

GTFO!! - POSITIONING AS INTERACTION STRATEGY IN MMORPG COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

OMG! Lol noob :)! When gamers, especially of MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) like World of Warcraft®, talk to one another they adapt language to their needs, as do all speakers. It is a common misconception that expressions such as smileys, acronyms and neologisms are a deterioration of current language. On the contrary, they can be regarded as instances of creativity, efficiency and in-group markers. Moreover, these expressions help gamers to position themselves in conversations, thus they can be regarded as active interaction strategies in the gaming discourse. But while communication is of crucial importance to achieve goals and for role-playing in MMORPGs, there are many communicative challenges for gamers, such as high-stress situations, missing paralinguistic cues and intercultural obstacles. By reference to an online-questionnaire, a self-compiled corpus and theories of pragmatics this paper sheds light on interaction strategies used by MMORPG-gamers.

KEYWORDS

Positioning; pragmatics; discourse analysis; MMORPGs; CMC

INTRODUCTION

According to the scholar Huizinga (1938: 20-21), games and playing games form communities in which shared in-group meanings, language and conventions are created. Hence it comes as no surprise that non-gamers when talking to gamers, or listening to a conversation between them, are either confused or unable to understand what is said. An example of this are MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games) like World of Warcraft® or Lord of the Rings Online® which are currently popular computer-games. In these games gamers do not only play together but also communicate with one another. It is not uncommon to see a sentence as illustrated in the following example:

Example (1)

LFG SoO normal 2DD and tank

Here, a gamer of World of Warcraft® is asking for help by looking for a group (LFG) in particular two damage dealers (DD, classes focusing on causing damage) and a tank (a class which concentrates on getting the enemies' attention so that the damage dealers can fight without interruption) for the raid Siege of Orgrimmar (SoO) in normal mode. These acronymic LFG-sequences used in MMORPGs do not only, as Huizinga (1938: 21) claims for in-group meanings, create secrets which exclude outsiders, but also raise efficiency and speed in the interaction between the gamers. It takes almost four lines to describe

what the five word sequence expresses. Thus, the acronymic way of asking for help saves the gamers time and effort. Yet, even though the language of gamers consists of several features expressing distinctive meanings and functions, non-gamers often dismiss the language of gamers as nonsense or even as a deterioration of current language. Efficiency and time-saving are not the only motivations of the distinct use of language in MMORPGs, but also expressing creativity and individuality as apparent in the use of smileys.

These and several other motivations and linguistic expressions can be subsumed under the term positioning. Whenever people, hence also gamers, talk with one another, they take a position in the conversation at hand since they want to achieve an effect. This does not necessarily have to be a hierarchical decision or a matter of power relations, even though scholars like Harré and Moghaddam (2003: 5-6) regard position as “cluster of rights and duties to perform certain actions[...]”. For them a position is a certain place in a hierarchical setting or story line like being a judge in the story line of a court trial. My approach, as put forth in Kramer (2014) regards a position as a place in relation to others. In my definition of a position the focus is on the underlying motivation and the perlocutionary effect the speakers want to achieve, rather than on the social conventions, rights and rules which are applied to a situation, genre or, as Harré and Moghaddam call it, story line. Positioning, in my definition, is a matter of co-operation, which is also a crucial aspect of playing MMORPGs.

By applying the concept of positioning to the setting of communication in MMORPGs, light is shed on the underlying motivations and desires of gamers as well as speakers in general. This article does not only describe the use of and reasons for certain linguistic features in MMORPG communication but also attempts to raise awareness of the manifold aspects of language used by the players. It elaborates on the notion of positioning and looks at how gamers deal with challenges caused by the medium and use distinct features of communication in them to their advantage in order to position themselves in conversations with one another. The exploration of communication and positioning in MMORPGs raises questions in how far it differs from interaction outside these games.

