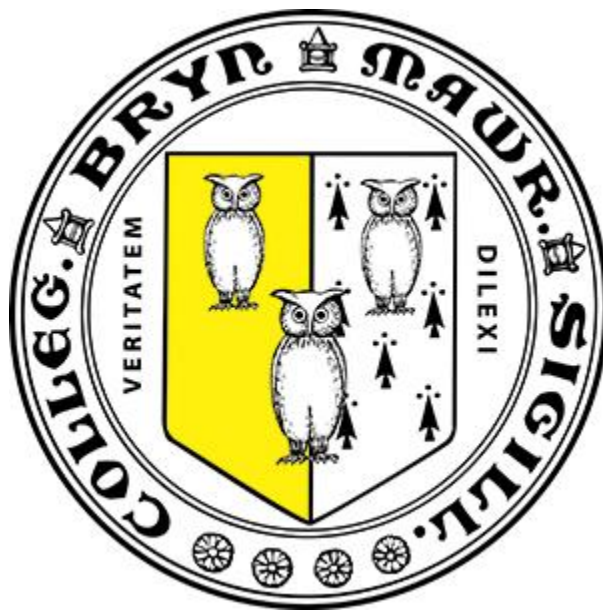# Floor Organization in Dungeons and Dragons[1*]

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Abstract

The floor as a concept of conversational organization is investigated in the context of the tabletop gaming environment Dungeons and Dragons (D&D). Building from Carole Edelsky's 1981 article "Who's Got the Floor", I recorded and analyzed one online D&D session to explore collaborative characteristics of floor organization in a recreational, social, entertainment-focused game environment. Due to the unique power dynamic established by the role of Dungeon Master (DM) in a D&D game, a comparison is made to classroom environments to investigate similarities between the floor organization of teachers in academic settings. I observe how the environment of D&D promotes traits of collaborative creativity among participants and how these traits affect the conversational floor by developing longer, uncontested floor-holding segments of talk when a speaker's contribution is narratively focused. The DM exhibits an ability to take control of the floor and regulate speaking order among participants but does not constantly sustain one end of the floor as teachers do (Philips 1983). As expected, players exhibit more agency in the recreational gaming environment than students do in the classroom, including an ability to call for game actions to be made that could fall under DM responsibility. Players also display a respectful organizational tendency to self-regulate off-topic talk back to game-relevant discussion. I conclude with a discussion of future work to be done in fields of educational and linguistic study within this language environment of tabletop roleplaying.

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1   Introduction

This thesis investigates how conversational floor organization practices among English-language speakers operate in an environment of collaborative creativity that is enforced by the context of tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs). TTRPGs are social story-telling games where individuals gather and collaborate to construct a narrative under a set of rules. In my research, I focus on one of the most commonly played TTRPG systems known as Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) (Arneson and Gygax 1974).

The terms conversational *floor,* and by association *turn,* at the foundation of this study have inconstant definitions throughout their history of use (Goffman 1971; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; Ochs 1979; Edelsky 1981). Floor in general is used by conversational analysts to discuss control among conversing speakers, and so having "the floor" is synonymous with directing and controlling the topics, pacing, and emotional or tonal elements of conversation that a participant is involved in. This fits well within a standard of conversation defined by competitive characteristics between listeners and speakers wherein those involved in the conversation are passing control from one participant to another (Goffman 1971; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974).

However, the idea of a floor that centers individual-focused communication, as in a competitive conversational environment, complicates the study of floor organization in collaborative group interaction. This focus on the competitive nature of the floor also does not leave room for structures of talk like those found in classroom settings where engagement in the conversation is facilitated by a teacher, and that teacher has consistent floor control without direct competition (Philips 1983). Given that the linguistic terminology of *turn* can also be considered an element of control in conversational organization, these rough definitions create an unclear boundary between what should be considered "taking a turn" in conversation and what should be considered "having the floor" in conversation. For the purposes of my research, I define *floor* and *turn* by Edelsky's 1981 study, with floor as "the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space" in a conversation and turn as an "on-record 'speaking'" that must be "both referential and functional" in its intentions furthering the conversation (Edelsky 1981, 403). The individual-led notion of the floor, its definitional history and use, and how it relates to turns and turn-taking is discussed in Section 2.1 of this thesis.

TTRPGs such as Dungeons and Dragons create a unique language environment through the mechanics and goals of the game. Individuals work creatively to tell a story together under the constraints of the rule system. While players interact with traditional chance-based game mechanics in the form of rolling dice to determine the outcomes of in-universe actions, they also hold conversation in-game by roleplaying as their characters to progress the story and outside of the fictional universe by discussing as players what actions they may wish to take next as a group. These multiple channels of communication create a complex series of interactions where collaborative practices of conversation and creativity are fore-fronted.

Additionally, one player, decided by the group before play occurs, acts as the Dungeon Master (DM). A game's DM is responsible for maintaining the fictional setting that the game takes place in, as well as every inhabitant or environmental factor the other players may encounter. This player narrates important information about the state of the fictional world, requests for certain game mechanics to be used based on a given situation, and contributes to both levels of conversation (in-universe and out-of-universe) by clarifying rules to players or portraying non-player characters (NPCs) that exist in the fictional world for players to interact with. Everyone else plays as one character in this shared world. As such, the DM is the adjudicator of all the gameplay outcomes and the provider of official information about the fictional world (Wyatt et al. 2014). They are the one most responsible for keeping the flow of the game and the conversation going by requesting actions from players based on what they would like to accomplish in character. Given the DM's position of power, I posit that floor organization in D&D is similar to the floor organization of classrooms where a teacher is the most frequent initiator of attention-held topics and so most often the floor-holder.

With this comparison, it is important to note the less extreme power dynamics that exist between people playing D&D for entertainment purposes versus the dynamic between teachers and students where more constraints often impact the relationship (such as: student attendance requirements, regimented classroom rules, and age or experience gaps) (Philips 1983). Due to this difference, even without considering the DM's control over the floor, there are more observed instances of collaboratively held floor behaviors and collaborative creative practices present among those of the group participating as players than among those students in a classroom. As students face more strict environmental constraints to their conversational participation, and the less formal, entertainment-focused setting of D&D allows for regular use

of perceivably "disruptive" styles of communication. There are also likely to be more collaborative behaviors occurring between players and the DM since the power dynamics of players and DM are inherently similar to that of students and a teacher in a classroom, but the structure and social expectations of talk are much different in a gaming environment.

In order to investigate how the conversational environment of D&D affects the organization of floor-holding, I observed and recorded a group of 5 (4 players and 1 DM) playing the game throughout one full session. After recording about 4 hours of conversation in these sessions, I proceeded to organize and analyze it following closely with Edelsky's methodology. In Sections 2 and 3 I contextualize my research through literature review and expand upon the methods used to conduct this study. Then, in Section 4 I present my findings on the observed characteristics of floor organizing behavior in group D&D play and discuss how these findings relate to characteristics found in classroom environments.

2   Background

In this section, I contextualize my research within the scope of previous work done on conversational analysis. I focus this discussion on aspects of floor organization and turn taking, characteristics of group interaction and collaborative creativity, and additional features of tabletop gaming environments.

