

Magina's Two Blades: The Dual Nature of Discourse in the Game Chat of Philippine DOTA Players

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This paper examines culture in the popular video game "Defense of the Ancients," or DOTA, through an analysis of the discourse that players use in the gamesetting. It explores the link between discourse, agency and structure, arguing that discourse mediates between the other two, which are portrayed in sociological literature as opposing one another. The paper uses in-game chat as a source of data and discusses the ways that the articulations of game players reflect both the structures that are built into the original programming of the game, as well as the agency that the players possess as creative actors in the game. The former is manifested in evaluations of character strength, game strategy and tactics and support talk. The latter is reflected in player discussions about changing and negotiating game rules, popular culture appropriations in their expressions and in-game politeness.

Keywords: discourse, culture and computer game studies

INTRODUCTION

Computer and video game consumption has become so popular over the past few years that the present generation of young people has been described as the "game generation" (Beck and Wade 2006). The medium's significance to a generation of young people, on the one hand, and ambivalence to older people, on the other hand, has arguably led to the coming of a generation gap, whereby a generation of young people grew up consuming video games in large quantities and immersing themselves in

video game worlds, while their parents are largely ignorant, sometimes hostile, towards the medium. The growth in video game popularity has made it a booming industry. According to a 2010 American Electronic Software Association (ESA) report, computer and video game sales in the United States has reached 10.5 billion dollars.

Similar trends in consumption may be seen throughout the rest of the world including the Philippines, with Filipinos consuming video games in a variety of platforms, including the Personal Computer (PC), the Sony Playstation 2 or 3, the Nintendo Wii, the Microsoft X-Box 360, as well as handheld devices such as the Sony PSP, the Nintendo DS and even mobile phones. In the area of PC gaming, one may observe internet cafes filled with people playing games via Local Area Networks or LAN or through the internet. Many PC games, require participation by two or more players, and as such, constitute arenas for human interaction within a virtual space. One of the most popular PC games played in the Philippines is called *Defense of the Ancients*, or DOTA, an unofficial user-made modification to the popular game *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*, which was released in 2002 by the video game company Blizzard. DOTA was created by an anonymous developer named IceFrog. Originally intended for small-scale consumption, its popularity has grown such that the DOTA modification is still a competitive event in gaming tournaments throughout the world, while the original game, *Warcraft III*, no longer retains that status.

DOTA is structured such that each individual player only controls one character, with unique powers and skills. This is a different setup from *Warcraft III*, where each player controls an entire army. Individual players are assigned to one of two teams: the Scourge and the Sentinel. The main objective of each team is to destroy the other team's key building, defeating characters and obstacles in order to do so. In order to achieve the objective, individual players must manage resources, which they use to buy items that can make their characters more powerful, and experience points, which are used to widen the special skill set of a character, or to strengthen a special skill. DOTA may be likened to a game of capture the flag, 'though with infinitely more choices regarding how to achieve the objective.

The game of DOTA is the central focus of this paper. Informed by the research of Yates and Littleton (1999), who argue for the need to culturally contextualize games, playing a game of DOTA may be likened to entering a subculture with its own discourse. This paper examines the discourse of

Philippine DOTA players, arguing that the discursive practices of Philippine DOTA players reflect their creative agency as key actors in the game world. This agency is exercised in two ways: first, it is used in the context of achieving the objective and winning the game; second, creativity is seen in the way that players appropriate popular culture from the non-virtual world, the way they use word play while talking to one another in the game and the way that the discourse subverts the structures that are inherent in games.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

This research makes use of sociological concepts of agency and discourse in analyzing creative agency discourse among Philippine DOTA players. Creative agency discourse is a concept appropriated from the research of Wright et al. (2002), who make use of the term “creative game talk,” which refers to the way that computer game players show innovation in the way that they talk to one another. This is seen through word play, naming, use of popular culture references and the images and logos that players use in the context of the game Counter-Strike. Though an important concept in itself, it may be enhanced further by making use of the sociological concepts of discourse and agency.