Clearly, computer-games and MMORPGs have received increasingly attention during the last years. Scholars like Consalvo (2009), Corneliussen *et. al.* (2008), Trippe (2009) or Yee (2006) started to prepare the ground for more research in these areas. Yet, linguistic inquiries have been rare in computer game studies and especially so in the setting of MMORPGs. Certainly, one can resort to the meanwhile extensive research done in CMC (computer-mediated communication) like Crystal (2006), Danet and Herring (2007), Baron (2008) and Herring (1996). But while both areas, CMC and MMORPG communication, may look similar they are not the same. Gamers are faced with other challenges than the common Internet user and they have other needs for communication. As mentioned already, only little research has been done in the field of language use in MMORPGs, especially the issue of positioning, and topics of pragmatics like politeness in games have not received enough attention so far. However, the works of Grice (1991), Brown and Levinson (2009) and Goffman (1967) on co-operation and facework offer useful frameworks for dealing with communication and positioning in MMORPGs.

Although the concepts of politeness theory were not formulated to take online communication into account they can still be applied as frameworks to all linguistic situations. Similarly, research in positioning theory can and has to be drawn upon even though it is not aimed at communication in MMORPGs, like Harré and Langenhove (1999), Harré & Moghaddam (2003), Jaffe (2009) and Du Bois (2007) as these theories and concepts provide a sound foundation for dealing with communication in MMORPGs.

Yet, it is not enough to only review previous works when attempting to explore the topics of communication in MMORPGs. Therefore, data was collected for this research in MMORPGs and outside of them. The following section describes the data sources and methods used for this research, before MMORPGs as communication setting are dealt with illustrating the communicative challenges but also opportunities they pose. Afterwards the concept of positioning is described in more detail and how it can be applied to the MMORPG setting supported by examples taken from the data collected for the research.

DATA AND METHODS

This paper is based on a survey carried out for my PhD thesis project (Kramer: 2014). It has been the basis for other papers and articles like Kramer (2010; 2013a; 2013b). A hands-on approach was followed including actively researching the speech community of MMORPG gamers. Hence, the data was gathered in MMORPGs, in the game (henceforth ingame) and from gamers, thus qualitative data in form of a self-compiled corpus as well as elicited data from a questionnaire. The data sources complement one another and allow reassessing findings in the other data set. At this point it has to be mentioned that I limit myself to text-based communication in my study. Despite the popular use of VoIP (Voice over IP) chats, meaning communicating using headsets, I argue that written communication is still prevalent when it comes to casual gaming, playing in random groups and contacting strangers. Three data sources or methods were drawn upon to research the communication in MMORPGs, a self-compiled language corpus, an online-questionnaire and introspection.

First, the questionnaire provides quantitative, elicited data and was collected in form of an online survey. The online-questionnaire was a self-selected survey, hence, there was no artificial sampling applied to the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 50 questions comprised of three parts: gamer profile, gaming behavior and language behavior. The gamer profile surveyed general data like gender, age, nationality and native languages spoken by the gamers. The questions about gaming behavior interviewed the participants about their playing time per week, self-assessment concerning their gaming style and gaming behavior. The main part of the questionnaire surveyed the language behavior. The questions attempted to determine the use of stylistic features and politeness ingame as means of positioning. All in all, 324 gamers coming from 42 countries participated and completed the survey.

The collected data was analyzed using statistical and quantitative methods. The results were linked to the concept of positioning and brought into context. A combination

of rating questions and open questions provided insights into the use and frequency of stylistic features as well as the gamers' perception of communication ingame. The results demonstrate how gamers react when confronted with problems ingame and how they attempt to avoid a potential face threatening act. Applying the conceptual framework of positioning to it allowed exposing motivations and influential factors that bring about linguistic choices.

Second, the self-compiled corpus complements the online-questionnaire since it provides observed, qualitative data. It yields examples of communication in MMORPGs as well as outside of the games. The ingame communication data consists of chat-log-files. All in all, 1,776 hours of communication were recorded in the games, primarily in World of Warcraft® and Lord of the Rings Online®. Furthermore, the corpus consists of communication from official game message-boards and the official game websites. Summing up, the data collected from outside the game equates 300,000 characters. The corpus was analyzed using grounded theory and a hermeneutic approach. Rather than categorizing, labeling and measuring specific language features in the corpus, meaning and language use were analyzed using frameworks and theories of pragmatics and the concept of positioning. This approach allowed context-specific observations in certain situations. However, the corpus did not only provide examples of real and contextualized language use but also allowed testing hypotheses. It was used as a complementation to the questionnaire, since findings in the questionnaire could be tested in the corpus and vice versa.

