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in MMORPGs”

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One for all and all for one! 1fa&af1

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*This thesis is dedicated to my parents and grandparents
and all those
who never had the chance to visit a university.*

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1. Introduction

Example (1)

eh i gess you wiped us^^ can you pls do it better next time ? :p [sic]

When playing a MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game) like *World of Warcraft*®, *Lord of the Rings Online*® or *Aion* the utterance showed above is a typical way to express oneself. It includes several features of the language commonly used in such games like smileys, acronyms, neologisms and misspelled words. In the given example, a gamer informs a fellow gamer that he or she caused the death of all party members (wipe) and that he or she should do better to avoid it. The gamer uses positive smileys (:p and ^^) as well as the word *please* (pls) to mitigate the possible negative effect of the statement.

Such an utterance is ordinary for a gamer but non-gamers will not only find this sort of language strange but probably will not be able to decode it. Non-gamers might believe that the language used by gamers is a degenerate variation of standard language or rubbish all together. People who are against computer games and the Internet claim that new technologies and leisure activities cause a decay of language usage in gamers. These objectors believe that computer games are only played by children and hence the threat of such degenerate language becoming standard is even higher. Strongly connected to this phenomenon appears to be the constant occurrence of English terms in other languages like German or French which is accompanied with strong emotions (see Muhr 2013). The use of English terms in the area of (new) media and computer games creates an even stronger animosity.

Certainly, it is nothing new that media and technologies are shunned or even demonized. Print, radio, television and computer technologies had to struggle in order to claim their place in the world of media and to gain a positive reputation which is not stigmatized by the negative effects often attributed to them (c.f. Kunczik; Zipfel 2004: 1). Only some decades ago television had to gain a reputation as a serious and positive medium and did so only when a new “enemy” came into existence:

“In the past few years a new medium has come along to fascinate young people and worry their elders: video games. Some adults fear that, even more than television, the games are at best frivolous and at worst mindless, numbing, and violent.” (Greenfield 1984: 2)

Television was in the eighties still regarded as a medium which causes degeneration in children, at the same time video-games started to become a medium and leisure activity. Almost 40 years later video-games and computer games¹ are still suffering from a bad reputation. Acts of violence are quickly blamed in public on computer games and their negative effect on children. The public requires a scapegoat which is easily detected and pointed to since it hides possible more serious problems in a society. It is an easy and fast explanation for unbelievable events which have more complex reasons (c.f. Kunczik; Zipfel 2004: 1).

Generally, it still happens that computer games are presented in the media as a medium which causes the evil of mankind to surface in every single gamer. It was this negative and demonic view of computer games which led me to research computer games because my experiences in and with computer games are vastly different to the image of them in the public. Computer games are fun, a leisure-activity like many others and they bring people together. Certainly, negative events cannot be denied like possibilities of addiction and cases in which computer games are misused for example as trial run for acts of violence. However, such negative examples should not be used to demonize computer games. It is not the computer game and its content which causes harm but deeper and more serious problems.

That said, this thesis regards computer games and in particular MMORPGs as a medium of possibilities. The positive effects for gamers but also for the researcher dealing with MMORPGs is highlighted. MMORPGs provide the researcher with a testing ground for linguistic and sociological hypotheses. Scientific concepts can be easily tested in the setting of MMORPGs and hence provide numerous opportunities to researchers. But this thesis is not only a playground to apply linguistics to computer games. This PhD thesis project

1 Henceforth the term computer games will be used to refer to video-games and computer games alike.

investigates communication and language use in MMORPGs by gamers. Hence, the main focus is not the form of language as such but the speakers, the gamers, using it and the question why they use it to that extent. In my view, the speaker is the driving force behind the linguistic choices taken. While the context, interlocutor, purpose, aim and other aspects influence the language, it is in the end the speaker who takes the choices based on certain conditions.

But why should one study the language of a handful of eccentrics? Since gamers of MMORPGs from all over the world play and interact with one another online, this medium provides a unique setting. Furthermore, according to Blizzard Entertainment, the developer of *World of Warcraft*®, *World of Warcraft*® had about 12 Million gamers worldwide in 2011

(<http://eu.blizzard.com/de-de/company/press/pressreleases.html?id=2450471> (05.07.2012)). Computer games are also an important part of the entertainment industry today. They influence print-media, the film and merchandise industry. These developments made computer games known to broad public which leads to linguistic crossroads. Therefore it could be said that the enormous number of gamers coming from numerous cultural and language backgrounds as well as the distinct features of online communication make the setting of MMORPGs a linguistic and sociological testing ground of contemporary issues. It offers insights into the connection of international, intercultural communication and globalization in the game (henceforth ingame) as well as outside of it.

The linguistic perspective taken for this PhD project allows immersing into the linguistic matrix of these games. By linking communication aspects and strategies such as stylistic features, politeness to underlying human needs and urges, this thesis raises more general issues about the understanding of international interaction as it is enacted through an electronic medium. In order to do this, conversational strategies and expressions are subsumed under the term of *positioning*. Taking up a position in a conversation is central to the act of communication, since every speaker makes certain linguistic choices during speech. My argument is that gamers use stylistic features and other interaction strategies in order to position themselves in conversation with other gamers. Whenever people talk with one another, they take a position in the conversation at hand since they want to achieve a particular effect. I would define *position* as

a place in relation to other people and therefore the focus is on the underlying motivation and the perlocutionary effect the speakers want to achieve rather than the social conventions, rights and rules which are applied to a situation, genre or story line. In my definition, it is a matter of co-operation between the speakers involved and refers to the expression of one's position but also to the relation of the interlocutor's position which can be achieved through several positioning moves like claiming sympathy or antipathy, building rapport, evoking closeness or distance but also attempting to place oneself in the in-group. The concept of positioning provides insights into the motivations and purposes of the language used in MMORPGs (c. f. Kramer 2013b: 1-2).

The research questions underlying this thesis are therefore not only which linguistic choices gamers make, but how they utilize linguistic resources available to them to position themselves and others in conversations. Hence the interrogative words *which*, *how* and *why* sum up the driving questions of this thesis. Which features and strategies of language are used in MMORPGs? How are they used? Finally, why and to what end are they made use of? The hypothesis of this thesis, is that gamers make use of the linguistic resources available to them in form of stylistic features and other interaction strategies in order to *position* themselves in conversation to *achieve* certain *effects* in their interlocutors.

But while this PhD project looks at computer games and especially at MMORPGs from a linguistic perspective, it does not merely follow a descriptive approach. It provides a new angle towards game studies, linguistics and media studies, also by combining them in an innovative way. A hands-on approach is used in order to study the speech community of and the language used by MMORPG gamers. This means, I compiled a language corpus using data from ingame chat-channels and official message-boards of games like *World of Warcraft*®, *Lord of the Rings Online*® and others. It has to be mentioned that I limit myself to text-based communication in my study. Despite the popular use of VoIP chats², I argue that text-based communication is still prevalent when it comes to casual gaming, playing in random groups and contacting strangers. In addition to the corpus, introspection is used, referring to my own experience as

2 For a study on VoIP (voice over IP) communication see Williams et al. (2007)

a gamer as well as being an active member of the speech community. Since corpus data does not allow us to draw conclusions about speaker's attitudes concerning language features, a third data set was used, namely quantitative data from a questionnaire.

Before deepening the discussion of the linguistic reality of MMORPGs, a word or two about the structure of this thesis. The thesis consists of four sections. The first section called *MMORPGs: the nature of the game* is dedicated to the exploration of the discourse and practice of play and game. Therefore there are three chapters in which the, at first glance seemingly similar, discourses of game and play, computer games and MMORPGs are described. When researching computer games, there is no way around defining the nature of gaming. What is the difference between play and game? Why is gaming even important to us? Chapter two starts out by defining play and game and therefore the discussion begins with a broad focus which is reduced throughout the section. Chapter three focuses on computer games describing several aspects and approaches towards them like history (3.2), media studies and narrative studies (3.3), media literacy and education (3.4) and cultural studies (3.5). The review of these perspectives provides insights into the field of computer game studies as well as several aspects which are involved when researching computer games. Chapter four focuses on the main aspect and main discourse of interest for this thesis, namely MMORPGs. It provides a description of MMORPGs and its features, so to say what makes a MMORPG. Chapter 4.2 discusses why MMORPGs are such a successful game-type and how aspects of the game influence the behavior and therefore also the language of the gamers. A further chapter (4.3) is dedicated to the aspect of role-playing and identity. Since every gamer creates an avatar in order to represent him or her in the game, it is important to discuss what happens to a gamer or in a gamer at this moment. This chapter also introduces the setup of communication in MMORPGs (4.4). The formal setup and functionality of the forms and channels of communication available in MMORPGs are described including synchronous and asynchronous communication. This is particularly interesting for the following discussion of the language used in MMORPGs since the technical setup gives rise to specific linguistic features and influences the choices made by gamers. It is important to describe MMORPGs and what the social, cultural,

cognitive and experiential reality of the gamers and therefore of the speakers is, hence this work presents a detailed introduction to these aspects before discussing the linguistic phenomena in this setting.

The survey-intersection takes the thesis one step closer to practice. The chapter describes the survey in detail by explaining the setting of the survey and the data sets used for this thesis. This chapter provides information on how the survey was carried out and what possible shortcomings there are. Finally, the results are discussed, in particular the raw data of the questionnaire. However, most of the results are interwoven into the following chapters. The questionnaire used for the online survey can be found in a static print version in appendix A.

The survey sets the frame for the core of the thesis, section two *MMORPGs playing the game*. In this section MMORPGs are described using the Jakobson's speech event model (7). This concept allows for discussing several aspects of communication and meaning making in MMORPGs, which are all interconnected but have to be brought into a linear sequence for analysis. The context and a description of contextual factors such as conventionalized schemata (8.1), the conversational maxims (8.2) as well as turn-taking and timing (8.3) which provide basic guidelines and therefore influence communication ingame, are discussed in chapter eight. The context leads to the speaker and speech-communities which are discussed in chapter nine. This chapter prepares the ground for the next chapter in which positioning is discussed since it is first and foremost speaker positioning.