The term agency is often contrasted with the idea of social structure, with the latter referring to the larger societal forces that shape individual human relations. The great influence of social structure is emphasized in the work of sociology’s intellectual forebears, such as Durkheim (1994) and Marx (1961). Both writers stressed the importance of larger social forces, such as religion and social class that influenced the behavior of individuals in society. Inherent in the argument of classical sociological thought was the idea that it would be very difficult to overcome such social structures unless, as in the case of Marx, there were to be a violent revolution.

More contemporary sociological thought has accommodated spaces by which social structure could be affected by smaller units in society. The work of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984) give relevance to the concept of agency, which refers to the ability of individuals or small groups to alter social structure or act outside its boundaries. Bourdieu (1977), for example, makes use of the concept of *habitus*, to refer to practices that develop in micro levels and can ultimately alter the macro level of structures. Giddens (1984), for his part, coined the term structuration whereby structure is seen as being both “medium and outcome of the practices they reclusively

organize." By consequence, structure is not an objective reality as argued by earlier thinkers. Rather, it exists as a result of the everyday practices of social actors, which reach the level of institutions and social systems.

The trajectory of this paper dovetails with that of Giddens and Bourdieu in that there are indeed interfaces between structure and agency. However, it focuses on the phenomenon of discourse. Discourse may be broadly defined as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world" (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002: 1). All the different approaches to discourse believe, to some degree, that discourses shape social reality. Foucault (1977), for example, argued that discourse makes its objects. In *Discipline and Punish*, he examines how discourses about suitable ways of disciplining people have changed. For example, he gives the example of how criminality is dealt with in the pre-modern period versus the modern period. To illustrate disciplinary mechanisms in pre-modern France, he describes the case of Damiens, the regicide, who was quartered in front of the Church of Paris. The example indicates how in the pre-modern, committing a crime warranted swift retribution from the King, either through execution, dismemberment or torture. However, just "eighty years later, Léon Faucher drew up his rules 'for the House of young prisoners in Paris'" (Foucault 1977: 6), which was the modern period's equivalent of public execution or torture. Categories of criminality and acceptable forms of punishment are all objects that were ordered by discourse. The change in penal practices between the pre-modern and modern periods is attributed to changes in discourse.

The work of Marston (1989) connects the concept of discourse with the ideas of agency and structure. Looking at the discourse of 19th century American urban immigrants, he argues that discourse mediates between agency and structure. Similarly, this paper argues that discourse, like light, which is both particle and wave, has a dual nature since it reinforces social structure, but is also a vehicle for the agency of social actors. On the one hand, what people say reflects the existence of larger social structures, which order the lives and actions of individuals. On the other hand, discourse exposes the perceptions that social agents have about their social positions in reference to social structures, as well as the strategies that they possess to negotiate the boundaries set by those same structures, either by changing them or by overcoming them.

The dual nature described above is ubiquitous in the discourse of Philippine DOTA players, since games, by their nature, possess structures. Salen and Zimmerman (2003) described the fundamental aspects of games

and mentioned that rules, which organize the system of the game, are essential in any game. Rules influence players by laying out the objectives of the game, as well as the constraints under which the game is played. They determine what players must do to win a game, and what they can and cannot do in order to achieve their objective. Scholars, such as Abbot (1984), Axelrod (1984), Ordeshook (1986), that have applied game theory or a related theory, such as rational choice theory, to analyze social reality have discussed the importance of rules in influencing the social game. Rules in a game, whether real or metaphorical, behave like structures in that they are larger forces that affect players' actions in a game.

