

Computer Mediated Communication: Enregistration of Gamerspeak and Intertextual
Borrowings by 4chan Users

Natalie Regina Chambers Richoux

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Dr. Katie N. Carmichael
Dr. Abby J. Walker
Dr. Charlene M. Eska

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Gamerspeak

Natalie Richoux

ABSTRACT

Digital spaces are opening the doors to developing types of registers within languages that rely on computer mediated communication. Participants in the video game community have enregistered language that is concise and efficient for the purposes of game play to make snap decisions. However, the register is being borrowed by 4chan users, adapted to their sociocultural needs, and employed by some to communicate threats of violence. The aim of this thesis is to understand the structure of gaming language both inside and outside of a gaming platform and to examine how some users of 4chan make use of this less commonly understood register for expressions of violent intent. I observe professional eSports athletes in game play, interviews, and news articles to establish a baseline of gaming terminology and examine the structure within this enregistered facet of language. I found that much of gaming terminology is derived through processes already common in the development of slang and other forms of language change, and I used the results of this analysis to generate a survey about understanding of these language forms. This survey was distributed to participants who had different amounts of experience with video games (mega gamers vs. non-mega gamers) to determine each groups' awareness of gaming terminology and their understanding of certain phrases as communication of a threat. The survey revealed that mega gamers more commonly define terms in relation to video games than non-mega gamers, but that they were not more likely to identify phrases with gaming terms as threats except in a few isolated cases.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Bryon and Marguerite Chambers. My parents have always supported me in every venture I have undertaken and given me courage to chase my dreams. With their unconditional love and reassurance, I have become the person I am today. Additionally, I dedicate this thesis to my siblings, Christopher, Kalin, and Logan, for encouraging me in the most uplifting ways and making me smile when times were rough. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my loving and supportive husband, Gary. He has been my rock and support system through this entire journey that has led me to this point in my life. I have been shown abounding love by him that has been the fuel behind my academic endeavors and inspired me to chase my dreams.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Linguist William Labov gave an interview to ReVEL (an interactive learning environment platform powered by Pearson) in which he proposed that linguistic research should strive to provide answers to fundamental questions about the nature of language and the people who use it.¹ The research done for this thesis represents an attempt to understand the social consequences that accompany use of a particular kind of in-group language within internet spaces: that of gamerspeak, or language that developed for use in video game contexts. Individuals who post to 4chan, an anonymous online forum, borrow gamerspeak as a means of constructing power identities to establish in-group connection, and on some occasions these language practices may also be used on such forums to make threats that have real-world consequences not always understood by outsiders in time to intervene. One such example occurred on October 1, 2015, when a school shooting occurred on the campus of Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon. The Umpqua shooting claimed the lives of nine people and injured another eight. The disaster was discussed beforehand on the 4chan board Robot 9001 (r9k) where the shooter, Christopher Harper-Mercer, outlined his homicidal intentions, and also sought suggestions from fellow 4chan users on how to most successfully accomplish the shooting. Though his 4chan post was anonymous, Harper-Mercer made his intentions known by stating that, "the beta uprising is going down so stay away from schools in the northwest. signing off space robots" to which fellow users responded anonymously with suggestions such as, "to get highscores, make it seem like a hostage situation, get them all in a corner, and then shoot," "fuck normies and alphas, it's time for betas," "these dayfreaming [sic] edgelords can't commit, dream on beta faggots," "don't get associated with spergout" and "godspeed anon." I interpret the Umpqua shooting as an

¹ William Labov, interview by ReVEL, August 9, 2007.

example of a social consequence of a speech action communicated on the internet, one which linguistic research could help us better understand, in particular if we are able to determine the processes at play in developing this ingroup register and how it is interpreted and understood by fellow gamers and 4chan users, in contrast with outsiders. I argue that such language is used demonstrate the power of the particular user, who takes advantage of the aggression inherent to gamerspeak due to the goals of many video games in an attempt to build this power identity.

In this thesis, I work to establish gamerspeak as an enregistered variety of language and explore the intertextual borrowing of gamerspeak by 4chan users. The concept of linguistic gratuity² provides justification for the potential applications of this project, since it is my belief that linguists ought to use their analytical skills to combat real-world social consequences of speech actions such as the Umpqua shooting. Though linguists collect data from participants out of a desire and necessity to understand language and its processes, linguists should arguably also give back to those people whose data fuels our research, which in this case I apply more broadly towards the common good.

Gamerspeak, the language employed by video game players and 4chan users, has recognizable differences which I argue constitute it as an enregistered variety of Standard American English. I identify the morphological, semantic, and syntactic processes that result in the distinctive terms from gamerspeak, which are used to fulfill the communication social needs unique to the video game and 4chan communities. Following a general description of gamerspeak, I demonstrate how the 4chan community has borrowed gamerspeak to communicate with fellow users and how it has undergone specific processes to become a register of its own

² Walt Wolfram, Jeffrey Reaser, and Charlotte Vaughn. "Operationalizing Linguistic Gratuity: From Principle to Practice," *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2 (2008): 2.

and that these speech actions carry social consequences. Additionally, I present the results of a survey on the public's understanding of gaming registers and whether participants interpreted sentences as communicating threats.

The rest of this chapter deals with the varying research and scholarship that has been done on registers and computer mediated communication. However, before I could start my research it is necessary to establish a foundation for my work by studying the various scholarship and research that has already been done on registers and internet language.

1.2 Enregisterment

Agha proposed that enregisterment occurs when a linguistic repertoire becomes recognizably different within a language attached to certain social forms.³ Since Agha's research on Received Pronunciation (RP) in Great Britain, many sociolinguists have explored enregisterment within their own research. For example, Johnstone et al. undertook research exploring the enregisterment of Pittsburghese, demonstrating how a language variety may become enregistered as being tied to a given place.⁴ They further posited that an enregisterment approach to understanding certain language changes involves more than linguistic and ideological change; enregisterment also relies on the subjective, social experiences of speakers who speak that language variety.⁵ While Johnstone et al.'s work related enregisterment to a physical place, Lauren Squires developed a way to apply the theory of enregisterment to cyberspace, by examining the enregisterment of internet language.⁶

³ Asif Agha, "The Social Life of Cultural Value," *Language and Communication* 23 (2003): 231.

⁴ Barbara Johnstone, "Language and Geographical Space," *Language and Space: An International Handbook of Linguistic Variation* (2010): 21.

⁵ Barbara Johnstone et al., "Mobility, Indexicality, and the Enregisterment of 'Pittsburghese,'" *American Speech* 22 (2006): 77.

⁶ Lauren Squires, "Enregistering Internet Language," *Language in Society* 39 (2010): 457.

Agha's foundational research of enregisterment explored how language patterns are linked to social identities in a process through which certain linguistic features come to point to, or index, a recognizable social identity.⁷ It is this identification as part of a coherent system, this recognizing by outsiders, that makes a variety enregistered.

While Agha focused on the historical processes establishing RP in Britain as an enregistered dialect of English, Johnstone et al. focused on the historical component as well as the multitude of social interactions that speakers encounter that develop these associations between language practices and social identities.⁸ Johnstone et al. write that in the case of Pittsburghese, local linguistic practices were once not noticed at all because everyone in a given speaker's speech network used them. However, these same features became noticeable when contrasted with the speech of outsiders.⁹ Often the speakers of Pittsburghese belonged to working class families who lived in insular neighborhoods where the speech networks were comprised on people with the same variety of language, so the speakers had limited opportunities to realize that their speech utterances were different than people from outside of Pittsburgh and that outsiders would consider the way they talked nonstandard.¹⁰

Agha's and Johnstone et al.'s research is essential in establishing my own research because their research explored associations of language to specific groups of people. While their research focused primarily on class-based and geographic forms of enregisterment, my research examines on gamerspeak as an internet form of enregisterment. In the case of gamerspeak, as in the case of Pittsburghese, in order for the variety to be recognizably different, it must be acknowledged in contrast with another variety. Squires notes that Internet language is

⁷ Agha, "Cultural Value," 233.

⁸ Barbara Johnstone et al., "Mobility, Indexicality, and the Enregisterment of 'Pittsburghese,'" *American Speech* 22 (2006): 77.

⁹ Johnstone, "Enregisterment of Pittsburghese," 79-80.

¹⁰ Johnstone, "Enregisterment of Pittsburghese," 88-89.

enregistered in contrast with Standard English.¹¹ In her research, she posits that enregisterment is not exclusive to a geographic location but rather tied intimately to perceptions of linguistic variation and shared social experiences that construct practices associated to in-group speakers of that specific enregistered variety.¹² Squires examined two enregistered internet languages, netspeak and chatspeak. She defines netspeak as linguistic communication through internet speech networks such as email or social media whereas chatspeak is communication through short message service (SMS). Squires' research found that both have recognizable differences from SAE, which she linked to social contexts and speaker personae. The differences that Squires observed in netspeak and chatspeak were that acronyms and abbreviations due to the fact that internet communications are both space and time constrained and therefore must be efficient. The textual shortenings of chatspeak and netspeak through internet technologies reflect the view that technology is highly integrated into the daily lives of speakers and that reflect nonstandard language choices.¹² These textual shortenings through the netspeak and chatspeak enregistered varieties of language reflect similar processes as the development of slang.

Enregisterment does not generally involve the invention of new linguistic forms but rather the development of connections between linguistic practices and social identities. Slang, in contrast, is the development of new forms, however these can also be connected to certain social identities.¹³ Slang exploits existing forms of words and their current meaning to best suit the users' culture. Previous studies of slang have explored the register and the processes it undergoes to meet the needs of the culture using them and some of these processes are shortening and functional shifts. Just as Squires' research noted that chatspeak and netspeak often undergo

¹¹ Squires, "Enregistering Internet Language," 457-62.

¹² Squires, "Enregistering Internet Language," 460.

¹² Squires, "Enregistering Internet Language," 464-75.

¹³ Connie Eble, "Form," in *Slang and Sociability: In-group Language Among College Students* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 25-27.

processes to shorten the enregistered variety of language due to space and time constrained limits of the internet, slang sometimes goes through shortening processes. Gamerspeak undergoes similar formation processes as slang, developing as an in-group variety, however it is also enregistered, as a coherent set of linguistic forms tied to a social identity. Similar to the arguments made by Squires, I argue that gamerspeak is enregistered in its contrast with Standard American English. Through processes resembling those used in the development of many slang words, gamerspeak is distinguished from SAE, and the connotations of these terms are tied to a gamer-specific identity.

1.3 Gamerspeak and Culture

Technological advancements allow for video game users to communicate with one another in-game, creating social opportunities to develop specific registers that rely on the specific mediums of communication the game provides. In the online world, many of the basic cues about the personality and social role we are accustomed to in the physical world are absent. For this reason, communication mediated through video games occur in a context where identity performance and identity play can be very conscious and consciously deceptive.¹⁴ Collister's research within the field of gaming has documented the language within games like World of Warcraft, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG). While no linguistic research has focused on gamerspeak to communicate threats on non-gaming platforms, there has been research focused on online registers in gaming. Collister examined language use in World

¹⁴ Tim Grant and Nicci Macleod, "Assuming Identities Online: Experimental Linguistics Applied to the Policing of Online Paedophile Activity," *Applied Linguistics Journal* 37 (2016): 51.

of Warcraft, focusing on the relationship between powerful language and power roles in the game.¹⁵ Her analysis of the relationship between participatory surveillance, public discipline, empowerment, and fun in World of Warcraft guilds determined that there is a unique relationship between power construction and language use within World of Warcraft. Collister's research examines gaming language within the virtual world, accomplishing a rich description of how gamers use gamerspeak in interactions within the contexts of an online game.