Third, introspection was used as an approach to research the language of MMORPG gamers which means that the researcher is a member of the speech community researched. Being part of the community allows knowing the in-group workings and meanings of a speech community. As a gamer of computer-games and MMORPGs, I have insights into the gamers' culture, history, language use and usage and behavior of the speech community. A qualitative heuristic approach was followed while researching, observing and discovering language use of gamers. This type of observed data not only gives information of language use from an insider perspective but also provides authentic examples of real language usage compared to other approaches which use artificial examples.

The three data sets and types of methodology complement one another and also help to compensate for shortcomings in the other sets. The combination of the data sets makes the picture clearer, yet it is still a kaleidoscope and not exactly the whole effigy.

MMORPGS — COMMUNICATIVE SETTING AND CHALLENGES

Before describing the communicative setting and challenges present in MMORPGs, it is necessary to explain what MMORPGs are. MMORPGs are currently highly popular computer-games like World of Warcraft®, Lord of the Rings Online® or Warhammer Online®. The acronym stands for Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games and describes the main features of this gaming genre. These games are role-playing games (RPG) in which a large (massive) amount of gamers simultaneously plays online with each other (multiplayer). While the name of the game genre includes the

term role-playing, referring to the assuming and acting out a role of a character (avatar), the extent of the actual role-playing varies from MMORPG to MMORPG and from gamer to gamer (see Kramer, 2013b: 7).

As mentioned in the introduction, the gamers do not only play together but also communicate with one another using channels of communication available in MMORPGs like chat-channels and official message-boards provided by the game developers. Chat-channels are comparable to chat-rooms ingame. There are several chat-channels, which have specific functions, available to the gamers in MMORPGs. The general chat-channels are used to seek for other gamers to play with, search for items to buy or sell or advertise one's own guild. Chitchat which has nothing to do with the game is discouraged in the general chat-channels. While the general chat-channels can be used and read by all gamers on the same server, other channels are more private like party channels, if the gamer is in a group of gamers (party), or the guild channels if he or she is a member of a guild (an association of gamer characters). Gamers can only read and use these channels if they are in the respective group or guild. While the chat-channels are like chat-rooms one-to-many communication forms (see Baron, 2008: 22-23), there is also the possibility to privately message one gamer, so called whispering, which can be regarded as one-to-one communication (see Baron, 2008: 17-18).

Outside the game, most MMORPGs offer their gamers message-boards (or forums) to communicate. These can be used by the gamers to exchange about the game or anything else which they are interested in. Message-boards offer the gamers a platform for casual chitchat and small-talk which is discouraged in ingame chat-channels.

These communication channels are written forms of gamer interaction. As has been mentioned before, the only spoken type of communication in MMORPGs is VoIP chat, which has been disregarded in this survey for the already noted reasons. Furthermore, all but one channel of MMORPG communication, namely the message-boards, are synchronous forms of communication, in that the interlocutors are present while talking. The various technical characteristics of the listed channels provide the gamers with different possibilities and challenges. For example, the privacy of one-to-one communication can be an advantage when a gamer does not want to harm his or her gamer reputation by asking a question. However, the process of information gathering from a single person, for example where a certain quest objective is located, can be slow and unsuccessful. One-to-many communication, for instance asking a question in the general chat-channel, can provide more and faster replies than the private whispering of individuals. Another factor that influences the language of gamers is the possible time lag between production and reception. Asynchronous forms of communication such as message-boards do not require the presence of the interlocutors during production of speech, hence it could take time until the interlocutor reads a question on a message-board and answers it. Yet, even in synchronous forms of communication like chats, there is a certain time lag partly because the interlocutor does not know if the other person is still typing something or already done (see Kramer, 2014: 104-111).

Besides these technical characteristics of communication in MMORPGs, there are also other aspects affecting the way gamers communicate with one another. A crucial

factor influencing the language used in MMORPGs and in computer-mediated communication (CMC) in general is the absence of paralinguistic cues. In normal face-to-face conversations facial expressions, gestures and the sound of the voice help interlocutors to interpret the utterances of the other speaker. Yet, in MMORPGs all but one channel of communication are written forms of communication, hence these cues helping to interpret meanings are missing. In order to compensate for these missing paralinguistic cues, gamers utilize stylistic features like smileys to add meaning to their written conversations (see Dittmann, 2001: 72).