Chapter ten, therefore, provides a detailed overview and treatment of the concept of positioning and how this concept is connected to other (linguistic) theories. The nature of positioning is explored (10.1) as well as the act of positioning as such (10.2). The complex relation between positioning and politeness (10.3) as well as the concepts of face and facework (10.3.1) are treated. Chapter eleven describes how the channel or the medium influences language. It starts out by discussing computer mediated communication (CMC) (11.1) and then deals with the difficulty of categorizing language in gaming situations as writing or speech (11.2). Since the channel considerations (11) influence how speakers encode their messages, chapter twelve describes

several stylistic features which provide examples of how gamers encode their messages in different ways like English as lingua franca, smileys, acronyms and others.

Section three focuses on positioning ingame and particularly on the perception of the gamers. The chapter discusses aspects which are of crucial importance to the gamers and influence their linguistic choices and positioning acts such as efficiency (14), politeness (15), role-playing (16) and power (17). The discussion of the politeness aspect also includes a treatment of negative behaviors ingame (15.1) such as trolling, flaming, ganking, and griefing. These aspects of gaming and communication shape our perception of the gaming surrounding.

The final step in section three is a close analysis of a core question of the questionnaire called the wipe (18). In this chapter all loose ends are tied together and the features and concepts discussed applied to an example. A difficult situation is presented to the participants and they were supposed to describe how they would react. The answers give insights into how the perception of politeness and the reality drift apart. The close analysis of this question is an attempt to apply the concept of positioning and illustrate the several interaction strategies and positioning moves in use in the utterances of gamers. It is therefore not only an illustration of the findings of the thesis but also to some degree a summary of the positioning moves and features described in the previous chapters. The final conclusion (20) attempts to answer questions raised in the thesis, dismiss myths and provide pointers towards future research in the area.

It is clear that not every reader of this thesis is familiar with all the technical terms of computer games and MMORPGs, therefore a glossary of MMORPG terms can be found in appendix B. This should provide the reader with a better understanding of the terms without interrupting the flow of the text by reciting definitions.

While there are many research projects dealing with aspects which are also part of this thesis for example computer games, this thesis offers a unique, interdisciplinary viewpoint to the questions of language and computer games. Computer game studies hold several concepts to deal with computer games such as MMORPG. Nevertheless they approach them from other angles and

disciplines. The gamers as speech community and their language as distinct research topic are rarely recognized. Alike game studies, linguistics focuses on the description of the setting and the language used but not on the speakers, the gamers. Therefore this thesis provides a new angle to MMORPGs by combining applied linguistic approaches, sociolinguistic and pragmatic concepts, with game studies frameworks as well as sociological and psychological theories, namely the concept of positioning. By combining, altering and adapting these different approaches, this thesis attempts to provide new insights into how computer games, culture, language and society are interlinked with one another, and form a cycle in which they influence one another. The setting of MMORPGs offers a linguistic microcosm which allows raising more general issues about international and intercultural communication in the globalized and media-dominated world.

One of the main profits yielded by the results of this thesis is the possibility to raise society's awareness of gamers, their community, their culture and their language. They can help to understand how gamers tick and adapt language to their needs. Since the community of gamers is constantly increasing and not a minor matter, the results give valuable insights into the gamer's culture and language and how they are connected to the world and culture outside of games.

Certainly, this thesis cannot possibly deal with all aspects and features of MMORPGs as the scope of this thesis does not allow the treatment of every aspect worth researching. However, it hopefully sheds light on some elements of language use and usage in MMORPGs and invites other researchers and linguists to work in the field of computer game studies. Clearly, there are people who do not see any sense in researching MMORPGs, computer games and the language used in them. Is there any use in researching in such a popular field? Let me put it in the slightly changed words from the cinematic trailer of *World of Warcraft® Mists of Pandaria* (2012): "To ask why we [research] is to ask why the leaves fall. It is in their nature."

Section I: MMORPGs: the nature of the game

“Linguistic theories [...] are fictions. This is a perfectly respectable thing to be.” (Widdowson 1984:26). As Widdowson (1984: 25-26) notes, models of social sciences and humanities especially those which attempt to describe human behavior can only be idealizations of procedures and behaviors which create prototypes. They resemble reality to some extent as well as they are convincing and plausible but they are not necessarily correct. The function of such theories thus is comparable to fictions in general which also show an idealized image of reality.

The notion of *fiction* as an idealized version of reality in which prototypes are created is also a crucial aspect of all types of games. Throughout the thesis the process of idealization and prototype creation is reoccurring. Yet, there is another fiction beside the fiction created in games by gamers, namely the all-encompassing fiction of the *discourse*.

Discourse and *discourse analysis* are buzz-words in humanities no matter if it is linguistics, sociology or history. The term is used frequently and profusely, but when it comes to defining what discourse actually means the fiction of the theory of discourse takes a turn into rough territory. The often quoted and criticized definition of discourse (in the linguistic sense) by Stubbs (1983:1) labeling it as “language above the sentence or above the clause” does not appeal at first glance. However, no matter how unappealing or even discriminating the definition appears, it provides directions away from strictly grammar based linguistics towards applied linguistics.

Some researchers like Brown and Yule (1983: 1) refer to discourse as language in use which cannot be restricted to describing linguistic forms but has to incorporate purpose and function. Yet the term discourse often includes more than just language in use, its speakers, purpose and function. Fairclough (1992: 28) goes as far as to say “discourse is for me more than just language use: it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice.” The notion of language as a social practice is also particularly important in Foucault's theory in which language is an expression and execution of social reality and of ordering it (c. f. Foucault 1974). This shows that several aspects

and phenomena are covered by the term discourse. On one hand it is referred to as language in use which includes motivations, functions and the speakers. On the other hand it refers to social practices and ways of seeing, creating and controlling social reality, as in xenophobic discourse or sexist discourse. The later phenomenon is often referred to as critical discourse analysis (CDA) which focuses on social problems and power structures which are expressed with and through language. However, sociocultural aspects and language cannot and should not be neatly separated because as Jaworski and Coupland (2006: 3) say “it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals' interaction with society”. This thesis focuses on the notion of discourse as *language in use* and hence aspects which are discussed in the field of critical discourse analysis have to be left open in this work.

Yet, the definition of discourse as *language in use* is still fuzzy as the comparison of two approaches illustrate. In Cook's (2001) textbook *Discourse* it is defined as “stretches of language perceived to be meaningful, unified, and purposive” (Cook 2001: 156), followed by the definition of discourse types as “a recognizable and often colloquially named category of discourse whose identification assists in discourse processing and production: for example, *menu, chat, textbook*” (Ibid: 156). Comparing it to Widdowson's definition given in his book *Discourse analysis* provides interesting points of discussion: “[...] the meaning that a first person intends to express in producing a text, and that a second person interprets from the text.” (Widdowson 2007:129). While Cook describes discourse as if it is a set of utterances, Widdowson's approach depicts it as a process of meaning making. Widdowson's definition can also be compared to Habermas' theory of communicative action (2011) which regards discourse also as a process of negotiation in which the speakers negotiate meanings and validity claims. Both approaches of discourse provide points of contact with the notion of positioning put forth in this thesis such as the process of meaning-making as well as the negotiation of meanings and claims through the speakers.

For this thesis I regard *discourse* as a process, particularly a process of meaning making and negotiation of meanings. But the process of meaning making does not necessarily refer to making meaning of or through language but relates to a general notion of it including also paralinguistic interaction, signs and the context. As Widdowson (1984) states describing written discourse “[...] as a realization of linguistic rules in the act of making sense and this inevitably involves an engagement with the language user's cognitive and experiential reality.” (Widdowson 1984: 44) This appears to be valid for all settings and discourses. Thus, one cannot research the language in MMORPGs without studying the cultural and cognitive frame of it.

While this might appear as a rather open approach as if anything goes, it does not mean that there are no rules or conventions involved. To return to the comparison of theory and fiction, the creation of prototypes is a basic aspect of human behavior. Discourse “[...] cannot be dissociated from norms of social behaviour and cultural values” (Widdowson 1984: 52). Hence in the process of meaning-making, speakers create and build upon prototypes, which I call *conventions*, and rules. Conventions are, according to the Oxford dictionary, “a way in which something is usually done”

(<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/convention?q=convention> [04.02.2014]). A more sophisticated and accurate definition is to refer to conventions as a set of agreed and generally accepted behaviors, standards, norms or customs. People or speakers create and agree to conventions in a certain setting (see Searle 1995: 27ff; see also Goffman 1967: 33ff.). But to anticipate the more detailed treatment of conventions concerning language use in the chapter 8.1, conventions are also part of the meaning making process hence they can be conformed to, therefore, affirmed but also broken and changed. In order to break the conventions there have to be conventions in the first place. Meaning-making takes place within a *frame* which can be loose or rigid but there are conventions which were agreed upon. The speakers can conform to them but also negotiate them within this frame. For example, when meeting one of the neighbors in the apartment building, one will probably greet the person and maybe hold open the door. These are conventions of everyday interaction often subsumed under the term manners. They are socially agreed conventions. If you do not greet your neighbor, and by this break the

conventions, he or she might think that you are impolite but it probably will not have much impact because the setting is not that strict and rigid. However, if you are at court where the conventions are strict there is not much place for maneuver concerning negotiation, meaning-making or even changing the conventions. One might try but it could bring you to jail for contempt of court. It is always depending on the setting, if conventions are loose social conventions and good manners or if they are stricter like format conventions of a journal. Nevertheless conventions are the basic layer of discourse because they provide idealized prototypes which speakers require to make meaning of interaction. Conventions make discourse and at the same time discourse creates the conventions followed.