My research builds off Collister's in that I am examining gamerspeak, though I am not explicitly interested in its relationship to power within game play as Collister was. That said, taking a closer look at some of the distinctive uses of gamerspeak in World of Warcraft that Collister uncovered could aid in understanding why and how such language is also borrowed on sites like 4chan. Collister posits that there are two forms of communication within virtual gaming worlds and those are collaborative (or polite) language and aggressive language. Collaborative language was often employed by powerful people who speak politely, respecting other players' needs to fortify their position of power.¹⁶ Collaborative language is seen in party chat functions of video games (or chat functions where it is players on the same team or guild). Since the players must work together to complete goal and objectives of the game, the participants cooperate with one another using collaborative linguistic forms because players respond better to a party chat leader who is friendly and are less likely to respond to a party chat leader who shouts or gives harsh orders.¹⁷ Alternatively, there are aggressive linguistic forms encountered in video games. Aggressive language employs linguistic forms that relay control, abuse, and malicious intent. Many players who employ aggressive language are often making fun of another player in front of

¹⁵ Lauren Collister, "Constructing a Powerful Identity in World of Warcraft: A Sociolinguistic Approach to MMORPGs" in *Dungeons, Dragons, and Digital Denizens: The Digital Role-Playing Game*, ed. Gerald Voorhees et al. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012): 197.

¹⁶ Collister, "Constructing Powerful Identity," 202.

¹⁷ Collister, "Constructing Powerful Identity," 204-06.

other players. Despite its difference in form, aggressive language is functionally similar to collaborative language in that it employs linguistic forms to build the power of a player. However, in the case of aggressive language this is accomplished by yelling at fellow players to control their actions, establish player dominance, and exert player power. Aggressive language is primarily encountered in trade chat or player versus player chat functions to demonstrate player power in situations.¹⁸ However, the decision to employ collaborative and aggressive language in video games relies on the culture of video games and motivations to play them.

Yee proposed three motivations for online game play: achievement, socialization, and immersion.¹⁹ All three are cultural factors and reasons for individuals to play video games that are influencing the enregisterment of gamerspeak. The achievement culture of video games is centered on advancement and competition, with players focused on either growth in the game, learning to become a better player, or wanting to challenge fellow players to build skills. Enregistered features of gamerspeak are built on language that advances strategy, emphasizes upcoming battles or strengths and weaknesses of players, or describes areas or weapons, all of which are critical to player advancement.

Socialization is focused more on social interactions with fellow players rather than advancing a character or gameplay. In addition to more competitive components, there are social, relationship-oriented, and teamwork aspects of video games. Players chat with fellow players, build meaningful long-term relationships, and attempt to gain satisfaction from their group or guild.²¹ Socialization as a factor influencing gamerspeak is important because it is responsible for developing communications more focused on being able to chat with fellow players, exchanging pleasantries that are sometimes avoided in achievement video game cultures, such as

¹⁸ Collister, "Constructing Powerful Identity," 203-05.

¹⁹ Yee, "Motivations for Play in Online Games," *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 9 (2006): 772. ²¹ Yee, "Motivation," 772.

greetings or congratulations.

Immersion is the final type of video game culture that impacts register development. Immersion culture is built on discovery, role-playing, and customization that are concerned with finding out information other players do not know, creating an online identity, and changing character appearance.²⁰ Immersion influences register development through the cultural need to be fully immersed in these worlds where play is not only achieved independently but also as a group through interactions within the frame of the game. Due to these issues, gamerspeak has developed ways to communicate with players to advance the immersion experience, with enregistered language forms that communicate position, location, and aesthetics.

While the three dominant reasons to engage with video games are different, the linguistic forms employed in collaborative and aggressive language choices in video games are dependent on the culture of video games and motivations of players, they are both attempting to accomplish the same goal: power in video games. Power is central to player success in video games, and perhaps because of this gaming and indeed gamerspeak has gendered connotations. While isolated academic research has explored gender differences in video game play, few have given concrete numbers for the amount of male and female participants who regularly play video games. However, according to Statista.com, 56% of video game players were male in 2015 (down from 62% in 2006). As a substantial amount of linguistics literature has established, powerful language can be gendered, and gamerspeak is no exception.

Just as enregistered language varieties feature connections between linguistic features and social identities, language may also index, or point to, other social factors, such as gender. In any community, the linguistic behavior of men and women are reflective of the gender expectations

²⁰ Yee, "Motivation," 772.

of the community.²¹ However, these gender expectations are not predicted by one's biological sex alone—one chooses one's gender identity, and thus gender may become performative, with gender identity constructed through stylized repetitions of these performative acts.²² One such performative act is communication, with use of gendered linguistic features representing one way gender is performed.²³ In studies of language and gender, it has been found that men use language in ways that accrue or assert power, while women are more concerned with building relationships of solidarity, with the performative language acts of men and women reflecting these priorities.²⁴ While I have established that both power-asserting and solidarity-building components exist within gamerspeak, there remains a masculine association with this enregistered language variety, in part due to who uses it, and in part because there is an interaction between these two kinds of goals within male speech patterns. Previous research on language and masculinity has observed that male speakers will insult one another not to establish dominance, but rather to signal connection with one another. Their linguistic practices display commonalities with one another and create a close sense of homosociality, or male bonding, that values social relationships among men and are established through nonstandard language practices.²⁷

While gamerspeak is most commonly used within a gaming context, it is spreading to other internet platforms, such as 4chan, which I argue allows users to establish an in-group identity with one another, interacting based on homosocial norms. Because 58% of video game players are male, there are homosocial practices that occur within gamerspeak that are then

²¹ Deborah Cameron, "Gender and Language Ideologies," in *The Handbook of Language and Gender* ed. Janet Holmes (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 449-52.

²² Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988): 519-20.

²³ Butler, "Performative Acts," 531.

²⁴ Scott F. Kiesling, "Prestige, Cultural Models, and Other Ways of Talking About Underlying Norms and Gender," in *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, ed. Janet Holmes et al. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 509-24. ²⁷ Scott Kiesling, "Homosociality in Men's Talk: Balancing and Recreating Cultural Discourses of Masculinity," *University of Pittsburg*: 1-12.

borrowed by 4chan users to establish a connection with one another that thrives on nonstandard language practices contingent on social practices to create a sense of in-group and out-group speakers.

1.4 Thesis Research

As technology becomes more integrated into the daily lives of speakers, there are inevitable changes to language practices of speakers. My research draws on previous research dealing with enregisterment, such as Agha and Johnstone et al, as well as research on language practices in online and gaming environments, from Squires and Collister.

I have argued in this chapter that gamerspeak is an enregistered internet language, and because of its coherence as a recognizable set of forms, it may be borrowed on other social media platforms. In particular, I have suggested that aggressive form of language from gamerspeak are used on platforms such as 4chan to establish a homosocial connection with fellow users.

The purpose of this thesis is to establish gamerspeak as an enregistered form of internet language, to examine how 4chan borrows aggressive forms of gamerspeak in order to establish a homosocial connection with fellow users, and to determine populations' understandings of gaming registers as well as their identification of threats employing terms from gaming registers. In this thesis, threats are defined as any statement of intentions to inflict pain, injury, or damage on someone in the real world, excluding how they are directed at people in video games.

Chapter 2 identifies my methods for carrying out this study, including a rationale for software choices, as well as a description of the manner in which the survey was constructed and distributed. Chapter 3 undertakes a description of some features of gamerspeak as observed from news articles, live game play, and interviews from two prominent professional video game athletes. In this chapter, I identify common linguistic processes that lead to the distinctive,

enregistered features of gamerspeak. Chapter 4 reports on a survey that asked participants to define gaming terms to determine how well general populations understand gamerspeak, and then determined whether they interpret example sentences incorporating gaming language as communicating threats of violence. Chapter 5 discusses the relevance of my research to the field of sociolinguistics and provides some suggestions for how the research in the thesis can be applied to solve real-world problems.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

2.1 Establishing Methods

To illustrate how language is used in computer mediated communication, specifically in relation to video games, I first had to establish what the terminology in video games is and the definition of video game terms in a gaming context. To accomplish this task, I analyzed the language use of professional eSports athletes (people who play video games professionally and often as a living) within interviews, recorded gameplay sessions, and published news articles that discussed the language employed in video games. After establishing a repertoire of gaming terms and understanding their definitions in the context of video games, I then turned my focus to text mining computer network spaces that facilitated computer mediated communication in order to produce an analysis of how gamerspeak is employed outside of video games to communicate threats of violence. Finally, I designed a survey to understand how likely American English speakers are to define a term not by its more commonly understood meaning but rather in its more specialized meaning specific to gamerspeak. I then prompted the speakers to identify whether they interpreted a sentence containing terms from gamerspeak as communicating threats of violence.

2.2 Introduction to 4chan and CiceroLite

4chan is a social media platform that operates as a simple image-based bulletin board with 65 different boards available for users where any internet user can post comments and share images. There are a variety of boards for users to explore and connect with users with similar cultural interests. On these boards, one may communicate by posting images with message threads attached with interests ranging in topics such as video games, sports, Japanese Anime, photography, and politics. Users do not need to register for an account before participating in the

4chan community. Rather, one can post on message boards anonymously as long as the post follows the global rules set forth by 4chan. There are 17 rules that maintain freedom of speech while disallowing for automated posting, scams, and advertising. 4chan's popularity is driven by its anonymous and ephemeral environment which has facilitated rapid generation of new trends and registers that have created a digital, social media platform for violent interactions between users. Each 4chan board only allows for ten pages of content and the length of time image threads spend on a specific 4chan board is contingent on the volume of traffic therefore more traffic means a faster turnover; less traffic means a slower turnover. Therefore, a link to a particular message board or post will be non-existent in a matter of hours to days and time depends on how popular the message board, with only a ten-page limit, more posts means each post spends less time on 4chan. Given its anonymous and ephemeral nature, 4chan has created certain message boards that have fostered a violent computer mediated communication space that often incorporates aggressive gamerspeak to build in-group identities that project identities of power.

The three message boards that were a point of focus for my research were: Robot 9001 (r9k), Random (b), and Politically Incorrect (pol). I chose the Robot 9001, Random, and Politically Incorrect boards because they are often a more violent environment than other 4chan boards due to the outcast nature that attracts fellow users who and more like "robots." Additionally, the three boards selected have strictly enforced "no repeat" policies, meaning no one can repost, copy, or repeat any content that has been on the image board, by the moderators so the conversations of users are typically random and obscure. While many of the 65 4chan boards are content specific (boards with dedicated uses such as technology, fitness, business, literature), Robot 9001, Random, and Politically Incorrect are not content-specific boards but rather boards where anything can be shared. For this reason, each has created a CMC space where freedom of speech is given high protection with disregard to the images and communications

being shared. Robot 9001, Random, and Politically Incorrect are image boards with rules stating there may be no exact reposts and all images must be accompanied by text. The challenge in working with 4chan from a linguistic research perspective is that archiving posts for the purpose of text mining are made difficult when the very nature of this interface involves a lack of permanency. My solution has been working with CiceroLite.

CiceroLite is natural language processing software nestled within Language Computers. Language Computers is a software company that assists in researchers, “with intelligent, semantically-informed search and discovery software tools which unlock value by actually understanding the information stored in any large collections of text.” The goal of Language Computers is to assist in archiving and processes unstructured texts, like 4chan, and CiceroLite is software that was developed to be a tool utilized by researchers to make sense of unstructured texts. CiceroLite is a natural language processing tool to help researchers collecting and studying large amounts of text.

Natural language processing (or NLP) is a field of computer science that handles artificial intelligence and computational linguistics so that researchers can study the interactions between computers and human languages. As computer mediated communication (CMC) becomes a more common platform for speakers to utilize, linguistic research has to adapt to be able to study and analyze large sets of data and NLP has aided in being able to undertake research with large sets of data by providing technological innovations to archive and process the data. NLP is relevant to my research on how people use language in digital spaces in that it assisted with processing this information to make it understandable and useable to my research in a specific way. I used NLP for my research so that I could collect research from 4chan as sets of data to interpret how users were borrowing gamerspeak to build in-group identities.