2.1 Floor organization and turn-taking

Floor organization and turn-taking have been extensively studied in conversational environments such as academic committee meetings and classrooms, and models for studying turn-taking have been developed based on these environments (Edelsky 1981; Philips 1983; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974).

Edelsky's 1981 article "Who Has the Floor?" begins as a sociolinguistic investigation into gender and language differences in conversational interaction. Her research quickly becomes a thorough questioning of the terms "turn" and "floor" as used in linguistic practices. The definitions that Edelsky derives from this article are the ones I will be referencing throughout the course of this paper. In order to define these terms she undergoes a process of recording, transcribing, and analyzing academic committee meetings in which she was a participant. These meetings occurred during her time as a faculty member at Arizona State University. She analyzes

approximately 7.5-8 hours of English language conversation held between 7-13 people depending on the attendance of committee members, and in one case, the presence of two guests. Beyond her definitional contributions, her other primary observation is challenging the notion that there is only one type of floor

Common ideas of the floor and what constitutes having the floor are based on a perception of conversation that operates primarily on a give-and-take structure of talk (Goffman 1981). Within this structure, participants are alternating between listening and vying for attention. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) state in their work on turn-taking and turn organization that "overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time" over the course of a conversation. While the primarily individualized structure of conversation may be true, Edelsky contests the idea that one person speaking at a time must indicate that there is only one way of holding the floor within that structure (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 699; Edelsky 1981). Instead, she observes and defines two different types of floor, one individually-held (F1) and one collaboratively-held (F2) (Edelsky 1981).

(1) **Individually-held floors** (F1): one person can be identified as the primary floor-holder or person responsible for controlling the direction of the conversation

(2) **Collaboratively-held floors** (F2): floors where no individual can be identified as the single holder of the floor, but instead the floor is being held by multiple participants at once. This can occur as perceived "free-for-alls" where lengthy fights for the floor create multiple overlapping participants speaking on separate topics. F2s more commonly occur as "on-the-same-wavelength" style floors where participants are contributing to the development of the same concept or idea at the same time and without one individual guiding the conversation more than the others (Edelsky 1981, 391).

Turning towards the classroom setting, Philips (1983) observes that teachers are consistently responsible for maintaining one end of the floor throughout academic activities and discussions (Philips 1983). This responsibility means that a teacher, in classrooms where students are exhibiting expected social behaviors and complying with this social structure, will

not often have competition for their control of the floor. However, it is worth noting that there can be a considerable variance in the behaviors of school-aged children, especially when observers in the classroom are present. These observations may not hold in a dysregulated classroom environment, but the authority of a teacher to regulate the classroom communicates an expectation that they will have control of the floor. This expectation gives a teacher in their own classroom a claim to hold the floor or retake the floor in disruptive circumstances, even when retaking the floor might not be immediate or successful. One of the primary characteristics of teacher floor control that Philips outlines is the power that they have to regulate speaking order during interactions with the whole classroom and the three formats this regulation of talk can frequently be found in.

These formats for eliciting student responses and ordering talk can be referred to as choral, in-the-round, and first-come-first-served (Philips 1983). Choral formats occur where a teacher provides the initial prompt for speech as expected but addresses the whole group of students without an establishing structure with the expectation that an answer will be given together. In-the-round formats occur where a teacher assigns a speaking order (alphabetically, by desk layout, or another metric) before collecting student answers, and everyone is expected to respond to the prompt. First-come-first-served formats are what Philips identifies to be the most common assignment of speaking order where students will somehow indicate (often by raising their hand) that they wish to speak, and the teacher will choose which students speak roughly by who raised their hand first. Based on my observations choral is the most common type of elicitation format used by the DM in Dungeons and Dragons. Rarely, first-come-first-served interactions were determined by the DM but often only as a tactic to clarify speaking order after a chaotic choral response where multiple participants responded at once and continued overlapping in their speech. One speaking-order interaction resolved by the DM will be discussed in further detail in Section 4.

2.1.1 Virtual classroom turn-taking and floor-holding behaviors

Specific characteristics of my participant group will be discussed in Section 3, but it is important to note here that the D&D session I observed and recorded took place online over a voice call. While some methods of face-to-face classroom interaction that teachers employ for ordering speakers and floor organization may still apply to the virtual classroom space, others are known

to be less effective or complicate the turn-taking process online. Bannink and Van Dam present a series of online learning interactions that showcase how transitions from face-to-face learning impacted the virtual classroom environment during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 (Bannink and Van Dam 2021).

One element of their case study investigation into characteristics of online learning as it is adapted from techniques of face-to-face classrooms presents an example of a missed bid to speak by a student. In this interaction, a student makes multiple bids to speak by raising their hand (physically on camera, as opposed to a virtual hand-raise feature) and is unsuccessful at getting a chance to speak each time. In the second attempt at speaking, the professor turns their head away from the screen. When they turn their head back, a student that previously did not have their hand up is called upon. This example highlights to Bannink and Van Dam the potentiality for "confusion or misunderstanding to arise" specifically about speaking order allocation in online classrooms (Bannink and Van Dam 2021, 11).

While this interaction could also occur in the physical classroom space, the digital space exacerbates this risk of miscommunication due to the reduced visual field and lack of same-space audio. In the physical classroom the professor would have been more likely to see the initial student attempting to speak next in their peripheral vision due to their occupying a more prominent physical space, and the addition of sound in the physical space. The directional noise associated with the student's body movement could also have aided in avoiding this missed perception. Although the digital space did not seem to greatly impact the primary focus of my investigation into floor organization, my observations of floor organization may have differed if I had been observing in a physical gaming space as opposed to a virtual one. As such, this type of investigation is worthy of repetition in observing the physical format of gameplay to compare these findings concluded from a virtual communicative environment.

2.2 Collaboration and group creativity

While current studies exist on the linguistic analysis of corrective talk or observed traits of co-creation in collaborative settings, many of these studies focus on areas of professional performance such as dance groups (Keevalik 2010), musicians (Weeks 1996; Sawyer 2003), and theater artists (Sawyer 2003). These professional performance spaces where individuals are working towards a public showcasing of their group efforts differ greatly from an environment of

personal entertainment found in the setting of a D&D group. However, there are still valuable similarities across these spaces considering how individuals work together in an environment of collaborative creativity can share methods of creating whether the work is for public enjoyment or personal. Weeks and Keevalik conduct similar investigations into the nature of correction talk across the different creative group environments of an orchestral rehearsal and a recreational dance class (Keevallik 2010; Weeks 1996). While their work is topically distinct from my own, it reflects a steady interest in interdisciplinary research on creative group dynamics from adjacent fields.

Sawyer's research focuses on defining the characteristics of collaboration in creative interaction as it occurs in improvised performance ensembles (particularly improvisational theater troupes and jazz music ensembles). He expresses how the performance of improvisation is not dedicated to making a creative product but instead "the performance is its own goal...the process is the product" (Sawyer 2003, 5). He also defines three prominent characteristics of collaborative creation as:

(3) **Improvisation**: Performers create as an ensemble, and their work and the act of creating features less rules and guidelines impacting the creation than scripted arts (scripted including musicians working from scores and dancers performing pre-choreographed materials)

(4) **Emergence**: The focus on the creative process is prioritized over the creative product. These creative works are created as they are performed. Thus, the work is more experiential and difficult to fully replicate and reproduce exactly the same from one performance to another.

