

A social semiotic approach to ludonarrative assonance in the discourse of *Metal Gear Solid V Series* and *Ghost of Tsushima*

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Abstract

Video game has been in high demand recently and the historical events as the settings of video games in Metal Gear Solid V series and Ghost of Tsushima make the story of the video games more immersive. However, how this video games story and their gameplay system interact are not addressed yet from social semiotic perspective. From this perspective, this study aims to analyze the story of two mentioned video games and how this story can be in balance with its gameplay system. This research also offers an alternative point of view of how narratology and ludology should collaborate in video game discourse. This research used social semiotic approach, applying Kress and van Leeuwen Analysis on moving images and genre analysis by Martin and Rose. The data of this research are video game narratives and gameplay system. This study used four steps: collecting, viewing and logging, taking sample, and analyzing the data in collecting and analyzing technique as an adaptation of the multimodal method from Bezemer and Jewitt. The result of this study shows that those selected video games were developed into what Ensslin stated about Mastery-Mentoring-Choice category for the protagonist. The meso-macro level of discourse in two mentioned video games allow the players to upgrade weapons and equipment without disturbing the flows of the story. In Metal Gear Solid V series, the stories flows with orientation-complication-temporary resolution pattern, and the gameplay allow players to upgrade the base because of having main mission to help other nations from colonialism. Meanwhile, in Ghost of Tsushima, the story flows with orientation-complication-resolution pattern and the gameplay allows players only to upgrade character skills because of having main mission to fight the invaders. Future scholars can address the micro-meso analysis in social semiotics and how the video game players make their choices.

Keywords: discourse; gameplay; ludonarrative; narrative; video games

INTRODUCTION

Video games sales keeps raising year by year as the statistics shown that the revenue of video game have reached 455 billion U.S. dollars only in 2024 and it

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keeps raising (Clement, 2024). It also claimed that the triple A video games are the type of video game with high demand. Triple A video game is the type of video game which is developed by mid to big size of company and its high sales. Of course, because of its budget, it produces has high definition graphics (Liang, 2022). This paper aims to address how triple A video game selected in this study: Metal Gear Solid V series (Kojima, 2014, 2015) and Ghost of Tsushima (Fox & Connell, 2020) tell their stories and how stories can interact with gameplay harmoniously. The importance of this research is to bridge the debates among scholars of video game studies.

This research is trying to offer an alternative point of view for long debates in video game analysis between narratology and ludology which is considered “never been resolved” (Arsenault, 2023). Since both point of view offer the strong philosophical foundation, this research aims to confirm how semiotics can be the alternative answer (Kokonis, 2014). The reason of selecting these video games were that they have story based on the historical events and this type of video games commonly have dense narrative (Denning, 2021). Metal Gear Solid V series took the story based on the Cold War, from 1940s to 1980s and Ghost of Tsushima’s story was based on the Mongol invasion in 1274-1281. However, this video game only takes one point in that period of events. Metal Gear Solid V series took 1980s and Ghost of Tsushima took 1274 for its story background. These video games had been conducted by researchers in video game study.

Previous study on the selected video games

One of Metal Gear Solid V series, Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, has been researched by Gandolfi and Sciannamblo (2018), Hall (2018), Hammar (2019) and Murray (2018). Each researcher has their own point of view in conducting their research. Gandolfi and Sciannamblo (2018) conducted their research to criticize the female character named Quiet which has been sexualized, meanwhile Hall (2018) has different starting point in his research since he addressed how the main enemy, Skull Face, manipulated language. This research also compared the way of Skull Face with the way of Big Brother in George Orwell story to revise language. Hammar (2019) and Murray (2018), in their separated research, criticized how this video game glorified the imperialism of United States of America because of the absence of local people and the use of modern weapons produced by United States. In recent study the research of Kurniawan (2024) and Kurniawan et al. (2024) addressed the historical representation of social actors and criticizing the colonialism of White Mamba in Angola. Although, this video game is addressed with critical point of departure, the research from Kurniawan et al. (2023) viewed the video game with positive discourse of ecological awareness. Previously, the research from Kurniawan (2020) analyzed the genre of three video games including Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain using moves structure theory. While Green (2017) focused on how post-traumatic stress disorder of the main character is represented. From these previous studies, the ludonarrative assonance is not addressed yet as the part of the main focus of this research.

Similarly, previous studies on Ghost of Tsushima has been addressed by Bolano (2024) who specifically discussed how female characters contributes to

the story and even helps the main character in winning the battle. Other research conducted by Abela and Anne (2023) observed how medieval Japan, its history, artefacts, and buildings are represented accurately to raise the value of Japanese culture and beliefs which presented by the use of this to the story and to win the battle against the Mongol invasion. The previous research from Malmquist (2022) specifically discussed how the historical representation was re-contextualized through video game. Its accuracy can help the story development and even the story can be so immersive to the players as Chun (2021) previously found from ludo-narrative point of view. From those previous studies, there are still gap in terms of how story can interact with the game system. Although this particular topic, the story and gameplay, has been discussed by Chun (2021) and also by Wildfeuer and Stamenkovic (2022), revealing how choice and limitations are compiled within the stories using perspective of genre of the text by Martin and Rose (2008) and remapping of the game network system adopting the theory of social semiotics by Caple (2013) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) have not been addressed yet.

From the theoretical perspective, video game discourse has been addressed by Ensslin (2015) who categorized video game discourse into six point of departure in terms of observation. Those criteria are games as texts, games as narrative environments, games and their language features, games and their multimodal interfaces and interaction, games in metaludic communication, and games as rhetorical constructs. From those criteria, this study took games and their multimodal interfaces and interaction. To bridge between two different point of view ludology and narrative, this study adapted social semiotic approach without ignoring the narrative aspects of video games. As Kokonis (2014) mentioned that ludology and narrative debates can be bridged using semiotic perspective.