To text mine websites such as 4chan, researchers have often relied on screenshots and transcriptions due to the ephemerality of the website, but this creates high error rates due to human inaccuracy. Instead of using screenshot and transcription methods, I processed the webpage of the specific image board that incorporated threats of violence using NLP software such as CiceroLite which would transcribe the text present for me and I had an accurate and permanent record of the sample. Before completing an analysis of the tokens of gamerspeak on 4chan, it was crucial to establish gaming terminology independent from 4chan so I knew what data to collect. The following section outlines how I accomplished this goal.

2.3 Collection of Video Game Terms on Non-Gaming Platforms

4chan data was collected on the last weekend of each month because this time period is when games are generally released, resulting in more conversations than usual which incorporated gaming language. Since Robot 9001, Random, and Politically Incorrect are message boards on 4chan with no specific topic, they are the most populated boards by users. During low activity times, a post will last between two and three hours. However, at the release of video games and times of violence (such as the Umpqua College shooting on October 1, 2015), the posts lasted approximately an hour which means that double the traffic was coming through these boards during these times which allowed me to mine more data for research.

2.3.1 Determining Data to Text Mine

Since I was not a regular user of gamerspeak, I had to establish a repertoire of terms that hold specific meanings within a video game context in order to identify threats of violence incorporating video game terms so I knew whether it was valuable and useful data for the

purposes of this research. In order to do this, I conducted an analysis of eSports athletes who play video games. In this analysis, I focused only on video games that allow for in-game communications with fellow players. The most common gaming platforms that allow for in-game communication are role-playing games (RPGs), which include genres such as first-person shooter games (FPS games like Call of Duty, Destiny, and Bloodborne), and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs like World of Warcraft, League of Legends, and Clash of Clans). Additionally, I avoided non-FPS games where in-game communication with other players is not possible (games such as strategy, simulation, or sports and include games like Madden NFL, The Sims, or Rock Band). The world of eSports incorporates more than these types of games but these offer the most CMC interactions between players. Two of the most accomplished and established professional athletes in FPS and MMORPG are Jonathan Wendel and Peter Dager, who have won major competitions playing games like Alien vs. Predator, Call of Duty, Painkiller, and Dota 2. I began studying Wendel and Dager by watching their gaming sessions, reading interviews they conducted, and listening to what language they employed. From here, I was able to build a vocabulary of common gaming terms so that I could identify them in online spaces such as 4chan.

The first step was to collect data from published interviews that discussed the world of competitive video gaming from Forbes, Time Magazine, the New York Times, and 60 Minutes to establish that Wendel and Dager were professional athletes well acclimated to video game cultures and were appropriate speakers to study. After establishing their appropriateness for the research, I watched YouTube videos from popular video game channels such as Major League Gaming and Major League Gaming DOTA and watched videos they have released on their own web pages where each eSports athlete discussed topics such as rigorous training schedules, awards, titles, and strategy methods that included discussing the most efficient ways to

communicate with fellow players. The purpose of this step in the research and data collection was as a means to begin building an archive of gaming terms that included information on how professional eSports athletes use these terms to become more effective in their gameplay strategies. I selected terms that were used at least three times in similar contexts because that indicated a commonly held definition of the term. Following the first step of identifying terms specific to video game play, I had to determine definitions for these terms and this research objective was accomplished by watching recorded competitive gameplay sessions of Jonathan Wendel and Peter Dager and archiving when a term was used in similar situations and held a common meaning.

2.3.2 Jonathan Wendel and Peter Dager

I determined that Jonathan Wendel (game name Fatal1ty) and Peter Dager (game name ppd) were the ideal candidates to study based on four criteria I deemed to be good measurements of their expertise knowledge of video game terms: experience, earnings, sponsors, and champion titles. While Wendel and Dager did not represent the gaming community as a whole, they were two of the most influential video game players who speak American English and have a significant impact on the processes of gamerspeak. Wendel has sixteen years of professional gameplay experience, debuting in 1999, grossed close to a million dollars in prize money, attracted a variety of corporate sponsors, and won fourteen tournaments, twelve of which were world titles. Dager has four years of professional gameplay experience, grossed over two million dollars in prize money, attracted T-Mobile as a sponsor, and has won eighteen eSports championships.

I watched videos of their gameplay that won them championship titles and recorded terms that were specific to gameplay such as kiting, spergout, aggro, pk, beta, camp, and uber. For a term to be used in the research, both Wendel and Dager has to use the term and I had to either see

or hear the word used in four different situations with similar contextual meanings. Furthermore, I turned to slang dictionary sites such as Urban Dictionary and video game blogs to assess whether it was a term encountered commonly in video games and if the ways in which Wendel and Dager were using the terms were consistent with their definition. Through the study and research of two professional eSports athletes, I was able to determine linguistic features of enregistered gaming language so that I could understand these features, process them, and begin designing a survey that would assess how well outside speakers gamerspeak speakers could define video game terms and identify when they were being used outside of a gaming platform but still within a computer mediated communication platforms (such as 4chan) through a survey that was distributed to the Virginia Tech community.

2.4 Survey Construction

The purpose of the survey was to determine how well speakers with varying exposure to video games recognized terms from gamerspeak, in general and then in the context of a threat. This was accomplished by first asking participants to define terms common to gamerspeak and then asking the participants to identify whether they interpreted example sentences incorporating common video game terms as communicating threats of violence. The survey was constructed using Qualtrics software that allowed me to collect, analyze, and interpret the data in multiple ways. The first page of the survey was a static page which provided participants with information about the study and informed consent.

The second page of the survey posed questions about demographic information about participants. The first demographic question of the capacity of attendance at Virginia Tech (undergraduate, graduate, or faculty/staff) was asked so that I could see which population sect is more heavily involved video games to determine if there was a community correlation, similar to

asking for their age. I asked participants to identify what their age was to determine if certain age groups are more familiar with gamerspeak to be able to identify any patterns in the data collected. The third demographic information I asked for of participants was whether they were an international student because international students' answers were not considered for the survey due to the language and cultural barriers that could provide different common definitions of video game terms. The fourth demographic question asked the participants gender to be able to draw any possible correlations to gender and understanding of video game terms. Finally, the last two demographic questions asked how much time they spend on social media and how much time they spend playing video games (hours per week) in order to observe possible correlations between frequent hours of video game play and terms defined in relation to video games. For this question, participants were given seven options, and could choose 0-5 hours per week, 6-10 hours per week, 11-15 hours per week, 16-20 hours per week, 21-25 hours per week, 26-30 hours per week, and 31 hours or more per week.

Following the demographics page of the survey, I provided gaming terms alongside distractor terms (such as *fleek* and *thot*) and asked the participant to define the term to the best of their ability. The use of distractor terms was so that the survey wasn't obvious that it was seeking to answer questions about gamerspeak comprehension and seemed as if it were trying to provide answers to current language trend comprehension. If they were unable to define the term, they were asked to put "N/A" in the text box. The final part of the survey provided example sentences that incorporated both video game terms and distractor terms in ways that could be perceived as either non-threatening and threatening communications and asked participants to determine whether a sentence was communicating a threat of violence or not. An example sentence used was, "I'll be kiting them in and finish it later" (for all example sentences participants were given, see Appendix A).

The survey was distributed through the undergraduate and graduate listservs through Virginia Tech. By using these listservs, I was able to target 18 to 25 year-olds, since they are the key demographic for video games. This age group also generally consists of individuals who are digitally oriented and have experience with computer-mediated communication. While I did not actively limit participants who were outside of the 18-25 age bracket, participants did, however, need to be at least 18 years of age to participate in the survey due to ethical considerations of obtaining consent from minors.

Data from the surveys was examined for patterns to answer research questions about gaming language, online threats, and law enforcement. Assessing outside speakers' understandings of gamerspeak was important because it can provide research that builds off of Collister's previous work on language and video games and Squires's work on internet registers and explore the intertextual relationships between gamerspeak and internet registers.

CHAPTER THREE: GAMERSPEAK AND VIDEO GAME CULTURES

3.1 Enregistering Gamerspeak

While conducting research on video gaming language, I encountered characteristics of gamerspeak that seemed to result from the unique needs of video game players. For example, many of the examples of gamerspeak I discovered shared features of abbreviated or simplified terms. Within video game platforms, decisions must be made quickly to respond efficiently to certain situations occurring within the game and communicate those decisions to fellow players, which is the major influence in the process that language undergoes in video games.

Enregisterment happens when a language variety becomes recognizably different from other varieties and develops associations with certain groups of people.²⁵ In contrast, jargon is a specialized vocabulary for specific fields. The enregisterment of gamerspeak has seen rapid changes over time as the genres and strategies of games are developed, since some vocabulary is no longer used while new vocabulary is developed in order to meet player needs. Like other natural languages, gamerspeak will never become fossilized due to frequent technology changes. That said, many of the linguistic processes of the language will remain because the social components of video games and need for efficient, concise communications will always be a factor in the linguistic processes of gamerspeak. While these changes are rooted in technological changes such as new video games release, downloadable content (DLC), and expansions of the game, there are also language processes rooted in social and ideological changes. Behavioral patterns of gamers and interactions with fellow players, new and old to a given game, satisfy certain preconditions of enregisterment by making gamerspeak maximally noticeable in contrast with Standard American English, as gamers themselves gain increased exposure to new terms over the course of their exposure to different gaming communities.²⁶

²⁵ Agha, "The Social Life," 231.

²⁶ Johnstone, "Pittsburghese Shirts," 160.

This chapter explores two concepts: enregistered linguistic features of gamerspeak and the intertextual borrowing of aggressive gamerspeak by 4chan users to create in-group power identities. There were 48 terms specific to games that were observed being used in three different instances for each term (therefore, 144 usages of the terms defined the terms in a video game context). Gamerspeak is an enregistered variety of language that allows users to be able to communicate concisely and efficiently to relay decisions that need to be made quickly, given there is a small window of time to respond to situations within the video game.

3.2 Structure of Video Gaming Language

There are two forms of communication that exist in video games: verbal and written. Verbal communication relies on certain technological software (such as console compatible microphones) and is slowed by the lag created by internet-connected communications. Internet lag is one of the factors in video games by players wanting to communicate quickly; information relayed through full sentences gets slowed down by lag and the information is often useless by the time it goes from speaker's mouth to hearer's ears. Various companies have attempted to compensate for lag with written communication, which relies on an in-game chat box where players can talk with one another without any delay. However, because information needs to be relayed quickly, the forms of words and sentences are significantly reduced to allow players to type quickly and relay the information.

The linguistic processes that produce gamerspeak are similar to the linguistic processes that produce much of the commonly popular slang outside video games. Slang is formed productively in that it is formed in conformity with patterns already established in the language

rather than the invention of a word merely by putting sounds together.²⁷ Slang exploits existing forms of words and their current meaning to best suit the users' culture. Previous studies of slang have explored the processes language undergoes to meet the needs of the culture using it. Two common processes are shortening and functional shifts. Shortening is the process whereby a word is shortened by one or more syllables (for example, *obvi* from *obviously*). Functional shifts are when words shift in grammatical function without the form of the word being altered (as is the case with shortenings).²⁸ As a non-slang correlate, Eble used the example *step* since it you can use it as a verb (step to the right please) or as a noun (be careful on the last step).²⁹ Thus, while the function of the word changes, the form stays the same. These same linguistic processes, as well as some others, that produce more mainstream slang also produce gamerspeak, an enregistered variety of CMC, which in and of itself has certain linguistic norms.