(5) **Interaction**: The interactional processes that Sawyer investigates throughout the course of his book on the topic of group creativity are fore-fronted and emphasized in the acts of making the creative work.

Sawyer's sense of collaborative creativity further informs my understanding of the group dynamics present in D&D, where improvisation is an integral component of both the game mechanics and social elements of participating, and the process of storytelling created by these

structures is an emergent one where the value of entertainment gained is gained by co-creating rather than working towards a product.

2.3 The structure of D&D and talk at the table

In this section, I discuss elements of the D&D game itself to build understanding about how its mechanics work, clarify game terminology that has relevance to my data, and discuss preliminary observations of how the game can impact language use. Much of this section is composed with my personal ten-year history of the game informing my claims. With that in mind, I acknowledge that this is a highly variable setting wherein my experiences will not capture all possible forms of engagement with the creative medium of D&D. Instead, I offer up this information to provide a necessary level of familiarity with the game for those who might not have it.

D&D is played in *sessions* that can typically last anywhere from 2-6 hours. These sessions can be standalone stories, often referred to as *one-shots*, or develop into longer multi-session stories known as *campaigns*. The chance-based aspects of the game rely on rolling dice and adding numbers based on a characters' abilities (decided before the start of the game and changing/improving throughout based on their experiences in the story). The result of these rolls is used to determine the outcome. The DM is most often the person asking the players to make these rolls, but players may also request to make certain rolls depending on the in-game situation. Other aspects of the game are determined through improvised acting and roleplay together or through discussion and problem-solving by both the players and their characters. There are three primary types of gameplay that can occur during a session: roleplay, skill checks, and combat.

(6) **Roleplay**: Conversations between characters or other statements that impact the in-game social dynamics and/or environment of the story's setting. There are no specific rules or mechanics for roleplaying. Moments of roleplay often exist for the purpose of furthering relationships between characters, learning more about the world the characters exist in, or expressing a character's feelings about the ongoing events of the plot.

(7) **Skill checks**: There are 14 skills in D&D related to social/mental traits and 4 related to physical, all of which are often used to determine non-combat outcomes and intwine the chance-based game mechanics with the roleplay elements. For example, if a player is roleplaying a conversation with a local innkeeper played by the DM, and the player asks a very personal question, the DM could request that player "make a Persuasion check" to determine if and how the innkeeper responds based on how well the player rolls and how good their character is at that skill.

(8) **Combat encounters**: Combat is the most regulated form of gameplay in D&D by rules. It is turn-based (turn order decided by a roll at the start of a fight) and inspired by war strategy games like RISK or Axis and Allies (Leggett 2023). Understanding further combat mechanics is not necessary to engage with my research, as my data did not feature a combat encounter, and my focus is primarily on the dynamics created by Roleplay and Skill checks.

Another prominent structure of D&D conversation is differentiating between "in-character" and "out-of-character" talk. There are no written game mechanics prescribing how to move in between roleplaying as characters, through conversations taking place within the fictional world, and talking as players. Talk as players occurs throughout the game session and can include other discussions, digressions, and conversations not about the game, but often conversations happening as players still pertain to the actions of the world.

For example, if the characters discover during a moment of roleplay that there will be an attack on a nearby city, once the "in-character" conversation is over, the players may then discuss how they want to proceed. This planning phase of talk is "out of character" in that no one character is directly speaking to another about the scenario and having a direct, in-world impact, but players are engaging in discussions about the game that will inevitably impact further decisions their characters have to make.

The boundaries between when a player is speaking on behalf of themselves or on behalf of their character seem to be somewhat undefined. In my observations this characteristic of gameplay creates an environment where it becomes harder to distinguish how the floor is being organized and who is holding the floor when everyone at the table can be representing at least two people on two different levels of conversation at once (more for the DM). As there are multiple places in

my data where an individual appears to have the floor in character but not out of character, I opt to consider characters and players individually throughout my analysis where it is relevant to how the game's dynamic impacts floor organization among the group.

2.4 Edelsky's methodology and findings

Edelsky's work on floor organization and turn-taking behaviors is not only the basis for definition of these terms throughout my research but also serves as the foundational work I have built my methodology from. After transcribing the recorded committee meetings collected for analysis in "Who Has the Floor?", she first prepared her data by dividing the transcripts into topical and/or functional episodes. These were considered segments of talk that can be grouped together either by a shared subject matter or purpose to furthering the conversation. She also categorized conversational contributions as *turns*, *side comments*, or *encouraging remarks*. Then, she assigned functions to these contributions.

(9) **List of functions used by Edelsky**:

"informing/explaining;	soliciting response;
giving positive or negative opinion;	criticizing;
praising;	reporting;
arguing or disagreeing;	joking/teasing;
agreeing/validating;	complying/acknowledging;
warning/announcing;	analyzing/interpreting;
chiming in/hitching on;	complaining;
suggesting;	summarizing;
initiating a topic;	offering;
apologizing;	ritual politeness or greeting"
(Edelsky 1981, 409–10)	

Finally, she separated the episodes into F1's (individually-held floors) and F2's (collaboratively-held floors) and eliminated "a very small number of uncategorized episodes" from further discussion (Edelsky 1981, 410). Since her investigation was primarily on floor

types, she then hypothesized 15 "variables that might be characteristic of the two types of floors in varying proportions rather than in all-or-nothing terms" and performed counts of her categorized data to see where these characteristics appeared in what coded contexts (Edelsky 1981, 410).

2.4.1 Edelsky's results

Edelsky observed that F1s occur with more frequency than F2s both in overall counted instances and in minutes spent with each type. She categorized a total number of 192 F1s compared to 96 F2s and noted that in any given meeting there were 5 to 14 times the number of minutes dedicated to F1s over F2s (Edelsky 1981). The distribution of assigned variables did indicate a functional difference between F1s and F2s, as there were a variety of functions that predominated each floor type: *reporting*, *soliciting response*, and *validating/agreeing* in F1s and *joking*, *hitching on/chiming* in for F2s (Edelsky 1981). Edelsky also notes that this distinction is not simply between meeting talk and other conversations occurring since both F1s and F2s occur in each context. The two floor types were further characterized as follows:

(10) **F1s**: more pauses and non-turn utterances than in F2s (likely due to the fact that more participants were free to make these side comments than in F2s), fewer overlapping turns and self-stopped utterances by participants than in F2s

(11) **F2s**: more deeply overlapping turns than in F1s (indicates less of a concern for interruption than in F1s), question/answer sequences often opened F2s (Edelsky's impression of this being that it seemed as though many felt they could answer and attempted to)

After an overview of floor types from her observations, Edelsky returns to her original intent of investigating gender differences in floor holding behaviors. She found that men talked the most and for the longest in F1s, but they spoke considerably less in F2 environments and in some meetings less than women. These findings furthered support for fundamental differences in the two floor types by the fact that women in F2s consistently used certain functions (*joking, arguing, directing, and soliciting responses*) more than in F1 environments (Edelsky 1981). This suggests that the difference between each floor type was felt by participants given that

participants were consistently adjusting their speaking style in line with both gendered factors associated with each floor type and the general functional style of each floor type.