There is another communicative characteristic of MMORPGs which leads to opportunities and challenges, namely the fact that for many gamers English became a *lingua franca* ingame. One reason for this is the technical setup of these games. MMORPGs are separated into region servers based on the region the gamer is in and language servers. Gamers have to play on the servers provided for their region. In most cases these are the following: United States, Europe, Asia and Pacific. The language servers refer to the prevalent language used on the respective server hence it is expected to use the server language in the chat-channels and support is only given in it. Normally, English, German, French and Spanish language servers are offered to the gamers. World of Warcraft® has in addition to this Italian and Russian servers. According to the study the 324 gamers participating come from 42 countries and a wide range of language backgrounds. They are native speakers of 36 different languages and 31 languages are named to be spoken as foreign or secondary language by them. It comes as no surprise that no game can offer a language server for every language, hence many are forced to play on English servers. According to my data 291 (89.8%) of 324 gamers play on English language servers. However only 126 (39%) regard themselves as native speakers of English, thus the majority of gamers on English language servers are non-native English speakers, yet they use English to play and communicate with one another. The prominence of English as the most spoken foreign language (197) of the gamers combined with the fact that 291 gamers play on English language servers, allows for the conclusion that English is used as a *lingua franca* by many gamers. It has to be noted, however, that the high amount of gamers speaking English as a secondary language does not allow for any claims about the proficiency of the gamers in it. The participants specify several levels of proficiency ranging from that of beginner to native like competence. This has to be kept in mind as a challenging aspect for the communication in MMORPGs: not all gamers are equally skilled in English and yet they are forced to use it ingame (see Kramer, 2013a: 47-48). While there are clearly also guilds based on language background, for example Danish guilds on English servers, many of them have another than language focus. They want to achieve something in the game and therefore the gaming skills are of more importance than a shared language background. This means that the possible different language backgrounds of the players are a challenging factor but not a prevalent one for grouping up into guilds.

Thus, MMORPGs and their communication setup provide the gamers with opportunities but also challenges. An aspect which makes MMORPGs different to other

current computer-games is the strong incorporation and linking of social and co-operative gaming. Two driving forces in co-operative gaming in MMORPGs are achievement and progression which are linked in a vicious circle, since in order to progress in the game, the gamer has to achieve something (fulfill quests), but to do this he or she has to improve his or her character in the game (e.g. reaching higher levels with one's character or getting better gear). In addition progressing ingame requires sooner or later the help of others, therefore gamers have to co-operate and play together to achieve something. The experiences, challenges, failing and success weld the gamers together, create friendships, and deepen existing ones in MMORPGs. By this speech communities with strong ties are created. This highlights also the social aspects of these games. The communication tools provided by the game allow strong interaction and socializing between the gamers. According to the results of the questionnaire the aspect of socializing and spending time with friends and family online in MMORPGs is an important one. Clearly, some gamers are motivated more by achieving something in the game, improving and bringing to perfection their characters than role-playing, exploring and creating characters with background stories, yet the social and co-operative component is a part of all these gaming motivations. One can achieve something in the high levels of the game only with help of others. Improving one's character requires materials and resources that other gamers can offer and role-playing is more exciting when there is someone to perform to. As will become apparent in the following sections, co-operation ingame does not only mean to help one another but also to verbally communicate with others and to be involved in the process of interpersonal positioning. In turn the setup of the game and the distinctive communication ingame influence the language of the gamers.

Another factor which crucially influences the gamers and their language are high-stress situations. Many ingame encounters are complex, attention demanding, time-intensive and cause enormous pressure and stress in the gamers. The gamers are required to be able to multitask and deal with several different inputs synchronously. This also influences their gaming styles and their language. Often it is a matter of ingame life or death, hence there is not much time for long-winded explanations. Typing *inc* for incoming and by this warning the other gamers from an approaching danger or attack is by far faster than typing "Watch out! There are enemies arriving!" This is also linked to what Huizinga (1938: 27-30) refers to as holy earnestness. Games cause strong emotions like sympathies, excessive joy but also earnestness about the outcome in gamers. For gamers it is not just a game but a serious matter. That is why the high-stress situations as well as the desire for progression and achievement are treated by participants with such earnestness and greatly influence their language.