Social semiotics approach to video game discourse

The reason of social semiotics approach is used to analyze video game discourse is that social semiotics has been widely used for multimodal data, data which do not only involve verbal data but also non-verbal data. This approach can be applied from political speeches (Taiwo & Oamen, 2018), social media post (Caple, 2019), music analysis (Cheung & Feng, 2019) and video game (Pérez-Latorre et al., 2016). Social semiotics can take any potential data which have meaning in its overall discourse because it gives the consideration to any semiotic source which has meaning potential (Andersen et al., 2015). Social semiotics was basically developed from the Halliday's perspective about language which he mentioned as only a part of semiotic sources (Halliday, 1978). From Halliday's point of view which is called systemic functional linguistics, then it developed into more expanded theory which can approach other semiotic sources other than language into consideration.

Martin (2016) mentioned that the development of systemic functional linguistics have been started from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) work related to visual grammar which used three metafunctions proposed by Halliday. These three metafunctions are the way Halliday and its tenets to view language. They are all included into language strata which include the text in context, context of situation and context of culture (Martin & Rose, 2008). The text in context

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has three key terms and they are called ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunction. Meanwhile, context of situation includes field, tenor and mode. All of those three key terms are interrelated. In understanding ideational meaning, field is important point to understand. Ideational meaning view language as the participant, the action and circumstance and field is what kind of text discussed, whether it is activity or identity oriented.

In interpersonal meaning, tenor should be taken into consideration because every words and attitudes are heavily influenced by the participants' status (Martin, 2018). In the other hand, the mode is closely related to textual meaning because mode is about how language is organized (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). From those metafunctions in language, Caple (2013) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) developed theory which can expand into the analysis of non-verbal semiotic sources as well as their interaction. Therefore, this theory is used to analyze video game because of its possibility to view multimodal data. By elaborating those previous studies and theoretical gaps, the purpose of this study is to analyze 1) how video games tell the story in terms of narrative text genre, 2) how gameplay is arranged in the network system.

METHOD

This research on video game discourse used qualitative approach. This research used digital documents (Rapley & Rees, 2018): two selected video games: Metal Gear Solid V Series and Ghost of Tsushima as the source of the data. The main data of this research were verbal and non-verbal data. The verbal data of this research were the main stories of the video games meanwhile, the non-verbal data were the movement, setting, play style, weaponry system and game purposes. The highlight and emphasize of this research were in the interaction between the verbal and non-verbal data.

Respondents

This research did not use respondent because this data was included into digital document analysis. For the next research, the data could add how respondent interact with those systems.

Instruments

This research used Bandicam™ to record the video games playing and the stories. This research also used snipping tools to capture the relevant data for the analysis. This research also used presentation graphics and word processing software.

Procedures

The research procedures were divided into four steps. These four steps were adapted from Bezemer and Jewitt (2010) The first step of the research were collecting data by using Bandicam™ to record the gameplay and the story. The step of collecting data were continued by using the snipping tools to capture the non-verbal data. The verbal data were collected using word processing software. The second step of the research were viewing and logging the data. In terms of viewing and logging the data, the researchers viewed the game recording two to three times. After the data were viewed, the researchers logged the data by

making notes in the word processing software. The third step of the data was to take the sample. Because the recordings were 32 recordings of gameplay from 13 hours of playing Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes, 286 hours playing Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, and 122 hours playing Ghost of Tsushima, this research took the sample from those 32 recordings. After that, the fourth step of this research was to analyze the data.

Data analysis

The process of data analysis were divided into two steps. First step of analyzing the data, the researchers used Martin and Rose (2008) theory in analyzing the story using the genre of the text in narrative. In the narrative text analysis, it is divided into two aspects the stages and the phase. The stage of narrative text is famously known orientation, complication, resolution and coda. However, this stage can be explained further using phase. The phase of narrative text is based on how the story develops. It has 9 phases which includes setting, description, events, effect, reaction, problem, solution, comment and reflection (Martin & Rose, 2008).

For the analysis of non-verbal data which includes movement, setting, play style, weaponry system and game purposes, this research used Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), especially the narrative representation. The narrative representation includes action and circumstance which are important to view how game system network is designed and developed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research has two focuses on the narrative text genre of two selected video games: Metal Gear Solid V Series (2015) and Ghost of Tsushima (2020) and the how gameplay system interacts with the stories of the video game which take the historical settings as the part of the story. Metal Gear Solid V Series (2015) used orientation-complication-temporary resolution pattern because the end of the stories is not in this series. Meanwhile Ghost of Tsushima (2020) used orientation-complication-resolution pattern because this video game tells the players how the story of Mongol invasion in Japan ended.

Narrative Text Genre of the Video Games

The narrative text genre analysis of video games is based on the theory of Martin and Rose (2008) theory. In this theory, narrative text is divided into three stages: orientation, complication, and resolution and for coda stage it is an optional one.

Narrative Text Genre of Metal Gear Solid V series

Metal Gear Solid V series are divided into two titles Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes and The Phantom Pain. These two video games are the prequel of the previous series Metal Gear Solid IV: The Guns of the Patriot. However, in this research, Metal Gear Solid V series are the focus of the research. Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes is the starting point of the story and the Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain is the continuation. In the figure 1 and 2, the story of two video games are explained.