CMC is characterized by features such as acronyms and initialisms, word reductions, letter/number homophones, and stylized spelling and punctuation.³⁰ However, in the beginning of CMC research, there were few considerations of social and contextual factors that led to the linguistic processes of language use in a digital world. Publically available data was collected in large quantities, generally at random, and analyzed without any interpretation of how the discursive and social contexts impacted the linguistic processes.³¹ However, membership in a speech community is not defined by uniformity in the use of all language elements but rather by participation in a set of shared norms or language.³² In video games, there are generalized

²⁷ Connie Eble, "Form," in *Slang and Sociability: In-group Language Among College Students* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 25-27.

²⁸ Eble, "Slang and Socialbility," 34.

²⁹ Eble, "Slang and Socialbility," 33-34.

³⁰ David Barton and Cameron Lee, "Language in the Digital World," in *Language in the Digital World* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5.

³¹ Barton, "Digital World Language," 6.

³² William Labov, "The Reflection of Social Processes in Linguistic Structures," *Readings in the Sociology of Language* (1968): 250-51.

processes that happen because of the social contexts; the need to make quick decisions between player and teammates requires that language undergoes processes to meet these needs.

3.2.1 Morphological Processes

Morphological processes occur when a new word form is developed through shortening a larger word and is the result of applying rules that alter a word-form or stem in order to produce a new word. There are three morphological processes I observed language undergoing when used in a video game context: clipping, blending, and acronyms and initialisms.

Video game players are in unique cultural circumstances where they encounter situations that are rarely encountered in the real world such as attacking or luring in enemies to defeat them, so this culture has to develop ways to communicate in these situations that are suited to their cultural interests. Processes through final clipping preserves the meaning of the words being relayed but makes communication between players much simpler. Table 3-1 demonstrates various words that have been enregistered by the gaming community and undergone morphological processes predominantly through final clippings, but there are isolated cases of initial clipping.

Type of Clipping	Original Word	Clipped Words	Example
Final	Aggressive	Aggro	Aggro boss
Final	Complicated	Com	It's com
Final	Defense	Def	Be on def
Final/Initial	Experience	Xp	Xp level up
Final/Initial	Congratulations	Grats	(typically encountered as a stand alone)
Initial	Robots	Bots	Bots playing
Final	Mesmerize	Mez	Mez him
Final	Materials	Mats	Mats up ahead
Final	Strategy	Strat	Certain strats are needed

Table 3-1 Morphological Clippings

Acronyms and initialisms are another morphological process that language undergoes to result in terms specific to gamerspeak. Inside speakers of video gaming understand the necessity of shortening language to quickly communicate with fellow players the decisions that need to be made. Table 3-2 illustrates the various the type of morphological process (acronyms and initialisms), the full phrase, and the resulting morphological process that Standard American English has undergone to become unique to gamerspeak.

Type	Words	Result
Initialism	Away From Keyboard	AFK
Acronym	Damage Over Time	DOT
Initialism	Game Master	GM
Initialism	Link Dead	LD
Initialism	Learn to Play	L2P
Acronym	Low on Mana	LOM
Initialism	Player Versus Player	PVP

Table 3-2 Morphological initialisms and acronyms

3.2.2 Semantic Processes

Gamerspeak terms have also undergone semantic processes within gaming platforms, with the most common semantic process consisting of borrowings to form polysemes. Polysemes are when a sign (word or phrase) has multiple signifiers (definitions). The video game community enregisters signs that hold common place signifiers but have a different meaning for their purpose of communicating information to fellow players to make group decisions. Gamerspeak undergoes similar processes as slang, with the end-result eventually becoming an enregistered variety of language based on the coherence and consistency of the terms associated with gamerspeak. Table 3-2 illustrates the words that have undergone semantic processes to hold a specific meaning to the video game community.

Term	Common Meaning	Gaming Meaning
Add	Put together	Extra characters coming into a game play level
Alpha	First letter of the Greek alphabet	Primary characters in a video game
Beta	Denoting the second of a series	Secondary characters in a video game
Boss	A person with authority over others	A monster or signature character that characters fight
Camp	Temporary accommodations or supporters of a particular party	Position in some games where a group will sit and continually kill things as they spawn
Ding	A ringing sound	Indicates that an item or player has leveled up
Farm	Plot of land used for growing crops and rearing animals	When a character collects certain items
Kite	A toy flown in the wind	A player that pulls in enemies to kill them

Table 3-3 Semantic process of terms within the video game community

In addition to morphological and semantic processes, there are significant syntactic structure differences in video gaming communications compared to SAE. As seen with other examples in this chapter, in the case of syntax often unnecessary words are removed from sentence structure, such as copulas, determiners, and discourse markers³³. Copulas assign attributes or qualities to nouns but can be eliminated and retain the meaning of the sentence. Copula deletion and contraction has been studied in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) for many years and has focused on copula behavior in an environment that is based on quantitative sound and theoretical grounds.³⁴ What linguist have found with copula deletion in AAVE is that the copula is deleted where SAE would allow for contraction.³⁸ For example:

³³ William Labov, "Language in the inner city," in *A study of the Nonstandard English of Negro and Puerto Rican speakers in New York City, Volume 2* (New York: Columbia University, 1972).

³⁴ Renée Blake, "Defining the envelope of linguistic variation: The case of "don't count" forms in the copula analysis of African American Vernacular English," *Language Variation and Change* 9 (1997): 57-58. ³⁸Labov, *Language in the inner city*.

We *are* out of town —————> We out of town
They *are* going to sing on stage —————> They going to sing on
stage The bird *is* flying —————> The bird flying

Many copulas in English act as a linking verb and are unnecessary to the understanding of sentences, therefore familiar speakers of gamerspeak often delete copulas while retaining the meaning of their communications for information to be more quickly relayed to fellow players.

Examples of copula deletion in gaming communications are:

Boss *is* ahead —————> Boss ahead
We *are* kiting —————> We kiting

The sentences have retained their meaning without the copulas but have been simplified to more quickly communicate with fellow players their intended actions so that other players can accommodate and respond to those actions. Determiners are also deleted words in video gaming language to efficiently and concisely communicate.

A determiner is a linguistic item such as an article (*the, a, or an*), demonstratives (*this, that*), possessive determiners (*my, their*), quantifiers (*many, few, several*), distributive (*each, any*), and interrogative determiners (*which*) that qualifies or determines nouns or noun phrases.³⁵

However, communication within gaming platforms is widely truncated to remove words that do not add additional meanings while retaining what the speaker is attempting to communicate with fellow players. For example:

My mana is low —————> Mana low (deletion of possessive determiner)
Any player welcome —————> Player welcome (deletion of distributive determiner)
I am in the camp —————> In camp

The determiners are deleted and the meaning is not lost for familiar speakers of video gaming language. This allows for speakers to communicate quickly for decisions to be made quickly.

Discourse markers are deleted from gaming syntax structure in order to simplify communications

³⁵ Carlota Smith, "Determiners and Relative Clauses in a Generative Grammar of English," *Language Society of America* 40 (1964): 38-39.

with other players. Discourse markers are particle words used to redirect conversational flow but do not add anything significant to the meaning of communication (words such as *like, oh, um,* and *you know*). Discourse markers are part of conversational routines, syntactically detached from the sentence, therefore they can often be deleted without any semantic content being lost in the sentence.³⁶ Therefore, video game players who participate in gamerspeak conversations often delete discourse markers in order to quickly communicate ideas to fellow players. Language is broken down into its most basic forms and stripped of all unnecessary language to quickly communicate in game decisions with fellow players.

3.3 Intertextual Borrowing of Gamerspeak to Form Social Identities

Computer mediated communication (CMC) is becoming an increasingly more common medium, providing opportunities for intertextual borrowing of enregistered varieties of language from one platform to accommodate needs on another CMC platform. While video games offer a unique communication platform for individuals to utilize, the enregistered language of gamerspeak has been borrowed by the 4chan community to communicate with fellow users. This overlap in language use across the two platforms may in part be due to demographic makeup of 4chan users, which is similar to that of frequent gamers: 18-34 years in age, 70% male, college attendees or graduates, and primarily interested in video games.³⁷ CMC platforms such as 4chan offer the availability to form communities of people with similar interests and have created a digital space where video gaming language can be used to communicate with various 4chan speakers while under the protection of ephemerality and anonymity. However, when the

³⁶ Karin Aijmer, "Chapter Five: Discourse Markers as Conversational Routines," in *Conversational Routines in English: Convention and Creativity* (New York: Routledge, 1996): 215-17.

³⁷ "4chan's Statistics Page," last modified January 2016. <http://www.4chan.org/advertise>

enregistered language is used outside of a video game platform, it presents comprehension issues for non-gamers as well as new opportunities to use the language in a variety of ways.

4chan is a growing CMC platform that is an ephemeral image sharing space for users that allows communities with similar interests to communicate with one another on an anonymous platform; the communities create a space that allows users to borrow aggressive gamerspeak in order to build in-group identity with one another that demonstrates their power in the group. While there are isolated incidences of the communication of threats of violence being committed in real life, for the majority of 4chan users the borrowing of aggressive gamerspeak terms is more about building in-group social identity than intentions of committing violence in real life. Social identity is something that is not fixed but rather in a constant state of fluctuation because people are continually constructing and reconstructing their social identities based on experiences with other people in the world. One way people achieve social identities with others is through language and what theorist Judith Butler calls a set of repeated acts. Social identities are formed through repeatedly performing cultural norms, values, and expectations.³⁸ Within the 4chan community, the cultural norms for Robot 9001, Politically Incorrect, and Random represent aggressive, dominance-asserting interaction styles. Because 4chan thrives on social identities that exert power, 4chan users borrow the aggressive language of gamerspeak in order to demonstrate their power to other users.

Figure 3-1 and 3-2 demonstrate semantic processes in words such as *beta* and *robots* that have been appropriated by video game speakers to have unique meanings for them and illustrates how video gaming language is used outside of video game platforms on 4chan to communicate threats of violence. The terms *beta* and *normies* were employed by speakers who understand

³⁸ Dwi Noverini Djenar, "Language, Identity, and Communities of Practice," in *Language and Identity Across Modes of Communication* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015): 15-17.

gamerspeak but in a way to build a social identity with other users, “how about next time one of your beta cuck faggots goes postal take out some politicians or gangbusters huh” and “normies, get ready to fuckin drop” but under the protection of anonymity because they do not have to register an account with 4chan. While Figure 3-1 can be understood by outside speakers of gaming language, there are instances where the communications involve more complex aspects of gamerspeak as a means of forming solidarity with users and constructing a social identity. Additionally, Figure 3-2 illustrates how a working vocabulary of gaming language is employed to target certain populations of people; the user and inside speaker is communicating what types of people and how many of each type to kill, “13 normies, 1 robot.”