A final factor which has to be mentioned in connection to language in MMORPGs, even though it is not necessarily valid to every gamer, is the role-playing aspect. Paradoxically, while MMORPGs have the term role-playing in their name, role-playing is not mandatory. Yet, it is an aspect which can influence linguistic choices and lead to the intentional omission of stylistic features, like smileys as they are often frowned upon by strict role-players. At the same time it can also cause gamers to use specific politeness

or impoliteness and positioning strategies because they are part of the enacted character. According to the questionnaire some classes are predestined for certain behavior, for instance priests are very often played as overly polite while rogues and death knights are usually rude or impolite. Other examples of language used for role-playing are the use of certain register or dialects and accents.

Gamers face numerous communicative challenges in MMORPGs. The technical setup of these games with several channels of communication offered to the gamers provide different opportunities such as differences between production and reception time (asynchronous/synchronous communication) and the factor of direction (one-to-one/one-to-many communication). The written medium with the absence of paralinguistic cues as well as the fact that some gamers use English as a lingua franca are additional obstacles to overcome. Yet the manner of MMORPGs requires the gamers to co-operate, play together and hence also communicate with one another to achieve goals. The goals become congruent with the motivations of the gamers, namely progressing, achieving, socializing, role-playing and exploring. All these aspects influence the language of gamers. The following concept of positioning is an attempt to describe how the manifold influential factors motivate linguistic choices taken by gamers.

POSITIONING THEORY

The concept of positioning is at first glance easily explained. To recall the definition given in the introduction, whenever we talk to one another we take a position in the conversation at hand, it is so to say a place in social space. But while the term positioning theory is normally used in psychology, the concept as such is not unknown to other sciences and disciplines. The notion of territoriality and negotiation which is closely linked to positioning theory is common in several approaches. Terkourafi (2008) claims that there is a biological grounding for the concept of positioning namely the two poles of approach and withdrawal. Every organism even bacterium has deeply engrained reactions of approaching and withdrawing. When approaching another life form, one has to let down one's guard and take the risk of harm. When withdrawing and choosing security over risk, one passes on a possible chance for food, reproduction or interaction.

A similar dichotomy can be observed in the concept of the face as described amongst others by Goffman (1967: 5) and refined by Brown and Levinson (2009). The positive face is our want to be accepted and appreciated, hence approached. The negative face is our desire for independence and not being imposed on, therefore withdrawal. Scollon and Scollon (2001: 46-51) as well as Locher (2004: 55) refer to these two sides of the face as involvement and independence, and note the paradox of the concept as both sides of the face cannot be combined completely at the same time. Widdowson (1984: 85) describes similar opposites calling them the territorial imperative and the co-operative imperative. Likewise, Goffman's (1967: 5-45; 47-95) notion of facework and demeanor and deference can be regarded as a treatment of the concept of approach and withdrawal which is the basic grounding for positioning. He notes the possible risk of endangering one's own privacy and territory when interacting with others: "There is an inescapable opposition

between showing a desire to include an individual and showing respect for his privacy.” (Goffman, 1967: 76).

As Durkheim (as quoted in Goffman, 1967: 73) put it: “The human personality is a sacred thing; one dare not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others.” This means that on the one hand, humans want to be independent in their own territory and have privacy. On the other hand, they desire the closeness of, the involvement and co-operation with others.

These dichotomies provide the essential human needs which are at the basis of the concept of positioning. But what is a position?

“A position is a place in social space in relation to others either taken by oneself or appointed to by someone else, achieved through positioning in order to cause certain perlocutionary effects in the interlocutor(s). Positioning is a dynamic, relational and active discursive process consisting of complex and multiple layers of meanings and positions realized in one or more simultaneous communicative acts (language, extralinguistic cues like gestures and facial expressions and symbolic forms). The process requires the interlocutors to cooperate and negotiate meanings and positions in the context of the situation, sequence, genre and social space which add up to the personal biographies and experiences of the speakers influencing their subsequent conversations.” (Kramer, 2014: 190)

This means that positioning is a dynamic process with no clear-cut borders. Just like dancing, positioning means that an action by one speaker leads to a reaction in the interlocutor which causes again a reaction in the speaker. These actions can be several positioning moves taken simultaneously for example the use of certain language (e.g. word choice, grammar structures, accent, etc.) or extralinguistic cues like gestures, a gaze or symbols. Furthermore, a speaker can not only take a position himself or herself but also assign it to the interlocutor. The prosecution can assign the position of witness and with this certain behaviors and conventions of communication, for example a witness should not ask questions but answer them. Similarly, ingame the raid-leader assigns certain positions and behaviors linked to them for instance the position of healer. A healer is supposed to heal and not deal damage. One of the most important aspects of positioning is the context which allows the speaker to interpret and negotiate the meanings of the utterances. But since communication and therefore also positioning is a dynamic process it is a joint-venture and requires the co-operation of the speakers in the frame of the two poles (approach and withdrawal) or faces (positive and negative face/ involvement and independence) (see Kramer, 2014: 182-190).