3   Methodology

In this section, I will discuss my data collection, cleaning, and analysis process.

3.1 Participant background

All discussion of my participants, including names of both players and characters, as well as place names in and outside of the game, will be anonymized for the sake of participant privacy. At times, words within an utterance or exchange may be omitted or altered to respect this if that would reveal identifiable information (and it would not change the overall meaning of the phrase to do so).

The participant group has played consistently in the same campaign since January 2023, around ten months at the time of recording. I only knew one participant prior to our recording who responded to a public call for groups interested in being a part of my research. After explaining what my research entailed and the extent of what my involvement would look like during their session, I acquired participant consent and gathered more information about each of them and the format of their game. They play online using the voice calling feature of the messaging application Discord, and their sessions tend to be 2-4 hours long. The group consists of five members, four players and one DM, whose ages range between 19-24. Most participants reported experience with multiple languages, either through upbringing or learning in classroom settings, and English is the shared language which the game was conducted in.

Participants also shared with me their history and experience playing D&D so that I had a better understanding of their familiarity with the game ahead of my research. This was also highly variable, but everyone involved had been playing the game with some frequency for at least one year at the time of recording. All five group members had DM'd at least a one shot which can indicate a different knowledge of the ruleset as opposed to a participant who had only ever played (of which there were none). No one was absent during the session that I recorded, but one player did communicate primarily through the chat function of Discord. This multimodal method of communication did not cause any significant changes to the overall flow of the conversation.

3.2 Recording the session and data preparation

Recording occurred on October 21st, 2023 from roughly 7:00PM-11:00PM. After reintroducing myself, my research, and reiterating participant consent beyond the previously established written communication, I used Audacity to record audio from Discord. I remained muted with my camera off and present the entire session to observe, take notes, and ensure that recording was still operating as planned throughout the night.

As the digital format allowed me to observe somewhat less intrusively than may have occurred at a physical table, my presence at the session did not seem to affect the overall pacing of the gameplay. There were, however, a few utterances that were cut short due to a reminder that I was there and a desire to return attention to the game. I do not consider these moments disruptive to the overall session, as there were also pieces of tangential conversation that were similarly cut short without acknowledging me but out of a similar desire to refocus attention to the ongoing gameplay.

To prepare my data for analysis, I began with a first-round categorization of the audio file into floor types, making note of functional content but not officially tagging the episodes with functions during this period of time. As I was mostly concerned with the frequency count of different floor types to test how often the DM held the floor throughout the session, I was less concerned with acquiring an in depth functional coding during this first parse of the data than Edelsky was. However, I did extensively note the general topical content of each floor segment to help with the functional coding process later. The excerpted transcripts presented in Section 4, follow Edelsky's method of formatting where the floor-holding speaker's words are placed in the center of the page with other speaker contributions surrounding. By prioritizing the placement of the floor-holding speaker to the center of the page, it is easier to see the development of the conversation around that speaker's control of the floor than in traditional down-the-page transcription practices. For collaboratively-held floors, the first speaker to talk is centered or indented, but this does not indicate control of the floor.

After my first parse of the recording, I returned to any segment marked as questionable and on further listens either clarified the floor type, determined that it was actually not a floor-holding series of talk, or solidified it as an outlier wherein I could not determine whether the floor was singly- or collaboratively- constructed. Assigning functions to each floor holding

segment involved a process of determining the overall intention of the speaker holding the floor in an F1 and assessing the goals of F2 collaborations. This judgement was never made in isolated, phrasal, or even single-sentence lengths of talk but instead relied majorly on the series of replies given by those active participants in the conversation to determine. While I was initially concerned about my lack of prior knowledge of the campaign and how that may affect my ability to interface with the data I collected, I found that my role as observer actively throughout the initial session, rather than only through the transcript, and my prior knowledge of the game as a whole made the contents of the session easy to follow in such a way that did not seem to impact my ability to make functional judgements.

Accepting that there is a general understanding among participants about the intended meaning of the speaker's utterance during the flow of exchanges in a conversation, the response to that utterance conveys some information about its initial content and intention (Goffman 1976). These participant responses should then allow for some clarity of the intention to occur for someone not directly involved in the conversation but present for it. I could have at any given point joined in the conversation would it have been socially acceptable for me to do so from a base point of understanding the exchanges going on around me, and so feel confident providing functional judgements on the exchanges from this session. Although I was not a traditional participant in the conversation, the small size of the group, and the semi-structured environment of gameplay confined to one session in the overall campaign meant that there was a limited use of functions throughout. As such, it did not prove especially difficult to determine what a speaker's utterance in their time holding the floor was accomplishing in the overarching conversation.

4   Results & Discussion

In this section, I summarize and discuss my results, first through the overall types of each floor counted in my data, as well as the average length of floor-holding segments of talk broken down by participant role as DM, player, or respective character of each. Then I discuss collaborative qualities of conversational interaction in the observed session before finally turning attention towards classroom comparisons.

4.1 Floor type frequency, length, and holders

As expected in accordance with the commonly observed distribution of floor types (Edelsky 1981; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; Philips 1983), individually-developed floors (F1s) greatly outnumbered collaboratively-developed floors (F2s) throughout the game session. Over the course of 3 hours and 45 minutes of recorded conversation, I identified 155 F1s and 56 F2s. Not only were F1s the overall more common floor type, but they also accounted for significantly more speaking time than F2s.

Floor Type	Average Duration (sec)	Total Number Identified
F1 (individually-developed)	66.64	155
F2 (collaboratively-developed)	57.03	56

Table 1. Frequency and length of floor types

Lengths of time where the floor was held primarily by one person lasted on average about ten seconds longer than collaborative floors. In the broader context of the session time conversation occurred in F1 formats for a total of 2 hours 40 minutes. The length of F1s in this context can likely be attributed to a combination of the following factors. The social convention of conversation in D&D is shaped around continuation of the story (Breland 2022). Assuming that participants in any given conversation are aiming to be cooperative (Grice 2008), following this principle in D&D is not simply about staying on topic until the subject matter has reached a conclusion or is otherwise interrupted to move the conversation in another direction. It also matters significantly that the topics are concluded or moved on from in such a way that satisfies the needs of the game (not just the needs of the group members).

While in traditional conversational environments there are risks of upsetting or offending other conversational participants by terminating topics of conversation via interruption (Culpeper 2011) or ignoring certain bids for the floor (Bannink and Van Dam 2021), those risks exist with a different weight of disruption in D&D because the story, in a setting where furthering the story in each other's company is one of the primary goals, relies on topic shifts that are, if not sensible to the progression of the session, at least agreeable to those present and participating. Unsatisfying, incomplete, or rude conversational interactions not only have social consequences but also can jeopardize the group's construction of the narrative, causing both social unrest and ceasing a crucial part of the game's mechanics that are reliant on the conversational elements to develop further.

