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Distractives: Framing-Based Linguistic Markers that Distract Players from Solving In-Game Puzzles in Role-Playing Video Games

Abstract

In-game puzzles are a core element in role-playing video games, commonly abbreviated as RPG. They have distinctive characteristics from general puzzles. This distinctiveness is perceived from how in-game puzzles influence and determine narrative and mechanical progressions of the players. In designing in-game puzzles, the designers have to consider the difficulty balance – the balance between clues and distractors. In this study, we propose what we call distractives, linguistic markers employed as a distractor in in-game puzzles. We employed the theories of frame semantics by Fillmore, ludic language for in-game puzzle designs by Purnama, Nababan, Santosa, and Purnomo, and bias language by Recasens, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil and Jurafsky. Twelve RPGs were investigated to prove the presence of distractives. The findings indicate that distractives operate through framing by employing bias language to frame falsity as truth from which players are expected to be distracted. We further classified the framing acts into causal, chronological, conditional, directional, reciprocal, reflectional and representational framings. Game developers could employ this typology as a guideline to balance the difficulty of distractives for in-game puzzles in role-playing video games. Future studies could employ distractives as a theoretical basis for investigating distractives as a speech act in the context of in-game puzzle design.
Keywords: distraction; distractives; linguistic markers; puzzles; role-playing video games

1 Introduction

Distractions in games come in many forms from the spaces where the player-controlled characters have to engage (Borodovski & Verbrugge, 2016) in what Danesi (2002) calls verbal perplexities. Through these distractions, in-game puzzles are balanced. If the balance becomes the focus, as studied by Csikszentmihalyi (2013), games would maintain their challenging aspects – not too easy and not too difficult. In the context of linguistics, these distractions, as implied by Purnama et al. (2024), are articulated through ludic language. This language in short can be called a language in game use where ludicity – playfulness and playability – becomes the central focus of the use. Therefore, to maintain ludicity, in-game puzzle designs should be concerned also with the lingual expressions that indicate the use of ludic language.

In the case of studying distractions in games, frame semantics as proposed by Fillmore (2006) might be able to explain how distractions work in maintaining the ludicity of the puzzles and also the games. Frame semantics emphasizes the influence of world knowledge in deciphering certain meaning. In the case of puzzles, this holds significant in the context of in-game puzzles, since having particular background knowledge of particular lingual expressions might enable the players to spot the distractions and decode the puzzles. The following example from Capcom's *Dragon's Dogma II* might illustrate the statement:

> Sphinx: How easily the mind unravels! Some say it's pain that does it best, others darkness – but I say neither. Rather, I say a mind cannot be more soundly broken than when it beholds its earnest efforts laid low in a single stroke. Could you survive such despair? We shall see. Here I have an amphora destined for Ser Maurits in Battahl. Deliver it to him, but beware; it's rather fragile.

The Sphinx orders the players to bring an amphora to a character by the name Maurits in the desert city of Battahl. The amphora is fragile and thus, the players have to carry it with extra caution. The fact that the Frontier Shrine where the Sphinx resides and Battahl have rough terrains and are swarming with monsters requires strategic thinking from the players in carrying the amphora. These inferences and implications that the players have to carry the amphora are actually a frame to distract the players from solving the puzzles easily. If the command is to bring an object to a person, it might also be possible to bring the person to the object. If the players grasp this reversed logic, they will directly put a portcrystal and throw a ferrystone to teleport the players to Battahl, take Maurits, and return to the shrine.

The example illustrates how meaning could be framed as a distractor for the players to engage. If seen from what Barthes (1977) calls obvious and obtuse meaning, the Sphinx employs obvious meaning, since the instructions the Sphinx delivers are clear. However, the obvious meaning of the instructions leads to obtuse meaning that can be seen from the hardships the players have to face if they decide to carry the fragile amphora to the designated place. In the perspectives of bias language by Recasens et al. (2013) who classify bias language into framing and epistemological biases, what the Sphinx says is a combination of the two. When the Sphinx provokes the players through questions and statements that indicate the absence of the player's ability to complete her request, framing bias is in use. When the Sphinx instructs the players to deliver the amphora to Maurits, epistemological bias is employed. The combination works in tandem as a distractor for the players from thinking of the solution in a reversal fashion.