This paper, in its analysis of game discourse, looks past the overbearing influence of rule structures and looks at the agency of players as well. Wright et al. (2002), analyzing the first person shooter game Counter-Strike, looked at creative player actions within the game. Implicit in their research is the idea that players have agency despite the authority of game rules. Agency is seen in computer game players' ability to express themselves, through words, images and actions, in a game, as well as their ability to alter the rule structures of games. This agency is seen in the discourse of Philippine DOTA players as well.

METHODOLOGY

Analyzing the discourse of Philippine DOTA players is done through the analysis of text, which is typed by players during the course of a game. This text is commonly referred to as in-game chat, and may be directed towards teammates, or allies, or everyone in the game. To study the discursive patterns in the game, the log files, containing all of the in-game chat from over 40 hours of DOTA gameplay, with games ranging from between 30 minutes to over an hour, were examined and coded. The games selected to be analyzed were taken from the DOTA Philippines official website. The most frequently downloaded games from the site were used, since these were considered to best reflect the discourse of Philippine DOTA players by virtue of their popularity. Interpretation of in-game chat was possible due to the researcher's direct experience with playing the game, as well as discussions with key informants who clarified or validated some of the more technical terms used in the discourse.

Game chat was coded into two major categories: discourse reflecting game structure and discourse mirroring player agency. Each category has a

set of nodes. Discourse reflecting game structure has a set of nodes that are related to the rules and objectives set by the game. This includes: Game Strategy and Tactics, Evaluation of Character Strengths and Weaknesses and Support Talk. Discourse that indicates the agency of players contains the following nodes: Changing and Negotiating Game Rules, Popular Culture Appropriations, and Game Ethics and Politeness. This category of discourse, for its part, denotes the ability of game players to shape in-game practices and alter game structures.

DISCOURSE REFLECTING GAME STRUCTURE

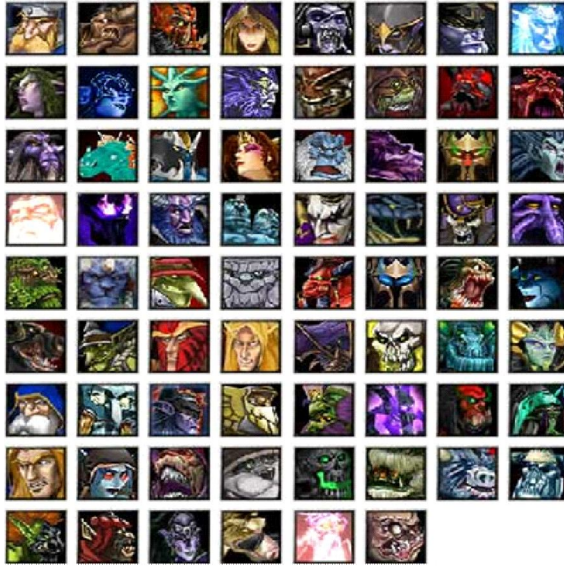
DOTA, like any other game, has an objective and a set of rules that guide the actions of players. The objective of destroying the opposing team's main building is always at the back of the players' minds even as they are making individual split-second decisions as the game progresses. The discourse of DOTA players indicates the existence of the rules and objectives that are intrinsic to the computer game.

Evaluation of Character Strength

The first few minutes at the start of each game are usually dedicated to making the basic preparations for the game, such as character selection. In the game DOTA, each player selects a character to control, with its own special skills. Some characters are powerful close-range fighters that can cause a lot of damage in one hit, while other characters are fast and agile, being able to fight from a distance, and make quick attacks and move quickly. Other characters have are physically weak, but have the ability to cast magic that can damage multiple opponents at once. Character selection is a complex process, since a player's choice affects how they would play the game. Character selection is not simple, since there are seventy characters for each player to choose from. The portraits of the characters are shown in Figure 1.

The character that each player selects is revealed to all other players in the game, both teammates and opponents. This means that teammates can select their characters accordingly to complement each other's selections, while opponents choose characters that can counteract those of the other team. Much of the discourse at the start of each round is about evaluating characters, since character selection is crucial for the overall goal of winning the game.