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The video game story is about the main protagonist, called Snake, has a mission to rescue one of his men or armies called, Chico. Snake, Chico and other character under main protagonist is the army without nation or mercenary and the main antagonist is the secret army under CIA. Chico is a child who is the victim of the war on his homeland. He is never permitted to go to battlefield and he helped the protagonist, Snake in collecting the data about the mission and the mission location. However, this time Chico initiatives leave the mother base to rescue his friend who he is in love with, called Paz. Paz was kidnapped by the main antagonist, called Skull Face to be interrogated because Paz herself is a double agent. She works for both sides the main protagonist and the leader of Skull Face called, Cipher. Cipher is not the real name and it is an alias. Cipher himself serves under United States of America government as leader of espionage agent and Snake in the past worked for Cipher. However, because of ideological difference, Snake left United States of America and established his own army without nation, or mercenary that fight against the Cipher agenda. Cipher only mission is to destroy Snake new established organization because Snake knows too much about Cipher's operation. Cipher then, has Skull Face to play his part, but Skull Face has his own agenda which are far more dangerous from Cipher, and this has been discussed by Hall (2018).

Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes		
Orientation – at Camp Omega, Cuba		
1	setting	The two men are wearing soldier uniform and one man is wearing black suit. They are walking outside the labor camp prison located in Cuba. Those three men are entering the prison camp and they are talking with child prisoner called Chico.
2	description	One of the man wearing black suit approaches Chico to ask about the location of his headquarter. That man is called Skull Face and he gives a Walkman to Chico and in this Walkman there is a leaked voice a girl screaming.
3	reaction	Chico gives the information to Skull Face about the location of his headquarter. He gives the information because he is threatened that the girl screaming in the recording will be eliminated.
4	problem	Skull Face goes to the helicopters with his armed forces and all his armed forces are removing their XOF badges. They leaves headquarter as soon as they change their identity and helicopter label from XOF to United Nation.
Complication – at Camp Omega, Cuba		
5	setting	The main protagonist, Snake is climbing the cliff in the mission.
6	problem	Snake is given a mission to rescue Chico.
7	reaction	Snake is sneaking into the prison to rescue Chico and bring Chico to the pickup location.
8	problem	Snake received a message, Paz was also held captive in the same location but in different building. He has to rescue Paz from the prison.
9	reaction	Snake is sneaking into the main compound of headquarter to look for Paz by passing the security camera and guards.
10	problem	When he succeed to get Paz, the alarm gets off and all guards are in state of alert.
11	reaction	Snake succeeds to sneak up and brings Paz in the pickup location for helicopter to arrive.
12	problem	Snake succeeds to bring Paz back to Snake's headquarter but it is rampaged by Skull Face.
13	reaction	Snake is rescuing his men and troops to helicopter and shooting the enemies.
14	problem	Paz is known to have bomb planted in her womb and Snake and all of his men tries to take the bomb out by operating her without anesthetic.
15	reaction	Snake and his men succeed to take the bomb out of Paz womb.
16	problem 7	Paz is panic because she said that the bomb is still in her body. Paz forced to get off from the helicopter and the helicopter is crashed with other friendly helicopter.
17	effect	Snake is impacted by the explosion. The metal splinters are puncturing his face in middle of helicopter explosion.

Figure 1. The Summary of Story

in Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes Video Game
(adapted from Martin and Rose (2008))

In figure 1, the game starts with Cutscene from number 1 to 4 in orientation. So the Cutscene function in this video game is to give the important information about the mission, the location and the problem which are conveyed in form of movie (Ensslin, 2015). After the orientation conveyed in Cutscene, the game moves to complication which starts with the instruction from the narrator as the part of mentoring based on Fraiman thematic triad (Ensslin, 2018). The narrator in this video game is Miller, the character whose job is to collect information about the mission and he is the head of intelligence division in the mercenary army which Snake is joining in. In the complication part, the problem is basically conveyed by the narrator or the system which give the instruction to the players and this is a part of video game as not only a narrative but interactive narrative. In Bogost's (2010) view, it is called procedural rhetoric because he sees video game's story as a rhetoric which makes the players want to interact with the story and do the mission or actions related to the story. In genre theory proposed by Martin and Rose (2008), this may be called procedural narrative because it is the mixture between narrative and procedural text.

Instead of making the claim what is the difference between narrative and rhetoric, this paper shows that narrative text alongside with non-verbal semiotic source with every system built in the video games constructed the rhetorical alignment. Because rhetoric is no longer seen as only the product of language as Bogost (2008) referred to Burke who expanded the rhetoric to non-verbal communication. The narrative element in the video game telling the background of the story and what happened to the main character, to the character players are going to rescue in this case is Chico and Paz in this video game series make the players move to the place where Chico and Paz are being held and rescue them as in number 5-11 in complication stage. The importance of narrative with the non-visual rhetoric make the video game more compelling and persuading as what Huang and Guo (2021) research which took the case of story in branding and they investigated how anthropomorphism can induce immersion. In case of video game, those characters are non-human entity but with story, players can treat them like real human need to be rescued.

The narrative text informed the location and the mission which is Cuba is the important starting point. United States of America has long history with Cuba especially when it comes to the land Cuba lent to U.S: Guantanamo. The choice of Cuba as a setting which was based on the true historical event and this place in Cuba is the point of departure to represent United States domination and hegemony towards its neighboring country. The acquisition of land called Guantanamo bay is that United States had its interest to Cuba as a U.S. investor had sugar plantation and he needed access to Cuba for his business. Furthermore, it was also used by U.S. to supervise Cuba who had close relation to Soviet Union and until the event of 9/11 on September 2001, this Guantanamo naval base was still used to imprison the suspected people from Afghanistan (Ferrer, 2021).