It often happens that conventions and rules are used synonymously. However, while they are related, they are not the same. According to Searle (1995: 28) “‘convention’ implies arbitrariness, but constitutive rules in general are not in that sense arbitrary.” Conventions are preferred and expected customs, behaviors or practices, which can lead if not followed to stigmatization or discrimination. *Rules* either regulate or constitute activities, based on Searle's account (1995: 27-28). Regulative rules regulate already existing activities, which existed already before they were put under certain rules, for example traffic. Traffic existed already before traffic rules were implemented. Constitutive rules, however, constitute and characterize an activity which normally did not exist in that way before. Searle uses the example of chess to illustrate constitutive rules. Hence if you do not follow the rules of chess, you do not play chess (Ibid: 28). Yet the question is, if constitutive rules are that fixed how can it happen that the collective intentionality as Searle (1995: 23) calls it, the shared intentional states, beliefs, desires as well as intentions, change and create new rules? Searle seems to miss a point here, he made before when talking about facts, namely that “[...] there are portions of the real world, objective facts in the world, that are only facts by human agreement.” (Searle 1995: 1). I claim in the following course of this thesis that rules, conventions, positions and meanings are shifting and changeable because “[i]n a sense there are things that exist only because we believe them to exist” (Searle 1995: 1).

Before tying together the loose ends of this introduction I return to a term used already before and which reappears throughout this thesis, namely *frame*. The term receives a thorough treatment in chapter 4.3, but it is such a universal notion that it reappears throughout this thesis. The term *frame* was coined by Goffman (1986) and in my understanding is a structural scaffold by which humans organize and make meaning of interaction, experience and society in general. Frames are made of concepts, conventions and rules which guide the actions of humans through interactions. In this thesis several frames appear because the notion of the frame is essential when it comes to gaming and playing. Frames are set over activities to denote them as separate frames compared to others. The game is framed differently compared to the “real world”. But also the “real world” consists of several frames humans create to organize experiences and activities. Of particular interest are the frames within games which create a fiction. This ties the loose end of the fiction to the frame because idealized representations of prototypes create specific frames within bigger frames. Playing house creates a fiction which is based on the frame of social interaction within families. Yet it is an over-idealized fiction of it.

While frames appear to be similar to discourse there is one crucial difference, frames are rather rigid and static and discourse is a process of meaning-making. Discourse draws upon the frames in our minds. Clearly, frames can be broken, left or changed to some extent but they uphold our structural mindset.

Summing up discourse is the process of meaning-making and negotiating meanings within frames which separate activities and interactions from another. The frames are composed of conventions, rules and behaviors which can be followed but also challenged.

Why is all of this important in a thesis about MMORPGs? This section explores into the different discourses which are involved in the study of language in MMORPGs, namely the discourse of game and play, the computer game discourse and in particular MMORPGs as discourse. While these several discourses appear to be different they also share similarities. They resemble another and at the same time also differ from another. This is quite similar to Wittgenstein's (2003) notion of family resemblance which is treated in the next chapter in more detail. A gamer of MMORPGs can restore oneself in the

discourse of games in general as well as in computer games, yet he or she can also see the differences between playing chess and playing a MMORPG. The gamer can make meaning of these framed experiences because he or she recognizes the conventions and frames within them. The importance of conventions and rules is apparent in particular in the gaming discourses discussed in this section. Similarly the notion of the frame is crucial when discussing games since it reappears in the form of the magic circle.

Clearly, discussing the discourse of MMORPGs and the language used in it is like dealing with a Matryoska. There are always other dolls hidden within the previous doll. They fit into another but still they are not the same. Hence this thesis has to start with one of the smallest dolls hidden within the MMORPG, the discourse of game and play.

2. Game and play

2.1 Defining play and game

One of the features all humans, and even all animals, have in common is that they play. The form play takes vary, sometimes playing is a solitary activity, sometimes not. Playing can be silent, earnest, joyful, loud, wild and cheerful. Playing is independent of age. Humans participate or watch plays at the theater. They play music instruments. They play games like card games, boardgames, role-playing games, sports and lately more and more often computer games. These activities are very diverse, but the fact that we refer to them with the same name suggests they have something in common. According to Wittgenstein (2003: §66-71) there is no commonality but a resemblance, namely family resemblance (*Familienähnlichkeit*) in which characteristics overlap and intersect. They are similar but not the same.

But first of all, before discussing what it means to play a game, it is of importance to make a distinction between *play* and *game*. The act of playing is often referred to by scholars as *play*, while categories of playing are referred to as *games* (see Pias; Holtorf 2007: 9). Sometimes playing without rules like role-play, plays at theater and such are called *play* while playing with rules and boundaries is named *games* (Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 24). This elementary definition should provide a starting point to the discussion about what gaming and playing mean and is again returned to at a later stage in this chapter.

The question why humans even play at all gained attention of many thinkers, philosophers and theorists. Friedrich Schiller claimed in 1795 that humans play only where they are fully human, and they are only completely human where they play (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 18). Roland Barthes noticed, after watching Japanese playing at an arcade, that humans play as they work. They play games which resemble their activities at work. He concluded therefore, that games fulfill a copying function or reproduction of activities (see Barthes 1981: 44). McLuhan identified a similar function of games and established an analogy between games and work. He claimed that games which imitate work provide most fun for the gamers because they free the gamer from monopolistic tyranny of the *social machine*. Yet, according to McLuhan the gamer is not freed of the

current tyranny but of previous ones because games depict earlier realities. "The social practices of one generation tend to get codified into the 'game' of the next." (McLuhan 1987: 239). This makes games not only a copy of the world but also a reproduction (c. f. Pfaller 2007: 150-152). This notion of reproducing by copying elements of the real world can also be applied to the language used in games. The language used in games is in many cases a copied version of language outside of them. In the game, the language is adapted and in return reproduced in the real world. However, it is McLuhan's belief that games and art are replaced by a society of complete participation and interaction in which there are no producers and recipients (c. f. Pfaller 2007: 152). This idea of increased participation and interaction reoccurs throughout the thesis.

Horkheimer and Adorno (2006: 145) believe that "Amusement ist die Verlängerung der Arbeit im Spätkapitalismus". Rosenfelder (2008: 57) notes that Horkheimer and Adorno based their belief on their perception of cinemas in the 1940s and that work and leisure activities today cannot be that easily compared to the 1940ies. Horkheimer and Adorno claimed that watching Donald Duck taking stick leads to becoming used to oppression in daily life. Today, however, there is no abundance of work and working is regarded by many more positively. Rosenfelder (2008: 58) goes as far as to apply Weber's "Die protestantische Ethik" (1965) (translated: "The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalisms") to gamers, recapitulating: "Nur, wer sich selbst diszipliniert, gehört zur Schar der Auserwählten. Und nur, wer sich quält, besitzt Anspruch auf Glückseligkeit. Gamer erfüllen diese Bedingungen." The notion of gaming as work deserves more attention and is dealt with in the chapter on MMORPGs (4.2) due to the fact that gamers regard MMORPGs as labor intensive. Finally, Gadamer (1989: 102ff.) regards playing as a self-representation which "renews itself in constant repetition." (Gadamer 1989: 102).

These treatments of gaming deal with games and play as such but do not provide a basis for game studies. It was Johan Huizinga in 1938 who established the theory of play in his work *Homo Ludens*. His work is still one of the basic theories in game studies and computer game studies today, even though they did not exist yet when Huizinga wrote his work, and therefore requires a thorough discussion here. Huizinga starts his work with the following

claim: "Spiel ist älter als Kultur [...] die Tiere haben nicht auf die Menschen gewartet, dass diese sie erst das Spielen lehrten." (Huizinga 1938: 9). Play is older than culture because animals do play as well and the term culture presumes human society. It is Huizinga's belief that culture arises from the activity of playing as well as that culture develops from playing, and therefore that culture is initially played (Huizinga 1938: 189). In his work Huizinga also defines characteristics of games. Contrary to Wittgenstein's claim (2003: §66) that there is no commonality to every game but only similarities, Huizinga describes features which can be found in every game.

The first characteristic Huizinga identifies is that playing is a *voluntary activity*. Humans, of every age, play not out of necessity but rather out of choice. Games can be stopped temporarily or not be played at all. Forced play is not playing anymore (see Huizinga 1938: 16). Who has not witnessed children playing playhouse and suddenly a hot-headed discussion arises about the roles and how to play them. It is not unusual to see one child standing up and declaring "I don't play with you anymore" and rushing off. In the same way playing a computer game is a voluntary action. The game can possibly be saved and put aside if the gamer does not feel like playing anymore. However, it should be mentioned that the borders of voluntary action and necessity blur in professional play like sports leagues or even MMORPGs which are sometimes regarded by its players as work, scheduled activity and stress. This might have to do with what Huizinga calls the cultural function. As soon as play becomes culture, terms like duty, task and obligation become relevant (see Huizinga 1938: 16).

The second characteristic Huizinga draws attention to is that play is not real-life. The players only pretend to do something or to be someone. The actions during games are "as if -actions", they are not to be taken completely serious. Playing is stepping out of life into another sphere or world for a certain amount of time. The player steps into a *magic circle* created by the game and leaves it after the game is over. The entering of another reality and world without sanctions in the real world is one of the attractions of games (see Huizinga 1938: 16). Every child knows that they are not really a pirate or princess but that they only pretend to be during playing.

Huizinga's magic circle provides another aspect of playing namely its limitations. Games take place within limits of time and place (see Huizinga 1938: 18). When a game is over, or as in the previous example of the child declaring to stop playing, playing stops. The boxer knows that the fight is over as soon as he or she leaves the boxing ring. A player of *World of Warcraft*® knows that as soon as he or she exits the game he or she is not anymore able to transform someone into a sheep. However, the concept of the magic circle is strongly criticized nowadays especially when it comes to the discussion of computer games as game. This discussion is treated in more depth in the chapter on computer games (chapter 3). But it can be argued that the magic circle provides the frame for the gaming discourse. It sets a frame around the action of playing which differs from the discourse outside the game. The magic circle as frame provides the gamer with what Searle (1995: 23) calls collective intentionality, as was mentioned before. It means "[...] not only that they engage in cooperative behavior, but that they share intentional states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions." (Searle 1995: 23). He provides even an example from football in which the action of one player is not only an individual action but also a part of the collective action.

