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Ludic Taunting: Does Taunting Work Differently in Video Games?

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Abstract

Studies on taunting in video game context tend to mull over around how players taunt other players via online chat features. Studies on how taunting works in games with in-game taunt features are under investigated. Examining twenty-seven gamestory-wise and gameplay-wise games, we argue, through this sociolinguistic study, that taunting designed for game characters is better termed ludic taunting since it has different functions from that of taunting in games with online chat feature and in real life. Ludic taunting has two major functions namely narrative and mechanical. The former which refers to taunting for game story-bound purposes is classified into archetyping, cameoing, and mythopoesing. The latter, for game play-bound purposes, is classified into buffing, cosmeticizing, cueing, debuffing, hinting, and rewarding. Game designers and scholars could employ this study as a reference in designing games with in-game taunt features.

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Introduction

'Toxic', 'toxicity', and words derived from them, as found from Urban Dictionary and Merriam-Webster, are identical to gaming behaviors especially online gaming. These toxic behaviors are articulated through the use of lingual, para-lingual, and non-lingual expressions intended for, as studied by Paul (2018), abusing, offending, harassing, and even threatening other players. These toxic expressions are mechanically uttered through online chats on which the players speak or text the target players directly or through button pressing from which the controlled avatars utter the programmed toxic expressions. The former tends to disclose a freer fashion of uttering toxic expressions than the latter since the latter is programmed. One of the commonly found lingual

expressions related to the latter is taunting. From the perspectives of linguistics, these studies on taunting in video game context might fall into cyberpragmatics as studied by Balogh and Veszelszki (2020), semantics by Šimko and Bieliková (2014), sociolinguistics by Graham (2019), and ludic linguistics by Purnomo et al. (2017).

Taunting in games, as implied by Leonard (2004) and Rouse III (2004), not only revolves around player-to-player interaction but player-to-character interaction with both being done over an avatar-based computer mediated communication. The former emerges as a phenomenon due to the growing popularity of eSport while the latter has been an integral convention of game designs for game genres which emphasize on role-plays and mimicry. The phenomenon of the former has drawn several linguistic studies and those studies tend to favor the former more than the latter with the focus and emphasis over online games. Those studies mull over online lingual patterns of toxic expressions (Kwak and Blackburn, 2015), sexual harassment (Tang and Fox, 2016), taunting as gauche strategies (Patridge, 2017), and trash talk as a part of gaming experience (Pujante, 2021). Studying taunting as a part of game character design is a topic under investigated. Su and Shih (2011) studied taunts by game characters but the taunts are connected with virtual spectating – commentaries by spectators – in Capcom's *Street Fighter IV*. The gap left by these studies is the typology of taunting in games delivered prosthetically by game avatars or game characters through the control of the players.

The communication happened in games, as laid out by Purnomo et al. (2019), is called prosthetic communication, where players require the presence of an avatar or game character to relay their communication. When the players want to taunt, for instance, they are dependent on what communication mechanics the games provide through the avatars and game characters. In most Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG) and Massive Online Battle Arena (MOBA), which involve hundreds and thousands of players, conventionally players can taunt via direct chat features relayed through the avatars or the game characters they play. On the other hand, in offline games, taunting is made possible through different mechanics, the mechanics Su and Shih (2011) call as in-game taunts.

In Namco's Role-Playing Game (RPG) *Tales of Legendia*, for instance, taunting is an *arte* – spell – learned by one of the protagonists – Norma Beatty. Players have to learn the *arte* if they plan to decrease the attack strength of the foes they want to engage in a fight with. Casting the *arte*, the attack strength of the foes will be reduced and that will make the characters played will have less damages when hit. This in-game taunt treated as a spell points out that the taunt is limited only to the character – Norma Beatty – and thereby implying that the players could not channel their lingual expressions of taunting. All the players could do is to prosthetically control the character when they think they need to taunt for a strategic gaming purpose. This example also indicates that taunting in the game acts as a strategy or what Patridge (2017) calls as gauche strategy delivered in a playful or ludic fashion. The ludic fashion is seen from the fact that taunting is a skill the player has to master – a parody of what taunting is used for in a real life.

As implied by Baugh (2018), verbal and non-verbal taunts are aimed at delivering a provocation. Through this provocation, those being taunted are expected to suffer a distraction or disruption from which the taunters might exploit to achieve what they truly aim. In games categorized into what Caillois (1961) calls as *agon*, emphasizing on competitiveness, taunting is a *necessary* game mechanic for the players to exploit as a strategy to defeat the other players. Game genres with competitive values and online features like fighting games, MMORPGs, and MOBAs are the genres mostly associated with taunts in a different mechanical design. Taunting in video games is different from taunting in real life in a sense that the former tends to involve what Purnomo et al. (2017) call as ludic functions with which any game elements including taunting is treated as a game mechanic. Due to its status as a game

mechanic, taunting plays a role in influencing the gamers in winning a game or losing it.