Because of the use of Guantanamo naval base for imprisoning Afghanistan suspected person after 9/11, the place Afghanistan is used in the

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next series of video game. Besides, the organization called Mujahedeen also appears in the video game as the client to be helped to drive out the Soviet Union aggression to Afghanistan in 1979. Moreover, the remaining United States power helping to fight against the Soviet Union power and influence in Afghanistan, United States chose to give the support both finance and military to Mujahedeen as part of President Raegan's agenda to balance the power of Soviet Union in Middle-East (Saikal, 2010). It is similar to Angola as the choice. Angola was the witness of Cold War because the Cold War was fueled by the civil war happened in Angola (Weigert, 2011). Angola is also known as the practice of Cuban Internationalism which helped Angola to fight the Portuguese colonialism (Weigert, 2011).

The location chosen in the video game story was based on the actual historical events make the video game narrative more convincing since the players are likely to be involved in the historical timeline offered by the video game. Although it was a fictional work, the collective memory shared through historical record make the characters in the story more vivid. This what this paper observes as the rhetoric strategy of the video game to make the players keep playing as the main protagonist as if they are playing with history. In the story, players are continuing their journey from the previous series. The main character called Snake is waking up from five-year comma. Therefore, the first location to start is in hospital, in Cyprus.

Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain		Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain	
Orientation – Dekhalia Memorial Hospital, Cyprus		Complication 5 – Angola: Africa	
1	setting	17	setting
Snake is awake at the hospital with a doctor asking him about his identity.		Snake is heading to Angola and he is landing in the shallow river contaminated with oil.	
2	problem	18	problem
A mysterious woman comes to the room Snake is treated. She killed the nurse and the doctor and wants to kill Snake.		Snake must sneak and investigate the oilfield and destroy the facility and gather the information.	
Complication 1 – Dekhalia Memorial Hospital, Cyprus		19	reaction
3	events	Snake succeeds to sneak into the location and destroy the facility.	
Another patient helps snake by confronting the female assassin. This patient threw a glass of containing alcohol to the woman and the woman was attacked by the male patient but she is still able to get away.		20	problem
4	problem	In Angola, Snake also has several missions: to kidnap the Angolan linguist, to destroy the walking gear: the enemy more advanced bipedal armored vehicles, to kidnap the prisoners and informants, to rescue child soldiers, to subdue the White Mamba – the only European child leading African Child Soldiers, and to kidnap the scientist called Code Talker – a Native American scientist – who can make a virus mutation which can erase English as Lingua Franca.	
5	reaction	Snake should sneak out to hospital avoiding every mercenaries sent to the hospital.	
Snake and the male patient evading the mercenaries by crouching and crawling, and fighting back.		21	reaction
Resolution (Temporary)		Snake can do every mission successfully.	
6	solution	22	problem
Snake and male patient succeed to go out from hospital. But they are followed by "A Man of Fire" – A man who is literally in flame – riding a horse.		But in the way of the last mission in Angola, kidnapping a Native American Scientist: Code Talker, Snake should deal with another super zombies before he meets Code Talker and while he is bringing Code Talker back to the mother base.	
8	reaction	Resolution (Temporary)	
Ocelot helps Snake to escape A Man of Fire and Snake is taken to the new mother base.		23	setting
Complication 2 – Afghanistan		24	events
9	setting	Snake is heading back to the mother base with Code Talker. With Code Talker in mother base, Snake can cure all of his men from the infection because of the vocal cord parasites.	
The first mission is rescuing Miller from Soviet's army posted in Afghanistan. Snake is wearing prosthetic arm because of the injury made his hand amputated.		25	solution
10	problem	All of men were cured. Miller, Ocelot and Snake interrogates Huey about the Sahelanthropus and they get the information where Sahelanthropus and other vocal cord parasites are held.	
11	reaction	Complication 7 – Afghanistan	
12	problem	Snake has to deal with the Sahelanthropus for the second time and it is controlled by the floating boy who control Man of Fire from the beginning.	
Snake should rescue Miller stealthily to avoid further injury to Miller.		26	problem
Snake succeed to rescue Miller.		Snake succeeds to defeat the Sahelanthropus and kills Skull Face	
In Afghanistan, Snake has several missions: to kidnap the Afghan linguist, to destroy enemy communication, to destroy the enemy armed vehicles, to pick up the most advanced weapons from enemy and to rescue the prisoners who have the information about the main antagonist operation: Skull Face.		Resolution (Temporary)	
13	reaction	27	reaction
Snake succeed to do all of those missions.		28	solution
Resolution (Temporary)		29	reflection
14	events	The damaged Sahelanthropus is brought to the mother base. Snake is seeing Skull Face alive while Miller claims Sahelanthropus.	
Snake is bringing Huey Emmerich who cannot walk except by using exoskeleton but this exoskeleton cannot function well outside the main base operation.		Complication 8 – Mother Base	
15	reaction	30	setting
Snake succeeds in avoiding and escaping from Sahelanthropus and brings Huey Emmerich back to the mother base for interrogation.		The floating boy is still alive and tries to control White Mamba, a European child suspected of the result from Snake cloning program.	
16	problem	31	reaction
The result of interrogation is that Angola is the place where Skull Face is doing his illegal research. And now Snake is heading to Angola, Africa.		White Mamba is interrogated by Miller and Ocelot about his motives and his connection to Cipher, the main enemy who commands Skull Face.	
		32	problem
		White Mamba can escape from the Mother Base with the help of floating boy and he escapes by taking Sahelanthropus with him along with the African Child Soldiers as his troops.	