Another characteristic is that playing requires *rules* and order which apply to every player independent of their status in real-life. These rules and their outcome only apply to the game and not to real-life. The rules ensure that all players start out on the same level and with the same chances. It is the gamer's time, energy, skills but also luck which lead to success or failure (see Huizinga 1938: 18-19). It is not always easy to see the rules of certain games. At first glance there appear to be no rules in games like play house. Yet there are clearly rules, namely those the gamers come up with. This becomes apparent when playing together with children and they tell you that you cannot do something in the game just because they decided upon it. Hence most rules are created by the gamers. They can be constitutive rules as Searle (1995: 27-28) refers to them like in chess. But they can also be regulative rules if the action existed before the rules were applied. I would claim that this holds true to many games for example sports like bowling. To anticipate the following discussion on the differentiation between *paidia* and *ludus*. The activity of rolling a ball existed

before rules were applied and created the sports called bowling. Rules in games can also be practices and conventions the gamers agreed to, hence arbitrary regulations as in playing house.

The player *community* is another characteristic of playing. While playing games, player communities come into existence. Huizinga argues that player communities tend to remain even after the game is over outside the magic circle. Such communities also tend to create meanings, in-group meanings, language, rituals, rules as well as secrets (see Huizinga 1938: 20-21). People meet for games evenings to play boardgames, card games or console games. Others group together as teams for sports like baseball or tennis. In MMORPGs gamers form guilds, clans or parties to play together. Communities exist even outside the game especially on the Internet in form of online-communities, forums, wikis, websites but also in form of magazines in the print media sector. Some guilds even meet in real-life in order to strengthen the bond of friendship. A usual way for gamers to create a community is by means of language like shared in-group meanings also constitute secrets. This aspect is discussed further in the chapter of computer games as culture (3.5).

A further aspect Huizinga discusses is what he calls *holy earnest* referring to the excessive joy, earnestness, furor and sympathies of the players but also of the audience watching a game (see Huizinga 1938: 27ff.). As Pfaller (2002: 93-95) highlights, Huizinga knows that holy earnest is not the result of confusion between reality and game. The players and the audience of a football match do not forget that football is only a game and do not believe the situation to be real and therefore get into a flurry of excitement. Still, the game causes strong emotional reactions. Games appear to be the only situation in which humans are able to feel such affective, excessive emotions and holy earnestness. Sometimes games are even more serious and emotional than the real world. Good friends would not argue in real-life but when playing a game even best friends can argue and even fall out. As Pfaller (2002: 97) notes Huizinga does not answer the questions why games cause such reactions and where holy earnestness comes from. This thesis can also only raise the question why such reactions are caused but cannot offer a satisfying answer to it.

Finally, Huizinga identifies *uncertainty* and *suspense* as important characteristics of playing. The outcome of the game is unknown at the beginning of the game. According to the rules the winner can be declared (see Huizinga 1938: 19). In rather open types of games like playing house, MMORPGs and similar there is no real winner since there is no real end to the game. However, the players set their goals, for example performing particularly well, tossing a ball as far as possible, reaching the highest level, getting the best gear, fulfilling all quests available and so on. The outcome of a game has to be uncertain and provide the player with suspense and moments of surprise.

To sum up, Huizinga arrives at the following definition of playing:

“Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is “different” from ordinary life.”
(1955: 28)

In 1958 the French scholar Roger Caillois (1961) takes up Huizinga's characteristics and refines them. Caillois defines two poles of playing. One of the poles is free, uncontrolled, anarchic and capricious playing referred to as *paidia*. On the other side is rule-based and conventional playing called *ludus*. At the beginning of this chapter the differentiation between *play* and *game* was based on similar poles. *Play* would equate *paidia* while *game* equates *ludus* (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 23-24). *Paidia* is strongly connected to playing instincts and refers to open-ended, spontaneous improvised play and creativity. There are games like playing house, tossing balls or several computer games which fit into this category like simulations, *the Sims*, *Age of Empire* or MMORPGs. *Ludus* is rule-based playing with clear outcomes or winners. Chess would be a typical example of *ludus* (see Dovey, Kennedy 2009: 25). *Ludus* channels the playing instincts of *paidia* and allows the creation of games. Rosenstingl and Mitgutsch (2009: 24) provide many examples of this like the joy of rolling a ball (*paidia*) becomes bowling (*ludus*), fight (*paidia*) becomes boxing (*ludus*), the joy of dressing up (*paidia*) becomes theater (*ludus*).

Caillois furthermore proposes four play formations in order to categorize different sorts of playing in the *paidia* and *ludus* continuum. The first formation is called *agôn* and describes competitive games in which players compete under

the same circumstances with a clear winning or losing outcome. The aim is winning. Games of this category require skill and training. Chess, racing or baseball are examples of this category. Certainly, many computer games also fit into this category from first-person-shooters (FPS) to racing games (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 24-25; see also Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 24).

The second formation is called *alea* and refers to games of chance or fortune. Named after the Latin word for dice, *alea* means rather passive games in which the player complies to chance, fate and fortune. The skills of the player are meaningless. Typical games in this category are gambling games such as roulette, lottery or even certain boardgames. There are also computer games using *alea* like computer-based gambling games. However, many games for example board games and of course also computer games use a combination of *alea* and *agôn*, in the sense of the chances intervening and causing changes in the setting (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 25). In chapter 4 one of the predecessors of MMORPGs, the pen and paper role-playing game is discussed in which the gamemaster is rolling dices in order to calculate the impact of weapons and spells. Similarly, the players of pen and paper games and also MMORPGs roll on lootable items. The player who rolls the highest number wins the loot and receives it automatically by the game. This element causes suspense and uncertainty as well as frustration. Many gamers talk about loot-luck and lucky dices when it comes to this element of luck. Hence, *alea* is an important aspect, even in MMORPGs.

The third category is called *mimicry* and refers to masquerading and dressing up. There is no aim and no winning in games of the category *mimicry*, just the joy of pretending to be someone or to imitate someone. There are no winners or losers in *mimicry*. Typical examples of this category are theater, role-playing like playing pirates, cowboys or playhouse (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 25-26). Certainly, this does not mean that there are no rules in *mimicry* because there are. The roles require certain behaviors. The actor of a play at the theater has to perform a given text. Even in child play, *mimicry* rules are made up during play. When watching children playing knight and princess it is not unusual to hear things like “You can't do that! You are the princess you have to wait for the knight to rescue you!”. Computer games offer several games fitting

to some extent into this category like *The Sims* or simulations in general. However, very often such games are not exclusive mimicry but also include tasks or competition. In *GTA* you do not only pretend to be a criminal and do whatever pleases you, but you can also fulfill tasks, quests or jobs. Typical role-playing games like *Dungeon Siege* are not only about pretending to be a warrior or a healer but about fulfilling quests and advancing in the story of the game.

The last category Caillois puts forth is *ilinx* which some scholars equate with vertigo. Games of this category are driven by the desire to feel dizziness, disorder and intoxication. Typical games in this category are children spinning around, driving rollercoasters or dancing. Some scholars even list using drugs and drinking alcohol as *ilinx* driven “games” (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 24). This category is difficult to find in computer games but recent games making use of motion capturing devices of consoles like Wii, Playstation 3 and Xbox Kinect offer *ilinx* to some extent. Games such as *Dance dance Revolution*, *Wii Fit*, *Wii Sports*, *Rayman Raving Rabbids* provide *ilinx* by causing the gamer to move in order to play the game. It is also possible to create *ilinx* moments in other computer games like vertigo in some levels of *Unreal Tournament*, or by jumping off mountains in MMORPGs.

According to Rosenstingl and Mitgutsch (2009: 27) another category could be added to these four, namely *experiment*. Construction kits and labs fall into this category and are used mainly in order to experiment and try things out. Driving forces in such games are curiosity and creativity. There are many computer games which offer virtual labs and construction kits and allow the construction of machines, cars, cities and so on. This category is of interest for educational and learning games.

Caillois' refining of Huizinga's theory certainly offers many new perspectives. One of them is that games and therefore also computer games normally do not fall into one category but are a combination of many elements and exactly this combination makes them so popular and successful. To anticipate later chapters, MMORPGs are not only about role-playing (mimicry) but also about suspense and loot-luck (*alea*) and to a large part about achieving goals (*âgon*).

One of today's best known (computer) game theorists Jesper Juul provides a detailed analysis of what makes a game. His model, however, is not medium specific and can be applied to all games not only computer games. It is Juul's belief that there is a difference between game and play. "All games must be played, but not all play takes the form of a game. Games entail rules. It is rules that give meaning to players' actions." (Buckingham 2008: 6). According to Juul there are six features that games have in common. First of all, games are based on rules. Second, the outcomes are variable and quantifiable. Third, the outcomes get different values (positive and negative) assigned. Fourth, effort is invested by the player in order to achieve the desired outcome. Fifth, the player is emotionally attached to the game and the outcome. Sixth, there are negotiable consequences in games for real-life (see Buckingham 2008: 6). Juul's approach focuses on the outcome and the players of games. The player's effort and his or her emotional attachment to the game and the outcome are mentioned the first time in game studies. Interestingly, Juul believes that there are consequences of games in real-life, this is different to Huizinga who argues that there are no consequences in real-life.