This study of distraction of in-game puzzles from linguistics perspectives is a gap left unfilled by previous studies. The studies investigating puzzles from the perspectives of linguistics circumnavigate recreational linguistics where puzzles are employed in language teaching (Danesi, 1979; Mollica, 2008), the roles of cognitive and semantic features of language in puzzles (Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari & Mehrabi, 2022; Tojiddinovna, 2024), gaming language (Purnomo & Khristianto, 2019; Purnomo et al., 2019), and puzzle as a key element in adventure games where languages play a significant role (Suckling & Walton, 2016).

We argue that distractors with linguistic markers where framing becomes the main focus should be called distractives. To prove the existence of distractives and how they operate, we formulated the following questions:

1. What are distractives?
2. How do distractives operate in in-game puzzles in role-playing video games?

To answer the questions, we employed the theories of frame semantics by Fillmore (2006), ludic language for in-game puzzle designs by Purnama et al. (2024), and bias language by Recasens et al. (2013). The first theory was employed as a basis to comprehend how meaning is framed to distract players from selecting the correct answers or responses to the in-game puzzles. The second theory was used to point out how distractions employ lingual expressions for ludic purposes. The third theory was implemented to understand how bias language is employed in delivering the distractions. The combination of these three theories was the basis of distractives.

2 Literature Review: Frame Semantics and Distractions in the Puzzles of Role-Playing Video Games

RPGs, as studied by Howard (2022), are signified through three types of meaning, namely meaning as initiation, meaning as narrative, and thematic meaning. These three types of meaning are delivered through quests and one of the driving interactive forces of quests are in-game puzzles. It further implies that the deciphering of the meaning that in-game puzzles are embodied with influences the overall meaning of the games narratively and mechanically. In-game puzzles in RPGs, as investigated by Purnama et al. (2024), are

narratively and mechanically linked to the game stories and gameplays. Through solving in-game puzzles, players could progress their stories and level up the stats of their characters. These crucial roles of in-game puzzles require game narrative designers to pay attention to the difficulty balances of the puzzles.

The balances that narrative designers have to consider are clues and distractions. Clues, as implied by Danesi (2002), should have a level concern. This level concern points out that puzzles with hard difficulty might have fewer clues but more distractions to keep the players engaged with the games and their puzzles. The engagement, as implied by Purnomo et al. (2017) in their study on how fictional languages could function as a puzzle, could take the forms of interpretation, exploration, and configuration. The last two modes are the differentiating factors of puzzles in games from puzzles in general. Exploration requires players to roam the in-game world in order to solve the puzzles while configuration to perform changes on game mechanics to solve the puzzles. Departing from these specific traits of in-game puzzles, it implies that the distractors could be delivered not only in an interpretive fashion but also explorative and configurative. It further suggests that the meaning encoded in the distractors could be framed.

In the lens of frame semantics, as proposed by Fillmore (2006), where meaning deciphering is reliant on knowledge of the word, not just the meaning of the word in a literal sense, comprehending the frames of knowledge encasing certain words becomes an essential element. In the distractions of in-game puzzles, bias language might become the frames to distract and divert players from acquiring the correct solution for the puzzles. Recasens et al. (2013) propose two types of bias language, namely framing and epistemological biases. The former refers to interpretive subjectivity and the latter to the misleading of propositions. The combination of both, in the context of in-game distractions, might influence how players interact with the puzzles.

3 Method: Design, Data, Data Sources, and Data Analysis

The data forms of this qualitative study encompass textual, visual, and operative data. The first data forms are verbal and written expressions of the puzzles and textual elements related to them. The second data forms are images and scenes that function as a puzzle and distracting elements of the puzzle. The third data, operative data, are the gameplays of the games in regard to the distractions and the puzzles. The data were taken from the following games:

Table 1. Data Sources.