Figure 2. The Summary of Story
in Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain Video Game
(adapted from Martin and Rose (2008))

The players as a character can feel how the character struggle to gain its power after five-year comma as orientation stage in number 1 to 2 in figure 2. The story then continues to take Snake to Afghanistan to fight Soviet Union occupation and helping Mujahedeen, a real organization to fight Soviet Union domination in Afghanistan supported by United States. This is included in the story summarized in number 9 to 16 in figure 2. After the problem intensifies, Snake flies to Angola as summarized in number 17-25 in figure 2 to help one of organization called MPLA, an anti-colonial organization supported by Soviet Union to fight against UNITA, an organization with similar movement supported by United States. In Angola, Snake has some missions which include to investigate the illegal experiments to the local people in Angola to build biological weapons, developing a parasite which can attack vocal cord and being activated when the host of the parasite talk with particular language.

The duel between those two anti-colonial organizations shaped the history of Angola and it is represented through this video game. However, interestingly, this video game makes the players return to Afghanistan to finish the war, the Sahelanthropus which has been activated and is suspected to be capable for holding and being used for mass destructed weapons. In the last conflict, number 26-29 in figure 2, Snake with his most upgraded weaponries, he should fight and defeat the Sahelanthropus, a giant bipedal robot. Yet, after the resolution, another conflict arises when White Mamba, can take over the Sahelanthropus after it is brought to mother base. White Mamba is used to represent United States as White Supremacist (Kurniawan et al., 2024), who is arrogant and forgetting the consequence of its past action (Philpott & Mutimer, 2009).

Narrative Text Genre of Ghost of Tsushima

If the story of Metal Gear Solid V series is driven with the United States political agenda and how it dealt with Soviet Union. The way of United States ended the World War II by dropping atomic bomb to Japan in 1945, are what inspired Kojima to create the atomic-bomb-related story even in his new video game series Death Stranding. In this selected video game, directed by other developers took the setting further back to 1241, when Mongol invaded two Japan islands, Tsushima and Iki. Although in this paper, story about Tsushima become the focus of the research.

This video game took three act inside the Tsushima Island. Those three acts are based on the region and prefecture of the story to take place. The first act is in Izuhara region, the place where the Mongol invasion starts. As the history recorded, the invasion of Mongol started in 1241 and they landed in Komoda beach as the story of the video game tells (Turnbull, 2010). As the battle occurs in the Komoda beach, the Samurai armies under the command of Lord Shimura as the *Jito* of the Tsushima fell defeated and this is based on the historical event which made the leader of the samurai armies, So Sukesuni fell dead in the Komoda inland (Turnbull, 2010). Although in the video game story, the *Jito* called Lord Shimura, the uncle of the main protagonist, is not dead and he is held captive by the Mongol leader called, Khotun Khan.

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In this video game, the main protagonist, Jin Sakai, tried to rescue his uncle from Khotun Khan. In the process of rescuing his uncle, the story of rescuing is similar to the previous discussion on the video games Metal Gear Solid V series. The NPC, non-playable character, and also PC, the played character, are designed to have story, to have to be rescued and to have to be protected. As in the complication 1 of the ACT I, the summary of the story number 3-8 shows the problem and the tension rises. The story makes the players to play by rescuing the NPC and to help them as if they are the real person. Therefore, the anthropomorphism can induce the immersion (Huang & Guo, 2021). The story continues to induce the players' compassion and empathy by showing the consequence of their choice when Jin Sakai poisons the Mongol armies in ACT II complication 3, number 17-22 and later on his poison is used by Mongol army to kill the villagers as the problem arise in ACT III.

As Ensslin (2018) stated in video game, players are designed to follow the rise and fall of the main character. In Ghost of Tsushima story, the players will experience three times of the characters fallen. The first is when the character is being defeated in Komoda beach as the prolog of the story, the second is when the character challenges the Khotun Khan and defeated, and the third is when the character escapes from his uncle's prison after choosing the way of the Ghost which violates the Samurai's tradition and code. In the story of Ghost of Tsushima, the players will have to learn the three things. In Ensslin (2018), it is mentioned that Fraiman thematic triad: mastery, mentoring and choice can be seen to evaluate the ludonarrative assonance. The story of the video games Mastery in Ghost of Tsushima is related to how the players learn the mechanics of video games which later will be discussed in network system as the choice does. However, the story brings the mentoring where the players learn the video game through its narrative and instructions what to do.