Fighting games have more restrictive fashion of delivering taunts than MMORPGs and MOBAs. In fighting games, the taunts are expressed through button pressing to execute programmed in-game taunts performed by the game characters. Pressing particular button or combination of buttons, characters will do a pose while uttering the taunt or will do only a non-verbal taunt. On the other hand, MMORPGs and MOBAs tend to be less restrictive than fighting games due to their online nature. MMORPGs, which value social narratives, tend to be less competitive than MOBAs which are defined by their status for being an eSport. This degree of competitiveness is one of the primary factors that define the emergence of taunt. This is what Paul (2018) calls as a toxic meritocracy, where the strive for merits is achieved through toxic behaviors. In sociolinguistic perspectives, if seen from Hymes' SPEAKING formula, to achieve an end – purpose or goal – as represented through 'E', players might exploit the letter 'I' – instrumentalities – as they deem fit. This condition, in relation to taunting, implies that taunting is mechanically bound to the game system in which the game is played.

In ergodic literature perspectives, those instrumentalities hold a key role in defining what Aarseth (1997) calls as user's functions, how game elements lead to different responses from the players. That fighting games, MMORPGs, and MOBAs have different manners in delivering taunts points out that they have different user's functions. Through these differences in user's functions, ludic or playful structures of each game are designed to generate different gaming experiences. In relation to taunting, we can say that taunts might function differently since the ludic structures of each game are different. In ludological perspectives, as laid out by Frasca (2013), where all game elements including lingual expressions are all game mechanics that define a game, taunting might be considered also as a game mechanic. Since taunts are a game mechanic, they might function differently than what provocation or provoking means in the real world. Thereby, to address this issue, Purnomo et al. (2019) propose what is called prosthetic communication, which perceives game avatar or game character as the central figure in a game mediated communication – implying that what the players want to express are limited by elements that construct the avatars or the characters. To reveal how this communication works, they propose a Hymes' SPEAKING like formula called GAMING.

GAMING stands for game system, attributes, mechanics, indexicalities, narratives, and geosocial systems. Through this formula, if applied for taunting, we can comprehend how taunting is communicated. Taunting in an RPG where narrative exploration is what defines the game, taunting might function more as a part of the story. In Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*, for instance, taunting is facilitated as a playful mini game from which the players can engage as an optional quest. The taunting is a part of what is called as flyting – taunting, insulting, and mocking in a poetic and rhymical fashion. Winning the flyting, players are rewarded by in-game currency and an increase on the charisma level of the main character. This presence of flyting functions not only as a mini game but also as a storial reference. The game is set in Norse and to strengthen the Nordic nuance in the game, flyting is one of lingual traditions in Nordic culture has to be included. In the perspectives of GAMING, the use of flyting in which taunting is a part of it is a part of narratives – the 'N' – which concerns on indicating that one game mechanic like taunting might influence the flow of the narratives in its entirety. This case indicates that taunting has what Caillois (1961) calls as ludus, a structured play, and what Huizinga (2014) calls as a ludus which refers to playfulness since the taunting is structured as such to mimic a real life taunting while at the same time to induce playfulness.

Departing from these distinctive and unique traits of taunting in video games, we argue that taunting in game designs requires a more linguistic attention by offering a neologism as a start. This study aims at indicating the presence of ludic taunting and constructing a typology of functions of in-

game taunts in games which we call ludic taunting.

The theories of ergodic literature by Aarseth (1997), ludology by Frasca (2013), prosthetic communication by Purnomo et al. (2019), ludus as a structured play by Caillois (1961), lability and merriness by Huizinga (2014), and taunting by Baugh (2018) were employed as a ground basis for constructing the typology of ludic taunting. These theories were selected since they are interrelated. Their inter relation is perceivable from how each theory could address the elements of games from macro level e.g. game as a literary work to micro level e.g. taunting as a lingual activity, a game narrative, and a gameplay. The first theory, ergodic literature, was employed to address how video games have distinctive user's functions different from the other interactive media. These distinctive user's functions are further defined by ludology, a game study which perceives any elements within a game including lingual elements as a game mechanic. Since lingual elements in games are uniquely uttered by character and avatar mediated, an analysis on how the elements work in a game requires a framework of communication analysis. We used prosthetic communication formula – GAMING – to address this issue. Since taunting involves a structured play and playfulness, to address this issue, we employed game theories from Caillois and Huizinga. Employing the theories, it was expected that Baugh's taunting signified by the presence of provocation, jeering, and sneering sarcasm would be *gamingly* perceived to give a picture that taunting in games with in-game taunts work distinctively from taunting in games with direct online chat and taunting in real life.

Methodology

Data and Data Sources

This research is of sociolinguistic study with an emphasis on the taunting mediated interactions between game characters-to-game characters in a prosthetic communication context. To explain these interactions, GAMING approach was applied.