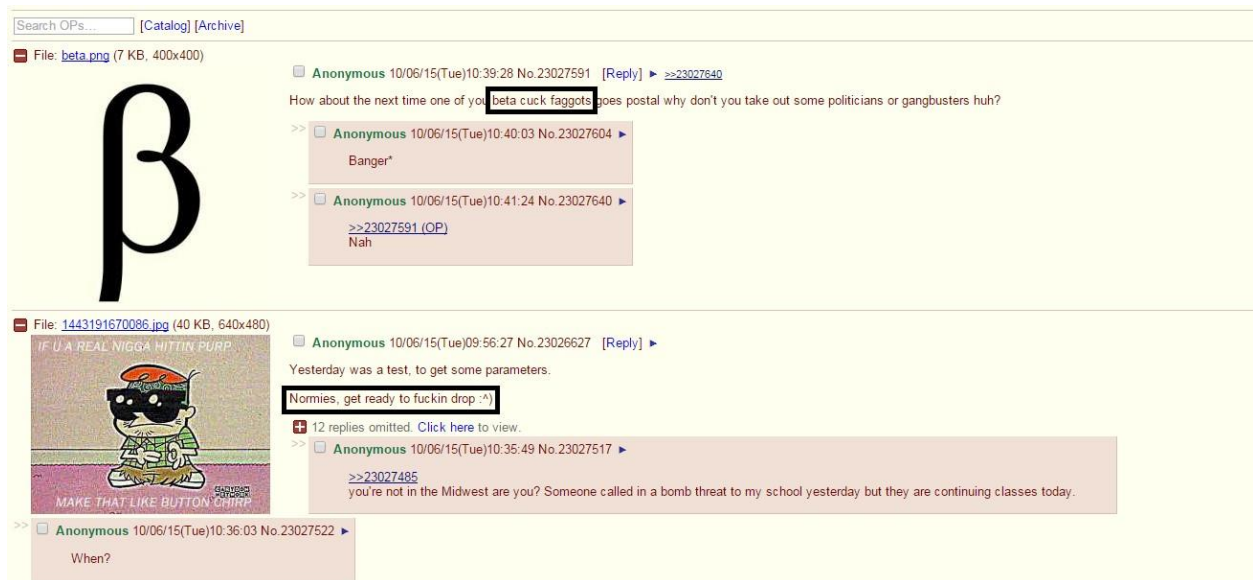


Figure 3-1



Figure 3-2

Figure 3-3 demonstrates how the term *anon* is employed by speakers who understand gamerspeak. *Anon* is commonly understood as meaning as soon or shortly, however it is the name used to mark someone as member of “The Kill Everyone Project” (or TKEP) which is a common hold in video games to go on rampages and kill both enemy and ally in the game.

However, outside of a video game platform, it is used as an organization to coordinate shootings. 4chan users borrow this aggressive gamerspeak term to demonstrate the power that they hold as a way to form a social identity congruent with the social identity expectations of users on the boards Robot 9001, Random, and Politically Incorrect. Figure 3-4 and Figure 3-5 incorporate more complex gamerspeak that it not as easily understood with terms such as *irc channels*, *beta uprising*, and *high score*.

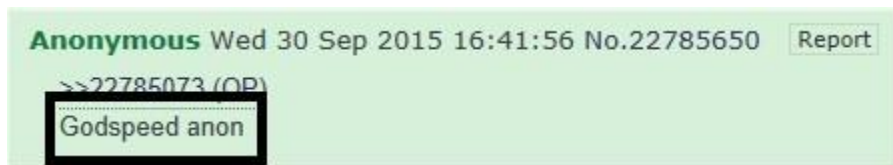


Figure 3-3

Figure 3-4 and Figure 3-5 demonstrate morphological processes in words through acronyms and initialisms while illustrating how communications between inside speakers of gaming language and how these speakers are employing various terms from video games and using those terms to communicate threats of violence while attempting to coordinate the actions with other inside speakers of gamerspeak while protected on a CMC platform with anonymity and ephemerality. An IRC channel is an *internet relay chat* that allows gamers to communicate with fellow players if the video game does not have in-game communication platforms. Within this particular threat, the speakers are coordinating communication through an IRC channel. Additionally, the speakers are attempting to coordinate acts of violence that have been termed the beta uprising (secondary characters in games, but secondary males in life) and achieve a new high score (high scores in games are when players are able to kill enemy characters to beat a former high score). However, inside speakers of video games have also developed words to fit their situations in video games that are not necessarily reflective of actual actions within the society.



Figure 3-4



Figure 3-5

Figure 3-6 and Figure 3-7 offer insight into the language that develops out of a need to communicate situations and actions unique to video games. The term *sperg* is commonly understood as an aggravated player due to some perceived injustice within the game (cheaters, glitches, cheat codes, etc.). The term *spergout* is employed to mean a violent act due to some perceived injustice. While semantically understood to individuals within the gaming community,

it is a word developed by these individuals and not easily understood by outside speakers and employed to communicate threats of violence.



Figure 3-6



Figure 3-7

3.4 Conclusions of Gamerspeak

Enregistered varieties of language are closely tied to social context and experience, and gamerspeak reflects the cultural norms of video games and video game players. In part, we see

this through the linguistic processes that produce gamerspeak, which reflect the culture of video games and the unique needs to its players. While the syntactic, semantic, lexical, and morphological processes of gamerspeak produce what appear to be commonly understood terms, they are employed in ways specific to video games so that players can fulfill a communicative need within their situations. Due to the substantial linguistic processes that language undergoes, however, gamerspeak may not always be comprehensible to outsiders. 4chans users capitalize on the lack of understanding by outside speakers in order to use gamerspeak as a coded language, at times using it to communicate threats of violence.

CHAPTER FOUR: VIDEO GAMING LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION
SURVEY

4.1 Survey Results and Interpretations

Recent research has explored how gamerspeak is used in face-to-face conversations.³⁹ Sierra found that there were epistemic shifts, or shifts in knowledge acquirement, in conversation when problematic talk was encountered, and gamerspeak was used as a means to shift the tone of the conversation. Instead of conversations being framed around serious and urgent issues, gamerspeak was used to explore the same problems in a lighter, more humorous mode of discussion.⁴⁰ Thus it can be seen how gamerspeak may be used in an in-group context to build solidarity, if all members of the groups understand the function and meaning of the terms employed. Of course, if speakers unfamiliar with gamerspeak were present to observe, these same interactions likely would be interpreted differently.

Enregisterment processes rely on the social contexts and shared experiences of the users, however, 4chan users have borrowed linguistic processes from gamerspeak to communicate threats of violence that are difficult to understand for non-gamers. As a way to assess understanding of gamerspeak and the intertextual borrowing of gamerspeak by the 4chan community, in following subsections I analyze the results from the survey that was distributed to the Virginia Tech community. The aim of the survey was to determine if there were differences between gamers and non-gamers in terms of how often they defined the gaming vocabulary identified in the previous chapter in a way specific to video games, and then by determining whether they differed in deciding whether certain phrases featuring these terms communicate threats of violence.

4.2 Participant Demographics

³⁹ Sylvia Sierra, "Playing out loud: Videogame references as resources in friend interaction for managing frames, epistemics, and group identity," *Language in Society* (2016): 2.

⁴⁰ Sylvia Sierra, "Playing out loud," 4.

Details about the survey design are outlined in Chapter 2. The survey was distributed through ListServ functions at Virginia Tech to undergraduate, graduate, faculty, and staff of the university. The survey was open for 30 days (running from February 9, 2016 to March 9 2016), had an 88% completion rate (of 106 surveys started, 90 were completed). The participant pool had participants between the ages of 18 years old and 58 years old, was comprised of 43 undergraduate students, 44 graduate students, and two faculty or staff, and an almost even gender split.

76 participants identified spending five or less hours per week playing video games, but 14 of the participants identified spending six or more hours per week playing video games. In the rest of this paper I will refer to these 14 participants as *mega gamers* and the remaining participants as *non-mega gamers*.

4.3 Data Presentation, Interpretation, and Analysis

The inclusion of common slang terms as distractor terms was so that participants could not overtly identify the aim of the survey and I could collect more organic answers (the distractor terms were *fleek*, *thot*, *snatched*, *bae*, *ama*, *dafuq*, *ELI5*, *sus*, *boots*, and *hunty*). The first task for participants was to define the terms as best they could, and I coded whether participants defined the terms in relation to video games.

Term	Mega Gamer Raw Count	Mega Gamer Percentage	Non-Mega Gamer Raw Count	Non-Mega Gamer Percentage	Ratio
Fleek	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Thot	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Snatched	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Bae	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Ama	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Dafuq	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
ELI5	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Sus	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Grats	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Hunty	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Spergout	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
Pwned	5	35.71	16	21.05	1.70
L2P	2	14.29	6	7.89	1.81
Camp	7	50.00	20	26.32	1.90
Beta	5	35.71	12	15.79	2.26
Newb	4	28.57	8	10.53	2.71
Mana	10	71.43	18	23.68	3.02
Xp	4	28.57	6	7.89	3.62
Aggro	6	42.86	8	10.53	4.07
PvP	3	21.43	4	5.26	4.07
Git Gud	5	35.71	6	7.89	4.52
Leech	1	7.14	1	1.32	5.43
Kiting	6	42.86	5	6.58	6.51
Boots	1	7.14	0	0.00	7.14
Normie	4	28.57	0	0.00	28.57

Table 4-1 Quantitative analysis of terms defined in relation to video games by mega gamers and non-mega gamers. The highlighted rows are where gamers were twice as likely as non-gamers to define the terms as video-game related.

Table 4-1 provides information for a quantitative analysis of definitions of terms by mega gamers and non-mega gamers. Ratios were calculated by dividing the percentage of megagamers who defined a term with gaming terminology by the percentage of non-mega gamers who did. If the ratio is 1, the two groups defined the word equally in gaming terms. If the ratio is higher than one, more mega gamers defined it as a gaming term, and if the number is lower than one, more non-mega gamers did. Critically, the terms that were used as distractors were rarely defined in relation to video games by both mega gamers and non-mega gamers, with the exception of *boots*. One participant defined the slang term *boots* in relation to video games by defining that it was a mod a video game character could wear to increase their speed and agility. However, terms that hold specific meanings in video games had higher ratios of being defined in relation to video games by mega gamers than non-mega gamers. For example, *aggro*, *PvP*, *git gud*, *leech*, and *kiting* were at least four times more likely to be defined in relation to video games by mega gamers than non-mega gamers. The blue section of table 4-1 are terms that were at minimum twice as likely to be defined in relation to video games by mega gamers than nonmega gamers. However, the terms *spergout* and *grats* were never defined in relation to video games by either mega gamers or non-mega gamers. The reason *grats* was not defined in relation to video games is that it is also used commonly outside of video games to congratulate someone; because *grats* holds the same meaning both within and outside of video games, it does not hold a meaning exclusive to gamerspeak. The fact that *spergout* was not defined in relation to video games by anyone suggests that it is a less well known term outside of the vocabularies of Jonathan Wendel and Peter Dager and is likely highly specific to the game DOTA that they were playing and not gamerspeak in a more generalize sense.

Term	Mega Gamer Raw Count	Mega Gamers Percentage (N=14)	Non-Mega Gamer Raw Count	Non-Mega Gamers Percentage (N=76)	Ratio
PvP	1	7.14	45	59.21	0.12
Ama	1	7.14	39	51.32	0.14
Xp	1	7.14	35	46.05	0.16
L2P	5	35.71	65	85.53	0.42
Leech	4	28.57	51	67.11	0.43
Aggro	4	28.57	48	63.16	0.45
Mana	4	28.57	48	63.16	0.45
Camp	2	14.29	22	28.95	0.49
Git Gud	5	35.71	53	69.74	0.51
ELI5	6	42.86	62	81.58	0.53
Pwned	3	21.43	28	36.84	0.58
Kiting	6	42.86	56	73.68	0.58
Grats	4	28.57	37	48.68	0.59
Beta	4	28.57	36	47.37	0.60
Sus	9	64.29	61	80.26	0.80
Snatched	4	28.57	26	34.21	0.84
Bae	3	21.43	19	25.00	0.86
Normie	7	50.00	41	53.95	0.93
Hunty	11	78.57	62	81.58	0.96
Boots	6	42.86	33	43.42	0.99
Spergout	14	100.00	72	94.74	1.06
Fleek	5	35.71	23	30.26	1.18
Thot	7	50.00	31	40.79	1.23
Dafuq	2	14.29	8	10.53	1.36
Newb	4	28.57	16	21.05	1.36

Table 4-2 Quantitative Analysis of Terms Unknown to Mega Gamers and Non-Mega Gamers. Highlighted rows are places where non-gamers were twice as likely than gamers to not define a term.