Titles	Developers/Publishers	Reasons for Selection
Brave Fencer Musashi	Squaresoft	The puzzles are designed in a light tone making them feel like mini games
Dragon's Dogma II	Capcom	The puzzles have multiple solutions
Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes	Rabbit and Bear Studio/505 Games	The puzzles revolve around character recruitment and combos resulting from the combination of the characters
Final Fantasy XII: the Zodiac Age	Square Enix	The puzzles reward the players with figurine collectibles
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	Square Enix	The puzzles involve first person view interaction – meaning that the player's personal experiences influence the results of the puzzles
Harvest Moon: Back to Nature	Victor Interactive Software	The puzzles revolve around problems in daily lives
Legend of Legaia	Prokion/Sony Computer Entertainment	The puzzles deal with employing the right items to solve them
Monster Rancher	Tecmo	The puzzles involve inserting different CDs to acquire monsters
Tactics Ogre: Reborn	Square Enix	The puzzles involve first person view interaction – meaning that the player's personal experiences influence the results of the puzzles
The Legend of Dragoon	Sony Computer Entertainment	The puzzles involve how to use items effectively
Valkyria Chronicles 4	Sega	The puzzles circumnavigate character recruitment and character potentials
Vandal Hearts 2	Konami	The puzzles deal with choices that influence the endings

The data acquired from the data sources were investigated by employing techniques of analysis proposed by Spradley (2016). Four phases were considered in the analysis. First was domain analysis. In this phase, frame semantics by Fillmore and bias language by Recasens, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil and Jurafsky

were implemented to reveal the lingual expressions that contain distraction and how they were constructed. The second was taxonomy analysis. In this phase, ludic language of in-game puzzles by Purnama, Nababan, Santosa, and Purnomo was applied to comprehend how the distractions were embedded in and integrated into the in-game puzzles. The third was componential analysis. In this phase, the findings from the first and second phases were connected to reveal the characteristics of the lingual expressions that function as distractions. The fourth phase was cultural theme analysis. In this phase, the definition and the characteristics of distractives and the typology of framing were proposed.

4 Findings

The findings are divided into two subsections. The first subsection will present the definition and the characteristics of distractives. The second subsection will present the typology of framing that becomes the core operations of distractives.

4.1 Distractives

We define distractives as linguistic markers that frame lingual expressions through biases embedded in in-game puzzles to make players believe that the frames are the truth and to distract them from solving the puzzles. This definition suggests that distractives have three constructing characteristics. They are: framing, bias language, and make-believe.

The first characteristic is framing. One of the core functions of frames, as implied by Fillmore (2006), is the discovery of important functions of word classes or grammatical categories. In the context of in-game puzzles, frames might involve the abilities to differentiate between clues and distractives. Victor Interactive Software's *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*, for example, positions the players as a young farmer that has to tend to farming and socializing with villagers. The players have to perform those two core activities every single day and those activities require energy and money. Players have the chance to do both core activities in a single action. One of the methods is maximizing the functions of the hot spring – not only for bathing to rejuvenate the character's energy but also boiling eggs from which money could be acquired. The presence of the hot spring is both clue and distractive. When it comes to the phrase 'hot spring', generally what comes to mind is bathing. However, players could break this bathing frame when they know words associated with hot spring. One of those words is boiled egg. In Japanese culture, by which the hot spring in the game is inspired, consuming boiled egg after taking a bath is considered a healthy diet. The players have to throw the eggs into the hot spring to transform them into spa-boiled eggs. That 'hot' is connected to 'boiled' further indicates that the meaning framing revolves around the use of synonyms.