The data of this qualitative study were in the forms of verbal and non-verbal expressions. Data in verbal expressions were the utterances performed by game characters and data in non-verbal expressions comprise visual and operative data. Visual data were images and visual effects accompanying the emergence of taunting while operative data were poses and actions by the game characters. Poses were iconic character defining gestures which are commonly indicated by a short signature motion while actions were active motions. These data were taken from 16 gamestory-wise titles and 11 gameplay-wise titles:

Table 1. Data Sources

Gamestory-wise	Developers/ Publishers	Gameplay-wise	Developers/Publishers
Assassin's Creed Valhalla	Ubisoft	Blazblue Continuum Shift	Arc System Works
Dragon Age II	Bioware/Electronic Arts	Crash Team Racing	Beenox/Activision
Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age	Square Enix	Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2	Bandai Namco
Devil May Cry III: Dante's Awakening	Capcom	FIFA 22	Electronic Arts
Final Fantasy X	Square Enix	Gwent: The Witcher Card Game	Cd Projekt Red
Final Fantasy X-2	Square Enix	Mortal Kombat 11	Netherrealm/Shiver Entertainment/QLOC/Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

Gamestory-wise	Developers/ Publishers	Gameplay-wise	Developers/Publishers
Final Fantasy XII	Square Enix	Pocket Fighter	Capcom
Final Fantasy Tactics	Square Enix	Sonic All Stars Racing Transformed	Sega
Genshin Impact	Mihoyo	Street Fighter 3rd Strike	Capcom
Legend of Legaia	Prokion/Contrail	Street Fighter IV	Capcom
Red Dead Redemption	Rockstar Games	Tekken 7	Bandai Namco
Scribblenauts Unlimited	5th Cell/Nintendo/ Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment		
Suikoden II	Konami		
Tales of Legendia	Namco		
Thousand Arms	Red Entertainment/ Atlus		
Wild Arms 2nd Ignition	Media Vision/Contrail/ Sony Interactive Entertainment		

Data Analysis

Data analysis technique by Spradley (2016) was employed in this study. Four phases of analyses were taken. First was domain analysis. In this phase, the theory of taunt by Baugh (2018) was implemented to classify which expressions were categorized as taunt and which ones were not. Completed, taxonomy analysis commenced. In this second phase of analysis, taunts were analyzed based on GAMING formula by Purnomo et al. (2019), ludus by Caillois (1961), and lability and merriness by Huizinga (2014) to indicate how the verbal and non-verbal elements of the game characters influence the emergence of their taunts. Done, componential analysis took place. In this third phase, findings from taxonomy analysis were addressed by the theories of user's functions by Aarseth (1997) and ludology by Frasca (2013) to reveal how in-game taunts work as a game mechanic. In the last phase, cultural theme analysis, ludic taunting is constructed as a neologism based on the findings on componential analysis along with its function typology.

Results and Discussion

This section is divided into two sub sections. The first sub section deals with explaining what ludic taunting is and how it distinguishes itself from taunting in real world. The second sub section talks about the function typology of ludic taunting.

Ludic Taunting

We argue that taunting in games with in-game taunt features is better termed ludic taunting since taunting in such games is a game mechanic to which players could optionally or obligatorily interact and benefit from. Due to its position as a game mechanic, taunting might fall into two major functions namely narrative and mechanical with the first referring to story-wise and the latter to playing-wise. In CD Projekt Red's *Gwent: the Witcher Card Game*, an online digital card game adapted from *The Witcher* series, players can pick a leader with which the players could deliver a taunt during the card match. The taunts are intertextually linked with the narratives of the characters in their source game – *The Witcher* series. Dettlaff van der Eretein, the high vampire from *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*'s expansion, *Blood and Wine*, for example, has a verbal taunt that goes 'Your world will soon lapse into slumber as darkness descends'. This utterance is categorized into a taunt since it triggers provocation and jeering from which physical reactions from the taunted takes place. In the

context of the story, the physical reactions appear from the Duchess of Toussaint, her subjects, and Geralt of Rivia. This taunt is a reference for his action in performing the Crimson Curse with which he summoned all types of vampires to bring destruction upon the City of Beauclair. The details are as follows:

> *Detlaff: (revealing himself) I'm here.*
> *Geralt: This belong to you, maybe? (showing Detlaff's severed hand)*
> *Detlaff: It did. But you may keep it. I've a new one.*

By revealing himself, it shows that Detlaff has confidence in facing Geralt. This confidence is further emphasized by displaying his nature as a vampire that could regenerate. Displaying this regenerating ability of his, Detlaff discloses an opportunity for Geralt to scheme how to counter foes with regenerative abilities. This confidence persona is condensed through his taunt in *Gwent* through his utterance 'Well done, indeed. How I adore a challenge.' This intertextual narrative on taunting is found on six scenes of *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* and its spin off card game *Gwent.* The details could be seen from Table 2 on the appendix.

The Witcher III: Wild Hunt is the last of saga of the Witcher Geralt of Rivia. A witcher is a hunter with exceptionally monstrous power earning his life through monster hunting. The game has a sidekick card game called *Gwent* in which the world of the witchers is explored from a card narrative and gameplay perspective.

Taunts are not merely used as a cosmetic to provoke but also an intertextual narrative pointer to the source game from which the game is adapted. All the six taunts could summarize the whole narrative life of Dettlaff from being tricked by Syanna to sending Beauclair into chaos through Crimson Curse. All of these events lead him to earn the title the Beast of Beauclair.

Besides functioning in a narrative fashion, taunting in games with in-game taunts function mechanically also. In Konami's *Suikoden* series, for example, taunts play an important role in winning a one-on-one duel with in-game characters. The duel is carried out in three actions. They are attack, defense, and desperate/wild/special attack. This duel system is constructed in Rock-Paper-Scissors (RPS) fashion meaning that one action overpowers the other action. In *Suikoden* series, the RPS is carried out in attack > defense > desperate/wild/special attack > attack. The key to understand which move the opponent attempts to deliver is to imply and infer the lines the opponents say. Taunts uttered by the opponent tend to result in attack and thus, by comprehending that a line is a taunt, the player is expected to perform wild/special attack to damage the opponent.