Figure 1 DOTA Portraits of Characters



In a game between the teams AREA E and GIERGESS, some of the players discussed the character choice of one player who happened to make a selection that was thought to be disadvantageous. The parts in parentheses are English translations of what was said:

- 3:33 [Allies] MightyMalunggay (Harbinger): gudlak sa zus (Good luck to whoever picked Zeus)
- 3:32 [Allies] MightyMalunggay (Harbinger): haha
- 3:29 [Allies] GS-Lay-Awn (Zeus): uu nga e (I know right?)
- 3:28 [Allies] Sirulo => (Rylai): haha
- 3:28 [Allies] ~DmOnyONG BALiW (Spectre): haha."

In the exchange above, the player MightyMalunggay wished luck to GS-Lay-Awn, who picked the character Zeus, because he thought that Zeus was a disadvantageous choice. GS-Lay-Awn, for his part, seemed to agree with the observation. Their exchange was followed by responses of "haha" from their other teammates.

Another instance of discourse where character strength is evaluated may be found in the game between the teams Name Dsr and SnSt. The following were noted by players who had observer status in the game:

- "2:18 [Observers] ~[cffff0000DsR: gus2 ko pick ng team ko (I like the characters my team picked)...
- 2:32 [Observers] kRvNsm: maganda rin sa kalaban (The opposing team picked strong characters too)."

In the instance above, two observers, meaning nonplayers who are simultaneously observing the game, were talking to each other and evaluating the character selections of the two teams. Despite being observers, however, it is clear that they are not unbiased in their feelings about the game since team allegiance may be found in the statement made by the first observer, who referred to his preferred team as his team, instead of referring to it by the team name, for example, "I like the character choices of Name Dsr." The use of the term "my team" denotes partiality.

A third example was found in a game between the teams Pd and Flow. In the following exchange, a member from one team is evaluating the character choice of the other team:

- "0:01 [Allies] tonymazzini (Puck): necro (He chose necro)
- 0:01 [Allies] tonymazzini (Puck): expected na (That was already expected)...
- 0:01 [Allies] tonymazzini (Puck): sobrang blib ni arby sa hero na yan (He really believes in that character)."

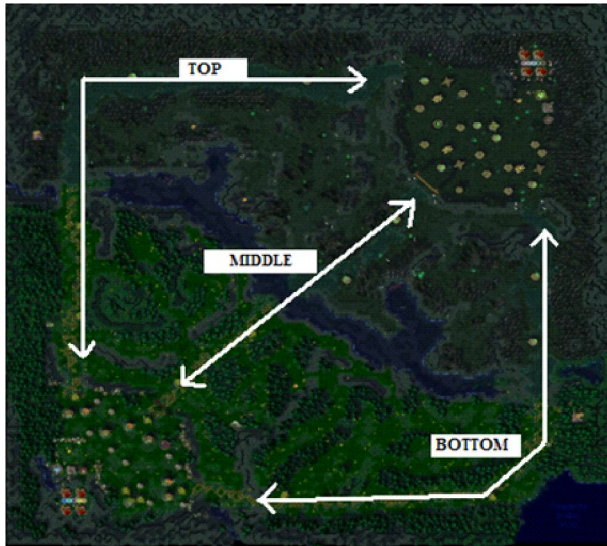
The player tonymazzini is telling his teammates about another player who chose the Necromancer character, which is shortened among Philippine DOTA players as "necro." His statement suggests familiarity with the player because he also comments that the player who chose the Necromancer really likes that character. The three examples of in-game chat above indicate the importance of evaluating character strength, in the discourse that reflects the structure of the game.

Game Strategy and Tactics

By their nature, discourse on game strategy and tactics reflect the structural aspects of a game, specifically the objective that all game players are working to achieve. Not surprisingly, the majority of the references coded in the study were on game strategy and tactics due to the fact that in-game communication mainly involves communication among teammates about how best to achieve the objective at different points throughout the game. Character selection, which was discussed above, is related to game strategy and tactics since proper selection is necessary to win the game.