The second characteristic is bias language. Bias, as studied by Recasens et al. (2013), primarily involves subjective and false propositions. As implied by Merricks (2015), propositions are linked to a set of possible worlds. In the context of lingual expressions of in-game puzzles, the possible worlds might refer to different interpretations of the expressions. Correct interpretation indicates that players manage to capture the clues to solve the puzzles, while incorrect interpretation points out that what the players capture is not the clue but the distractives. In Squaresoft's *Brave Fencer Musashi*, for example, the players have to decipher a puzzle involving finding a tower. They are given a note that reads 'The path will not open unless you sacrifice a warrior'. In response to the note, Musashi says, 'Maybe those statues have something to do with it.'. The statues that Musashi refers to are the statues of knights that encircle a statue in the form of a giant head whose red eyes emit a crimson beam that attacks the players. Though the clues, warriors and statues, are already given, problems arise with how to interact with the statues. Since the verb that defines warrior is 'sacrifice', the players have to decipher what is meant by 'sacrifice'. Possible actions that occur from the proposition 'sacrifice' might involve several game mechanics as follows:

The frame evoked from 'sacrifice' in relation to the action the players have to execute is attack, but the frame generates possible actions of attacking. As seen from Table 2, there are three possible mechanics of attack that can be implied. The frame 'sacrifice' in the case of possible attacking mechanics points out that 'sacrifice' transforms into distractives aimed at driving the players to experiment with various fashions of attacking.

Table 2. Propositions.

Proposition	Possible mechanics
Sacrifice a warrior	Attacking the warrior statues by Musashi
	Attacking the warrior statues with special moves by Musashi
	Tricking the giant head statue to attack the warrior statues

The third characteristic is make-believe. Make-believe in fictional worlds like video games, from the perspectives of Walton (2005), is classified into prop oriented make-believe and content oriented make-believe. The former places emphasis on the objects designed to evoke the make-believe while the latter highlights the content of the objects. In the context of in-game puzzles, the puzzles are prop oriented make-believe while the clues and the distractives are content oriented make-believe. The relation between props and content in the context of in-game puzzles might evoke make-believe. Tecmo's monster breeding game *Monster Rancher*, for example, has a unique way of capturing monsters. Players could swap the game disc with any discs, e.g. music or movie discs, from which the players could acquire the monsters. The discs are the props and the monsters within the discs are the content. They generate make-believe from a relation in which the disc types influence the monster types. This seemingly causal relationship serves as a frame since there is no exact pattern of disc and monster types – implying that the monster acquisition operates randomly.

4.2 Framing Types

Based on the findings, we constructed a typology of framing. The typology comprises causal, chronological, conditional, directional, reciprocal, reflectional and representational framings. These framings are aimed at generating make-believe of distractives directed to the players. When the framings of the distractives make the players believe that they are not distractives, the players would not have a maximum result for the in-game puzzles. The explanation of each framing type will be based on logical premises in the context of distractives.

Table 3. Framing Premises.

Framing Types	Premises
Causal	to make the players believe that b appears due to a
Chronological	to make the players believe that b comes after a
Conditional	to make the players believe that if a, then b
Directional	to make the players believe that to get b, the only way is a
Reciprocal	to make the players believe that a influences b and vice versa
Reflectional	to make the players believe that a reflects b
Representational	to make the players believe that a is a part of b

Causal framing revolves around lingual expressions that generate make-believe through a cause-and-effect relationship, chronological through a timeline sequence, conditional through event prerequisites, directional through a logical assumption, partial through a part-whole relationship, reciprocal through influences, and representational through an assumed representative agent. The details of each framing type will be given in the following passages.

Causal Framing A cause-and-effect or causation relationship could be framed to make the players believe that the frame displayed by the in-game puzzles is not a distractive. Neeleman and van de Koot (2012) summarise from various theories of causation that there are three characteristics of causation, namely a relation between two events, a temporal dimension, and a counterfactual dimension. In the context of in-game puzzles, the relation between two events in a game might be bridged through in-game puzzles from which

story and stats progressions take place, temporality might refer to the possibilities of limited time for solving the puzzles, and counterfactual might mean the negation of progressions when the puzzles remain unsolved. In the context of distractives, the three characteristics function as a distraction for the players.