An aspect all scholars agree on is that games are rule-based³. Rules designate the frame of the game and are its inner structure. The fact that games are structured by rules allows for the rather easy transfer of games from one medium to another. Juul (2003: 41) argues that:

"[...] there is no set of equipment or material support common to all games. What is common, however, is a specific sort of immaterial support, namely the upholding of the rules, the determination of what moves and actions are permissible and what they will lead to. This can conveniently be described as computation, which is in actuality provided by human beings (in board games or card games), computers, or physical laws (sports)."

Another approach towards play and game is put forth by Sutton-Smith (2001). He describes the functions of play as rhetorics. He uses his seven rhetorics in order to categorize and analyze games.

First, the *rhetoric of play as progress* can be regarded as means of development rather than enjoyment. Games of this rhetoric are used to socialize, achieve moral, social and cognitive development of children. Huizinga

3 Contrary to play which is not rule-based to this extent.

also notes the importance of play as means of healthy socialization. Computer games can also be seen in this sense as there is a strong claim of computer games as tool of education and learning (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 30).

Second, the *rhetoric of play as fate* applies mostly to gambling and games of chance. This rhetoric is synonymous with Caillois' alea category.

Third, *rhetoric of play as identity* can be applied to traditional and community celebrations and festivals. They are used to confirm, maintain or advance the power and identity of the community of players. The identity of the player is present in the performance. As example fan communities are described who take pride in being gamers (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 30).

Rhetoric of play as power describes the representation of conflicts in games. Games can be used to fortify the status of those in power. This can be exemplified by the rivalry between sport clubs or online game clans, arena teams, professional gamer leagues or even the two factions in *World of Warcraft*® (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 30; see also Rosenfelder 2008: 89-101).

Rhetoric of play as the imaginary describes playful improvisation, creative power and innovation in games. “[C]reative power becomes a key marker of competitive advantage.” (Dovey; Kennefy 2009: 31) A good example of this is the game *Scribblenauts* which uses very innovative gameplay since it draws upon the player's creativity. The player has to solve tasks in the game by using objects. These objects are created by writing down their name in the game. Everything is possible. For example, a cat is caught on a roof and the gamer is supposed to get it down. There are different ways to solve this problem for example by writing down “milk” causing a bowl of milk to appear which lures the cat down. Another possibility is to write down “slingshot” and shoot the cat off the roof. There are almost no limitations to fantasy in this game.

Rhetoric of the self focuses on the gamers and their experiences in the games.

“[P]lay is idealised by attention to the desirable experience of the players – their fun, their relaxation, their escape – and the intrinsic or aesthetic satisfaction of the play performances”
(Sutton-Smith 2001: 11)

The last rhetoric, *rhetoric of play as frivolous* describes games which are used in playful protest against the orders of the ordained world (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 31). Good examples of this are browser games which are used during election campaigns or socially “deep games”⁴ criticizing society. But there are also life games which should raise the player's awareness of the social reality in society for example those presented by Bertolo and Mariani (2013).

The difference between Sutton-Smith's approach and Huizinga's and Caillois' discussion of games, is that Sutton-Smith highlights the expressive force of games. He describes what games can express and be used for. Therefore games are seen by Sutton-Smith as means of expression of individual experiences, while Huizinga regards them as culture and producers of culture.

Finally, before coming to my own definition of play and game, Gregory Bateson's (2007) account of play should be mentioned. It has to be pointed out that Bateson approaches the topic from a cybernetics background. One of the main aspects of Bateson's approach is that play is an interaction sequence in which signals are exchanged. The signals are used to convey the message “This is a game” creating a paradox frame in which signals are either not true or are in good fun or the signal signifies something which does not exist. Hence, one of the main aspects of Bateson's theory is that play consists of actions which signify actions which are in turn signifying actions. Bateson's findings can be equated with Huizinga's “as if-actions”. One of the examples by Bateson is pinching which signifies playful biting which in turn symbolizes real biting (see Bateson 2007: 194-195). Similarly, the map-territory relation can be discussed here. While the map symbolizes the territory, it is not really the territory. This can be applied to play as well since actions during playing symbolize action of non-play but are not the same actions as the ones in non-play. It is Bateson's belief that during play, players can equate map and territory and at the same time differentiate them (see Bateson 2007: 196-200). “Play is a class of behaviors defined by means of a negative without commonly identifying what that negative negates” (as quoted in Pias 2007: 212). This seems comparable to Searle's (1995: 28) account of constitutive rules which take the form “X counts as Y” or

4 Deep games or serious games refer to games with another primary purpose than entertainment such as fostering and training certain skills (professional simulations), raising awareness of issues in society, rehabilitation and similar.

“X counts as Y in context C””. Y assigns a new status agreed or at least accepted by others to X which it did not have before. Play and also games are full of such “as-if action” in which an action counts as another one. Taking a chess-piece in chess does not really mean that the piece is gone for ever and that it was defeated but it counts as such in this specific context (see Searle 1995: 43-44).

To conclude Bateson comes to the following definition of play: “As I understand it play is an interchange of messages within a contextual frame which as frame carries the label “all messages within this frame are not literally true”” (as quoted in Pias 2007: 210).

While Bateson approaches the topic play from anthropology and cybernetics, Huizinga does so from cultural history. Still both identify similar characteristics of play and games. For example, that the actions in play are not real and only pretended “as if-actions”. Another similarity in Huizinga's and Bateson's account is that during playing the gamers are in another world, in a magic circle or a frame in which messages and behaviors are not literally true. This can also be compared to Searle's notion of assigned values to functions. He notes that

“[...] the capacity of conscious agents to create social facts is the assignment of functions to objects and to other phenomena. Functions are never intrinsic; they are assigned relative to the interests of users and observers.”
(Searle 1995: 19)

Gamers apply special and sometimes different values than in the real world to functions and objects. They voluntarily step into a discourse withing a magic circle or frame in which meanings and values are different than in the world outside the game.

I follow in my work Huizinga's and Caillois' definition of game. I would also add Juul's characteristics which take into account the players and their effort and emotional attachment to the game. Hence, my definition of game is as follows: Game is normally a voluntary activity or occupation within certain fixed limits of time and place. A game is based on rules which are freely accepted. Its aim is in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, pleasure, and the consciousness that it is “different” from ordinary life and not to be taken seriously. While the actions are not to be taken seriously, its players use certain effort to achieve a

desired outcome which causes an emotional attachment in the player. Playing is of importance in our culture and humankind in all ages and can be an expression of innermost desires and fears as well as can be a catalyst for emotions.

This review of different definitions makes it clear that they depend on disciplinary perspective of the definers. As Sutton-Smith puts it:

“Each person defines games in his own way – the anthropologists and folklorists in terms of historical origins; the military men, businessmen, and educators in terms of usages; the social scientists in terms of psychological and social functions. There is overwhelming evidence in all this that the meaning of games is, in part, a function of the ideas of those who think about them.” (Sutton-Smith 1971: 438)

The function of games, therefore, might be the one we apply to them based on the frameworks we have in mind. This leads back to Wittgenstein (2003: §67) and his family resemblances who said that one would, when asked what games are, name games and describe them. “Man kann sagen, der Begriff “Spiel” ist ein Begriff mit verschwommenen Rändern” (Wittgenstein 2003: §71).

Clearly, it is not only games and play that are blurry of definitions. This might have to do with the difficulty to render thoughts into language in general. It was Wittgenstein (2003) who treated in his work the connection between language and play and the topic of language play in general. The following chapter explores exactly this connection and the role of play in language as well as the role of language in play.

2.2 The role of play in language

In Bateson's (2007) account of play and game the message takes an important role. While in his work a message does not need to be a verbal message, Huizinga (1938) devoted a chapter in his work to language play, in particular poetry and fiction. As humans play with many things, they also play with language. Yet, the form of language in play can vary. Bateson's view of the signaling or declaration that “this is a game” is supported by observing children playing and declaring that they entered, want to enter or left the frame of playing. “Let's play now”, “We are only playing”, “I don't play with you anymore”. These declarations fulfill an aiding function.

In similar vein, Cook (2000: 16-17) notes how language and action are used in children and tickling rhymes, which he refers to as pre-linguistic play, to aid meaning. The “as-if actions” and map-territory relations are supported through language. By touching the respective toes and stating “This little pig went to market” the child is helped to make the map-territory relation and relating a certain toe and a pig.

Clearly, language play in form of verse and language aiding play are not only enjoyable for children but, according to Cook also helps their language development. Vocalization, speech rhythm, intonation, grammar and even semantic meaning can be learned more easily by children through verses (see Cook 2000: 16-23). Cook also highlights the importance of verse and rhythm in children rhymes. It is clear that semantic meaning is not necessarily a driving force in rhymes thinking of gibberish rhymes and rhymes composed of nonsense words. Playing with language, with its sounds and forms, creating new words even nonsense words with no referential meaning and enjoying verse and rhythm is throughout cultures also an adult phenomenon (see Cook 2000: 17).

“One possible explanation is that verse is the remnant of a mnemonic device, now partly superseded by literacy, whose usefulness during the longer part of human history has led to a profound liking for it in our species” (Cook 2000: 27)

Certainly, it can be claimed that passing on knowledge in form of stories and especially verses, which are easily memorized through their rhythm, was of utmost importance in earlier times when there was no literacy. Similar to other games, as soon as the struggle with nature and survival is over the human being has the chance to use former skills not for survival but for enjoyment. Passing on knowledge for survival in verse form is still possible but not necessary. If someone does not know which fruit or mushrooms are edible, it can be read up in a book instead of reciting a verse.

Even more general is Wittgenstein's (2003) approach to language play. As mentioned before, he regards the notion of language play (*Sprachspiel*) as an unclear one with unclear borders which is exactly what makes them useful in his opinion (see Wittgenstein 2003: §71). For him language play is every utterance made in a certain context (*ibid*: §7). This all-encompassing approach includes

also thought experiments, conversation, literature and logic. “Das Wort *“Sprachspiel”* soll hier hervorheben, daß das *Sprechen* der Sprache ein Teil ist einer Tätigkeit, oder einer Lebensform.” (Wittgenstein 2003: §23).