There are other aspects of game strategy and tactics, however, such as the positioning of players' characters. The virtual terrain on which DOTA is played has three main paths through which characters can pass. They are referred to based on their position when seen in an overhead view of the terrain: top, middle and bottom. These paths are illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 2 Paths through which Characters can Pass



The majority of in-game chat related to strategy and tactics is about which of the paths players in each team should take. In the game between the teams Area E and La Sale Dasma, the following exchanges were made among the players in one team:

- 43:52 [Allies] D/\st.cHuKoK (Lion): baba (Bottom)
- 44:06 [Allies] D/\st.\nG (Slardar): tra na (Let's go now)
- 44:14 [Allies] MYI^noobitah (Ish'kafel): tra (Let's go)
- 44:25 [Allies] MYI^noobitah (Ish'kafel): mid na (Let's just go through the middle)
- 44:26 [Allies] MYI^damulag (Admiral): tra (Let's go)."

The discussion among team members indicates the way that DOTA players tactically discuss map positions with one another.

Another topic for tactical discussion is the position of the other team's characters, especially when they are perceived to be strong. The exchange below exemplifies this part of the discourse:

- 32:26 [Allies] pd.jave (Nessaj): sandking
- 32:27 [Allies] pd.jave (Nessaj): nsa baba (He's at the bottom path)
- 32:34 [Allies] stevefox (Mirana): gagank yan (He will probably gank)
- 32:49 [Allies] stevefox (Mirana): aw
- 32:59 [Allies] pd.jave (Nessaj): baba pupush (Should we push at the bottom path?)
- 33:16 [Allies] stevefox (Mirana): abang ulet (Let's just wait for another enemy)."

The discussion that the players were having was about whether or not they should go to the location of Sand King, a particularly strong character, one that could potentially "gank," which is a video game term synonymous with kill, them. At the end, they resolve to watch out for another character, perhaps one that is not as powerful.

A third application of game strategy and tactics discourse has to do with team tactics. Beyond the positioning of players on a map, and whether or not to engage opposing characters, team members also discuss whether or not they should go on the offensive, or engage their opponents in more favourable virtual ground. The game between Area E and La Sale Dasma has an example of such banter:

- 41:04 [Allies] MYI^Mz (Dwarven): hayaan natin sila magpush ? (Should we wait for them to attack?)
- 41:09 [Allies] MYI^Mz (Dwarven): hinihintay lang tayo nyan eh... (They're waiting for us as well)
- 41:12 [Allies] MYI^ 'damulag (Admiral): -clear (Agreed)
- 41:18 [Allies] D/\st.cHuKoK (Lion): tar mid... (Let's attack through the middle)."

In the discussion above, teammates discuss with one another whether or not they should attack the other team, or wait for the other team to come to them. The player named MYI^Mz argues that the other team is waiting for them to go on the offensive as well, so D/\st.cHuKoK suggests going through the offensive and attacking through the middle path.

Support Talk

Another feature of discourse that reflects structure is referred to as Support Talk. Support talk refers to messages that players send one another as a form of moral support. Since DOTA is essentially a team-based war game, moral support is one way that teammates tell one another that they support one another. Two examples clearly exemplify the types of support talk that occur

in a game. The first example is from a game between teams BAS and CPG. Players in one team communicated the following to one another:

-2:24 [Allies] CPG.YanYan (Ulf Saar): nanginginig ako.. :) (I'm shaking)...
-2:08 [Allies] CPG.Dikoy (Vengeful): tissue?... (Do you need a tissue?)
-1:46 [Allies] CPG.Khai?? (Tidehunter): think pasitivek (Think positive)."