In one of the events in Prokion's *Legend of Legaia*, the players have to escape from a place called Absolute Fortress. The fortress crumbles and the players have to think strategically how to escape from the collapsing fortress. The players have to think quickly since they are limited by time. The players have to possess the knowledge of a basic item called Door of Light to escape from a dungeon. The description of the item is 'teleport out of dungeons'. The word 'dungeon' evokes bias since the word is associated with an underground location like caves. The fact that Absolute Fortress stands in a mountain strengthens the bias that it is not a dungeon. The combination between the generally accepted meaning of 'dungeon' and the visual display of the fortress makes 'dungeon' a distractive for the players. However, if the players comprehend that dungeons in games tend to refer to any indoor places where monsters crawl, they will have the knowledge that the fortress is also a dungeon. Comprehending that, the players can break the causal framing the word 'dungeon' emits in regard to the location of the Absolute Fortress.

Chronological Framing Propositions, as studied by Rescher (1966, 2010), might be expressed in chronological fashion and logic. Through chronological propositions, the focus of events lies in their temporality. In the context of distractives, this temporality might generate a chronological framing through the premise 'to make the players believe that b comes after a'. The following example from Capcom's *Dragon's Dogma II* might help clarify the statement.

> Mildred: So, what say you? Would you care to live here in my absence? As I've said, you needn't worry about tending to the place. Many thanks, friend! I knew I could count on you. I'll stop by again in a week's time, but till then, fare well!

Mildred requests the players to stay in her house for a week while she is out adventuring. The distractive in the puzzle is 'a week'. Chronologically the players have to spend their daylight and night for seven in-game days. That the game has day-night shifts mechanics tends to strengthen the distractives of being required to spend seven days in Mildred's house. If the players comprehend the concept of temporality, the essence of chronological propositions, they might find a way to quicken the day-and-night shifts. The way to do so is to sleep and awaken seven times inside Mildred's house. Doing so, it will not be necessary for the players to wait for day-and-night shifts for seven days.

Chronological framing also drives the players to think that the solution of the in-game puzzles is related to the sequential order of events. In a side quest in Capcom's *Dragon's Dogma* called Prey for the Pack, players have to find a kid by the name Rodge rumored to have been attacked by wolves. The distractives are framed in the rumor. Since it was a rumor, logically the players have to clarify it by finding and talking to some eyewitnesses on the whereabouts of Rodge. However, talking to eyewitnesses will only waste time. Moreover, the side quest is limited by time and failing to save Rodge means his death. Thus, every second should be efficiently spent – finding and talking to eyewitnesses wastes time. The most efficient way is to directly find locations where wolves nest around the town. Though the players fail to save Rodge and find him dead, uniquely the players could use an item called Wakestone to revive him from death. Doing so will reward the players the same way as when they manage to save the boy.

Conditional Framing Conditional expressions rely on their the protasis 'if'. As studied by Traugott (1985), protasis 'if' can be articulated through different expressions but with the same general meaning of 'if'. It further suggests that a different protasis might generate a different conditional meaning. In the context of distractives, this protasis could be framed to distract the players from solving the in-game puzzles. The following example from Konami's *Vandal Hearts 2* might help illustrate the statement:

> Nicola: I think that's what people call their "dreams". [Hero], you must have a dream of your own too.

Hero: My dream? I never thought about it but I want to…

1. Live freely.
2. Make a girl happy.
3. Become the king.
4. I don't know.

The protasis 'if' is articulated through the modality of doubt and wishing. These modalities are perceivable from the doubt of the hero about his dream and his wishes that the players have to respond by clicking on one of the four options. The use of doubt and wishing modality aims at immersing the players in the mythopoetic world of the game. That players can name the hero strengthens the immersion. Thus, it implies that the answer to the modality of wishing might reflect the personal knowledge and experience of the players. In the context of distractives, the protasis in the form of doubt and wishing modalities is a conditional framing. Players would assume that the choices would influence the ending of the game. They are led to think that the modality of wishing has attributes as follows:

Table 4. Conditional Framing.