Table 4-2 provides information for a quantitative analysis of terms that were unknown to mega gamers and non-mega gamers. While mega gamers had higher ratios of defining terms in relation to video games, they had higher ratios of not being able to define slang terms. The terms *dafuq*, *thot*, and *fleek* were less known to mega gamers than non-mega gamers (though the percentages are not drastically different) and this suggests that the fact that gamers more often

define words in gaming terms is not because they are just generally more slang-savvy than nonmega gamer; that is, their advantage is specific to gaming terminology. Table 4-2 also shows that mega-gamers more frequently offered any definition for terms that are specific to video games such as *kiting*, *pwned*, *camp*, and *mana* compared to non-gamers. A ratio below .50 means that non-mega gamers did not attempt to define the terms at least twice as often as mega gamers, and most of these words – *PvP*, *ama*, *Xp*, *L2P*, *Leech*, *aggro*, *mana*, and *camp* – are gaming words. This data suggests that the reason that the differences seen in Table 4-1 weren't because nonmega gamers offered alternative definitions of these words; instead, they do not know these words at all. Gamerspeak is associated with specific social experiences of video game players and gaming culture, but there is a lack of knowledge by outside speakers. When nonstandard language practices become associated with specific groups of speakers by outsiders, it becomes recognized as an enregistered variety of language. While gamerspeak employs nonstandard language practices, there are still many outside speakers who do not know or associate the nonstandard language choices with video game cultures so it has not become a fully enregistered variety of language.

Sentence	Mega Gamer Raw Count	Mega Gamer Percentage (N=14)	NonMega Gamer Raw Count	Non-Mega Gamer Percentage (N=76)	Ratio
I'm starting a spergout tonight	1	7.14	11	14.47	0.49
You're going to get pwned	5	35.71	46	60.53	0.59
Look at thot	2	14.29	17	22.37	0.64
Dafuq do you think you're doing	4	28.57	30	39.47	0.72
I'll be kiting them in and finishing it later	3	21.43	20	26.32	0.81
You're such a fucking normie	4	28.57	26	34.21	0.84
The dude deserves grats	1	7.14	6	7.89	0.90
I am going to be on fleek tonight	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00
The beta uprising is starting	4	28.57	21	27.63	1.03
Man she is going to be hunty tonight	7	50.00	28	36.84	1.36
My life Xp is going up after I'm done with this	3	21.43	8	10.53	2.04
I am going for a highscores lesson	3	21.43	7	9.21	2.33

Table 4-3 Quantitative analysis of participants who identified whether they interpret a sentence communicated a threat

The last component of the survey sought to assess how often participants identified interpreting a sentence as communicating threats of violence or not. Table 4-3 shows how often participants identified sentences as communicating threats of violence. The bolded sentences are ones that incorporated video game terms. While there is no strong relationship between having knowledge of video game terms and inferring a sentence as including a threat, there are two instances where mega-gamers are twice as likely as non-mega gamers to interpret a sentence as communicating a threat, specifically the sentences using the video game terms *Xp* and *highscores*. There is also one example of twice as many non-mega gamers identifying a sentence as containing a threat compared to mega gamers. Interestingly, this sentence contains the word *spergout*, which I identified as a gaming term in Chapter 3, but which none of the survey participants defined in terms of video games. However, it should be noted that only one sentence

was deemed threatening by over 50% of all participants (the *pwned* sentence), which suggests that because the sentences were not directed at someone or something specifically, they came across more as aggressive communications than threatening communications.

4.5 Discussion and Conclusion

The survey tells us two things. First, mega gamers more commonly define terms in relation to video games than non-mega gamers. Second, the ratio of mega gamers and non-mega gamers interpreting the sentences as communicating threats was fairly even in nine out of the twelve sentences. While there were two example sentences that were identified as threats by mega gamers twice as often as non-mega gamers, which suggests that there are isolated instances where knowing video game terms motivates a participant to interpret a sentence as communicating a threat, there is no strong relationship between having knowledge of gamerspeak and interpreting sentences as communicating threats of violence.

CHAPTER FIVE: APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF RESEARCH

5.1 Applications and Relevance of Research

Research conducted in this thesis has worked towards understanding gamerspeak as an enregistered variety of language, which is borrowed by 4chan users intertextually, at times to communicate real-world threats of violence. I established that gamerspeak is enregistered due to its identifiable set of terms that, while ever-changing, represents a coherent and consistent way of speaking that is generally associated with gamers as a social identity. The linguistic processes observed that distinguish gamerspeak from Standard American English seem to match the needs of the social contexts of gaming, which require truncated language in order to communicate quickly and concisely. However, because this enregistered variety of language contains certain aggressive terms again due to the context of use within video games, it has been borrowed by 4chan users to communicate threats of violence that may not be interpreted as such by outsiders.

Computer mediated communication (CMC) has become an increasingly common communication medium, and language has necessarily adapted to the specific parameters of this venue.⁴¹ More people are establishing communities by using home computer, laptops, and cellphones for communication which is shaping the language they use to communicate with one another.⁴⁶ The new ways in which languages are being used on the internet have allowed intriguing opportunities for building social identities through internet-specific language use. Furthermore, the internet is an electronic, global, and interactive medium, and each of these properties has consequences for the kind of language found there. The keyboard characters available determine the type of information that can be sent and the size and configuration of the screen determines the type of information that can be seen.⁴² These limitations represent a

⁴¹ Bucholtz, "Language and Youth Culture," 281.

⁴⁶ Tagliamonte and Denis, "Linguistic Ruin," 3.

⁴² David Crystal "The Medium of Netspeak," in *Language and the Internet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 24-25.

fundamental influence in speech acts that occur on the internet. Within video game-specific CMC, there are limitations in that either written or verbal channels exist to share information but the configuration of written textboxes are relatively small in size (occupying no more than 15% of a screen). Therefore, gamerspeak adapts to these limitations by developing terms and sentence structures that are truncated in order to be concise and efficient. Gamerspeak also undergoes linguistic processes that are relevant to the sociocultural factors of video games: achievement, socialization, and immersion. Each of these impacts why a person plays video games and how they negotiate playing video games and their language choices because each is different (achievement focusing on advancement, socialization focusing on relationships with fellow players, and immersion focusing on discovery). Due to these sociocultural factors, the gamerspeak adapts to the needs of the culture, but the resulting language always reflects the need to communicate quickly and efficiently. These linguistic practices have expanded to use on another CMC platform, 4chan, to build an in-group identity among users on the image boards Robot 9001, Politically Incorrect, and Random. This intertextual borrowing is interesting in its own right, but it also has real-world ramifications in that there have been instances of threats communicated using gamerspeak on 4chan which precipitated actual violent acts. Thus I move to applications of this research.

5.2 Applied Linguistics

Applied linguistics (AL) is defined broadly as being, “concerned with increasing understanding of the role of language in human affairs and thereby with providing the knowledge necessary for those who are responsible for taking language-related decisions whether the need

for these arises in the classroom, the workplace, the law court, or the laboratory.”⁴³ More easily understood, AL is an application of language studies in relation to practical problems. First, the ethics of AL studies need to be discussed.

Ethics are defined as a system of moral principles.⁴⁴ In AL research there are seven principles to adhere to in order to conduct ethically minded research. These principles are (1) value to society or science, (2) scientific validity, (3) fair participant selection, (4) minimal risk to benefit ratio, (5) independent review, (6) informed consent, and (7) respect for participants. With these seven principles guiding research, applied linguist should understand that the research they are conducting to solve real-world, language driven problems has ethical responsibilities to those who participate in the research and those who the research is being done for.⁴⁵ AL is intimately tied to completing linguistic studies to develop solutions to language driven problems.

The research that this thesis presented strives to offer solutions to real-world, language driven problems in the realm of online threats. As gamerspeak has come to be borrowed by 4chan users to make threats which sometimes result in real-world acts of violence. A potential application of this research is in terms of prosecution of such crimes, which falls under the realm of forensic linguistics.

5.2.1 Forensic Linguistics

Forensic linguistics is a relatively new subfield within linguistics, a form of applied linguistics. Forensic linguistics is an applied field in the sense that it identifies, investigates, and offers ways to approach cases that relate to language in the courtroom. Jan Svartvik introduced the subfield of forensic linguistics over forty years ago with *The Evans Statements: A Case for*

⁴³ Norbert Schmitt, “An Overview of Applied Linguistics,” in *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2-5.

⁴⁴ Oxford English Dictionary definition.

⁴⁵ Peter DeCosta, “Ethics in Applied Linguistics: An Introduction,” in *Ethics in Applied Linguistic Research* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3-16.

Forensic Linguistics. The growth of forensic linguistics grew slowly at the beginning, given that there was no established discipline or methodology for the study of using language as evidence in the courtroom. The establishments of two professional forensic linguistics associations have assisted in establishing forensic linguistics as a subfield in applied linguistics: International Association of Forensic Linguists (IAFL) and the International Association for Forensic Phonetics and Acoustics (IAFPA).⁴⁶

Forensic linguistics is the study of language and production of linguistic based information that can be used in a court of law. Ronald Butters extolls the virtues of his forensic linguistic consulting as a way to provide solutions to language driven problems in a legal capacity.”⁴⁷ Butters is credited with the sudden growth and development of the field of forensic linguistics. In 1997, Butters suggested three ethical rules to adhere by in forensic linguistic consulting in addition to the primary principles of ethics of applied linguistics as previously discussed. First, only takes cases in which you have specialized linguistic knowledge. Second, a linguist must understand law and be able to use it to obtain the linguistic truth. Third, a linguist has to strive for equanimity.⁴⁸

While the research conducted for this thesis does not provide a clear methodological outline for forensic linguists prosecuting online threats, there are methods and strategies used in preceding chapter that can be valuable for undertaking forensic linguistic evidence from internet based communications. The first strategy of use to forensic linguists is the incorporation of natural language processing softwares such as CiceroLite. A unique challenge to forensic linguist of using some internet communication as evidence is the ephemeral nature of many

⁴⁶ Malcolm Coulthard and Alison Johnson, “Introduction,” in *Introducing Forensic Linguistics: Language in Evidence* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5-7.

⁴⁷ Ronald Butters, “Forensic Linguistics,” *Journal of English Linguistics* (2011): 196.

⁴⁸ Butters, “Forensic Linguistics,” 196-200.

communication platforms, such as 4chan. The research for this thesis became more permanent by using CiceroLite to process a webpage and create a static file that can be employed to build a case for or against a suspect. The second is the survey format, as a means of determining how widely a given threat was understood, or how unambiguously it could be interpreted as a threat.

5.3 Conclusions

The goal of this thesis was to document the features of gamerspeak, identifying the key processes in its development, and to determine in what capacity and for what reasons such language use appear on non-gaming platforms such as 4chan. Moreover, I sought to establish how well general populations understand terms from gamerspeak, in particular in the format of threats. Chapter 1 established gamerspeak as an enregistered variety, distinctive from Standard American English as a recognizable and coherent code. Chapter 2 outlined general methodologies for the rest of the thesis. Chapter 3 illustrated the linguistic processes that produce terms specific to gamerspeak, noting that many seemed motivated by the specific social needs of video game players in terms of speed of communication, as well as their cultural needs of socialization, achievement, and immersion. Additionally, Chapter 3 provided examples of how the aggressive aspect of gamerspeak that Collister discusses is borrowed and adapted by 4chan users to create an in-group identity with one another that builds on masculine ideals of power and dominance. Chapter 4 presented the results of a survey, exploring how well gamer vs. non-gamer populations understand gamerspeak. The findings of the survey concluded that majority of people unfamiliar with gamerspeak do not define terms in relation to video games but rather in relation to common Standard American English or slang meanings.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey

Q1 This study is being conducted by Natalie Richoux, a current graduate student working to earn her Master's degree in the English Department at Virginia Tech. The purpose of this research is to understand how well populations understand current language trends, how they define these terms, and whether they can identify if the term is being used to communicate threats of violence. The results of the research will be used for a master's thesis and will not be published. You are invited to participate in this research as an anonymous participant and answer questions to the best of your ability. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes but understand that some participants could find the examples of the communications of threats incorporating current language trends upsetting. Participants will not be compensated for their time both monetarily and course grades (for students taking the survey). Consent for the survey is indicated with the submission of the survey. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study conduct, or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

Q2 In what capacity are you attending Virginia Tech

- Undergraduate student (1)
- Graduate student (2) Faculty/staff (3)

Q3 What is your age?