The two examples, besides signifying how taunting in games with in-game taunts have different functions with taunting of the real world, also indicate that the taunting has a significant role in determining the flow of the play and constructing the play style of the players. Addressing the roles of taunting in the flow of the play and play style, we adopted the word 'ludic' derived from 'ludus', a structured play (Caillois, 1961). Attaching 'ludic' to 'taunting', we attempt to indicate that taunting in games with in-game taunts is structured or programmed to define the playing process – implying that ludic taunting is never a 'paidia', a spontaneous play. The spontaneity might come from the physical responses by the players in pressing the buttons to deliver a taunt but not the taunt itself.

Analyzed by GAMING, it is revealed that the structures of function of ludic taunting are different only on the attributes. Narrative functions tend to emphasize on progress – implying that taunting will disclose the possibilities for a new story to progress or that taunting plays a key role in completing a story. In Square Enix's *Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age*, for instance, players are often taunted by the enemies and they have to face the taunts to progress the story. One of the taunts is found from one of the bosses called Dora-in-Grey, a pun of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, to progress the story and reveal the mystery surrounding her. On the other hand, mechanical functions of ludic taunting tend to have an impact

attribute – meaning that the taunts play as a key role in deciding the outcome of a play e.g. battle. As aforementioned, Konami's *Suikoden* series are the example of this impact attribute. The details of GAMING analysis could be found from Table 3 in the appendix.

Ludus, as implied by Huizinga (2014), could also mean playful. Being playful requires what he calls as lability and merriness with the former referring to rule breaking and the second to laughter resulting from a competition or a contest. These two elements of playfulness are within ludic taunting. Taunting in games with in-game taunts breaks the rules of taunting. As Baugh (2018) suggests that taunting is intended to generate provocation which tends to be negative. However, provocation in ludic taunting context might end up in a positive result like the victory of the played character. Merriness also becomes a part of ludic taunting since some characters like Dan Hibiki from Capcom's *Street Fighter* series throws his taunts in a silly manner. Even his taunts, called as Legendary Taunt, work as an opener for Ultra Combo in *Street Fighter IV*.

The acts of Dan's taunts like *the legend has now begun!*, *chickening out?!*, *burn this in your memory*, and *a piece of cake* indicate that he tends to narrate his identity and archetype as a self-admiring, self-adoring, or narcissist in a comic tone. This is further strengthened by the fact that his design is a parody of the characters from rival title. As seen from the lability, taunts which are supposed to be used for provocation are used as a combo opener. This rule breaking on what taunts are ought to be indicates the presence of lability. On the other hand, hostile reactions in Dan's taunt's case is in line with what taunts generate in a real life. To complete the playfulness, merriness is delivered through Dan's silly poses and using the taunt as a strategy to lure the opponent to him and knock him down with Ultra Combo. The details on how taunts are related to lability and merriness could be seen from Table 4 in the appendix.

The Functions of Ludic Taunting

As mentioned on the explanation about ludic taunting, there are two major functions of taunting in games with in-game taunts features namely narrative and mechanical. each function has a sub function with narrative functions having three sub functions and mechanical having seven. Three sub functions of narratives comprise archetyping, cameoing, and mythopoesing while seven sub functions of mechanics consist of buffing, debuffing, cosmeticizing, hinting, provoking, and rewarding.

Archetyping aims at narrative identity establishment and narrative alignment, cameoing at intertextual referencing, mythopoesing at story world construction. The presence of these sub functions points out that taunting is employed as a narrative device – further implying that the creation of taunting in game context takes a literary consideration. Since games are not only about narratives or stories, but also gameplay or mechanics, taunting in games addresses this trait also. Buffing aims at inflicting positive status for the taunter, cosmeticizing at generating alternative visual and catchphrasing purposes, cueing at indicating that a boss battle and a powerful attack from the enemy will commence, debuffing at inflicting negative status for the tauntee, hinting at indicating a clue to solve an in-game challenge, and rewarding at acquiring in-game rewards.

The sub functions of narrative functions tend to circumnavigate around story-bound purposes while mechanical functions tend to revolve around strategizing purposes. Each sub function has a tendency to be delivered in verbal in combination with the non-verbal of poses and actions.

As laid out by Baugh (2018), taunting is predominantly delivered verbally through jeering and sneering sarcasm. Sarcasm tends to possibly appear on any sub functions of taunts while jeering dominantly appears on mechanical sub functions. That jeering tends to be mechanical is understandable from the fact that buffing, debuffing, cosmeticizing and hinting focus mainly on taunt as a skill. On the other hand, narrative sub functions tend to be more varied than those of mechanical sub functions in delivering the taunts non-verbally. This condition occurs due to the

storial nature of narrative which tends to have interpretive and explorative user's function – meaning that any actions are possibly executed in responding to the game narratives. On the other hand, mechanical sub functions tend to be configurative in nature – meaning that players could adjust their mechanical responses through e.g. button configuration or strategy configuration to acquire the desired goals. The following sub sections will detail each sub function of ludic taunting. The details of the lingual and nonlingual expressions of taunting could be seen from Table 5 in the appendix.

