Dialogue
Elements of Game Narrative

- **Characters**
  - Protagonist: player controlled character
  - Supporting characters: NPCs

- **Storyline**
  - How does the story progress?

- **Dialogue**
  - Story vehicle in games and fiction
  - Easy way to allow player choice
Storytelling as Gameplay: Dialogue

- Primary *interactive* story vehicle
  - Where the player most likely has choice
  - If no choice, might as well be a cut scene

- Non-gameplay interactions reduce to dialogue
  - **Dialogue**: conversation of two or more entities
  - Animated responses are non-textual dialog
  - Interactive cut scenes are a response to player
Dialogue: Real Life

- Greet and make contact
- Fill in time/silence
- Gain information
- Reveal information
- Discuss ideas and opinions
- Express emotion
- Propose a course of action
- Acknowledge comment

- “Hi; my name is Bob.”
- “Nice party, isn’t it?”
- “What do you do, Bob?”
- “I design video games.”
- “Isn’t that a bit juvenile?”
- “You are such an idiot.”
- “Then prove me wrong.”
- “Sure, I can do that”
Dialogue: Fiction

- **Reveal information**
  - “Expository dialog”
  - Do not say the obvious

- **Reveal character**
  - Identify with protagonist
  - Empathy with companions
  - Hatred for enemies

- **Break up the narrative**
  - Description very passive
  - Goal: show, don’t tell
Dialogue: Games

- **Reveal information**
  - Story as investigation
  - Integrate with gameplay

- **Reveal character**
  - Reveal NPC personalities
  - **Define** player personality
  - Heightens sense of risk

- **Break up the narrative**
  - In-game humor
  - “NPC banter”
NPC Banter: *Dragon Age*
Standard Approach: Dialogue Trees

I'm ready to continue research on the last chapter.

Have you thought about disarming the bomb?

I've been thinking about your experiments. Can I ask you something personal?
Dialog Trees

start

question

question

question

question

response

question

question

question

NPC

Player

Player
Example: Avernum Series

Mother Twymon

Mother Twymon speaks with you, always positioning herself to show off her jewelry and robes to good effect. "So, warrior. What else can the Shrine of Divine Attainment offer you today?"

1. Tell me about your church.
2. I'd like to know more about Spire. And the death of the mayor.
3. Can you teach me any spells?

Record: You have 3653 coins.
## More than Just Talk

### Preconditions
- Not everyone is talkative
  - Test for dialogue option
  - Like rule-based AI
- **Symbolic preconditions**
  - Quest completed
  - Speaking for first time
- **Numeric preconditions**
  - Reputation points
  - Money on hand

### Actions
- Talking may alter state
  - State of player character
  - State of participating NPC
- **Symbolic actions**
  - Complete quest
  - Open up new dialogue
- **Numeric actions**
  - Give player money
  - Increase reputation
# More than Just Talk

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This Looks Like Gameplay Design
Dialog Trees: Symbolic Effects

start

question  question  question  question

response  response

question  question  question

unlocked!

Player  NPC  Player
Symbolic Effects and Faction Based Storylines

- Story A: Unlocked
- Story B: Locked
- Story C: Unlocked

Unlock B    Lock C
This Looks Familiar...
## Dialogue vs. Interactive Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Both have <strong>graph</strong> structure</td>
<td>• Graph <strong>temporal</strong>, not <strong>spatial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shows flow between text</td>
<td>• Often visit node only once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Only have discrete choices</td>
<td>• Limited “back-up” ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Basically a game flowchart</td>
<td>• “Lock-out” is a big worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Edges</strong> may need <strong>unlocking</strong></td>
<td>• Not designed as <strong>one graph</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Requires resource to access</td>
<td>• A graph for each person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Example</strong>: have enough gold</td>
<td>• Or per person/per act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Example</strong>: talk to person X</td>
<td>• Tie together with resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Lock-and-key” puzzles</td>
<td>• <strong>No text parsing</strong> of dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implementing Dialog Trees

- Node for each player choice
- Including the initial “hello”
- Contains NPC response, but can depend on game state
- Also code that specifies what this does as an action
- Pointers to follow-up dialog
- Data-driven design is simple
- Index nodes by numbers
- Numbers give tree structure
- Simple scripting for actions
Dialogue and Gameplay