Modality of Wishing	Assumed Attributes	Framed Narratives
Live freely	inclining to be positive	The queen and the cardinal oppress the people
Make a girl happy	definitely positive	The hero's love interest might fall into grief and he has to do something about it
Become the king	might be positive	Overthrowing the queen and the cardinal is the solution for the peace of the kingdom
I don't know	inclining to be negative	The chaotic condition of the kingdom confuses the hero

The word 'free' and 'happy' tend to generate a positive attribute if related to the framed narratives of a kingdom reigned by oppressors. That the adjectives 'free' and 'happy' are preceded by a process verb strengthens the positive attributes of the wishing modality. Though sharing similar positive attributes, the first and second modalities of wishing have a different hierarchal positive level, with the second higher than the first. The higher level of the positive attribute comes from the selflessness of the hero in making other people happy, while the first modality tends to indicate selfishness. A different hierarchy of positive levels is a conditional framing which might lead the players to think that 'make a girl happy' will result in a positive or best ending. However, the truth is that the modalities of wishing are not related to the endings – they are only related to different responses by Nicola.

Directional Framing Directionality, as studied by Son (2007), might end with or without results. In the context of distractives, this is true in the sense that when players are trapped with distractives and fail to capture the clues, they will acquire unexpected results. Distractives with directional framing tend to frame the players that there is only one solution for the encountered in-game puzzles. Thus, if the players do that directionality framing, they will still obtain the intended results. However, if they could break the directionality framing, they will obtain the intended results in a more efficient fashion or with bigger rewards.

Sony Computer Entertainment's *The Legend of Dragoon*, for instance, demands from players that they pay careful attention to the items they use. An item called a sachet, for instance, could do an instant kill on a boss monster. When fighting an ice-based monster with an exposed heart called Windigo, the players will have to engage it in a duel in the same fashion as the other boss battles. Doing so indicates that the players are trapped in a directional framing. However, if the players manage to decipher the true function of the sachet, they could finish the battle in a far quicker fashion. If the players comprehend the hidden meaning why a sachet is only found in three places synonymous with unpleasantness, they might grasp that the item must have something to do with bringing an end to an unpleasant matter with a pleasant matter. The way to do so is to direct the sachet at the exposed heart of Windigo.

If the players comprehend that Windigo might be derived from Wendigo, a mythical creature of Native Americans, they could break the directional framing in an easier fashion. In the myth the coming of

a Wendigo is always marked by the presence of a horrid and foul stench. With this coming to mind, the players are expected to break the directional framing by using the sachet. Supported by the description of the sachet that says 'gives subtle good aroma', the players are expected to be more convinced to use this clue to break the distractives of directional framing.

Reciprocal Framing This framing emphasizes making the players believe that a and b influence each other. This 'each other' relation, as investigated by Dalrymple et al. (1998), signifies a reciprocality that requires a context to define the intended meaning. In the context of distractives, the objects uttered through lingual expressions are framed to suggest that the objects could be categorised as 'each' and 'other' that have influences that might alter 'each other'. The following example from Square Enix's *Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift* might help illustrate the statement:

Table 5. Reciprocal Framing.

My Summer Vacation	My Summer Vacation	My Summer Vacation
1. This summer I'm going to…	2. As a personal goal, I want to…	3. Next year I promise not to…
(A) Hang out with my friends!	(A) Be able to swim half a mile!	(A) Misbehave in class
(B) Play video games non-stop!	(B) Get my warrior to level 75!	(B) Oversleep in the morning
(C) Study for next year!	(C) Learn a foreign language!	(C) Let my dog eat my homework

These questions appear in the beginning of the game. The players have to interact with the questions to determine what buffs the controlled character might receive from the answers given to the three questions. In the context of RPGs, buffs are status benefits of characters. Through buffs, the characters might mechanically be excelling on particular stats like power, HP, dexterity etc. Thus, it can be said that each answer given to each question might influence the other question in a combinatoric fashion. Through the combination of answers, influences to the characters are perceived after the game starts. As seen from Table 5, only choice B for question one can link itself reciprocally to the other choices for questions two and three. The logical flow is as follows:

a. Play video games non-stop → Get my warrior to level 75 → Oversleep in the morning
b. Play video games non-stop → Get my warrior to level 75 → Let my dog eat my homework
c. Play video games non-stop → Get my warrior to level 75 → Misbehave in class