Ghost of Tsushima		
Orientation – Komoda Beach, Izuhara Region – Prelude		
1	setting	The flags and banners of Tsushima island are waving in the middle of the night in the beach. Sakai and his samurai armies consists of many clans are joining the battle of Mongol invasion.
2	problem	Lord Adachi was killed by the leader of Mongol invasion and this event anger the Japanese knights.
Complication 1 – Izuhara Region – ACT I		
3	reaction	All Japanese samurai or knights are swarming the enemies on foot and riding horses and the enemies are sending the fire ball thrown by catapult.
4	problem	Many Samurais are killed in unequal battle using technology and the remaining samurais are fighting the enemies at the beach.
5	problem	Jin Sakai loses his armor and his weapons and he still sees the Mongol armies are attacking the villagers.
6	reaction	After finding his katana, Jin Sakai and Yuna head to Castle Kaneda to rescue his uncle Lord Shimura with the promise he will rescue Yuna's brother, Taka.
7	problem	Castle Kaneda is full of guards.
8	reaction	Jin Sakai faces all of those guards and finds the leader of Mongol invader, Khotun Khan.
Resolution (Temporary)		
9	solution	Jin Sakai is defeated although he succeeded to leave a long slashed mark in Khotun Khan face. Jin fell from the bridge. Jin was washed ashore and wake up at the beach.
Complication 2 – Izuhara Region		
10	setting	
11	events	He is meeting with Yuna for the second time and she is waiting for him to rescue his brother.
12	problem	Shortly, Jin Sakai in this region has to help prominent figures such as Masako Adachi, the wife of Lord Adachi, Sensei Ishikawa, Yuna's brother, Taka, Norio, and Ryuzo to gather the troops to fight Khotun Khan for the second time.
13	reaction	Jin Sakai can accomplish all of those missions.
14	problem	Only Ryuzo betrays Jin Sakai because of his own interest in money and power.
Resolution (Temporary)		
15	reaction	Jin Sakai defeats Ryuzo but Ryuzo succeeds to run away and join Khotun Khan.
16	problem	Jin Sakai must rescue his uncle and defeat remaining guards inside the castle.
17	solution	His uncle is rescued and they fight side by side liberating Castle Kaneda from Mongol armies.
Ghost of Tsushima		
Complication 3 – Toyotama Region: ACT II		
18	setting	Khotun Khan has arrived in Castle Shimura and take control of the castle with his army with the help of Ryuzo.
19	problem	Jin Sakai and his uncle, Lord Shimura still need more armies. They want to send the message from Tsushima to main Island for reinforcement, but the sea is under Mongol navy.
Resolution (Temporary)		
20	reaction	Jin Sakai and Lord Shimura, successfully send the message from Tsushima Island to the main island via the sea by taking control Fort Mitodake, and Jin Sakai is known as Ghost.
21	problem	When the samurai armies want to take the main castle by running through the bridge connecting the main castle and the Mongol armies destroying the bridge by using explosive and some of samurai armies were killed.
22	reaction	His uncle is offering the traditional way: to repair the bridge and re-attacking after the bridge is rebuilt.
23	problem	Jin Sakai has different tactics and it is different with his uncle.
24	reaction	Jin Sakai takes the initiative to retake the control of Shimura castle by poisoning the Mongol Armies and he also succeeds in killing Ryuzo.
Resolution (Temporary)		
25	description	Caste Shimura is liberated by single man, Jin Sakai with his new tactic.
26	problem	Lord Shimura is angry with Jin Sakai's killing style and put him in the jail.
Complication 5 – Kin Prefecture: ACT III		
27	setting	Jin Sakai stopped in Kin sanctuary and his horse is killed because of arrows shot in its back while escaping.
28	problem	Village is destroyed and the villagers were dying poisoned.
29	reaction	Jin Sakai head to Sago Prefecture to meet Yuna's friend, Takeshi to have more reinforcement.
30	problem	In the D-day of attacking, Jin Sakai still doesn't see his uncle but the attack must be continued.
Resolution		
31	reaction	The attack is commenced, his uncle can help Jin Sakai and Jin Sakai win the battle by killing Khotun Khan.
32	event	His uncle said that Jin Sakai will be hunted by the Shogun because of his way in killing Mongol Armies in Shimura castle violated Samurai's tradition.
33	problem	His uncle asks for the final duel between him and Jin Sakai to settle the dispute and His uncle was ordered to kill Jin Sakai to clean Sakai's name because his way defeating Mongol army with poison is considered a treason to samurai tradition.
34	solution	Jin Sakai win the duel and he has the choice to kill his uncle or to spare his life.

Figure 3. The Summary of Story in Ghost of Tsushima Video Game

(adapted from Martin and Rose (2008))

The System Network of the Video Games

In terms of system network, this research employed the theory from Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) especially in terms of narrative representation. In narrative representation actually there it consists of projective and non-projective. This research only focus on non-projective realization and it goes deeper to transactional action. Meanwhile, the other realization is circumstance which includes settings, means and accompaniment. In this section, the system network of three video games are explained. This system network includes the action and circumstance of the video game.

The System Network of Metal Gear Solid V Series

The system network of Metal Gear Solid V Series is divided into two parts, first part is the network system of Metal Gear Solid V: The Ground Zeroes and the second part is the network system of Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain. Although those video games are in the same series there are differences in terms of narrative representation especially in transactional action and circumstances.

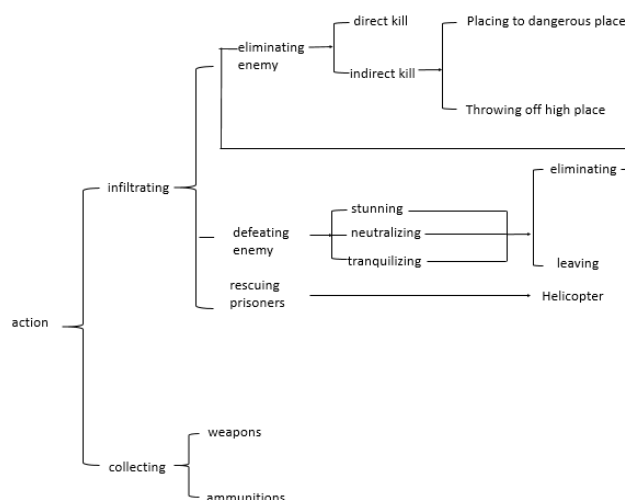


Figure 4. The System Network of Gameplay
in Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes Video Game (adapted from Caple (2013);
Kress and van Leeuwen (2021); Kurniawan et al., (2023))

Figure 4 shows the action that players possibly do when playing Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes video game. All of those choices are the actions which players do such as infiltrating and collecting only. This is very different from the next video game of this series, Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, as the sequel of this video game. This video game is the first series which was created only as the short length with only one main mission (de Vasconcelos Guimarães, 2015). This video game was used as a teaser for the longer length video game. As shown in figure 4, there are significant different in terms of gameplay system network although they are in the same series.

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The figure 4 shows that the short length of the video game makes further action such as developing items and weapons impossible. The only mission of this video game series is only rescuing Chico and Paz. These two characters have significant roles in the story development, especially in the previous series of this video game, *Metal Gear Solid Peace Walker*. These two characters should be rescued by Snake in the *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes* because before that Chico was trying to rescue Paz from the detention center in Cuban soil, Guantanamo detention center as Green, (2017) mentioned that the story of Chico is the intersection between the history and fiction. Because of its short in length, this video game does not has as complex system network as what is available in *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* as in figure 4.