Whereas in other board games, conversation can be more constrained in topical and functional relevance surrounding the actions of the game (Hofstetter 2021), the conversations held at the D&D table are a function of the gameplay itself and work to craft the scenarios that players face. For one exchange to end, a narrative decision has to be made in game even if the initial scenario is not fully resolved. It becomes harder to drop a portion of the conversation when it is the substance of the game and one of the primary methods for continuing the action for everyone involved. Based on my observations, there is a greater sense of attention and respect when in-character exchanges are occurring, meaning that in-character floor holdings perceivably have stronger holds over the floor than non-in-character floor holdings.

To accommodate the fact that topical shifts mid-conversation are more difficult to achieve due to the agreement of all members in the game to participate in a narratively-focused activity, there appears to be caution from participants around taking the floor from someone during narrative-driven F1s, leading to longer pauses in between turns or takings of the floor. This leads to long uninterrupted segments of talk of characters speaking in lengthy speeches that have monologue-like dramatic qualities.

When broken down by specific role of the floor holder, including a distinction between when a Player/DM held the floor and when a character, either portrayed by the DM (NPC) or a player (PC), this observed narrative respect is especially notable in the average length of PC and NPC segments of holding the floor. Players holding the floor in game as their characters did so for 11.62 seconds longer on average than they did holding the floor as themselves. Shorter out of character floor-holdings coupled with the difference in length of floor holding between player and character-held floors affirm the notion that narratively immersed or otherwise highly game-relevant segments of talk hold more attention, suffer less interruptions, and overall possess more of a right to take or continue holding the floor among participants than other roles or types of conversational segments.

Floor Holder	Total Duration (sec)	Avg. Duration (sec)	Total Floor Holdings

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DM	2300.4	67.66	34
NPC	1693.18	76.96	22
PC	3086.09	64.29	48
Player	2685.92	52.67	51
None (F2)	3193.84	57.03	56

Table 2. Results by individual floor holder

With four active conversational participants, the DM is outnumbered 3-1 and held the floor 31% of the time. Two players held the floor 21% of the time each, and another player held the floor 3% of the time. This session was highly thematically relevant to the PCs who held the floor most of the time, so their increased participation is to be expected based on their characters needing to be more involved to deal with the direct narrative circumstances being established.

The DM held the floor more than any one individual participating in the game by about 20 minutes, which is less than expected if a significant amount of authority is given to them over the control of the conversational floor itself. While there was a noticeable difference in how long the DM controlled the floor compared to the next-most speaker, 20 additional minutes in a conversation-based game where length of interaction time can vary significantly from session to session is not enough to firmly establish that the DM has a level of authority that constitutes consistently upholding one end of the floor as in Philips' observations about teachers (Philips 1983). However, this 20 minute difference does contribute to evidence of the DM's increased right to the floor and unique conversational presence at the table.

Further examining the length of floor-holding shows that the average length of a player's floor holding was 52.67 seconds, whereas the average length of the DM's floor holding was 67.66 seconds. Compared to how often the DM held the floor, this difference in average floor length denotes a different quality of reception when the DM is speaking. While interruptions seemed less common in the environment of gameplay, as opposed to the environments right before and after the session where the conversation was casual social catch-up and included much more rampant talking over each other, they seemed even less common when the DM held the floor. Lack of interruption led to longer sections of talk more often during these moments where the DM controlled the flow of conversation.

This type of attention-giving to the DM is also to be expected when considering how the DM controls the flow of information given to the players that authorizes the player group to make further game-based decisions. Sometimes the DM needs the floor for longer periods of time to

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provide exposition and establish the circumstances of a narrative scenario or scene. This means that in order for the game to continue moving along productively and in line with the goals of the overarching conversation, players must cede the floor to the DM for longer uninterrupted periods of time. Even if this does not indicate that the DM sustains the floor for a longer total duration than the players as a whole, it does indicate a difference in authority to hold the floor by receiving more undivided attention and less contested floor-holdings.

More notable is the attention given to NPCs when present in the game. About a quarter of this session was spent meeting and interacting with one very important character portrayed by the DM. No other NPCs held the floor during this session, and NPCs proved to be the longest floor-holders by a fairly significant margin, over 20 seconds longer than the average player time holding the floor. This amount of time on average dedicated to NPC-control of the floor indicates not only that narrative-floor holdings are stronger than non-narrative floor holdings, but in-character DM floor-holdings exist at the top of a certain hierarchy of control over the floor.

Besides the observed authoritative nature of the DM's NPC portrayal, there is also sense of urgency when players are interacting with NPCs that contributes to an NPC's stronger hold over the floor. This interaction is a primary way for players to gain actionable information, and there is no guarantee of presence with NPCs like there is with PCs. Thus, when an NPC arrives, especially an important one, or an NPC is sought out and successfully met with, no one knows when the next chance to speak to this character will occur. Since this character can provide crucial information to the group with which they can make narrative decisions based on, it follows that an NPC will have more respected control over the floor when they are active in the conversation.

4.2 Prevalence of F2s and collaborative qualities of game-related-talk
F2s accounted for about a quarter of total speaking time where a floor type could be identified and were on average the shortest floor-holding segments of talk (when considering PC/player combined, second shortest after players holding the floor in F1s). In attempts to learn more about the context wherein F2s occurred throughout the game and if this occurrence had anything to do with the role of the speaker preceding an F2, each F2 was counted according to the role that last held the floor before the F2 began. For F2s that were preceded by another F2, I counted the

previous F1, as the goal was to gain a better sense of who last individually held the floor before the conversational structure shifted to that of a collaboratively held floor.

Floor Holder	# Times Preceding F2
DM	10
NPC	7
PC	16
Player	22

Table 3. Number of times a floor holder preceded an F2

The players or their characters preceded F2 floors just over double the number of times the DM did. While this is likely attributed to the fact that the players outnumber the DM, it could also indicate a tendency for players to initiate F2s more frequently than the DM. From my observations, these collaborative floors are regularly developed after a pause in the DM's turn, usually when she was looking for information elsewhere to answer a question or further develop the scene at hand, wherein there is an opening and chance for comment. Sometimes these comments were disregarded or developed into taking the floor and developing an F1, but often, especially when the comments were comedic in nature, they would develop into an F2 until the conversation regulated back to an F1 structure. Collaborative floors also occur regularly after PC/player-player exchanges, and notably not commonly after interactions with the DM.

This suggests subtly different interactional qualities occurring between players as a group than what is established between players and the DM. Two possible reasons for this are that the players are used to existing within a group both inside and outside of the game that holds a similar positionality. As the acting narrative force representing all NPC characters and the general environment of the world around them, the DM does not have one single consistently present and active avatar to interface with like the rest of the players do. Players are also incentivized in a game-mechanical capacity to help problem-solve the current issues of the in-world scenario, or for the enjoyment of roleplay and developing further relationships among the in-game group to regularly interact with one another and maintain an in-character group dynamic. While these qualities do not socially alienate the DM within the space, they do further establish the separate functionalities of each role that impact how the conversation flows between them.

Whether or not players are more likely to begin development of F2s than the DM is, the contexts wherein F2s are regularly developed showcase how collaborative creativity is encouraged and developed among the player-group. As the gameplay of D&D relies on improvisation to further the narrative and is emergent in nature by creating a non-replicable product in the experience of play, it is not surprising that the interactional qualities of the player-group mimic those often found in improvisational creative groups. One way this type of group interaction is characterized is through examining the goals of emergent performance. Given that emergent performances differ from product creativity, the focus of emergent environments shift away from "what" product is created and to "how" the performance is created – the process.