However, playing with language is most obvious when it is used in literature. Poetry and fiction have become a widely-used kind of language play. Huizinga (1938: 133-138) regarded poetry and playing with language in general as play which takes place on the playground of the mind. Poetry is born in and as game. As Cook (1992: 233-234) points out in his book on advertisement how language play, or code-play as he calls it, is separated into private and public discourse and “high” and “low” discourse.

“Sadly, the discourse of poetry is in practice now often confined to a social minority. Even within that minority, it is frequently considered as a private and individual activity rather than as a public and collective one. It has also become synonymous with seriousness, and is valued only if it is felt to yield some insight of social or individual significance.”
(Cook 1992: 233)

This refers to playing with language in the form of poetry or fiction in “high” discourse, discourse with significance and meaning. There is of course also playing with language in a light-hearted way in private settings like banter, rhymes for lovers or rhymes for babies. The public setting offers likewise many instances of language play which are however often not accepted as useful or significant such as pop songs, graffiti, stand-up comedy or advertisements. “[...] [S]ome ads may answer a need for a light-hearted code-play in the public domain, which, though once provided by poetry, is now no longer available to many people[...].” (Cook 1992: 233).

Another approach is to regard poetry and language play in a more universal way which claims that poetry and fiction in the widest sense, are needed to run smooth interpersonal relationships. Humans distort the world by playing with language using metaphors, hyperboles, lies, understatements and deliberate misinformation. Deliberately flouting the conversational maxims is strongly connected to the notion of the co-operative principles. These language plays are also used to position oneself in conversations, to achieve certain feelings in the interlocutor, to achieve rapport or to be polite (see Carter 2004: 76). Humans bend reality by means of language play and periphrase in order to

make the possible ugliness of the world bearable. Friedrich Nietzsche is often quoted in this respect (see Niemeyer 2012). The notion of the flouting of the conversational maxims as means of language play ingame is returned to in chapter 8.2.

Cook (2000) demonstrates in his book how playing with language and certain games support child language development. Yet, as was mentioned before riddles, poetry, chants, puns, songs and verbal duels are not exclusive to children. Cook (2000: 80) highlights that riddles are powerful in many societies possibly because they are suited to competition and allow transition between worlds and frames.

At this point a special kind of language play suited for competition, namely the verbal duel, should be discussed. Interestingly, this game is described in all accounts of language play and plays in general, even though it is not that common in today's societies anymore. A verbal duel is a contest between two opponents in which words are used in turn. The duel can lead to violence and physical fight but does not necessarily need to. It is interesting that many accounts note that verbal duels are a male activity (e.g. Huizinga 1938:77; Cook 2000: 65) The turns in the duel are marked by clever insults, riddles, witty comments or boasts which can take on complex form. Examples of such ritualized verbal duels include young African-Americans (Sherzer 1992; Labov 1974), gangs and football fans (Argyle 1996) and native American tribes (Schwartzmann 1978). Huizinga (1938: 78-83) describes verbal duels of ancient times like the one between the Lombards and the Gepids as reported in the *Historia Langobardorum* or in epic stories like *Beowulf* or the *Edda*. These accounts could lead to the opinion that verbal duels are either an ancient, exotic practice or ritualized play of “lower” classes, minorities or “native savages”. Yet, Cook (2000: 67) points out that modern verbal duels can be observed in party politics, academic discussions, marketing campaigns between rival companies, clashes between journalists or attorneys in court. When academics have hot-headed discussions during conferences or via letters in a journal, they use similar techniques as in verbal duels like witty comments and mocking the other.

Verbal duels also exist under different names in gaming such as flaming or flame wars (see chapter 15.1) in which gamers verbally attack and insult

another on message-boards or ingame. It is also typical in competitive events like in arena fights or open PvP (player versus player) in *World of Warcraft*® to provoke or mock the other gamers in order to start a fight.

All these briefly mentioned forms of language play give insights into how humans play with language, with its form and how content can be demonstrated through the medium of language. Crystal (1998: 1) provides a good summary to the topic:

“We play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment, either for ourselves or for the benefit of others. I mean 'manipulate' literally: we take some linguistic feature – such as a word, a phrase, a sentence, a part of a word, a group of sounds, a series of letters – and make it do things it does not normally do. We are, in effect, bending and breaking the rules of language. And if someone were to ask why we do it, the answer is simply: for fun.”

Certainly, there are more reasons for playing with language than fun and entertainment. I mentioned Cook's approach to the topic and his belief that language play has language and social development potential. Huizinga claims that games and play, and therefore also language play, create culture, arts and religion. The role language play had in human history as a medium to pass on knowledge was also hinted in this chapter. But maybe “why” is the wrong question to ask. It might be that we do not need to answer it at all. Why do we play? Why do we play with language? Possibly, just because we can. It could be that the answer to playing, including playing with language, is that it is in the nature of the human to express themselves and to interact with one another.

Yet, this chapter shows how important language is in playing as aid and support and as game itself. Language is not a mere aspect of playing and games but rather that both play and language are part of culture. Language is not just an instrument of playing but is in itself a product and producer of games. Section two and particularly chapter 12 illustrate several instances of how speakers play with language on the Internet and in games like when using leet, smileys and other stylistic features. The next chapters on computer games demonstrates how important language is for computer gaming as a medium to communicate and convey meanings, but also in the sense of language play when it comes to narration, fiction and the community.

3. Computer games

After discussing the discourse of play and game and defining them in general, the following chapter deals with computer games and their features. There cannot be a discussion of MMORPGs and the language used by its gamers without describing the setting they emerged from and without discussing the fascination computer games hold in general. The first part discusses computer games as games as well as some aspects which cause the fascination with them and make them differ from conventional games. A short history of computer games should provide insights into the developments throughout the history of them. Furthermore, the following chapters deal with approaches towards computer games as media, narration and culture.

3.1 Computer games as games

Most people are familiar with game and play to some extent since most played or still play. It is taken for granted that games are good and meaningful and that they can help to relax and broaden one's mind. However, it is difficult for some to see these aspects when it comes to computer games. According to Rosenstingl and Mitgutsch (2009: 28) appreciation for computer games as games is not intuitive as their magic circle is not that easily recognizable. Computer gaming might look like passive TV consumption and not like playing. Rosenfelder (2008: 12-13) proposes that the fascination with computer games is caused by the tension between waste of time and concentration, beauty and horror, and idling and working. Computer games create parallel worlds which consume the gamers and their time.

While computer gaming is not only an activity of young people, there is a certain divide between generations as well as between gamers and non-gamers. David Buckingham among others even talks about a digital divide between people who are open to new technologies and media and those who do not possess or use them (c.f. Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 28-29). Those who deny technologies and new media may not appreciate and recognize computer games as games and therefore they may not transfer the positive aspects of games to computer games.

Furthermore, it is Rosenstingl's and Mitgutsch's (2009: 29) view that virtuality is not the opposite of reality, even though, some might be of that opinion. *Virtual* is derived from the Latin word *virtus* and means virtue and valor. Therefore, it is by no means the opposite of *real*. However, it is the human who makes the virtual real by applying meanings and feelings to it. The virtual world is not real but the rules, the gamers, their feelings and experiences are. Hence, the virtual world and the real world are interwoven through the gamers.

The virtual world redirects to the previously mentioned magic circle in games and play. The gamers know that their action ingame have no consequences outside of it. Hence, computer gamers know that they are not really mages, boxers or soldiers. If a gamer loses a fight in a beat-em up game, it has no consequences in real-life. A real box fight is a real fist fight with possible physical injuries, while the pretended action does not mean injuries to the player. The magic circle works as frame and borderline between the game world and the real world.

Nowadays, however, scholars criticize the concept of the magic circle like Pargman and Jakobson (2006) in their article "The magic is gone: a critical examination of the gaming situation". They argue that today in computer games

"there is not a strong boundary anymore between games and ordinary life in our digital world, and that games play many different roles and fill many other functions than those related to "fun", "specialness" and "other-worldliness"
(Arsenault; Perron 2009: 111)

Doubtlessly, computer games are not that easily limited by a magic circle. Gamers can play nowadays on their mobile phones, portable consoles, notebooks, netbooks, tablet PCs and PCs. The gaming space and place is not that well defined as in a board game or sports. Moreover, does gaming really stop even though gamers spend hours reading guidebooks, magazines, websites or buying equipment? I would argue that all these actions around games like buying equipment or reading belong to the area of gameplay or to the gaming experience of the gamer but not to the game as such. To return to the example of the *World of Warcraft*® gamer, he or she knows that he or she cannot transform others into sheep anymore as soon as the game is exited. The

gamer can read in a magazine about this but this does not mean that he or she can do it. The transformation only works ingame, in the magic circle of the game. Only the magic circle allows this sort of specialness.

Even though computer games belong to the category of games, there are some differences between conventional, non-digital games and digital games or computer games. Conventional rule-based games can be regarded as games of emergence, meaning that at the beginning of a game there is a fixed set of rules through which the games emerge. Hence, while the same rules apply to every game of chess, the outcome is always different. However, computer games are games of progression in which the conditions, rules and challenges can be changed from level to level. There are even computer games in which there are no explicit rules like adventures (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 31).

Certainly, there are rules programmed into the game which means that some actions are not possible. However, many computer games do not offer the gamer a rule handbook like conventional games. The game unfolds throughout gaming. A task has to be fulfilled and it is up to the gamer to find a way to solve the problem. Clearly, there are of course sometimes tutorial levels in games, however, these levels do not explain the rules but only game handling, for example how to jump, how to climb up a rock or how to build a market place. This is a major difference between computer games and traditional rule-based games.

