Impacts of Tabletop Role-playing Games on Interpersonal Communication: in Perspective of Communication Accommodation Theory

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INTRODUCTION

MOTIVATION

Tabletop role-playing games（TRPG）is a new dynamic and flourishing entertainment format that has become increasingly accessible to a wide variety of participants(Christopher, 2012).TRPG is a significant field of Ludology research. According to researches, role-playing has usually been used in training of technical skills and social science studies. The ability such as leading a team, making a decision, and cooperating with others can be exercised and increased by role-playing trainings.

Recently, scholars began to pay attention various effects games have on interpersonal communication. For instance, TRPG can create a classroom community of writers and let students share their opinions of plots(Cook & Gremo,2017). Another research pointed out that players of TRPG get a peaceful place to expand their socialization with whose who have similar characteristics(Christopher, 2012). In addition, TRPG are sufficient in particular to facilitate knowledge learning, increase role-play skills and enhance the ability of team building than before.(Daniau, 2016)

There are complicated phenomena of interpersonal communication in TRPG(Bowman,2010;Forest,2011). For examples, when players need to decide where to go, they need to discuss and exchange their opinions. Have a dialogue or conversation with a non-player character can enhance the ability of communication. The process of solving problems in the games is connected with logic capacity and team-building purposes.

THESIS STATEMENT

By the means of structural understanding of rules of games, role-playing activities and game progresses, this study compares the phenomena of interpersonal communication in TRPG with that of interpersonal communication in real life, and discusses the identity interaction between roles in the games and their players, inspects the obvious and potential rules in interpersonal communication and the structural difference between the process of interpersonal communication and the on-going of games. In addition, the researcher uses the frame of the communication accommodation theory to explore how the ludology is of significance to interpersonal communication research.

Participative observation is the main method used in this research. In the field of anthropology, this method is a common way to do qualitative research(Polit & Beck, 2010; Timeseena, 2009). As a tool to know people and culture, this method has been used in many disciplines (Kawulich, 2005).According to a research, participative observation "enhanced participants' willingness to engage in the research process"(Sherry & Wendy,2015).

METHODOLOGY

In the process the research, the researcher has taken part in a group of TRPG for roughly two years, from May 2016 to May 2018.
The group is formed by about 30 members, 10 of whom are core players and 20 occasional players. Five members of the group are female and others are male. In the group, core players have accustomed to take part in activities of TRPG every week, sometimes even two or three times a week. Non-core players sometimes joined in the activities, but not as often as core players.

Most of the players are students and graduates of Communication University of China (CUC), which belongs to University of 211 Project and is famous for human and arts disciplines. Other players are friends of these students and graduates. Their ages vary from 18 to 29 and all of the joiners are single.

Normally speaking, the group holds activities in a board game club. This club is owned by a graduate of CUC, whose major is animation. He loved playing tabletop games and he undertook this as business. This club is located in a flat near CUC, approximately 90 square meters.

The researcher has joined more than half of the activities occurred in this group and has taken the responsibility of host more than 30 times.

RESULT

Firstly, in TRPG, some players can do something that they would not like to do in reality. A gay player can make his role have romantic relationship with girls. A vegetarian can make his character have meat for supper.

Secondly, in TRPG, players may use a different moral standard than in real life. An interviewee said that she was a peaceful and kind woman who would not choose to kill people in life, while if she was playing an evil character, she might murder and burn to get profit. In contrast, it is not ordinary that players choose to do wicked things. Some people's characters have more strict moral rules than themselves, a reason of which is that expressing kindness and helpfulness in TRPG is easier and more worthwhile than in real world.

Thirdly, in TRPG, sometimes players resonate their real life in games. In a situation of one game, player A has tried to let his character hamper and impede player B, because player A's girlfriend was distributed to personate player B's wife in the game. He can not accept that his girlfriend formed a couple with another man, even it is only an avatar.

Finally, in TRPG, players not only pay attention to what the characters do, but also players' attitude to their characters. A player told the researcher that in reality, she did not like people who support androcentrism. By comparison, she can accept the role-playing of androcentrism in games. However, she would like to observe the player's attitude to this character played by him or her. If the player identifies with what this character does, she would be unsatisfied than otherwise.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, players have shown and used the strategy of convergence, divergence and maintenance in TRPG. Inside the game, in the dimension of storylines, characters tend to follow and accept others to make the game proceed smoothly, for which they can change their behaviors and tactics. While, in the dimension of role-playing, characters tend to show the unique aspect to make themselves funny and impressing. Outside the game, players sometimes take great care of the relationship in reality and maintain their ethics in games, which can lead to some conflict in games.

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