In figure 4, it is shown that the system network in *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* is more complex than the previous video game series *Metal Gear Solid V: The Ground Zeroes*. This system shows how the video game concept was built by the video game developers. This series has more complete stories than the previous one. This has been explained in the first part of this paper, the narrative part. Besides, this video game also enable the players to build and to upgrade not only the weapons and equipment, but also mother base or headquarter.

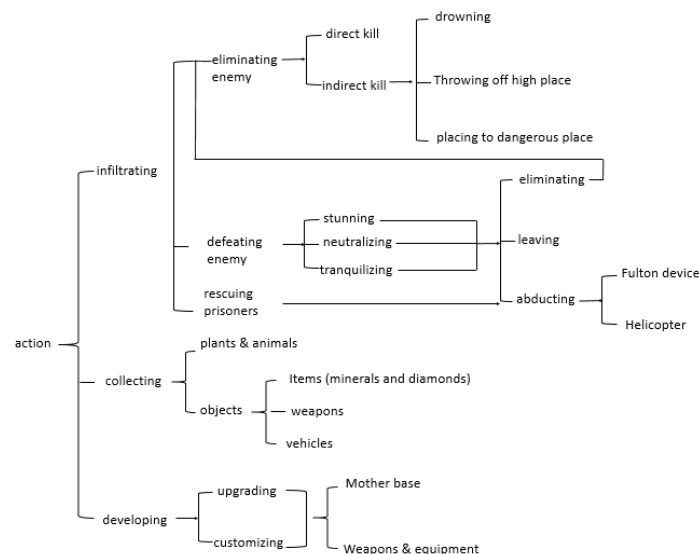


Figure 5. The System Network of Gameplay in *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (taken directly from Kurniawan et al., (2023) and adapted from Caple (2013); Kress and van Leeuwen (2021))

In upgrading and building the mother base or headquarter, the players should recruit people or armies. Therefore, in the part infiltrating, the players are not only required to sneak into the enemy territory but they should also abduct the enemy which has special abilities that can help the players build their mother base as what Green (2017) discussed. Killing the enemy will lead negative effect to the players (Kurniawan et al., 2023). This is in tune with the Cuban internationalism values to involve the local people in the program

(Grenon, 2016). The players are abducting the enemies to make them work for the players as the mercenaries. The players also has a chance to hear the conversation of the enemies. They will talk about their everyday business from something trivial such as the dialogues about their families left for battle, their societal problems i.e. racism when the players' go to Angola, and their fears. This mundane dialogues can raise the empathy to someone who listens to. This is the reason why the players are recommended to use stealth techniques rather than the brutal ways by killing the enemies using explosive and lethal weapons

The negative effect of eliminating the enemies by killing them will make the final score. Every mission in this series has the final score which will effect to GMP (Gross Military Product) which can be used to develop items, weapons, equipment, gears, and Mother Base and also Heroism points which can be used to online modes of the series. The more point the player has, the more advanced their weapons and equipment will be. These recruiters are classified into grades from S++ to E. Although some of them have lower points, they still have benefits to the players. When players use the lower grade soldiers they will get more points in deployment system (Kurniawan et al., 2023), a system created to deploy the armies to obtain additional materials and GMP and these soldiers also can upgrade their level after deployment. From this system it can tell that the system of video game allows player to play nice and undetected, because the lower the enemy players kill, the bigger the score players will get (Kurniawan, 2024). This kind of system is in line with the spirit of liberation as what Che Guevara told in his book Guerilla warfare that enemy soldiers were forced to do what the leader instructed and they were bound to the system and order, so that killing them will never get a better resolution (Guevara, 2006).

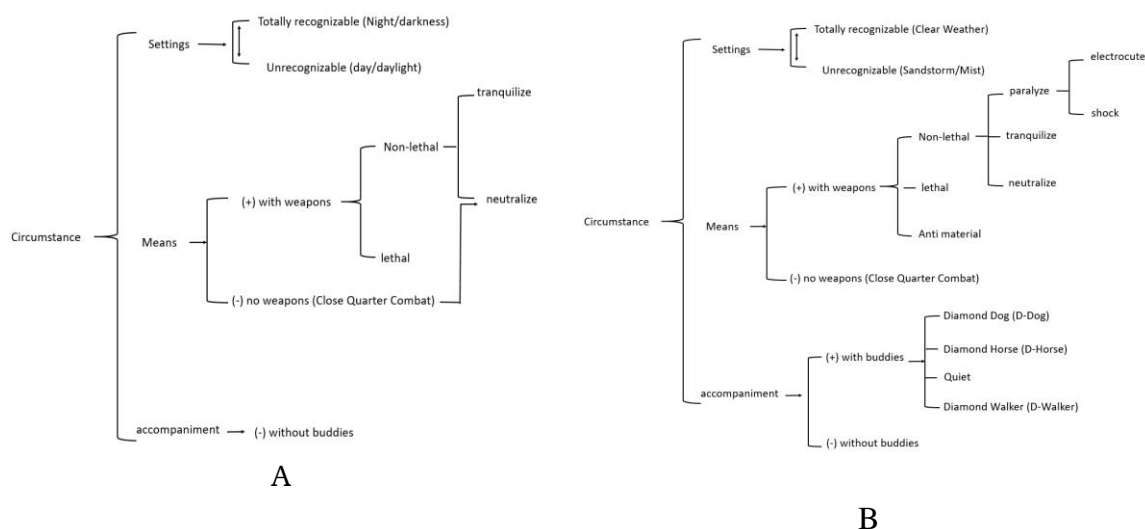


Figure 6. Circumstance system network of Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes (A) and Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain (B)
(Figure 6B was taken directly from Kurniawan et al., (2023) and adapted from Caple (2013); Kress and van Leeuwen (2021))