Some rules or restrictions are coded into the games, hence some action cannot be executed by gamers. For instance restrictions concerning which character class can use which weapons. A mage cannot equip a two-hand sword. Other actions are regulated by the community, the guild or clan, like how the loot is divided. Another example is that the community of MMORPG gamers come to the common understanding that if there is a healer in a group of gamers, he or she is supposed to heal the other players. If the healer does not comply to this he or she breaks the conventions of the community. A warrior cannot heal, this is based on mechanics coded into the game, it is a game intern rule so to say and cannot be broken by a gamer, except by illegal hacking.

While Huizinga regards breaking and bending the rules as cheating and hence as bad behavior, this is not the case in computer games. The practice of cheating is an important feature of gaming. Clearly, one has to differentiate between modifying (modding) the content, bug-using (exploiting an error (bug) ingame), playing against the grain and professional hacking. While the exploiting of loop-holes in a game became a game on its own for many gamers, hacking is regarded by many gamers as attempt to defraud (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 28). Forbidden fruit is the sweetest, and this is one of the motivations of gamers of computer games to cheat. It is a challenge to play against the grain. For example to fight an enemy not as the game developers intended the gamers to do, but differently.

The following anecdote should illustrate this: In *World of Warcraft*® there is a dungeon called Azjol Nerub. One of the bosses is a huge spider standing at the ground of a large room full of spiderwebs. As soon as you move into the room an event is triggered in which many smaller spiders attack while the boss spider slowly crawls up to the floor where you are. One of the special achievements is to finish the event fast enough that the boss spider does not reach your floor and you can kill it still down on the ground. Some gamers found out that the developers unintentionally left a loophole. If you sent a pet from a hunter to lure the boss, it was possible to sneak past it to the ground. After some moments the event was reset and the boss reappeared at the ground. That way you and your group would be at the ground with the boss spider and could kill it, getting the achievement and leaving out the event. This was a bug and players used it either to have less effort to gain the achievement or just in order to play against the grain. Unfortunately, the game developers found out about this and removed this possibility. Nevertheless, it is for many gamers a challenge to find and use new loopholes.

Similarly, places where players are not intended to go to are of course the most interesting ones. Gamers spend hours trying to climb a mountain where no road leads up. This type of breaking the rules has also to do with the hacking culture. Hacking in its original sense meant to cleverly manipulate a system out of fun and not in order to destroy it. It started out as a prank between IT students. The main idea behind hacking was: How can I make the software do other things?

How can I stretch its use? The aim was to playfully use a loophole (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 38-39). This is exactly what motivates some of the bug-using, modifying and cheating in games. Certainly, there are also gamers who cheat only in order to make playing easier. However, many gamers do it to try out something new and explore the edges of what is possible.

A unique aspect of computer games is that the algorithms of them are a frame which allow for easy changing of the conditions of the game. By changing some parameters new challenges are possible. This creates almost endless possibilities which are one aspect making up the fascination with computer games. There is an amazing diversity of computer games which offer something for every taste. But not only does the creation of new algorithms allow the creation of new games, the change of parameters also enables changes of the settings in an existing game for example playing a game on a higher difficulty level or the creation of alternative endings (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 35).

Similar to Rosenstingl and Mitgutsch (2009: 35), Newman (2004: 16-17) regards replaying a game as an important aspect of computer games. The challenge of computer games is to refine the performance by replaying and practicing the game. Gamers are expected to fail. However, there has to be a balance between challenge, demand and success in computer games. If a game is won and finished too fast or too easily and does not offer any challenges to the gamer, the game becomes boring. But if a game is too difficult for the gamer's skills, the gamer will be frustrated and stop playing. Klimmt (2006: 81-95) refers to this ultimate balance of challenge and skills as peak enjoyment which means that the gamer is experiencing challenge but also a sense of success. Normally, computer games achieve such a balance either by offering different difficulty levels or because the levels become slightly more difficult from level to level (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 40-41). Yet, not all researchers regard replaying and repetition in games as a positive aspect in order to perfect the gamer's skills. Rosenfelder (2008: 27) who drew upon the images of mythology in his work, regards the aspect of replaying as an equivalent of the Greek Hades. He compares the gamers to Sisyphus being doomed to replay passages of a game even after they die in the game. I agree

with the positive treatment of replaying, since I think that this, by gamers called, *grind*⁵ and possible self-flagellation is part of the gamer's gaming experience and memory. The painful replaying causes a bigger sense of achievement, satisfaction and perfection as soon as the challenge is won.

Another aspect which causes fascination with computer games is self-efficacy or the possibility to interact with the game. If a gamer presses a button on a controller or on the keyboard something happens on the screen. The gamer therefore causes a reaction by action. Rosenstingl and Mitgutsch (2009: 37) illustrate this with the help of an example, namely a child pressing the button to open the door of a tram. Children are fascinated by this because they cause a reaction by pressing a button. They influence the environment. The same principle is at work when playing a computer game. Pressing buttons has big impact on the environment in the game. This experience does not only cause pleasure in the gamer but also satisfaction. Klimmt (2006: 76-81) goes as far as to refer to computer games as a sequence of input-output-loops in which every single and small input of gamers causes immediate reactions. The action-reaction sequence observable in computer games is also a difference from conventional games where interaction happens mostly between gamers. A player of chess moves chess pieces, but the reaction caused comes only from another player and not from the game itself.

Newman (2004: 26) speaks of an empowerment of the audience in games. The buzz-word in computer game studies is interactivity. The actions of the players cause reactions in the game, thus, it can be claimed that computer games are interactive and not passive unlike watching a movie or reading a book.

"Videogame experience is, in fact, the product of a complex interplay of elements each demanding and facilitating different degrees and types of participation and activity." (Newman 2004: 27). The interactivity and free-choice of gamers in computer games has, however, to be treated with caution and can be challenged since most possibilities and solutions are programmed into the game and implementations like cut-scenes do not allow for interactivity. This is discussed more thoroughly in the chapter on media (3.3).

5 *Grind* means the act of repetitively doing something in the game for example a repeatable quest, killing enemies, collecting items in order to raise one's skills, reputation or level or to receive certain items.

Klimmt (2006: 95-102) points out that computer games and their interactivity allow gamers to simulate life experiences. The gamers play different roles for example warriors, mayors, admirals, race drivers, criminals and other. The stories of games are structured through plot lines which include suspense and solutions or relief. The combination of interactivity through input-output-loops and plot provide the gamers with very intense simulated experiences. These experiences can be made without consequences in real-life. Different roles and attitudes can be tried out in the secure setting of a computer game.

These aspects of computer games illustrate how and why they are such a fascination to gamers. While computer games are clearly games and to some extent comparable to conventional non-digital games, the features mentioned in this chapter show that they have an exceptional position among games. They offer gamers interactive possibilities which are not observable in conventional games. They provide the gamers with direct action and reaction chains, plots with moments of suspense and relief, satisfaction and challenges. Some aspects are only mentioned briefly in this chapter because they are dealt with in more detail in later chapters like narration of computer games which is discussed in the chapter on media. Another important aspect of computer games which causes fascination is the community which is dealt with in the chapter on culture in which participatory culture is treated. The next chapter provides a small introduction to the history of computer games which gives insights into how genres came into existence and which aspects are driving forces in the computer game industry.

3.2 A short history of computer games

Why taking a detour into history? As Thorne (as quoted in Back; Zepeda 2013: 234) says “all artifacts, including Internet communication tools, are imbued with characteristics that illustrate the intersection of histories of use with contingencies of emergent practice.” Hence one cannot research the language use in computer games and MMORPGs without taking into account their history. History is the base for all development. Keeping this in mind, this chapter provides insights into where computer games come from, why and how they developed the way they did and thus also influence the language use in them.

Many histories of video games and computer games cite the year 1962 as the year when the first computer game was produced, in many cases this is *Spacewar*. However, computer games did not just come out of the blue in 1962.

“Like other media, such as film or recorded music, it is difficult to connect the emergence of the video game to one brilliant inventor who started from scratch and decided it was time to invent something new.” (Malliet; Meyer 2005: 23)

In 1947 the first pin-ball machine with a lever to actually play actively was invented. Before that pin-ball machines only allowed inserting a coin and starting the game. The rest of the game was luck. Gambling machines of this kind have been invented already in the 19th century. But the years 1947 and 1948 introduced active play to gaming machines.

In 1951 the first real computer game was presented to the public. The constructed computer for this purpose was NIMROD and the played game was called *NIM*. The aim of the game was to remove in turns, with another gamer or the computer, pieces from a set of pieces in order to be the last one to take a piece. In 1952 the game *OXO* a realization of Tic-Tac-Toe was presented (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 45-46). These first developments allowed gamers to be more than mere consumers. Instead of passively consuming and watching like in theater, TV or radio, these games allowed to interact with the medium.

One of the “godfathers” of computer games, as Malliet and Meyer (2005: 23) call him, is Willy Higinbotham an engineer of the Brookhaven National Laboratory, a research institute of the American government. He proposed to

present something more exciting at the open day of the company and therefore designed a pinball game for a screen and controllers with buttons to play the game. According to him, his creation was an abstract simulation of tennis which he called *Tennis for Two*. For him the game was nothing more than a good way to present what can be done with technology, hence he never patented his invention (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 23).

Three men can be considered to have had enormous impact on the computer game industry namely Steve Russell, Ralph Baer and Nolan Bushnell. Steve Russell is often cited as the creator of the first computer game in history, namely *Spacewar* (see Herz 1997: 14; see also Malliet; Meyer 2005: 24). *Spacewar* can be seen as the foundation of several gaming genres in the 1970s and 1980s (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 24; see also Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 47).

The second important person in the computer game industry is Ralph Baer who designed a device connected to the TV. He, so to say, created the first home console connected to a TV. His game was a sort of ping pong which was similar to Higinbotham's *Tennis for Two*. 1972 he presented his console Magnavox Odyssey to the market. However, due to technical problems and the rejection of his visionary ideas by cable companies the first console in the history of computer games did not become a success (c.f. Malliet; Meyer 2005: 24-24; see also Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 47).