Logic a suggests that because I played video games non-stop to get my warrior to level 75, I overslept in the morning. Logic b suggests that because I played video game non-stop to get my warrior to level 75, I let my dog eat my homework (so I could concentrate on levelling up my warrior). Logic c suggests that because I played video games non-stop to get my warrior to level 75, I misbehaved in class (since I failed to level up my warrior to level 75). From these logics, it is perceivable that the 'I' (the player) reciprocally influences the character through the choices and the choices influence back the player. If the players follow the logics by starting with choice B, the players fall into the trap of reciprocal framing. By following the reciprocal logics above, the players will have buffs on power, clan privilege, and speed. However, they will miss out on having many other buffs resulting from different choices.

Reflectional Framing Through reflectional framing, the players are framed to believe that a reflects b. Meaning, as suggested by Gozzano (2006), is dependent on the roles the meaning evokes and associates with. In the context of distractives, roles are framed to make the players believe that the proposed roles are the correct solution for the puzzles. The following example from Square Enix's *Tactics Ogre: Reborn* might help illustrate the statement:

XVIII. The Moon
"Immorality, thy name is desire."

In a fit of passion, you take your friend's lover.
What will you do next?

Keep the lover for my own Savor the moment Put it from my mind

All of the lines in the example above are engraved on a tarot card. Just like the case of reciprocal framing in *Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift*, *Tactics Ogre: Reborn* also asks questions of the players to determine the initial stats of the characters. The questions in the game are greater in number than in *Grimoire of the Rift* and possess more complexities. The complexities come from the use of tarot card design, the use of archetypes, the use of sayings, and the use of heavy themed questions. These four layers of meaning drive the players to think what each usage means in generating the holistic meaning of the question.

The best choice between the three is the first one. Selecting it will grant the players more buffs than the other two. The problem is how to know that the first choice is the best one. To do so, the players have to break the reflectional frames of the puzzle. The frame is breakable by reflecting 'the Moon' with the three choices. If the players think that the name of the tarot card 'the Moon' is not significant to comprehend the meaning of the three choices, they would be trapped by the level of immorality of the choices – as signified from the line under 'the Moon'. Reflecting the choices with immorality will put the third as the most immoral, the second as the second most immoral, and the first as the least immoral. The third choice reflects irresponsibility, the second less responsibility, and the first responsibility. However, if the players could comprehend that the moon 'takes' the light from the sun to make it look like having its own light, they would select the first choice. This case indicates that meaning derived and signified through reflections can be employed both as a distractive and a clue.

Representational Framing Representational framing is defined and signified by part-whole relations. These relations, as studied by Winston et al. (1987), emphasise semantic relations where meaning is connected to other meanings. In the context of distractives, the meaning implied or inferred by the puzzles might assist the players in solving the puzzles or might distract them from solving the puzzles. Through partial framing, it is expected that the players believe that a is a part of b or vice versa.

Rabbit and Bear Studio's *Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes* boasts a roster of more than a hundred characters to engage and play. Each character has its different way of recruiting. The game on some characters employs a partial framing to distract the players. One of the examples is when the players want to recruit a muscular mage named Maureus. He will join the players only if the players have someone with 'Muscular Points' higher than him. In the context of RPG, those with muscles are typically defined and signified through melee combat character classes like warrior or knight. However, 'Muscular Points' is a distractive that attempts to lead the players to look for a warrior or knight with prowess involving physical strength. In terms of 'points', RPGs have Hit or Health Point (HP) to indicate the life force of the characters. They also have Magic Point (MP) to point out how many magic spells the characters can cast. If this MP is connected to the fact that Maureus is a magician, commonly called a mage, the players would be able to break the partial framing of Muscular Points by searching not those with enormous physical strength but those with enormous MP.