In this process the group as a unit can participate in either problem-solving or problem-finding creativity, where problem-solving focuses one specific goal that the group already has in mind and problem-finding occurs when the group has no singular isolated goal to work from and must instead figure this out together (Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer 1995, 169). Most improvisational groups are reliant on problem-finding skills as the primary mode of the creation process for their performances. However, improvised theater groups employ both in the creation of their shows by problem-finding first to set up the narrative structure of their performance and creating an environment where they can then problem-solve in character within the world that has emerged from their creative process (Sawyer 2003).

Similarly, players in a D&D group are expected to engage in both problem-solving and problem-finding behaviors together to continue the game. In the structure of gameplay, players are often presented with gaps of in-game time where, with the current information they have acquired in character, there is no one singular goal to tend to, and together they must put in work to seek out problems. The largest difference is rooted in the presence and role of the DM. Instead of a completely homogenous group where everyone has access to the same amount of information about the situation during problem-finding creativity, the DM is purposefully more knowledgeable about all aspects of the world and plot to help develop scenarios for the players to interact with. Still, the problem-finding creativity of D&D retains its collaborative qualities due to the fact that players regularly contribute to the development of how exactly problems will manifest and play out within the fictional world. The DM can prepare elements of a problem ahead of time in their mind, but player characters are the individuals navigating the fictional world and can, as in traditional improvised environments, introduce a variety of new variables

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via seeking out places or people the DM did not prepare for or attempting to conduct any actions that the DM did not anticipate.

One interactive quality of conversation produced specifically by this dynamic of collaboration between players and the DM, with the DM retaining a distinctive position holding more knowledge than the rest of the group, is how players ask questions about the campaign's lore. Rarely in my observations do the players address questions about the lore to each other, or to anyone specifically, even in the more chaotic conversational progression of an F2. Instead, it is far more common for a player to pose a question openly "to the group" and for the DM to join into the exchange to answer it or correct information, even if the DM was not previously a part of that spoken exchange. While players also often answer other player questions where they know the lore, or in the case that the DM is busy either tending to another player or preparing for the next interaction in the session, there is a general sense of waiting for DM affirmation on that information or always opening a response up to possible correction by the DM. The accepted understanding is that at any given point the DM may speak up to respond to these general questions, or even interrupt other discussions in or out of character to correct information stated by the players.

Within the bounds and understanding of group creative practices, such as the balance of problem-finding and problem-solving which is partially managed by the DM, a separate communicational dynamic is formed where the group of players appear more likely to spin off topic or begin these F2 styles of exchange. Oftentimes these F2 exchanges among players are specifically caused by the DM's absence or because her attention is focused elsewhere. I will return to this in Section 4.3 when discussing classroom comparisons. The prevalence of players initiating F2s appears to be supported by the fact that the DM is outnumbered by the players, not discounted by it as a byproduct of players being a majority of voices in the game but as a facet of the role itself in an encouragement of in-character camaraderie and out of functional necessity to problem-solve together aside from DM input. The DM's role is more relegated towards that of being "on deck" or "in waiting" to begin exchanges that are more commonly associated with F1s. In their position, while the DM can and does engage with F2s, especially humorous ones, they are functionally more prone to engaging in one-on-one interactions that lead to the formation of an F1 format. In (12)[2] the players develop a humorous F2. Participants talk over

each other to collaboratively build out this joking discussion, and the DM participates briefly.

(12) **P2**: but now it feels sad and alone –

it's so–   **DM**: Well, *Ham* is with you–

P2: Oh, he's out!   **P3**: Oh, shit!

                                       P4: [laughter]   **P1**: Oh no, that's the

                                       No, that might be worse   worst for meditation

P2: Oh, well, I was–   though, you're trying

Yeah, I was gonna say   to meditate and you

that feels so uncomfortable   Yeah, staring at you,   keep opening your

                                       stares unblinking   eyes and he's just

                                                                 looking at you. He's

P2*: Thanks *Ham*.   **DM**: Yeah [laughter]   the worst.

I'm gonna lock him   **DM***: /Anytime *Sedra*/

outside my door.

Paying attention to the DM's contributions at the beginning and end of this segment of talk, (12) begins with a more isolated exchange between the DM and P2 before others join in. Leading into this moment, the session had just shifted attention to P2's character. The primary portion of this F2 where multiple overlapping speeches are contributing to this brief joke is not fully engaged with by the DM until the end when the DM jokingly assumes the role of the character that the group is referencing. The chaotic exchange of the F2 has already quieted down after the players' interaction and with P2s in character decision. Shortly after this, P2 takes the

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[2] in the following transcript excerpts *denotes in character speech, *italicized* words are referring to places or characters in the game

floor and continues to develop this scene to find out more about their current narrative circumstance, and an extended bout of changing over F1 floor control occurs between P2 and the DM as the scene plays out. The DM's position in (12) showcases a quality of "chiming in" that is not as much a part of the cross-talk, but instead gives the impression of leading into and out of the F2 as a more isolated interaction between DM and Player, compared to the "break" in the F1 style of floor created by the players. Humor was a staple of the observed F2s throughout this session, and many of these exchanges functioned similarly.

While I utilized the same list of functions as Edelsky for coding my data, several functions appeared 5 times or fewer throughout the entire session. No functions were added, as it was not necessary to describe the goings on of the conversation. Of the floor-holding segments observed, 8 functions accounted for 81% of exchanges in the semi-structured game environment. As such, only those functions that constituted the majority of the interactions throughout the session are represented here.

Function	Total #	# During F1	# During F2
informing/explaining	35	31	4
soliciting response	33	32	1
reporting	10	10	0
joking/teasing	19	0	19
analyzing/interpreting	26	16	10
chiming in/hitching on	14	0	14
suggesting	16	14	2

Table 4. Functions by floor type

Most functions saw a rather distinctive split between those most readily used in F1s and those most readily used in F2s. *Informing/explaining* and *soliciting response* heavily favored occurrence in F1s, as did *suggesting* and *reporting*. Whereas, *joking/teasing* & *chiming/hitching on* only occurred in F2 environments. Given the observation of (5), it seems that the conversational trend during the game is to try and keep this off-topic sense of humor contained to this variety of talk in these shorter F2 bursts. As, it often seemed that once a joke was made the "dam" broke from a subset of people being involved in an isolated exchange to allowing for others to join in without the feeling of being interruptive due to the light-hearted nature of the exchange.

Not all F2s were humorous exchanges, and the most split function between F1s and F2s that I observed was found when the group performed the function of *analyzing/interpreting*. These F2s took on the characteristics of collaborative floor-holding that Edelsky describes as being "on-the-same-wavelength" where participants are not individually expressing overlapping ideas and fighting for control of the floor but instead are equally contributing to the flow of ideas piece by piece in such a way that a single floor-holder cannot be attributed to the exchange. This style of F2 appears not unlike the creative collaboration concept of "jamming" which has been utilized to describe both the flow of conversation and the flow of creative group performances trending towards a very present synergy in the group dynamic, with individuals "feeding off" each other and following each other's signals to co-create effectively and effortlessly (Coates 1997; Sawyer 2003). From the session, (13) showcases the beginning of a lengthy F2 that exhibits these characteristics.