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This system also shows difference in terms of circumstance as shown in figure 6A and 6B. Figure 6A shows that the complexity of the video game is different from figure 6B. Figure 6A shows that players are not allowed to upgrade anything because the story tells that the mother base is being attacked while the main protagonist is doing the mission. Figure 6B, on the other hand, shows that the possibility of the players to upgrade. This is called mastery mentioned by Ensslin (2018). Whatever the choice the players choose, this video game has linear ending as the story leads. This is called choice in Fraiman thematic triad. The choice is between victory or defeat against the main antagonist, Skull Face. If the character is dead, it means defeat and the players will start at the certain checkpoint.

The system network of Ghost of Tsushima

The system network of Ghost of Tsushima video game has difference and similarity to Metal Gear Solid V video games series, especially Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain. The similarity is in the part of the action which allow the players to upgrade weapons and items and also to collect materials for upgrading. This mechanism as a part of video game mastery in Fraiman's themes. The story and the setting of the video game make upgrading items and weapons possible because in the end of the video game, the players must defeat the main antagonist which are designed to be stronger and even bigger than the main protagonist. In Ghost of Tsushima video game the action is called liberating not infiltrating because in the story, the main protagonist must liberate his homeland from Mongol invasion.

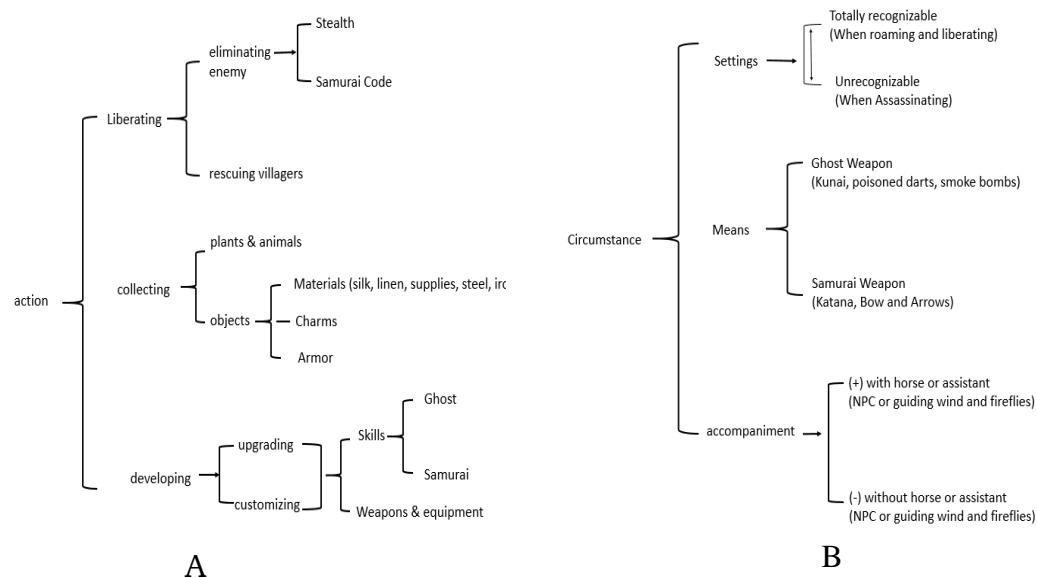


Figure 7. (A) Action and (B) Circumstance system network of Metal Gear Solid V: adapted from Caple (2013); Kress and van Leeuwen (2021))

The circumstance in Ghost of Tsushima is different where the local people stays and visible and it is different from Metal Gear Solid V Series. The local people may still inhabit the village, they are also usually found on the road

seeking from help because they are captured and even tortured by the Mongol armies. Because of the presence of local people NPC, the action in Ghost of Tsushima in Figure 7A includes rescuing the villagers. However, in Ghost of Tsushima video game the choice of eliminating the Mongol armies are lethal either using ghost or samurai weapon. This means that killing the invaders is the only way to make them leaving the Tsushima. Therefore, it makes video game is like a story with game developer as the main author and the players as the collaborative author (Cassidy, 2011).

CONCLUSION

These three video games show that the story and the game mechanics are harmonious. The story of Metal Gear Solid V series deeply rooted to Cold War historical event and of Ghost of Tsushima taking the setting of Mongol invasion in Japan makes the character more vivid and can be treated as if they are the actor of historical events. Those names are consciously made to represent anti-colonialism ideology but the players will feel that they are involved in the historical events. Those stories make the rhetorical elements more compelling and convincing because the use of anthropomorphism. The choice in system network also shows how the mastery the mechanism works. Mentoring element appears as an instructions told by narrator like in Metal Gear Solid V series or by the system as in Ghost of Tsushima. However, whatever the choice the players take, the final ending for the story has been directed and scripted. Further research needs to reach the micro-meso level to see how the social semiotics theory can be applied for interactive and narrative means in video games so that it can become more immersive and the player's choices.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

Muhammad Hafiz Kurniawan: Formulated and developed theory, analyzed the data and finished the manuscript. **Dadang Sudana:** Broadened the theoretical perspective and research concepts, and designed research methodology. **Wawan Gunawan:** validated the findings and contributed to data collecting and filtering process. **Maftukhin:** Supported the literature review and reviewed the manuscript. **Teni Hadiyani:** Conducted literature review on video game discourse, and supported the first stage of data analysis. **Wikandari Marselina Puspasari:** Supported on the application of genre based approach to video games and conducted data collection process, and supported the second stage data analysis.

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