In the next section I demonstrate how such an approach can be applied to MMORPGs which bereft the gamers from features available in face-to-face communication like the sound of the voice, gestures and facial expressions.

POSITIONING IN MMORPGS

At first glance the communication in MMORPGs and in online communication might look either deteriorated with its seemingly wrong orthography, unconventional use of keyboard characters and acronyms, or bereft of features transmitting additional information in communication like extralinguistic cues. Yet neither is the case. Approaching the language used in MMORPGs with positioning theory shows that the base of communication ingame and outside of it are very similar as this section shows. I have already illustrated in example one from the introduction how MMORPG gamers use features like acronyms and neologisms for their needs.

Example (1)

LFG SoO normal 2DD and tank

As mentioned before, here, a gamer is looking for a group (LFG) in particular two damage dealers (DD) and a tank for the raid Siege of Orgrimmar (SoO) in normal mode. It is definitely a long-winded sentence compared to the acronymic way, hence using acronyms serves the desire for efficiency in gamers. This is supported by the results of the questionnaire which show that acronyms are the preferred way of asking for help in MMORPGs. 79% (257 of 324 gamers) rate acronymic LFG-sequences as appropriate, only 11% as inappropriate.

Acronyms do not only speed up conversation and by this nourish the gamer's strife for efficiency but can also be regarded as in-group markers and positioning moves because they allow the gamers to actively position as part of the gamer's community and approach the territory of the other gamers. If a gamer did not know what a tank is, he or she would be exposed as noob, a newcomer to the game, and clearly not be taken along to such a demanding undertaking. Hence in-group markers like acronyms and neologisms allow the gamers to separate wheat from chaff, the pro-gamers (professional gamers) and the noobs. However, this also means that decoding, reading and understanding acronyms and neologisms to position as a gamer within the community is not enough, but rather active use of these features is required. Hence when asking for help, using certain acronyms and terms of the community allows the gamer to openly present himself or herself as pro-gamer compared to the noob. Clearly, other gamers will be more willing to help a gamer who knows how the wind blows rather than having to help along a newcomer who will probably need additional explanation during the quest.

Furthermore, LFG-sequences can be regarded as conventionalized schemata. Conventions and rituals are fundamental structures of interaction since they organize the course of actions but also categorize which actions are appropriate or not. Moreover, they provide the speaker with secure pathways through interactions. The LFG-sequences offer the gamers security because the exact quest objective is stated by naming which dungeon or raid gamers are gathered for. This also means that there is a fixed end to the undertaking, if SoO is finished, the group will disband. Furthermore, the LFG-sequence declares what is expected of the gamers, a tank and two damage dealers are needed not a healer. Therefore, LFG-sequences combine clear structure, information transmission, positioning as part of the in-group and efficiency (see Kramer, 2014: 151-153).

Another good example of positioning ingame by means of stylistic features are smileys or emoticons. According to Crystal (2004: 38-39) a smiley is “a sequential combination of keyboard characters designed to convey the emotions associated with a particular facial expression”. Smileys are not only commonly known and used in MMORPG communication but also outside the Internet. The participants of the questionnaire state that they use smileys especially when whispering or messaging friends (46% often, 26% always, 16% occasionally, 8% not very often, 3% not at all, 1% did not answer the question). Based on the results, it could be said that the less familiarity a situation has, the fewer smileys are used by the gamers. Like facial expressions, smileys convey information and fulfill several functions which help to position in conversation but also allow interpretation of utterances and positions of the interlocutors. For example, smileys can fulfill a back-channel function, by using them the speaker can display attention to the interlocutor and encourage him or her to continue in his or her talk. Furthermore, they can be used to convey approach and closeness through sympathy and compassion but also withdrawal and distance through antipathy.