18-75+

Q4 Are you an international student?

- Yes (1) No (2)

Q5 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Prefer not to answer (3)

Q6 How much time, on average, do you spend on social media (example Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr) per week?

- 0-5 hours (1)
- 6-10 hours (2)
- 11-15 hours (3)
- 16-20 hours (4)
- 21-25 hours (5)
- 26-30 hours (6) 31+hours (7)

Q7 How much time, on average, do you spend playing video games (example World of Warcraft, Call of Duty, Stargate) ?

- 0-5 hours (1)
- 6-10 hours (2)
- 11-15 hours (3)
- 16-20 hours (4)
- 21-25 hours (5)
- 26-30 hours (6)
- 31+ hours (7)

Q8 For the following section, please define the terms as you understand them as honestly as possible. If you do not know a word or cannot define a word, please indicate this by putting "N/A" in the box.

Q9 Fleek

Q10 Aggro

Q11 Thot

Q12 Kiting

Q13 Snatched

Q14 Bae

Q15 Beta

Q16 AMA

Q17 Leech

Q18 Neewb

Q19 Normie

Q20 Pwned

Q21 Dafuq

Q22 PvP

Q23 ELI5

Q24 Sus

Q25 Mana

Q26 L2P

Q27 Boots

Q28 Grats

Q29 Xp

Q30 Hunty

Q31 Camp

Q32 Git Gud

Q33 Spergout

Q34 For the following section, please indicate whether you believe the term to be communicating threats of violence.

Q35 I am going to be on fleek tonight

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q36 I am starting a spergout tonight.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q37 I'll be kiting them in and finish it later.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q38 You're going to get pwned

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q39 You're such a fucking normie.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q40 The beta uprising is starting.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q41 The dude deserves a grats.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q42 Man she is going to be a hunty tonight.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q43 I am going for a highscores lesson

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q44 My life Xp is going up after I'm done with this.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q45 Dafuq do you thinking you're doing?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Q46 Look at thot.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (please explain) (3) _____

Appendix B: Gaming Terms and Definitions

Add: an extra and often unintended creature joining the battle. If a fellow group member says "Add," expect more company.

Aggro: hatred from an enemy. A tank will want to keep aggro as it will keep the enemy focused on him. This can also be used to alert the group that an enemy has attacked.

AFK: Away From Keyboard.

Alphas: dominant and primary characters in game play.

Assist: used to instruct others to assist a certain person in combat to ensure focused attacks.

Beta: Secondary characters that are less remarkable than the primary characters (alphas) and lack a physical presence.

Boss: boss monsters or signature creatures in an area.

Bug: glitch in the game. They take many shapes and a general description is something within the gaming world that is not working as intended.

Buff: a beneficial spell that can be cast on oneself or an ally. These spells benefit the player with various effects such as armor class enhancement, hit point and mana regeneration, or other increased statistics.

Camp: a position in some games where a group will sit and continually kill things as they spawn. A camp is also referred to an area of enemy inhabitants such as a Pict camp.

Con: used to signify difficulty.

Def or Defense: defense and is also used to refer to a characters armor class or defensive rating.

Ding: a universal constant in every MMOG meaning someone gained a level.

DOT: Damage Over Time skill or spell that will cause the target to suffer a constant amount of damage over a given time period.

Emote: in game character animations that can be activated with slash commands.

Epic: epic quests and epic weapons. These can be and often are class specific.

Exp or Xp: experience.

Farm: When you continually camp an area for certain items of money it is referred to as farming.

GM: Game Masters. They serve as the customer service representatives in the gaming world for a company. They help with in-game issues and sometimes run events for the players.

Grats: congratulations.

Guild: large collection of players who have unified under one banner.

Healer: backbone of any group. It is their job to ensure that the group is healed of wounds before they suffer a sudden case of death.

Kite: players who use skills or spells with speed enhancing or debuffing abilities to pull an enemy like a kite.

LD or Link Dead: meaning loss of connection.

Leech: used to describe someone who joins a group and does little to nothing while reaping all the benefits of the other group members work.

L2P: Learn to Play.

LOM: used by casters and healers and means Low On Mana.

Mez: Mesmerize. This is used to refer to a skill that can keep an enemy locked in place and unable to attack.

Main: refers to a player's main character. The main is the character most played by a person and often their favorite.

Mana: the needed element for casters to use magical skills.

MA: MA is a term used in grouping and raids, it is Main Assist. This is the person that the group should be assisting in combat so that attacks are focused on the same target.

MATS: used by crafters and means materials.

Mob: refers to a creature or enemy controlled by the computer. It is a general term used to describe computer controlled enemies.

MMO: Massively Multi-player Online.

MMOG: Massively Multi-player Online Game.

MMORPG: Massively Multi-player Online Role-Playing Game.

Need before Greed: used to describe a method of loot distribution by ensuring characters agree to divide the loot on a needed basis.

Nerf: used by many people to describe a change in an item, skill, or spell that makes it weaker.

Newb: a new player. It is also used as an insult by some to accuse a player (even a veteran) of having no knowledge or skills.

Ninja Looter: used to describe a person who loots up quickly and greedily almost before the enemy's body hits the ground.

Normie: similar to newb in that they have no knowledge of gaming and its intricacies.

PKILL or PK: Player Kill. A term used for one player killing another.

Pop: used to describe a spawn.

Pulling: used by players to let the group know they are going to pull an enemy back to them.

Pwned: a term used by some people to taunt others and it simply means owned.

PvE: Player vs Environment.

PvP: Player vs Player content.

Uber: elite. This can be used to describe a player or item.

Appendix C: Expanded Tables of Definitions from Surveys

Definition Results

TABLE: General Results with no Filter and 93 Responses

Term	Percentage Defined in Relation to Video Games	Percentage Defined in a Commonly Understood Way	Percentage Defined in an Uncommonly Understood Way	Percentage Unknown
Fleek	0	59 (63.4%)	7 (7.5%)	27 (29.0%)
Aggro	14 (15.0%)	22 (23.6%)	8 (8.8%)	49 (52.6%)
Thot	0	48 (52.6%)	10 (10.7%)	35 (37.6%)
Kiting	11 (11.8%)	8 (8.8%)	5 (5.4%)	69 (74.1%)
Snatched	0	47 (50.5%)	9 (9.6%)	37 (39.7%)
Bae	0	72 (77.4%)	6 (6.4%)	15 (16.1%)
Beta	20 (21.5%)	43 (46.2%)	0	30 (32.2%)
Ama	0	16 (17.2%)	34 (36.5%)	43 (46.2%)
Leech	3 (3.2%)	54 (58.0%)	7 (7.5%)	29 (31.1%)
Newb	17 (18.2%)	54 (58.0%)	2 (2.1%)	20 (21.5%)
Normie	7 (7.5%)	29 (31.1%)	10 (10.7%)	47 (50.5%)
Pwned	24 (25.3%)	29 (31.2%)	10 (10.2%)	31 (33.3%)
Dafuq	0	78 (83.8%)	0	16 (16.7%)
PvP	8 (8.6%)	31 (33.3%)	12 (12.9%)	42 (45.2%)
ELI5	0	23 (24.8%)	0	70 (75.2%)
Sus	0	19 (20.5%)	2 (2.1%)	72 (77.4%)
Mana	24 (25.3%)	29 (31.2%)	9 (10.2%)	31 (33.3%)
L2P	15 (16.1%)	0	7 (7.6%)	71 (76.3%)
Boots	1 (1.5%)	51 (54.5%)	0	40 (43.0%)
Grats	1 (1.0%)	44 (47.3%)	7 (7.6%)	41 (44.1%)
Xp	37 (39.7%)	20 (21.6%)	0	36 (38.7%)
Hunty	0	4 (4.3%)	15 (16.2%)	74 (79.5%)
Camp	30 (32.2%)	28 (30.1%)	11 (11.9%)	24 (25.8%)
Git Gud	29 (31.2%)	6 (6.5%)	0	58 (62.3%)
Spergout	0	3 (3.2%)	0	90 (96.7%)

TABLE: Male Participants Answers

Term	Percentage Defined in Relation to Video Games	Percentage Defined in a Commonly Understood Way	Percentage Defined in an Uncommonly Understood Way	Percentage Unknown
Fleek	0	22 (58.9%)	5 (12.8%)	11 (28.2%)

Aggro	19 (51.3%)	0	4 (10.3%)	15 (38.4%)
Thot	0	20 (52.6%)	5 (13.2%)	13 (33.6%)
Kiting	11 (28.2%)	3 (7.8%)	1 (2.6%)	23 (60.5%)
Snatched	0	19 (50.0%)	4 (10.5%)	15 (39.4%)
Bae	0	29 (76.9%)	2 (5.2%)	7 (18.4%)
Beta	9 (23.6%)	20 (53.2%)	0	9 (23.4%)
Ama	0	3 (8.0%)	20 (52.6%)	15 (39.4%)
Leech	3 (7.8%)	19 (50.2%)	3 (7.8%)	13 (34.2%)
Newb	10 (26.3%)	23 (60.5%)	0	5 (13.1%)
Normie	2 (5.2%)	10 (26.3%)	5 (13.3%)	21 (55.2%)
Pwned	19 (50.0%)	8 (21.5%)	2 (5.2%)	9 (23.2%)
Dafuq	0	33 (86.8%)	0	5 (13.1%)
PvP	7 (18.4%)	20 (52.6%)	1 (2.7%)	10 (26.3%)
ELI5	0	10 (26.3%)	0	28 (73.6%)
Sus	0	4 (10.5%)	4 (10.5%)	30 (78.9%)
Mana	18 (47.3%)	0	2 (5.2%)	18 (47.3%)
L2P	8 (21.0%)	0	2 (5.2%)	28 (73.6%)
Boots	1 (2.6%)	17 (45.3%)	0	20 (52.6%)
Grats	1 (2.6%)	22 (57.8%)	1 (2.7%)	14 (36.8%)
Xp	30 (78.9%)	2 (5.4%)	0	6 (15.7%)
Hunty	0	0	3 (7.8%)	35 (92.1%)
Camp	24 (63.1%)	5 (13.1%)	1 (2.7%)	8 (21.0%)
Git Gud	15 (39.4%)	0	0	23 (60.5%)
Spergout	0	2 (5.2%)	0	36 (94.8%)

TABLE: Female Participant Answers

Term	Percentage Defined in Relation to Video Games	Percentage Defined in a Commonly Understood Way	Percentage Defined in an Uncommonly Understood Way	Percentage Unknown
Fleek	0	31 (64.5%)	0	17 (35.4%)
Aggro	13 (27.2%)	1 (2.0%)	0	34 (70.8%)
Thot	0	22 (45.8 %)	4 (8.3%)	22 (45.2%)
Kiting	1 (2.0%)	5 (10.4%)	2 (4.1%)	40 (83.2%)
Snatched	0	27 (55.2%)	8 (16.6%)	14 (28.2%)
Bae	0	40 (83.4%)	0	8 (16.6%)
Beta	3 (6.2%)	25 (51.3%)	0	20 (41.1%)
Ama	0	8 (16.6%)	13 (27.1%)	27 (56.2%)
Leech	0	31 (64.5%)	1 (2.2%)	16 (33.3%)