(13)

P3: Like where do we–

Where do we want

to go first   **P2**: Well–

P3: Are we really that-

like that concerned

about the assault

on *Last Lantern City*,

I guess is the question

P2: Gimme a sec *Eadith*

said that her first stop is

going to be to inform the

Lord Tane, and I think

that's a good idea. I'd

actually like–

On the way to?

P1: Yeah, actually, we

could do a run south

to our– to the *Iron*

Garden estate, get

That locked down

right?

P1: To talk to– We'd get to

speak to the *Lord Tane* in

person for–that could be

really useful for – to us

P2: We could just use the

teleportation circle.

Players exhibit these qualities of being on the same wavelength or jamming in these non-humorous F2 segments of talk. While talking over each other they are equally and regularly contributing to the discussion about what their next in-game decision should be. Given their *analyzing/interpreting* functionality, these segments of talk occur most regularly when players are discussing and planning their next in-game moves, bringing up what lore the group knows, and trying to problem-solve utilizing the information they've been given by the DM.

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Notably, the DM is more absent for these F2 exchanges than humorous ones, except for the previously established expectation that most comments made related to the game can be responded to at any time by the DM for clarity. This is either due to the DM's preoccupation with other elements of the gameplay or of a need to leave players to their own devices to make decisions without DM influence or the possibility of revealing too much information.

There is a felt desire for independence among the players as a group during exchanges such as these that reflects the DM's separated positionality as knowledge-holder and relegates the DM to the different type of interactive quality of participation described in this paper. So, in these exchanges the DM typically only offers information when incorrect information has been offered up by a player to the rest of the group or in an instance where it seems that DM commentary would be useful or interesting to the group as a whole.

4.3 Classroom comparisons

When comparing the positions of classroom teacher and DM, the perception that the DM consistently upholds one end of the floor as expressed in Phillips' observations of classroom environments, did not entirely hold for the session I observed. It is important to reiterate that in these circumstances wherein comparisons to classroom environments are made that there are obvious differences in the power dynamics and motivations of players, students, the DM, and the classroom teacher. Keeping in mind that all players are of a comparable age group, comprised of friends and peers, and that the goals of the gaming environment are categorically different from those of the structured learning environment, the purpose of this comparison is to investigate the similarities between the group roles and structure as they pertain to floor organization and its conversational qualities.

One example where it becomes clear that the DM's quality of floor control is not all-encompassing is (14) where P1 moves from holding the floor in-character while addressing an NPC, to interrupting that NPC. This interruption is a break from in-character speech to out-of-character speech as the player calls for a roll and subsequently makes that roll before DM confirmation is acquired, as the DM does not win her bid for the floor before this exchange is resolved.

(14)   **P1***: My involvement with your faction

is less of a blind zealotry and more of

an alignment of interests in a time

when few can be trusted to do good,

and I only bare this symbol on the

Implicit assumption that what you do

is in the best interests and the wellbeing

of the many.

DM*: Absolutely–

P3: Oh no,   **P1**: Insight check, I'm–

I don't know. Um– Why   **DM**: Yeah-

Why so shady bro?

[*rolls*] twelve. That's –   **DM**: Roll uh-

just a twelve.

DM: Let's see.

P1 calls for this roll without hesitation, and there is no negative expression on behalf of the DM from this action, indicating its social acceptability in this moment. Given that this is an acceptable thing for P1 to do and say, it highlights the power dynamic in this group setting where one person is positioned in a social place of more authority and knowledge about the internal

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subject of that space. It also showcases how this power dynamic differs from the similar base positionality of teachers organizing the floor and social learning activities within their classrooms. Even though this action showcases how player's have more shared authority in this space, and the power dynamic between player and DM is lesser than may be expected in similarly constructed contexts, the DM does still have more authority toward controlling the floor by being the arbitrator of the roll's outcome. Since the player looks to the DM to provide the information gleaned from the roll, but the action of determining what roll to make becomes more of a shared power in practice, the DM still has a different amount of power and authority in this space than the players but not enough to uphold the sense that they constantly maintain one end of the floor in the same manner as Philips' classroom observations.

 While this trait of consistently maintaining the floor was not shared between DM's and teachers, there were shared traits of floor organization between the two roles. In (15) the DM allocates speaking order between the players and determines who will ask their question first.

 (15)

DM: No, *Sedra,*

P2: [laughter]	or– Jesus,	**P3**: [laughter]	**P1**: I had a question—
	Emma had a		
	question		**P1**: I also have
			a question

DM: Emma first, then Liam.

Emma, what's your question?

This conducted action is very similar to Philips' description of how teachers are responsible for equalizing the chance for students to talk so that the facilitated discussion will be productive and involved as many of them as possible. In classrooms, this commitment to observant inclusion and facilitation benefits the group in either setting by allowing for a communicative environment that respects everyone in the group's turn a talk (Philips 1983). This respect in turn allows for those in the group to learn more effectively without having to worry about fighting for the floor consistently. The role of who allocates the turns at talk is clear here, as both P1 and P2 are requesting the DM's attention, and the DM is likely the only one at the table with both the knowledge and authority to answer both of those questions effectively. This exchange highlights how the DM upholds a role of facilitator within these discussions. It also highlights a comparable relationship between the roles of DM and teacher wherein both are expected to preserve some level of order and respect in their group settings and must use similar tactics to achieve this.

Another comparable aspect of the classroom floor organization to the D&D game environment is that expressed briefly in Section 4.2 where players will regularly initiate F2 styles of communication during time periods of DM inattention. Philips observes that student interactions can happen at any time, but are centralized around transitionary periods within the classroom and most prominently found at times "wherever the teacher's attention is not focused" (Philips 1983, 90). Due to the fact that F2s are most often preceded by player contributions, and the DM is often put in a position where they are waiting to be called upon to speak as an authority on certain game information, this mimics the setup of the classroom environment.

However, this pattern of players entering into collaborative styles of floor during periods of DM inattention is not characterized as disruptive in the same way that it is in classroom settings. In the classroom, student motivations towards interacting with one another when the teacher is not focused on them often derive from a desire to speak about off-topic materials (occasionally they will interact with one another for clarity or other questions regarding the classroom content), as these transitionary moments may be the only time that two students have a chance to perform social responsibilities of catching up with one another on certain life events (Philips 1983). In a D&D game, these F2s are not escapist tactics of reaching towards a more interesting conversational topic. In fact, most of the time an F2 is initiated, even a humorous one that could be categorized as disruptive in other contexts and does disrupt the flow of the gameplay here, the

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topic of the F2 is regularly still game-relevant in some capacity. These F2 interactions between players are also often encouraged by the DM, as a key functionality of their role is to allow the players regular intervals of time where the group (without influence, but occasionally with input from the DM) are allowed to talk amongst themselves in order to decide what to do next.

Reiterating that the DM does not have the same characterized "body" of presence that is consistently there in the in-game world, there is still the felt sense that the DM is actively ready to interject at various points during the gameplay as needed. While she may not sustain the floor in a directly comparable way to what Philips describes in classroom interactions, there is certainly a notion throughout my observations that the DM not only has more authority and claim to the floor than the players do, but that there is a sustained access to the floor, even if not absolute. This is particularly notable during moments of player interaction where the DM exists in a nebulous space awaiting to be called upon or is otherwise fact-checking player information as it is discussed among themselves.