The functions of smileys or possible reasons why they are used by speakers, namely creativity, efficiency, compensation for missing extralinguistic features and conveyance of additional information, also provide insights into their use as means of positioning. The following example shows how smileys are used as positioning strategy in MMORPGs:

Example (2)

(: so one last chance where you either do what we say or I'll kick you out, I'm afraid S:

Here, a gamer warns another gamer who caused the death of all party members (wipe) by a beginner's mistake that he or she will be removed from the group (kicked) if he or she does not shape up. The use of the positive smiley (: attenuates the harsh comment. The second smiley S: conveys the mixed feelings of the speaker if not even a certain confusion caused by the malpractice of the other gamer. The gamer clearly positions in this conversation as the leader of the group who is in charge and also responsible for the success of the undertaking. At the same time the gamer evokes closeness and even shows minimal sympathy for the other gamer by using a positive smiley and attenuating the negative effect of the warning. The sympathy is qualified by the use of a smiley depicting confusion and discomfort. While the speaker claims a position close to the other gamer thus claims to some extent sympathy, he or she also clearly positions in a way which shows disapproval and discomfort (see Kramer, 2014: 221-222). The results of the questionnaire show that smileys are commonly used as means of mitigation in difficult situations like wipes or arguments. Generally, it can be said that gamers react more positively to requests when a smiley is used and they are aware of this, hence, use smileys for this purpose.

Another feature which is illustrative when it comes to positioning is leet (1337). Leet is derived from elite and refers to a code in which numbers and symbols substitute letters in order to visually represent them. Thus the transcription of leet is 1337. Leet is strongly connected to individuality and creativity because it is up to the speaker which letters to replace by which symbol or number. Clearly, leet does not make communication

faster or more efficient, it therefore also does not serve the desire for efficiency and perfection but rather the desire to be creative and different.

Example (3)

How me get cool gr33n n4m3 on ze forums liek you ? O.o [sic]

In the given example the *e* is replaced by three, *o* by zero and *a* by four. In addition the words *the* and *like* are deliberately misspelled which is a common feature of leet. The example shows that leet is used in a playful and creative way but also to provoke or for irony. Besides creativity and individuality, the creation of an insider code is a reason for the use of leet. Hence, when it comes to positioning one could assert that gamers use leet to position within the gamer-community. However, there is a problem with this claim. While leet clearly exists and is often depicted as stereotypical marker of the community for example in machinimas (films created by gamers ingame) or popular culture as well as used for merchandise articles, the results of my survey show that it is rarely used by gamers. On average 66% of the gamers claim that they do not use leet at all. The discrepancy between the perception of the general public which regards leet as a marker for gaming culture and the results of the questionnaire could be explained by the negative connotation leet has in the gamer-community. Leet is often regarded as childish, immature and gamers who use it are vilified as leet-kiddies. Yet, gamers use leet from time to time or buy merchandise with leet prints on them. Leet can therefore be regarded as a very special stylistic feature when it comes to positioning. On the one hand, leet positions a gamer as member of the group and as creative and playful. On the other hand, leet puts the gamer in an odd position connoted with childishness and immaturity (see Kramer, 2013b: 12). According to this argumentation, it could be said that if a gamer uses leet, it is a conscious linguistic choice. The speaker actively takes a certain position within a community, or when speaking to people who are not gamers and therefore outside of their community. It is a clear statement of affiliation and individuality and can be used as provocation.

The examples given so far were straightforward and positioning moves could easily be determined. In many cases it is difficult to tell the positioning moves or redressing strategies apart, when following Brown and Levinson's (2009) frame of politeness redressing strategies. The main reason for this is that speakers do not use only one single strategy in an utterance but several simultaneously. They mix the strategies of positioning and use various positioning moves in an utterance. The following example illustrates this:

Example (4)

Hmmm (insert name here ^^)..do you think we could try it again a little better next time dear? Its not really your fault but its a little annoying :) [sic]