- Often easy to combine them
  - Resources affect gameplay
  - Dialogue **needs** resources
  - Dialogue **alters** resources

- When is dialogue a game?
  - Dialogue has **own** resources
  - No usage **outside** dialogue

- **Reputation systems**
  - Points measuring good/evil
  - Gain points from dialogue
  - Unlocks more dialogue
Reputation: Advantages

- Story A
- Add Resource

- Story B
- Add Resource

- Story C
- Add Resource

- Story D
- Needs Resource > x
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Feedback Loop
Reputation: Feedback Loops

• Reputation ever increasing
  • Good points for Good acts
  • Good points unlock Good acts

• Need to use them somehow
  • Otherwise, why get them?
  • Raise requirements over time
  • Escalating “lock-and-key”

• Creates black/white morality
  • Stop good acts; no good points
  • Too few Bad points to change
  • Stay good/bad all the way
Other Forms of Reputation

- Nonexclusive morality
  - Can anywhere in spectrum
  - **Example**: Mass Effect 3
  - But meaningful choice?

- Character by character
  - Each character has an approval/friendship rating
  - Affected by actions, as well as *tone* of your dialogue
  - Inter-NPC rivalries affect your relationships with each
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Optimization: Dialogue Graphs

- 2+ questions, 1 response
  - More compact than tree
  - No redundant information

- Why so many questions?
  - Actions, not speech
  - “I don’t know”

- Example: Reputation
  - Evil option (–repute)
  - Good option (+repute)
  - Tone of voice
NLP and Game Dialogue

- **Natural Language Processing**
  - Understand *any* sentence
  - Major area of CS research

- NLP in games?
  - Type in arbitrary sentence
  - NPCs react appropriately
  - Several experiments in 90s

- Generally avoided today
  - Nontrivial chance of failure
  - Any dialogue failure is bad!
  - Hard to write NPC reactions
Natural Language Generation

- **Given**: complex set of data
- **Outcome**: comment on data
- Also an area of CS research

Comment requirements

- Must be *simpler* than data
- Should also be *natural*

Sample applications

- Sports commentary
- Party combat chatter
- Intelligent townsfolk
Natural Language Generation
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NLG and Game Dialogue

Much More Successful Than NLP
Often a set of “canned” text
- React to specific events
- NPC picks text as appropriate

Text is *parameterized*
- “What do we do, <name>?”
- “Someone killed <monster>!”
- “That was <numb> days ago.”

Choosing text to say
- Favor important events?
- Favor recent events?
- Random (pull-toy)?
Drama Managers

- Freeform component design
  - Player can do any action
  - AI matches to component
  - Choice may be contextual

- Built for dramatic tension
  - Tracks the current tension
  - Picks storyline options most consistent with tension

- Guide player through hints
  - Help understand context
  - “You need a drink.”
Example: *Façade*
Façade Story Structure

- Story broken into **beats** and **joint dialogue behaviors**
  - JDBs are 1-5 lines between Trip & Grace (banter)
  - Beat is 10-100 JDBs resolving single plotline

- Storyline designed with goals and mix-ins
  - Goals specify how story proceeds if no interaction
  - Mix-ins give the player opportunities to join in

- AI planning algorithms used for **dramatic tension**
  - Each JDB is an operator that affects on dramatic tension
  - Pick JDBs consistent with story, that best build tension
Drama Manager in *Façade*
Drama Manager in *Façade*

**Drama Manager**
(sequences beats)

Bag of beats

Desired value arc(s)

Selected

Current story values

Previous action time

**Story World**

Player

Trip

Grace

**Natural Language Processing**

Surface text → discourse acts

discourse acts → reactions

Articles Online (Advanced)
Summary

• Interactive storytelling reduces to **dialogue**
  • Primary area where character has choice in story
  • Other options abstract to “dialogue with the game”

• Dialogue is often constructed as **graphs**
  • Edges represent dialogue flow
  • Some edges may need to be unlocked

• This is an area of very **active research**
  • Personalization requires natural language generation
  • Drama managers lead to more open-ended play