Archetyping

Each character in video games, just like characters in the other literary work types, is archetyped. The difference lies on the 'mechanical' archetype, where each character has distinctive movements that signify and define them. Taunting in games with in-game taunt features might function as an archetype indicator for the taunter. The following example from Beenox and Sony Interactive Entertainment's *Crash Team Racing* might help comprehend the statement.

> *Doctor Neo Cortex: The trophy's mine! Outta my way!*
> *Komodo Joe: Ssssucker! Ssssuccess! Sssheheheehehe!*
> *Dingodile: I'll fry youse!*

The taunts narratively reflect and strengthen the archetypes and the traits. Doctor Neo Cortex, the main antagonist of the series, is archetyped as a creator which highlights his being a 'doctor' or mad scientist and a ruler which always attempts to rule over anything. His self-centric taunts reflect this archetype. In Komodo Joe's case, his magician archetype, an archetype to indicate cunningness, is reflected from his hissing sound uttered in sarcastic expressions. Dingodile's outlaw, an archetype which indicates rebellious nature, is expressed in threatening tone through the word 'fry'. The details of how taunts work regarding with the archetypes of the taunter could be seen from Table 6 in the appendix.

Archetypes in games are not designed for storial aspect only but also mechanical or playing elements. In RPGs, for example, players can play as a knight who mostly wields two-handed weapons with which he uses for a melee combat or a mage who wields staffs to cast magic for a ranged combat, or any other character classes with distinctive mechanical designs. In the context of taunting, some games use taunting to define the character classes. One of the games is Square Enix's *Final Fantasy X-2*. The followings are the examples from three out of seventeen character classes along with their taunts:

> *Yuna (songstress): Might as well have some fun!*
> *Rikku (songstress): Welcome to your doom starring me!*
> *Paine (songstress): I guess we can win this way too.*

Songstress is a character class which uses songs and dances as a fighting ability. To emphasize these 'entertaining' fighting abilities, their taunting is also designed to reflect these abilities. Thus, the characters are equipped with lingual expressions like 'might as well have some fun', 'starring me', and 'win it this way too'. This character-taunting expression synchronization is also found from the other character classes like Gun Mage and Berserker. Gun Mages uses guns to project magic and Berserkers use their ridiculously powerful strength to physically brutalize their foes. Gun related lingual expressions like 'my gun cries out', 'I got a bullet for every fiend', and 'time for a fiend hunt' are uttered by Yuna, Rikku, and Paine respectively when they transform into Gun Mages. On the other hand, lingual expressions indicating physical prowess like 'Sometimes you just have to hack your way through!', 'fight me or better yet let me fight you', and 'if you're gonna bring it, bring it.' are the taunting expressed by Yuna, Rikku, and Paine.

Cameoing

Taunts in games with in-game taunts might work intertextually by referring to the other games through a character or a signature action reference. The function of cameoing tends to be comedic in nature. In Capcom's *Pocket Fighter*, for example, where characters from various fighting games

produced by Capcom are reanimated in a comedic *chibi* – small sized body with a rather big head – and crossover-ed, cameoing is one of the flavors added. This cameoing also appears on taunting. In one of Dan Hibiki's taunts, he dressed himself in an Elvis Presley-*esque* style while shouting 'Oh Yeah!' at the players. This comedic cameoing strengthens the hilarious narrative of Dan who always shows himself up in a flashy way – just like Elvis. The fact that the one he taunts is not the opponent but the player indicates the use of breaking the fourth wall formula, one of narrative devices in game to trigger laughter.

Cameoing is also delivered through mimicking signature actions from the characters of the other game titles. In Square Enix's *Final Fantasy Tactics*, for example, has a memorable scene where Ramza and Delita, the main characters of the game, grass whistle to reminisce their past. Interestingly this scene is somehow parodied in Atlus' *Thousand Arms* through taunting which ends in a positive narrative response.

Palma: Can you make a grass whistle?
Meis: a. Of course! Check it out!
b. Nah, that's for kids!

Thousand Arms is an RPG with dating simulation feature, in which the players could interact with female characters and flirt them to make them fall in love with Meis, the played character. Each female character has a distinctive personality. The example has Palma, a priestess who concerns on hygiene and sanitary. Thus, the player has to select an answer which indicates that Meis loves cleanliness. The correct answer for the case above is b – 'nah, that's for kids' – since grass is dirty. Selecting 'b' will make Palma respond 'I'm glad to hear that. Nobody in their right mind would do something unsanitary' and increase her love gauge. Meis' b choice and Palma's response are taunts that seemingly parodize Ramza and Delita's grass whistle in an intertextual fashion.

Signature action cameoing might metacognitively leave what Hocking (2007) calls as ludonarrative dissonance, where the narratives told through game story are in conflict with the narratives told through game play. In Electronic Arts' *FIFA 22*, any player can do any goal celebrations through button pressing or sequencing actions after the players score a goal. Some goal celebrations are iconic and taken from real life goal celebrations. One of the iconic celebrations is Ronaldo's called 'sii' celebration, where he would pirouette mid-air and shouting 'sii' which means 'yeah' after landing on the ground. Any players in *FIFA 22* could do this as long as they input the correct button pressing and sequencing. Since 'sii' is a part of Ronaldo's narrative, when Messi, Ronaldo's rival, performs this on the game, metacognitively dissonance occurs.