The situation is the same as in example two, a gamer in a group of gamers causes the death of all party members by a beginner's mistake but refuses to take advice. The participant aims at the negative face of the other person, by asking him or her if he or she could possibly do better. The other player's co-operation is sought and it is tried to involve him or her in solving the problem by means of an inclusive *we*. This is an attempt by the gamer to preserve the freedom of the other player to decide and act. "Instead of

ordering the other person and thus imposing on the gamer, redressing the utterance as request and mitigating the negative emotions by words like *little* attenuates the [face threatening act]" (Kramer, 2013b: 16). Such expressions, referred to as downtoners and understaters by House and Kasper (1981), "modulate the impact of the speaker's utterance" (Watts, 2003: 183). At the same time, the use of positive redressing strategies claims common ground, for example calling the other gamer *dear*. Obviously, the gamer also makes use of an ironic tone to manipulate the other gamer to some extent and challenge him or her to improve his or her play. Furthermore, the use of a positive smiley mitigates the negative emotions caused by the utterance. Hence, the gamer uses several layers and positioning moves to interact with the other player in order to induce him or her to follow advice. The gamer performs a balancing act between approaching the other player and withdrawing from him or her.

When the participants are asked about their politeness strategies in such situations, the majority answers that it gets them better responses to be polite. Several participants note that using polite language in difficult situations like wipes can be useful to, as one participant says, "talk him round", make him or her realize the mistake and follow given advice. It is not what you say but how you say it. Impolite behavior could cause the other gamer to leave and that would leave the group one member short and slow down the group or prevent the success of the undertaking. Hence, politeness is used as a means of positioning in order to successfully play together and achieve goals (see Kramer, 2014: 300).

The gamers make use of the several resources such as those described in the previous section, smileys, leet, neologisms and acronyms. Their choices are influenced by the considerations of the channel, the community, the context and its conventions. What is expected of gamers by other gamers as well as how to deal with someone who does not conform to the schemata of the community is illustrated by the example of the wipe. It is striking to see that the strategies and positioning moves by the gamers in such a situation as well as the underlying concepts influencing them (e.g. efficiency and rapport) are remarkably similar to those in the real world outside the game. This is not surprising as gamers are speakers. They are the same humans as outside the game. They have the same needs, for example the wish for co-operation, closeness and appreciation but also the desire for freedom, distance and security. Furthermore, they want to achieve something with their utterances just like any human.

CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates the numerous challenges gamers are faced with while gaming and the motivations and desires which drive them. The gamers are confronted with the technical challenges of these games and its communicative settings. Additionally, the gamers' goals and motivations influence their language, for example the need and desire to be efficient and fast in order to save ingame lives and achieve something, but also to display their knowledge of the in-group code and their involvement with the community.

Progression, achievement and socializing are directly linked to co-operation ingame and therefore also to interaction. In order to play MMORPGs one has to interact and co-operate with other gamers and therefore gamers alter language to serve their needs.

While communication in MMORPGs looks different and strange compared to communication outside of it, it actually is very similar to it. Positioning for example appears to be similar ingame as in real-life. The means and tools of communication may look at first glance completely different than outside the games, for example smileys, acronyms and leet, but they fulfill the same functions as other means of communication outside of MMORPGs. Smileys do not only compensate for the lack of paralinguistic cues but convey additional meanings, just like facial expressions which can be used as back-channel, or additional source of information.

Why is that? My answer to this is that the underlying concepts, motivations and needs of the speakers are the same. The gamers are in the end speakers, the same speakers as outside the games and they have the same needs. They want to be appreciated and part of a community at the same time independent and free. A balancing act which humans fulfill in every conversation where ever they are in a game or outside of it. Yet, what can be noted is that the desire for personal individuality and independence takes a back seat in MMORPGs to allow space for other more prevalent desires ingame. Subordinating one's own wish for independence to co-operation furthers achievement and progression. Instead of insisting on one's individuality, also in communication, complying to conventions, in-group meanings and general co-operative behavior leads to successful playing. It might be very unique and satisfying one's wish to be individual to play a healer who storms to the front lines to fight and uses long-winded language to express. However, this does not conform to conventions of gaming and does not support successful playing together. Clearly, communication is a constant process of negotiation and balancing act between being appreciated and independent. Yet, co-operative playing is of utmost importance in MMORPGs hence one has to take oneself back to further the gaming experience and the chances of success. In order to perform these balancing acts the gamers make use of all their linguistic faculty and arsenal of interaction strategies. There are no clear-cut borders between the game-world and real-life, thus MMORPGs can provide insights into how motivations like achievement influence our language in general. //

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