One of the players from team CPG, Yan Yan, expressed nervousness about the game. His teammates, then responded with support talk, with one of them offering him a tissue, while the other told him to be positive.

Another instance of support talk may be found in the match between the teams Mastah and Wafu, which is mentioned below:

36:54 mastah.panGz (Admiral) (1-9) was killed by ` (Rattletrap) shaboy (8-1).
36:54 `(Rattletrap) shaboy has a mega kill!
36:55 [Allies] mastah.miGZZ (Anub'arak): gg."

The short conversation shows another form of support talk. The first two lines are not player-generated in-game chat, rather, it is text generated by the game broadcasting, when one player has killed another player. In the case above, shaboy's character killed the character of mastah.panGz, leading to a "mega kill." A "mega kill" occurs when a player is able to kill off more than two characters in a matter of seconds, which is quite difficult to execute during the game itself. To congratulate shaboy on getting a "mega kill," his teammate sent him the message "gg," which literally means "good game," but the phrase is used in this context to express felicitations. Saying "gg" to one's teammates for playing well is a common form of support talk.

The discourse of Evaluation of Character Strength, Game Strategy and Tactics and Support Talk above all exemplify the importance of the objective when playing a game such as DOTA. Underlying all of those discourses is the existence of a governing structure in the game, which includes the constraints of player actions, as well as the objective that needs to be achieved in order to be victorious in the game.

DISCOURSE REFLECTING PLAYER AGENCY

The preceding section discussed how Philippine DOTA discourse reflects many of the structural aspects of the game, such as its terrain, objective and constraints. However, discourse is not just a manifestation of structure, it also mirrors the agency of players themselves. Playing a computer game like DOTA goes beyond playing within the rules set for the game. It also entails playing with the rules, modifying them to some extent, and creating rules

that are not built into the game system. Rules of propriety and expressions used by players during the course of a game, for example, are not built into the rules. Instead, they occur through the agency of DOTA game players. It is on these features that this section of the paper will focus.

Changing and Negotiating Game Rules

An examination of in-game text reveals that there are actually instances whereby game players can change some of the structural features of the game. The overall objective remains the same, but DOTA players do have the ability to play with the rules that bind them.

One such change is about the technical rules of the game. At the start of a game, the player that started the game, also known as the host, can make certain changes to the structural aspects of the game by inputting game commands. This is exemplified in the text below:

```
"0:02 [Game Command] JeZtAh (Terrorblade): -ap...  
0:05 [Game Command] JeZtAh (Terrorblade): -di."
```

The game host, JeZtAh, typed in two game commands, "-ap" and "-di," which change some of the structural aspects of the game. The "-ap" command allows players to choose from among all seventy characters, since without the command, they can only choose half of the available characters. The "-di" command renders invisible player statistics, which are usually available for all players in the game to view. Such statistics are useful to players who want to keep track of how many kills teammates and opponents make. Both commands alter the technical rules of the game, and ultimately affect the in-game behaviour of characters, since they directly affect tactics as well as character selection.

Another alteration that game players can make to change the structure of the game has to do with the characters available. It was mentioned earlier that there are seventy characters available for players to choose from. At the beginning of the many games examined, however, a process of negotiation occurs among the DOTA players regarding which characters should be banned, or rendered unusable by any player, and which characters should be retained. In a game between teams SK and Kr, the following exchange took place regarding the banning of characters:

```
"-6:32 [Allies] FnK.|eureka (Netherdrake): ban na (start banning)  
-6:32 [Allies] bLeenK (Earthshaker): UNDYING BAN  
-6:29 [Allies] kos.cho (Mirana): wag na ES (ban ES, or Earthshaker)...  
-6:20 [Allies] FnK.|eureka (Netherdrake): tauren
```

-6:18 [Allies] kos.cho (Mirana): tauren
 -6:17 [Allies] kos.cho (Mirana): tauren
 -6:15 TarsivY (Batrider) has banned Taur[en]...
 -6:12 [Allies] Jai-Ho.MaL-rr (Nevermore): ok
 -6:11 [Allies] bLeenK (Earthshaker): aw...
 -6:08 bLeenK (Earthshaker) has banned Admiral...
 -6:02 [Allies] Jai-Ho.MaL-rr (Nevermore): ano last ban (Who do we ban last?)
 -6:01 [Allies] Jai-Ho.MaL-rr (Nevermore): ?
 -6:00 [Allies] kos.cho (Mirana): undying nInG (Undying)."