Newb	4 (8.3%)	27 (56.2%)	2 (4.3%)	15 (31.2%)
Normie	1 (2.1%)	18 (37.5%)	4 (8.3%)	25 (52.1%)
Pwned	4 (8.3%)	18 (37.5%)	4 (8.4%)	22 (45.8%)
Dafuq	0	43 (89.5%)	0 %	5 (10.4%)
PvP	1 (2.1%)	10 (20.8%)	3 (6.2%)	34 (70.7%)
ELI5	0	8 (16.6%)	0	40 (83.3%)
Sus	0	5 (10.4%)	3 (6.3%)	40 (83.3%)
Mana	8 (16.6%)	0	8 (16.6%)	32 (68.7%)
L2P	5 (10.4%)	0	3 (6.3%)	40 (83.3%)
Boots	0	29 (60.5%)	0	19 (39.5%)
Grats	0	15 (31.2%)	6 (12.8%)	27 (56.2%)
Xp	10 (20.8%)	9 (18.8%)	0	29 (60.4%)
Hunty	0	8 (16.7%)	3 (6.2%)	37 (77.1%)
Camp	5 (10.4%)	25 (52.1%)	3 (6.2%)	15 (31.2%)
Git Gud	7 (14.5%)	7 (14.5%)	0	34 (70.9%)
Spergout	0	1 (2.1%)	0	47 (97.9%)

TABLE: 0-5 Hours Per Week Playing Video Game Answers

Term	Definition in Relation to Video Games	Percentage Defined in a Commonly Understood Way	Percentage Defined in an Uncommonly Understood Way	Percentage Unknown
Fleek	0	49 (62.6%)	5 (6.8%)	24 (30.6%)
Aggro	8 (10.6%)	17 (21.3%)	7 (9.5%)	46 (58.6%)
Thot	0	42 (53.3%)	7 (9.4%)	29 (37.3%)
Kiting	5 (6.6%)	8 (10.6%)	6 (8.2%)	59 (74.6%)
Snatched	0	42 (53.3%)	10 (12.1%)	27 (34.6%)
Bae	0	64 (81.3%)	2 (2.7%)	13 (16.0%)
Beta	12 (14.6%)	37 (46.8%)	0	30 (38.6%)
Ama	0	12 (14.7%)	26 (33.3%)	41 (52.0%)
Leech	1 (1.3%)	46 (58.6%)	5 (6.8%)	26 (33.3%)
Newb	8 (10.6%)	51 (64.0%)	3 (4.1%)	17 (21.3%)
Normie	0	27 (34.6%)	7 (10.8%)	43 (54.6%)
Pwned	16 (20.0%)	26 (33.3%)	7 (9.4%)	29 (37.3%)
Dafuq	0	69 (88.0%)	0	10 (12.0%)
PvP	4 (5.3%)	23 (29.3%)	5 (6.8%)	46 (58.6%)
ELI5	0	15 (18.7%)	0	64 (81.3%)
Sus	0	10 (12.0%)	4 (5.4%)	65 (82.6%)
Mana	18 (22.6%)	3 (4.0%)	7 (9.4%)	51 (64.0%)
L2P	6 (8.0%)	0	4 (5.4%)	69 (86.6%)
Boots	0	44 (56.0%)	0	35 (44.0%)

Grats	0	35 (44.0%)	5 (6.7%)	39 (49.3%)
Xp	6 (8.1%)	36 (45.3%)	0	37 (46.6%)
Hunty	0	4 (5.3%)	10 (12.1%)	65 (82.6%)
Camp	20 (25.3%)	32 (40.0%)	4 (5.4%)	23 (29.3%)
Git Gud	6 (8.0%)	11 (13.3%)	6 (8.1%)	56 (70.6%)
Spergout	0	3 (4.0%)	0	76 (96.0%)

TABLE: 6+ Hours Per Week Playing Video Games

Term	Percentage Defined in Relation to Video Games	Percentage Defined in a Commonly Understood Way	Percentage Defined in an Uncommonly Understood Way	Percentage Unknown
Fleek	0	8 (57.1%)	1 (7.1%)	5 (35.7%)
Aggro	6 (42.8%)	4 (26.6%)	0	4 (28.5%)
Thot	0	5 (35.7%)	2 (12.5%)	7 (50.0%)
Kiting	6 (42.8%)	0	1 (7.1%)	7 (50.0%)
Snatched	0	9 (64.2%)	1 (7.1%)	4 (28.5%)
Bae	0	10 (71.4%)	1 (7.1%)	3 (21.4%)
Beta	5 (35.7%)	8 (57.1%)	0	1 (7.1%)
Ama	0	9 (64.2%)	0	4 (28.5%)
Leech	1 (7.1%)	7 (50.0%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (28.5%)
Newb	4 (28.5%)	6 (42.8%)	0	4 (28.5%)
Normie	4 (28.5%)	2 (14.2%)	1 (7.1%)	7 (50.0%)
Pwned	5 (35.7%)	6 (42.8%)	0	3 (21.4%)
Dafuq	0	12 (85.7%)	0	2 (14.2%)
PvP	3 (21.4%)	8 (57.1%)	2 (14.2%)	1 (7.1%)
ELI5	0	7 (50.0%)	0	7 (50.0%)
Sus	0	1 (7.1%)	2 (14.2%)	11 (78.5%)
Mana	10 (71.4%)	0	0	4 (28.5%)
L2P	2 (14.2%)	5 (35.7%)	1 (7.1%)	6 (42.5%)
Boots	1 (7.1%)	6 (42.8%)	0	7 (50.0%)
Grats	0	9 (64.2%)	1 (7.1%)	4 (28.5%)
Xp	4 (28.5%)	8 (57.1%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)
Hunty	0	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	12 (85.7%)
Camp	7 (50.0%)	5 (35.7%)	0	2 (14.2%)
Git Gud	5 (35.7%)	4 (28.5%)	0	5 (35.7%)
Spergout	0	0	0	14 (100.0%)

Identification of Sentences as Threatening or Non-Threatening

TABLE: General Answers with No Filter

Sentence	Percentage Yes	Percentage No	Percentage Unsure
I am going to be on fleek tonight	0	81 (86.81%)	12 (13.19%)
I'm starting a spergout tonight	13 (13.48%)	31 (33.71%)	49 (52.81%)
I'll be kiting them in and finishing it later	23 (25.27%)	36 (38.46%)	34 (36.26%)
You're going to get pwned	52 (56.04%)	24 (26.37%)	17 (17.78%)
You're such a fucking normie	31 (33.33%)	48 (51.11%)	14 (15.56%)
The beta uprising is starting	26 (27.47%)	40 (42.86%)	27 (29.67%)
The dude deserves grats	7 (7.69%)	68 (73.63%)	17 (18.68%)
Man she is going to be hunty tonight	23 (24.44%)	36 (38.89%)	34 (36.67%)
I am going for a highscores lesson	10 (11.11%)	60 (64.44%)	23 (24.44%)
My life Xp is going up after I'm done with this	11 (12.22%)	62 (66.67%)	20 (21.11%)
Dafuq do you think you're doing	35 (37.36)	48 (51.65%)	10 (10.99%)
Look at thot	19 (20.88%)	59 (63.74%)	14 (15.38%)

TABLE: Identification of Threatening or Non-Threatening Sentences by Female Gender

Sentence	Percentage Yes	Percentage No	Percentage Unsure
I am going to be on fleek tonight	0	42 (88.00%)	6 (12.00%)
I'm starting a spergout tonight	9 (18.37%)	19 (38.78%)	20 (42.86%)
I'll be kiting them in and finishing it later	12 (24.00%)	18 (38.00%)	18 (38.00%)
You're going to get pwned	28 (60.00%)	10 (20.00%)	10 (20.00%)
You're such a fucking normie	18 (38.00%)	20 (42.00%)	20 (20.00%)
The beta uprising is starting	13 (28.09%)	20 (41.57%)	15 (30.34%)
The dude deserves grats	6 (12.00%)	30 (64.00%)	12 (24.00%)
Man she is going to be hunty tonight	19 (40.00%)	17 (36.00%)	12 (24.00%)
I am going for a highscores lesson	5 (10.00%)	30 (64.00%)	13 (26.00%)
My life Xp is going up after I'm done with this	8 (16.00%)	28 (58.00%)	12 (26.00%)
Dafuq do you think you're doing	19 (40.00%)	23 (48.00%)	6 (12.00%)

Look at that	13 (26.00%)	29 (60.00%)	6 (12.0%)
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TABLE: Identification of Threatening or Non-Threatening Sentences by Male Gender

Sentence	Percentage Yes	Percentage No	Percentage Unsure
I am going to be on fleek tonight	0	33 (87.1%)	5 (12.82%)
I'm starting a spergout tonight	3 (7.89%)	10 (26.32%)	25 (65.79%)
I'll be kiting them in and finishing it later	11 (28.21%)	14 (35.90%)	14 (35.90%)
You're going to get pwned	20 (53.85%)	12 (30.77%)	6 (15.38%)
You're such a fucking normie	11 (28.95%)	23 (60.35%)	4 (10.53%)
The beta uprising is starting	8 (23.08%)	18 (46.18%)	12 (30.77%)
The dude deserves grats	1 (2.56%)	32 (84.62%)	5 (12.82%)
Man she is going to be hunty tonight	9 (23.68%)	15 (39.47%)	14 (35.90%)
I am going for a highscores lesson	5 (13.16%)	24 (63.16%)	9 (23.68%)
My life Xp is going up after I'm done with this	3 (7.89%)	29 (76.32%)	6 (15.79%)
Dafuq do you think you're doing	13 (33.33%)	21 (56.41%)	4 (10.26%)
Look at that	7 (17.95%)	25 (66.67%)	6 (15.38%)

TABLE: Identification of Threatening or Non-Threatening Sentences by Participants Who Play Video Games 0-5 Hours Per Week

Sentence	Percentage Yes	Percentage No	Percentage Unsure
I am going to be on fleek tonight	0	88.31	11.69
I'm starting a spergout tonight	14.67	33.33	52.00
I'll be kiting them in and finishing it later	25.97	36.36	37.66
You're going to get pwned	59.74	25.97	14.29
You're such a fucking normie	33.77	50.65	15.58
The beta uprising is starting	27.27	40.26	32.47
The dude deserves grats	7.79	71.43	20.78
Man she is going to be hunty tonight	36.84	36.84	26.32
I am going for a highscores lesson	9.21	67.11	23.68
My life Xp is going up after I'm done with this	10.53	65.79	23.68
Dafuq do you think you're doing	38.96	50.65	10.39
Look at that	22.08	64.94	12.99

TABLE: Identification of Threatening or Non-Threatening Sentences by Participants Who Play Video Games 6+ Hours Per Week

Sentence	Percentage Yes	Percentage No	Percentage Unsure
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I am going to be on fleek tonight	0	78.57	21.43
I'm starting a spergout tonight	7.14	35.71	57.14
I'll be kiting them in and finishing it later	21.43	50.00	28.57
You're going to get pwned	35.71	28.57	35.71
You're such a fucking normie	30.77	53.85	15.38
The beta uprising is starting	28.57	57.14	14.29
The dude deserves grats	7.14	85.71	7.14
Man she is going to be hunty tonight	50.00	35.71	14.29
I am going for a highscores lesson	21.43	50.00	28.57
My life Xp is going up after I'm done with this	21.43	71.43	7.14
Dafuq do you think you're doing	28.57	57.14	14.29
Look at thot	14.29	57.14	28.57