Mythopoesing

Taunting could also be a narrative device to build the game world – the mythopoesis. As mentioned in the literature review, taunting in the form of flyting constructs the Nordic world of the Vikings in Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*. Through flyting, the depiction of Viking's culture would be more realistically detailed. The example of taunting in flyting context is as follow:

Manning: Have you ever seen muscles as massive as mine?
Eivor : a. You have the form of a very large swine
b. I'm not awed by your muscles, but shocked by your pride
c. What make up in muscles, you're lacking in spine

Manning is a character proud of his muscular build with which he taunts Eivor, the character controlled by the player, by saying 'have you ever seen muscles as massive as mine?'. The player has to respond this taunt by taunting back with considerations over rhyme and context. Since being muscular is not always the indicator of being brave, the best answer is choice c 'what make up in muscles, you're lacking in spine'. The word 'spine' which means 'guts', 'courage', or 'bravery' rhymes with 'mine' while 'make up' and 'muscles' rhyme and contextualize with 'muscles', 'massive', and 'mine'.

Taunting for mythopoesing in games with in-game taunts is also delivered to create a

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realistic scene. In Rockstar Games' *Red Dead Redemption*, the players could order John Marston, the main character, to taunt even Non-Playable Characters (NPCs). To enable the taunting, the players have to lower Marston's honor level. Fulfilling the condition, the players will acquire a wide variety of taunting which narratively strengthens the wild wild west cowboy world. The taunting revolves around 'death', 'fight', and 'kill'. These taunting themes are delivered from stock taunt in an action game like 'you're good as dead already', wild west cowboy defining taunt like 'you'd best shoot me now and this is over', to a hilarious taunt like 'you can shoot a fart out of your own ass'.

Buffing

Buffing refers to a mechanical device from which the players could benefit their controlled characters positive statuses e.g. power up. In Capcom's *Devil May Cry* series, performing taunting will fill the Devil Trigger gauge. Filled, Dante, the played character could transform into his demon from which is more powerful than his human form. That one of the methods of transforming into a demon form incorporate taunts points out that taunting becomes a significant game mechanic in the game. Players who do not want to do fighting or stylizing a fight or any other techniques possible can rely on taunting and thus implies that taunting here is a positive action.

Some games do not employ taunting for directly buffing the played characters – the taunting requires a strategy to execute it for the most of benefits. In Bandai Namco's *Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2*, taunt needs to be equipped and made it a tandem along with the other moves. In Bandai Namco's *Tekken 7*, Bryan Fury's taunts could deliver a significant damage to the foes if the players swiftly and accurately do a button pressing switch from taunting to moves corresponding as a follow up for the taunting. These game mechanics signify how taunting is designed as a game mechanic for the players to strategize with – a game mechanic design found from taunting mostly in mechanical functions.

Though buffing tends to be a mechanical device, in some games the mechanical devices are in tandem with narrative devices. In Capcom's *Street Fighter 3rd Strike*, for example, Necro, a character with flexible rubber like body and gruesome maniacal look and lunatic trait, taunts by jeering gibberish expressions. Executing this taunt, Necro's attack will increase in the next move. That the taunt is delivered through gibberish jeering strengthens his bizarre traits narratively. This case is also found from Mihoyo's *Genshin Impact*. Taunting in the game is aligned and synchronized with the character performing the taunting. The energetic and zealous Amber, for example, is a fire-elemental character and one of the taunting lines is 'Go! Go! Baron Bunny'. Both attributes strengthen the full of life energy Amber has.

Cosmeticizing

Taunting in games might work as a cosmetic element. Through cosmetics, the played characters could have an alternate look through visual changes. In Netherrealm's *Mortal Kombat 11*, for instance, has an equipable taunt called end of round taunts. As the name implies, the taunts are performed in the end of the fighting round. Each character has a wide variety of taunts along with their visualization. The examples from Netherrealm's *Mortal Kombat 11* are as follows:

> *Scorpion: (pointing to the enemy and drawing back the hand in fire) You will suffer!*
>
> *Sub Zero: I'll end you! (Casting shining ice energy from his hand in an upward direction)*

Mortal Kombat series are famous for its gore and brutal fighting scene. The taunts, either the verbal and non-verbal, as seen from the two iconic characters of the franchise, strengthen the gore and brutality. Though these taunts tend to be cosmetic, as seen also from the fact that to access the taunts the players have to browse the 'kosmetics' menu, their ludus could tempt the players to collect all of the taunts.

Taunting for cosmeticizing is not designed only for playable character but also non-playable characters (NPCs) like monsters in RPGs. Sony Interactive Entertainment's *Wild Arms 2nd Ignition*, for examples, have monsters that could taunt. Monsters like Dryad, Gizmo, Gremlin, and Pumpkinhead could taunt the players but the taunting either has buffing effects to the monsters or debuffing to the characters played. The facts that the taunting is not for the two functions point out that the taunting tends to be for cosmeticizing purposes.