The passage above is a combination of both player-generated and game-generated chat. The latter appears as statements of what characters have been banned. More significant to this paper, however, is the fact that character banning is a process that reflects the agency of game players since they have the ability to change structural givens, such as what characters are available to play as, through the process of negotiation. This has further implications on the way that players will proceed in the game, and is consequently a reflection of the way that players play with the rules of the game through discourse.

Players also have the ability to influence aesthetic aspects of the game, which are normally unchangeable givens in games. There are two such modifications that were observed during the course of the study. First, game players can make changes regarding the colour of the water in the river, which bisects the terrain that the game is played on. This is exemplified below:

"-9:03 [Allies] rinoa13 (Earthshaker): -water red
 -9:02 [All] S|3|X.eiNe3eb~ (Warlock): yan...(yes)
 -9:01 [Game Command] hambie02 (Tinker): -clear."

The river water can be changed from its regular colour of blue into either green or red. In the conversation above, rinoa13 typed in the command to change the river's colour to red. His choice was applauded by two other players who responded with "yan" and "-clear," both of which are expressions of affirmation. Another aesthetic change that game players can make is the background music in the game. In another match, the following took place:

"-8:12 [Allies] CPG.YanYan (Ulf Saar): -music special
 -8:11 [Allies] CPG.Dikoy (Vengeful): -clear
 -8:11 [Allies] CPG.Jhayson (Nevermore): -clear."

One of the players in the game above inputted a command to change the ambient music in the game. His choice was also met with affirmative responses of "clear" from his teammates. The instances above are all

manifestations of player agency, indicating their ability to alter given game structures.

Popular Culture Appropriations

Another way that agency is seen in the discourse of Philippine DOTA players is through the way that they creatively appropriate and make use of popular culture references. One such example may be found in a game between teams BAS and CPG:

```
"20:45 CPG.Jhayson's (Nevermore) courier was killed by ->aLL,eyEs,+ (Lucifer)
21:01 FnK.|^^MarViN14 (Lion) (1-8) was killed by CPG.Jhayson (Nevermore) (4-1).
21:01 CPG.Jhayson (Nevermore) is on a killing spree!
21:08 ->aLL,eyEs,+ (Lucifer) has used the stored Regeneration rune
21:11 CPG.Khai?? (Tidehunter) (1-4) was killed by FnK.|^eureka (Razor) (1-1).
21:11 FnK.|^eureka (Razor) (1-2) was killed by CPG.YanYan (Ulfsaar) (11-0).
21:11 CPG.YanYan (Ulfsaar) is beyond GODLIKE. Someone KILL HIM!!!!!!
21:32 Scourge middle level 2 tower was destroyed by CPG.YanYan (Ulfsaar) (11-0).
21:39 [Allies] CPG.Khai?? (Tidehunter): ^_^
21:43 [Allies] CPG.Khai?? (Tidehunter): ampatuan
21:47 [All] ->aLL,eyEs,+ (Lucifer): haha."
```

In the passage cited above, the in-game situation is that many characters in one team are being killed by the members of the opposing team, with one character being on a "killing spree" and another reaching "GODLIKE" status, meaning that he had killed many characters without himself being killed. The decimation of the other team prompted the player CPG.Khai?? to compare the situation to a prominent recent event in the Philippines known as the Ampatuan massacre, where a convoy with reporters and civilians were killed by armed men. Though the event in the Philippines had a negative connotation, it was appropriated and used in the context of the game to describe the massacre of the opposing team.

