

## DEDICATION

A great dissertation committee is like a great basketball team -- everyone plays a role, and the different roles complement each other perfectly. The following was my all-star team:

**Center:** Gregory Guy, University of Pennsylvania

The center is normally the tallest player on the floor. He must be an aggressive rebounder and lead the way in blocked shots. He has to be a mean defender, and a dependable scorer at short and middle ranges. He must be strong, and a defensive leader. The team's offense usually runs through him.

The center is the most important player of the team.

**Point Guard:** Mary Bucholtz, University of California at Berkeley.

The point guard runs the offense and watches the backcourt. She must have an instinctive knowledge of the game. She must be a good passer, able to move the ball quickly up the court, make quick reads, and dish off when guarded. She must be able to hit the outside shot, and also to play hard-nosed defense.

The point guard is the most important player on the team.

**Power Forward:** John Costello, New York University

The power (or strong) forward is the player usually doing the "dirty work". He must be a solid rebounder, a gutsy dribbler, and hard driver. He must be able to cover the entire length of the floor, and stand up to the opposition at both ends of the court. He is the unofficial "enforcer" of the team.

The power forward is the most important player in the team.

**Small Forward:** Rudy Gaudio, Stanford University

The small forward is the most athletically gifted player on the team. He must be fast and durable, able to play offense or defense anywhere on the court. He must be both a rebounder and a passer, capable of taking control of the game with his exceptional ability. He will be called upon to do a little of everything in the game.

The small forward is the most important player among the team.

**Shooting Guard:** Renée Blake, Stanford University

The shooting guard's job is to put points on the board and help her teammates to score. She must be a good passer and dribbler, with either hand, must be able to penetrate and dish off, and hit the long shot with consistency. Above all, she must be able to step in and run the offense if the other players are overplayed.

The shooting guard is the most important player with the team.

**Sixth Man:** Tami Kaplan, Cornell University

The sixth man is the player who can come off the bench at a moment's notice and fall right into the flow. She's able to do whatever is necessary to help her team win -- score, play exceptional defense, or rebound. She is a spark plug, capable of picking up the tempo, able to give her team quality minutes whenever she plays.

The sixth man is the most important player for the team.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation looks at the use of language in the conduct of fantasy role-playing games (RPGs) -- a topic of unusual but nonetheless great linguistic relevance to interesting problems in contemporary sociolinguistic research, such as identity construction, narrative theory, and reference. Participants in such games must execute a number of unusual verbal tasks:

- (1) Jointly construct (along with other players) the narrative that is the entire substance of the game
- (2) Relate their characters' actions and speech in the narrative typically by means of first person present tense description (e.g. "I smoothly evade the spear and step through the door") -- marked forms normally never used in ordinary discourse
- (3) Distinguish co-references between the game players and the characters whom the players portray in the game (ie, the pronoun "I" can be used to refer to the speaker's character, or can be used conventionally to refer to the speaker; similar problems occur with second and third person references)
- (4) Construct a fantasy identity for their characters -- one that may be strikingly at odds with their own real-world identity -- using only verbal means, mainly description and narration.

The linguistic means by which speakers perform these tasks constitute a distinctive, coherent cognitive practice, which makes use of both discursive frames and narrative structure. The core components in the form and framing of Role-Play inform and shape the distinct RPG narratives that emerge. Yet the underlying nature and functions of such narratives, in terms of both event sequencing and identity construction, remain highly conventional.

This unique narrative variety, when contrasted with traditional linguistic conceptualizations of narrative structure, provides further insight as to the crucial core components of narratives. Thus elements such as Orientation and Evaluation may be provided outside the RPG narrative proper. Furthermore, the comparison suggests that the dominant approach to narrative in linguistics has been heavily influenced by the single-person narrations of personal experience that long have been the focus of research in the field. For example, elements such as Abstract and Coda are primarily devices for inserting a narrative into broader discourse, and unnecessary in RPG narratives.

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# **Narrative and Identity in Fantasy Role-Playing Games**

by

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Gregory Guy

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*It all started at Shaw's house. I think I was twelve, though I might have been eleven. And it wasn't my brother Shaw, but my friend Shaw. Actually he was a Bill, too, but that's not nearly so interesting. Of course Shaw's older brother Ken was there (not me, but the other Ken), except that he wasn't really, and later there were also Jack and Tom and several others, including my brother Shaw, too. But that, of course, came later. It started with me and Shaw.*

*After talk about this and that, he introduced the box.*

*"It's red," I said, because I had always been good at stating the obvious. "And inside there are more red books, and some paper, and some funny-shaped plastic things with numbers on them."*

*"They're dice," said Shaw solemnly. It was funny, because my brother Shaw was often solemn in the same manner.*

*I knew of course that he was being silly, because everyone knew that dice were cubes and didn't have numbers on them, they had little pips instead.*

*"What are they for?" I asked.*

*"You roll them," he replied firmly. "It's how you play this game."*

*I hoped he wouldn't be able to tell just how baffled I was.*

*"So it's a game, then," I announced, relieved to have finally understood something. Then confusion flooded back in. "Um...what kind of game is it, again?"*