A unique case of cosmeticizing is found from Sega's *Sonic & All Stars Racing Transformed!*. In this cross-over racing game, players have to fulfill a particular condition to unlock the taunting of each racer. This is unique in a sense that the game is intended for 10+ - meaning that the game is friendly for kids minimum at 10 year old. Explicating the taunt would be, to some extent, make the age rating indicate a discrepancy. Even though the condition is fulfilled, the taunting is still considered mild since it mostly involves funny gestures.

Cueing

Taunting might also function as an indicator that a crucial battle or usually referring to boss battle will commence. Boss battle refers to a battle in RPG genre where, as the name implies, the players have to engage in a battle against a boss, a usually powerful character the players have to defeat to resume the game narratives. This ludic taunting also functions as an indicator that the enemies especially the bosses will deliver a powerful attack. The following example from Square Enix's *Final Fantasy XII* might help clarify this statement:

Gabranth: *Hear me, Basch! Do not think killing the kingslayer will win your back your honor! When you abandoned home and kin, your name was forever stained with blood!*
Basch: *Aye, this stain is mine to bear. But I will bear it willingly, knowing that I did that I could...for hope!*
Gabranth: *Preen and strut as you like! In the end, we are the same! Blood-thirsting carrion birds, hell-bent on revenge!*

All of the lines said by Gabranth are a taunt. Narrative consistency is seen from the taunt used in the boss appearance and powerful attack scenes. Taunting through blaming for past actions is used by Gabranth on the two scenes. Interestingly Gabranth ends his line by claiming that he and Basch are the same in nature – 'blood-thirsting carrion birds, hell-bent on revenge!'. The interesting part is that this taunting is to narratively support that they are twins. This case indicates that cueing in games is constructed by concerning also on the narrative elements.

Debuffing

Taunting for debuffing is the most common game mechanics employed in RPGs. Unlike buffing which inflicts positive statuses to the played characters, debuffing inflicts negative statuses to the enemies. In RPGs like Bioware's *Dragon Age II* and Square Enix's *Final Fantasy X* and *XII*, this mechanical sub function is even identical to particular character classes – tank and warrior. These character classes use taunts to draw enemies into them – allowing the other played characters to strike the enemies that have put their focus on the tanks and warriors. Due to the nature of RPGs, laden with narratives, the taunts are designed to align with the narratives of the characters even if the taunts are non-verbally executed.

In Square Enix's *Final Fantasy X*, for example, the non-verbal taunts reflect the traits of the characters. Beckoning signs, gestures which indicate a challenge for a fight, are dominantly employed by the male characters while female characters tend to be varied. The female characters tend to explicitly align the traits with the taunts. Yuna is calm and innocent in trait and nature from which bye bye hand gesture is aligned. Rikku's rebellious traits are perfectly reflected from her butt smack taunts. Lulu's

alluring trait and appearance are synchronously reflected from her air kiss.

Hinting

As mentioned on the first part of the findings, taunting in games like Konami's *Suikoden* series might serve as a hint. Through understanding what is implied by the hinting, the players could give a correct response which might endow them gaming benefits.

In Konami's *Suikoden II*, for example, the hero has to fight a character by the name Flik in a one-on-one duel. The duel, as explained on the first section of the finding, is constructed in a RPS system – meaning that the players have to guess the correct response through comprehending the lines said by the foe. 'You dodged my sword, the kid gloves are coming off...', for example, indicates a special attack or called desperate attack. This indication is seen from the use of the word 'kid' and the clause 'gloves are coming off'. The word undermines the hero's ability while the clause which means 'to fight hard to achieve something' indicates that the following attack will not be just a plain attack. Noticing this in an allotted three second chance of decision, the players have to correctly respond it by selecting defend. The details on how hinting works in *Suikoden II* could be seen from Table 7 in the appendix.

Rewarding

Performing a taunt in games might grant the players with in-game rewards. In Arc System Works' *Blazblue Continuum Shift*, players could earn a trophy or an achievement called Taut Taunt if they play the cat-like girl Taokaka and let her do the taunts five times to the enemy. The taunt itself is a non-verbal action in the form of punching and thus, the taunt functions as a game mechanic to damage the enemy.

Game rewards are not limited to achievement or trophy. In Capcom's *Devil May Cry III*, the rewards are the taunt itself. The players will receive a 'cooler' line of taunt if their killing style improves. With D rank being the lowest and SSS being the highest, it implies that the higher the style rank is, the 'cooler' the taunts will be. The consideration of being 'cool' is that on how the taunts reflect Dante's carefree personality and rebellious youth narrative. 'Let's start the party', 'sweet, baby', and 'crazy' are SSS level taunts since they reflect Dante's personality and narrative.

What connects the first and second taunting for rewarding systems is what Aarseth (1997) calls as anamorphic ideology of influence, where the pre-requisite actions to acquire an achievement is hidden. Since the actions are hidden, the players have to interpret, explore, and configure any possible game mechanics to acquire the achievements. This condition, in the context of taunting, points out that taunting is designed to ensure replayability of the games.

