in the discourse, which goes to show that not all misunderstandings should be avoided.

Most commonly, the misunderstandings were resolved by negotiating an understanding between all parties. In most cases, an understanding was reached within the scope of one to three turns. The most efficient way of reaching an understanding, seemed to be repair. Most of the misunderstandings in extracts where repair was apparent were all resolved either within the speaker's own turn, as in the case of extract 7, or during the third turn, as in extract 3. As for ways of counteracting misunderstanding, little in the way of comprehensive methods were found, since methods to avoid or counteract miscommunication varied between individual instances. If anything is to be deduced from the research material, it is that consistently playing with a group of individuals and getting to know their communication habits might be the most effective way of reducing the number of misunderstandings, other methods presented in this study should be considered speculative at best.

Role-playing games can be studied from multiple angles as discussed in section 2.1. I would argue that Dungeons and Dragons as a game and a form of interaction is an asset, and it should be further examined. Interactively speaking, the game contains vast amounts of conversational elements to examine. Additionally, Dungeons and Dragons could—and already has to some degree—be examined as a tool for learning. For instance, the game could be examined as a tool for learning elements such as teamwork, specialised register and second language acquisition. As for this particular study, further effort could be put into increasing the sample size in order to make the results of this study more comprehensive. Focus could also be shifted more towards the dungeon master and the effects that his performance has on misunderstanding and the game in general.

To conclude and summarise, all misunderstandings and instances of miscommunication halt the progression of gameplay. However, not all of the breaks in gameplay are entirely undesirable. The most common ways of resolving misunderstandings during gameplay were to negotiate an

understanding between participants and repair, both of which—in most cases—led to the progression of in-game events to stop. Unfortunately, the research material did not allow for conclusive ways of counteracting miscommunication to be deduced, so all methods presented in this study should be considered hypothetical. Dungeons and Dragons as an interactive co-operative storytelling game can, and should be further analysed, for further study may help uncover different functionalities that the game has, and it may improve the gameplay experience for those who already enjoy playing the game.

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