In this the DM is a consistent agent of correction and direction when it comes to the flow of conversation, and this can manifest as periods of time where they are more likely to sustain one end of the floor. This is felt too in the fact that the game simply cannot function without the presence of the DM. Players can roleplay among themselves and make a certain amount of in-game decisions on their own, but eventually and inevitably they will have to interface with the DM at a certain point in order to progress with the gameplay. This implicitly gives the DM a significant amount of authority in this conversational space, knowing that they will always be called upon again at some point in time.

In these moments of off-topic player-initiated F2s, players are as likely if not more likely to facilitate themselves to get each other back on topic than the DM is. Though the DM does still exhibit the authority to do so and refocus the group when on an F2 tangent, there are a variety of examples throughout the recorded session similar to (16) where players venture into an off topic or more chaotic F2, and then one of the players takes the responsibility of redirecting and refocusing the conversation back to the topic.

(16)

DM: Uh, you can sign up [laughter] but the *Belltower* has all the answers you can be looking for. saying.

P2*: I'm okay.
I'm okay.
I don't trust them.
Do they? Do they?
Do they have all

the answers?

P3: Wow

P1: There are zero

downsides, I'm just

DM: Do they?

DM: Well, he'll uh, he'll be with you in 2-5 business hours.

P2*: I would love to talk to the guy in charge. I would love to talk to your manager.

P1: Well, the floor manager is over in that building just

sitting on his thumbs

P2: Oh wait, [laugh], you're

The floor manager?   **P1**: No, the floor

manager, not–the

other guy, the

P2: Oh yeah, that's

true he is just twiddling   exalted one,

DM: Hey, he's doing hot   his thumbs, um, I'm okay   *Creon*.

girl shit, alright.   I'll see what answers   So twiddling

I can get [laughs]   thumbs what

[laughs] you can't

stay a hot girl and be

doing hard labor, I

mean, I'd love to see

it

P1: Anyway, sorry, I don't mean

to be pedantic and distracting.   **P2:** [laugh]

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DM: [laugh]

P1: Um, what are we, what are we doing?

In this exchange it is worth noting that the distracting player (P1) who made the offhanded comment that lead to the derailment of the conversation and the continuation of the conversation into an F2 is the one who redirected the conversation back to topic. Redirection could have been done out of a feeling of guilt (as expressed by the apology provided). Still, it shows a level of commitment and cooperation trending towards a desire to be on topic and continue playing the game or contributing to the overall goals of the original line of conversation.

Due to the recreational, casual setting, this behavior is allowed even when it's disruptive. It's an expected exchange whether it's the DM allowing for players to interact among themselves due to preoccupation or their need to problem-solve, or out of a necessity to enjoy each other's company as per the social conditions of the established environment.

5   Conclusion & Future Considerations

This thesis examined the qualities of floor organization and floor control found within the environment of a D&D game and compared these qualities of floor organization to similar structures of organizing talk and conversational authority found in the group dynamics created by teachers with their students in a classroom environment. Through this research, I established that the group dynamics of a D&D group trend towards a respect of narrative-floor holdings that allow for a stronger control of the floor where characters are controlling the flow of conversation. I also described how F2s are frequently started by players in a way that reflects how students trend towards beginning F2 style discussions during periods of time where the DM is preoccupied or distracted. This pattern of communication is encouraged in the D&D game-space, and out of a desire to contribute cooperatively to this space and the overall conversation, off-topic F2s tend to be regulated back to topical conversations by the players themselves before the DM has to intervene to regulate the discussion. Finally, I established that the DM has a

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significant amount of social and conversational authority in this setting, although their right to the floor is not necessarily felt at the same level as that of a teacher in a classroom. The DM routinely has the ability to take control of the floor or provide regular interjections that may be regarded as rude in other circumstances but are perfectly acceptable in the context of the gaming space.

The variability of the D&D experience is one of the many reasons the game has endured nearly fifty years of play. As such, these findings are derived from one type of session in a game with intensely fluctuating mechanics. While this research begins to investigate how our patterns of conversational organization change when we are engaging with semi-structured recreational activities such as tabletop roleplaying games, it does not provide a comprehensive examination of the environment of D&D, much less other games that have more and less rigid rulesets.

Outlined in Section 1, D&D mechanics can be roughly categorized into three types of gameplay. The majority of the session utilized for this research could be classified as Roleplay, with a few instances of Skill Checks being made throughout. Even so, this session featured a long amount of time where players interacted in character with a non-player character, and a long amount of time where the players interacted out of character to plan based on the information they received. This session did not feature a significant portion of time where players interacted in character with other characters. Given the lack of character-character interaction present throughout this session, it would be interesting to see how impressions of floor control shift when the DM does not have an in-world character present during character-character roleplay, and if the DM still assumes a role where they are constantly ready to react and answer questions or clarify lore, as it often felt in this session during player planning sequences of talk.

Overall, very few dice were rolled over the course of the session, and these dice-driven exchanges could provide more insight into the impact that the tabletop environment of D&D has on structuring the order and authority of talk. While Skill Checks across sessions are likely to produce similarly structured exchanges as those observed here, there is likely variability in how players request and respond to different skills being used based on how active or passive those skills might be or how much direct information the skill is likely to produce for that player to act on. Differences in skills could also impact the speaking order of participants in the D&D group based on the mechanical makeup of characters present in the group, as mechanical characterization was not something considered here.

Combat encounters are a significant portion of the game, and most characters mechanical abilities revolve around how effective they will be during combat. Combat is also conceptualized under more traditional board game mechanics, as it features allocated turn-taking, frequent dice-rolling, and resource management in a way that the rest of the game does not. With this in mind, it is worth investigating how the more structured mechanics of a combat encounter effect what has been observed about floor control here, as it could impact the overall perception of power dynamics between players and DM if the DM proves to have more consistent control of the floor in this environment than exhibited in the roleplaying portions of gameplay.

Beyond variances in the gaming environment itself, of which there are plenty to consider, and investigate the impact of, the primary concern of this thesis in tying the linguistic study of D&D into classroom structures is to consider how further the environment and space of tabletop games can be useful to educational pursuits. With an interest in gaming literacies, work is already being done to determine the educational benefits of incorporating roleplaying games into the routines of students inside and outside of the classroom. Current research suggests that roleplaying games can aide students in further developing skills of material and spatial awareness (Garcia 2020). Research also shows that roleplaying games enable students to deconstruct scenarios of social injustice and both envision and embody concepts of utopian futurism, especially when it comes to their use as a tool for performing their own marginalized identity in meaningfully hopeful fictions (Nielsen 2015; Garcia 2020; Storm and Jones 2021). Continued linguistic research into the interactional qualities of roleplaying game participants, alongside these educational research developments on similar topics, could lead to more extensive contributions toward understanding and developing teaching tools that greatly benefit how students not only learn course content, but also in the improvement of spatial awareness, and in the development of social awareness, self-perception, self-expression, and self-reflection.

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