Conclusion

Taunting in games with in-game taunts deserve a neologism which we called ludic taunting since it has different functions from taunting in real life and games with online chat features. 'Ludic' is used to signify the structured play and playfulness of the taunting. This signified element is embodied through two major functions of ludic taunting namely narrative and mechanical functions. The former refers to story-bound functions while the latter to playing-bound ones. Each function has sub functions with narrative functions having three and mechanical having six. The sub functions of the former are archetyping, cameoing, and mythopoesing while the latter has buffing, cosmeticizing, cueing, debuffing, hinting, and rewarding. All of these functions are what define ludic function and what differentiate it from taunting in real life and in games with online chat.

Taunting in games with in-game taunts tend to have a positive function in a sense that the players could benefit from the taunting to obtain significant experience in enjoying the games through assistances, rewards, and playful experiences. Taunting for assistances could be found from buffing, cueing, debuffing, and hinting sub functions. Taunting for rewards could be acquired from mythopoesing and rewarding. Taunting for playful experiences could be gained from

cameoing and cosmeticizing. Departing from this assumption, further research could address how lingual elements are designed as such to leave a positive impression to the sub functions of ludic taunting. Further studies could employ cyberpragmatics by Yus (2011) in addressing this issue.

Future research could also focus on taunting on casual games for educational purposes like 5th Cell's *Scribblenauts Unlimited*. In the game, players could type a noun or a noun with an adjective of any word from which the game visualize the typed words. Typing the word 'taunt' will not be visualized by the game but typing the word 'insulted', a character will appear with a boxing icon appears to indicate anger. If further experimented with 'insulting', a character will appear followed by a scene where the character is hunted by the other characters on the stage. This unique response toward insults in casual games for educational purposes could be addressed linguistically through educational linguistics.

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Appendices

Table 2. Dettlaff's Taunts in *Gwent* and Their Narrative References to *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*

Taunts	Narrative References
Well done, indeed. How I adore a challenge.	Countering Geralt of Rivia, the main character, in Beauclair when he investigates the murder of aristocrats
With each move, you make my task easier. Excellent.	Referring to his murder list to free Syanna, her lover
Your world will soon lapse into slumber as darkness descends.	Crimson Curse
Fool! You should have killed me when you had the chance.	Countering Geralt and Regis the High Vampire, Dettlaff's friend, who wants to stop him
Get on with it! Move! Now!	Countering Syanna, the one decepting Dettlaff with her fake love

Table 3. The Ludus (Structured Play) of Ludic Taunting

Prosthetic Communication	Ludus (Structured Play)	
	Narrative Functions	Mechanical Functions
Game system	Influenced	Influenced
Attributes	Progress	Impact
Mechanics	Button-Pressing	Button-Pressing
Indexicalities	Respective	Respective
Narratives	Metaleptic	Metaleptic
Geosocial system	Gnomic	Gnomic

Table 4. Lability and Merriness Analysis

Taunts	Acts	Ludus (Playfulness)			
		Lability		Merriness	
		Provocations	Hostile Reactions	Laughter	Contest
The legend has now begun!	Self-Praise	Combo Opener	Vulnerable	Pose	Strategy
Don't underestimate me!	Warning	Combo Opener	Vulnerable	Pose	Strategy
Chickening out?!	Mocking	Combo Opener	Vulnerable	Pose	Strategy
Saikyo!	Self-Praise	Combo Opener	Vulnerable	Pose	Strategy
Ohh yeah!	Interjecting	Combo Opener	Vulnerable	Pose	Strategy
Too easy!	Underestimating	Combo Opener	Vulnerable	Pose	Strategy
Burn this in your memory!	Underestimating	Combo Opener	Vulnerable	Pose	Strategy
A piece of cake!	Underestimating	Combo Opener	Vulnerable	Pose	Strategy

Table 5. Lingual and Non-Lingual Expressions of the Sub Functions of Ludic Taunting

Functions	Sub Functions	Verbals		Non-Verbals	
		Jeering	Sarcasm	Poses	Actions
Narrative	Archetyping	+/-	+/-	+/-	+
	Cameoing	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
	Mythopoesing	+/-	+/-	+/-	+
Mechanical	Buffing	+	+/-	-	+
	Cosmeticizing	+	+/-	-	+
	Cueing	+/-	+/-	-	+
	Debuffing	+	+/-	+/-	+
	Hinting	+	+/-	-	+
	Rewarding	+/-	+/-	-	+

Table 6. Archetyping Taunts in *Crash Team Racing*

Characters	**Archetypes**	**Traits**	**Taunts**
Doctor Neo Cortex	Creator/Ruler	Ambitious	The trophy's mine! Outta my way!
Komodo Joe	Magician	Cunning	Ssssucker! Ssssuccess! Sssheheheehehe!
Dingodile	Outlaw	Brutal	I'll fry youse!

Table 7. Taunting for Hinting

Character	**Attacking Taunts**	**Correct Responses**	**Defending Taunts**	**Correct Responses**	**Desperate/Special Attacking Taunts**	**Correct Responses**
Flik	Okay, let's see what you've got.	Desperate Attack	C'mon take a swing at me.	Attack	Now it's my turn. Don't faint on me.	Defend
	This is just a waste of time.		Don't get too confident or you'll get yourself killed.		You dodged my sword, the kid gloves are coming off...	
	That's how to attack. Got it?		Better be more careful. You'll get yourself hurt.		Here goes! Hope you can handle this!	