Representational meaning could also be framed in an archetypal fashion. In games, archetypes refer to narrative-related archetypes, e.g. thieves and mages and to the mechanics, e.g. thieves able to steal and mages being non-melee combatants. Square Enix's *Final Fantasy: the Zodiac Age* has an in-game collectible feature called Sky Pirate's Den in which players could collect cute *chibi* (super deformed) versions of crucial characters in the game. Comprehending these archetypes plays a significant role in acquiring each figurine. The main character, Vaan, is narratively archetyped as a thief. Grasping this might lead the players to think that to acquire Vaan's figurine, they need to steal from the enemies. A problem arises when two archetypes seem to be identical. Balthier, for instance, is narratively and mechanically archetyped as

a sky pirate. Being a pirate and a thief tends to be associated with money. This distractive representationally constructs a frame with which the players have to engage by defining what differentiates the two archetypes.

5 Discussion

In-game puzzles in RPG, as implied by Purnama et al. (2024), are inseparable from quests. Primarily quests, as studied by Howard (2022), are classified into main and side quests. The former are mainly related to story progression while the latter might be related to story progression. Different characteristics of these quests require different difficulty levels of in-game puzzles. Main quests, due to their nature as narrative drivers, might focus more on narrative-related in-game puzzles. Thus, the clues and distractives might revolve around background knowledge related to the game stories. On the other hand, side quests that tend to offer extra benefits for the players in the form of game mechanics-related elements might be freer in terms of referring the clues and the distractives to the stories of the game. Since in-game puzzles are related to types of quests, the balancing design could depart from this relation.

Frame semantics, as implied by Fillmore (2006), emphasizes that realities hold a significant role in grasping the meaning of a word – implying that the same realities might mean different things for the beholders. In the context of balancing clues and distractives, these concepts of realities as a point of departure to comprehend the meaning of a word might be employed on the basis of realities in the context of fictional worlds. Thus, clues and distractives requiring world knowledge outside the fictional world, as seen from the case of Windigo, could be categorised into clues and distractives with a high level of difficulty. Due to this high level of difficulty, the clues and the distractives should be designed not to influence the story progression but rather the game mechanics – offering rewards of certain buffs that help the players with the games.

The balancing between clues and distractives should also consider coherences. In communication, West and Turner (2010) classify coherences into structural, material, and characterological coherences. In the context of clues and distractives, coherences could be applied to the relations between the titles of the quests, the descriptions of the quests, the narrations of the objects or settings involved in the quests, and the dialogues of the characters. The clues and the distractives should cohere with these four aspects in regard to the languages of delivery and the languages of bias to evoke a structured in-game puzzle.

Subgenres of RPG could also be employed as a consideration in balancing the clues and the distractives of an in-game puzzle. Subgenres RPGs encompass Traditional RPG, Action RPG, Strategy or Tactical RPG, and Massively Multiplayer Online RPG. Each subgenre has a distinctive mechanics that differentiates one subgenre from the others. Addressing these mechanics, clues and distractives could be balanced in regard to the framing types. Traditional RPG, as implied by Purnomo et al. (2017), tends to be narrative-driven and thus, the clues and the distractives are suggested to frame in relation to the game stories. The treatment would be different for Action, Strategy, and Massively Multiplayer Online RPGs that tend to primarily focus on mechanics-driven gameplay. Side quest integrated in-game puzzles with distractives involving real world knowledge could be implemented.

6 Conclusion

We argue that lingual expressions that function as a distractor of in-game puzzles in RPGs, due their specific characteristics, should be called distractives. Those specific characteristics are framing, bias language, and make-believe. The combination of these three characteristics generates a typology of framing where the players are made to believe something false in order to distract them from finding the correct solutions to the in-game puzzles. The typology comprises causal, chronological, conditional, directional, reciprocal, reflectional and representational framings.

Game developers could employ the distractive typology to balance the design of in-game puzzles between clues and their distractives. The considerations to balance the puzzle could take the types of quests and the subgenre of RPGs. Taking these aspects into considerations, game developers could implement the suitable distractives for their in-game puzzles.

Future studies could employ the results of this research as a theoretical basis to further investigate the role of language in designing in-game puzzles. They could employ the theory of cyberpragmatics by Yus (2011) to investigate distractives under the umbrella of speech acts to reveal how distractives might be operable in the context of utterances.

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