Popular culture appropriations are also seen in the nonsense chatter that some players engage in, at the start of each game while players are selecting characters and game modifications are being made. The game between the teams RekTa and 3x contains the following exchange:

```
"-7:03 [All] jigger_01 (Akasha): jai ho
-7:02 [All] Badluck08 (Mirana): =))
-6:53 [All] Badluck08 (Mirana): ohhh ohhhh ohhhhhh
-6:52 [All] jigger_01 (Akasha): uh ow oh...
-5:56 [All] Badluck08 (Mirana): you got me hatin in the club...
-5:39 [All] S|3|X.Wu (Tidehunter): hatin on the club - rihanna?
-5:39 [All] Badluck08 (Mirana): coz you took my luv."
```

Above, one sees references to the song “Jai Ho,” from the official soundtrack of the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. Later in the passage, the popular singer Rihanna is mentioned. The content of the conversation above does not have any strategic significance, for the players, but it does reveal that popular culture references can be appropriated and used in game talk.

The appropriation of popular culture references may be thought of as a crossing of an idea from corporeal reality into virtual reality. This idea was articulated by Shields (2003), who discussed that virtuality and corporeality are elements that comprise reality equally. Using examples, such as memory or the Eucharist, he argues that there can be “slippage” between virtual and corporeal reality, whereby the virtual can affect the corporeal and vice-versa. The way that popular culture references are appropriated into DOTA game discourse may be thought of as slippage from the corporeal to the virtual.

In-Game Politeness

Game ethics and politeness are another aspects of the discourse of Philippine DOTA players. Rules of propriety are not built into the structure of the game. Instead, it occurs through the exercise of agency by DOTA players. In a game, politeness is best expressed when players say their farewells as the match ends. In the games observed, the latter is much more common than the former. This is exemplified in the exchange below from a game between the teams AREA E and APOL AND GIERGES:

```
“55:37 [All] D/\st/wApAk?? (Vengeful): gg  
55:38 :D (Dragon) (10-9) has left the game.  
55:38 [All] i <3 :D/\st (Mirana): ^^  
55:39 [All] i <3 :D/\st (Mirana): GG  
55:39 Gg (Morphling) parin??? (3-6) has left the game.”
```

The term “gg” was already mentioned earlier as a form of support that players offer to their teammates whenever they do well in the game. Its more widespread use is as an expression of leave-taking. A game between Dissidia and Gwapol contains similar in-game chat:

```
“45:06 [All] Kenpanchi (Mirana): GG  
45:12 [All] Parky. (Necro'lic): gg  
45:15 [All] ~DsR (Warlock): nxt game na>? (Is it time to start the next game?)  
45:15 [All] _MarKee_ (Zeus): haha  
45:15 [All] _MarKee_ (Zeus): gg.”
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The use of “gg” is arguably a fitting way to end games, since it stands for the words “good game,” an expression that implies sportsmanship in athletic

settings. Like the popular culture appropriations discussed earlier, “gg” may also be thought of as a slippage from corporeal reality into virtual reality.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the discourse of Philippine DOTA players. It looked at Game Strategy and Tactics, Evaluation of Character Strength and Support Talk as forms of discourse that reinforce the structural aspects of the game. Appropriations of Popular Culture, In-Game Politeness and Changing and Negotiating Game Rules are seen as manifestations of DOTA player agency. By analyzing Philippine DOTA discourse as such, the paper attempted to bridge the gap between agency and structure, a major preoccupation of the field of sociology. Though attempts have been made to form a connection between agency and structure, this paper argued that discourse mediates between the two. The data gathered for the study indicate that discourse indeed possesses a dual nature. On the one hand, the game discourse reflected the structural aspects of the game. On the other hand, it mirrored the agency of game players.

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