The third person to influence the computer game history was Nolan Bushnell. During his studies at university he encountered *Spacewar* and used it in 1970 as a base for his own game *Computer Space*. Bushnell made use of the dramatic reduction in price and size of computer chips in the late 1960s. Unlike Baer, Bushnell did not plan to create a home console but developed an arcade machine. In 1971 Bushnell had created the first coin-op arcade game. As Malliet and Meyer (2005: 25) suggest “[Bushnell] made no secret of the fact that the main purpose of this game was simply making money”. Unexpectedly, the game failed because the instructions were too difficult (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 25). Bushnell was ambitious and founded with his partner Ted Dabney Atari in 1972 in order not to be depended on a third party. His new arcade game *Pong* became the first major success in the computer game industry (see Malliet;

Meyer 2005: 25-26). To avoid the same mistake as with *Computer Space*, *Pong* had easy instructions namely “[d]eposit quarter and avoid missing ball for high score” (Herz 1997: 14).

The amazing success of *Pong* caused a run on computer games and especially arcade games. Several companies were founded but it was not long before the first video game crash took place. Many companies who specialized on selling clones of *Pong* had to close during the crash in 1977. One of the few companies surviving the crash was Atari which had established itself with arcade games and the Atari Video Computer System (Atari VCS 2600) (see Herz 1997: 15).

Until 1978 the gaming branch was dominated by American companies, then however Japanese companies started to expand. Amongst the most important being Taito and Namco. From 1980s on Nintendo, Sega, Konami, Tehkan and Universal started to export their games to the USA. In 1980 the Atari VCS 2600 became really successful probably because of the game *Space Invaders*. In the same year a counterweight to the flood of space games was published by Namco called *Pac-Man*. *Pac-Man* was an innovative game at that time. While being relatively simple, the game created a feel-good atmosphere by colorful level design, happy background music, funny names of characters and opponents and animation breaks between the levels. As stated by Malliet and Meyer (2005: 29) “*Pac-Man* entered history books as the first game that managed to draw the female population into arcades.” *Pac-Man* can also be regarded as the first computer game which left the screen and the arcade halls to become part of popular culture through merchandise. It can be considered the first star of computer games (see Herz 1997: 15; see also Malliet; Meyer 2005: 28).

While *Pac-Man* being a maze-game (the player moves the game character through a maze) was already an innovation in the enormous flood of space-games, a new sort of game came into existence in the 1980s, namely climbing games. Climbing games require the player to move a character from the bottom of a level to the top while avoiding obstacles. The most influential climbing game was Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* in which a bearded plumber, first called Jumpman and later on Mario, had to save a princess from a giant ape.

The innovation of the maze and climbing games were that gamers received more control over the playable characters and therefore could participate and interact with the game. *Pong* and other early games only allowed for limited movements for example moving a bar from one side to the other. *Pac-Man* enabled the gamer to navigate Pac-man through a maze and take decisions which turn to take.

In 1983 the gaming branch arrived at its second crisis. The reason for the crisis was clearly the overproduction of games. There were too many similar games offering the same concepts and too many poor games in general. The lack of variation led to a saturation of consumption and to a lack of interest in computer games. Many companies responded to the stagnation by dumping their games. The game industry and many companies faced serious problems. Companies were sold or taken over. The big winner at that time was Nintendo. Despite the crisis, Nintendo put a new console called Famicom on the market in 1983. The console became a money-spinner in Japan mainly because of a game called *Mario Bros* sold with the console. Miyamoto who was responsible for *Donkey Kong* developed *Mario Bros* which starred Mario, the plumber from *Donkey Kong*, and his brother Luigi. It goes without saying that Mario and all games involving him became bestsellers and are still bestsellers today. Mario became the ultimate trademark of Nintendo. In 1985 *Super Mario Bros* was released which was a milestone in the computer game industry as it allowed vertical and horizontal movements. The amount of levels was huge for that time as it consisted of 32 levels spread over eight worlds. The levels were detailed and the wide range of opponents had different abilities. In 1986 Nintendo managed to revive the US game industry by launching the Famicom at the US market under the name of Nintendo NES including the game *Super Mario Bros* (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 34-35). Innovations in the area of control and participation helped Nintendo to economic success. The big game world and new ways to control and partake in the action of the game character did not only cause financial success for Nintendo but also revolutionized the gaming market.

The major computer game genre of computers at the late 1980s were adventures like the *King's Quest*-series, the *Space Quest*-series, the *Leisure Suit Larry*-series, and the *Police Quest*-series by Sierra-On-Line. In 1987 Ron

Gilbert an employee of Lucasfilm Games (later LucasArts) developed a new navigation technique called point-and-click which gave rise to a new genre of adventures. It comes as no surprise that LucasArts became the most important developer of point-and-click adventures in the late 1980s. Amongst their titles are *Maniac Mansion* (1987), *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) and *The secret of monkey Island* (1990). Of course there were also adventure games on consoles, a famous one being Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda*, which was also one of the first role-playing games (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 36-37). The innovation of point-and-click adventures was that the gamers were allowed and expected to interact with items in the game world. The gamers were supposed to combine items in the game by clicking on them and try out how to use them to fulfill goals. While earlier games were about moving the ingame character and overcoming obstacles in the game, point-and-click adventures actively incorporate the virtual world into the gameplay. Point-and-click adventures gave the gamer no handbook or direct task but expect the gamer to experiment in the game using the game environment.

Another gaming genre coming into existence in the late 1980s was the strategy game which can be considered to be one of the most addictive game genres. Strategy games profited from the newly discovered isometric perspective which was already used in 1982 in the game *Zaxxon*.

“In games using isometric perspective, the action does not take place parallel to the edges of the screen, but at an angle of about 30°, a technique creating the optical illusion that some of the objects could jump out of the plane.”
(Malliet; Meyer 2005: 37)

Three games using this technique were developed during 1988 and 1990 namely *Populous* by Peter Molyneux (1989), *SimCity* by Will Wright (1989) and *Civilization* by Sid Meier (1990). The three named developers are not only known as the best game developers of strategy games but also the founding fathers of that genre (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 37). This gaming genre provided the new aspect of a seemingly open world which the gamer can control and use.

The 1990s were the downfall of arcades. The advancing of PCs in all households, the beginning of networks, the hotly contested console market and the handhelds led to the end of arcades (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 40). But the 1990s also introduced new technology to the computer game market:

“In 1992, a developer called ID Software shocked the world by introducing *Castle Wolfenstein 3D*. The commotion that this PC game aroused not only stemmed from its highly violent content, but also from the fact that the action took place in a world that was totally three-dimensional.”
(Malliet; Meyer 2005: 40)

Wolfenstein was a revolution of computer games as it allowed the gamer not only to move either from the bottom of the screen to the top, from left to right but made it possible to walk in a three-dimensional world in which objects existed in three dimensions. A player could walk around a wall. Furthermore, the graphics were astonishing for that time, even shadows could be displayed. The 1990s became the decade of first-person-shooters (FPS) in 3D like the *Doom*-series, *Quake*-series and *Duke Nukem 3D*. ID introduced another innovation namely the possibility of online gaming. *Quake* was the first game which could be played over the Internet and therefore gave the gamers the possibility to play against other real players at any time (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 40-41). It goes without saying that these innovations provide the base for several other games and gaming genres including MMORPGs which are played online and in a three-dimensional setting. FPS provided new aspects and layers to the desire of gamers to actively participate in games. The possibilities of movement in the 3D space of the game as well as the interaction between gamers, either playing together against one another at the same time, provided not only more active participation but also a sense of being part of the fiction of the game.

3D became the common technology of all gaming genres throughout the 1990s such as the adventure genre. In 1996 Core developed *Tomb Raider* (published by Eidos). *Tomb Raider* became one of the cult games of the 1990s and keeps researchers occupied even today. The protagonist of the game series, Lara Croft, became a symbol for many things. Some regard her as a sex symbol, others as a symbol of feminism and empowerment of women and others as a symbol of sexism in gaming. The story of the game and therefore also the

participation of the gamers in Lara Croft's story made her an icon of the gaming branch. Also role-playing games like *Diablo* (1996), *Baldur's Gate* (1998) and *Final Fantasy* came into existence in this decade (see Malliet; Meyer 2005: 41-42).

Online gaming became more and more common not only in FPS and real-time strategy games but also in MMORPGs which can be regarded as a completely new genre. Multiplayer is the buzz-word of the new century (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 50-51). Playing together or against each other and showing off achievements in games on Facebook or other websites has become an important aspect of gaming during the last years. New tools for ingame communication are introduced into the games which make playing computer games even more social.

This short history of computer games does of course not include everything which could be said. There are numerous games and companies which contributed to the gaming branch. However, the scope of this thesis does not allow such a detailed account. For a detailed account see Kent's (2001) *The ultimate history of video games*. What this chapter illustrates is that the computer game industry is a hotly contested branch in which innovations, technical and intellectual ones, are driving forces. Innovations are taken up by other companies and added to the basics of game development. Innovations of the last years are state of the art today. The milestones in computer game design are the base of MMORPGs today and of the gaming experience of gamers. One innovation in the gaming branch builds on a previous one, similarly the gaming culture builds on previous cultural tokens which are historically infused. Allowing gamers to interact with the game, the game world and characters but also with other gamers became part of the computer game tradition and culture. Active participation, interaction and control are driving forces in computer games and these elements increased throughout the computer game history. Even early computer games illustrate how not only technological innovations but also narrative devices, stereotypes (for example Lara Croft) and cultural tokens of the real world are anchored by reproducing them in computer games. This means that computer games, even though they could be used to create new cultures and break traditional stereotypes are often

a reflection and reproduction of the real world. Computer games and their history express cultural reality. This is similar to Kramsch's (1998: 3) view on language that "[...] language expresses cultural reality [and][...] language embodies cultural reality." It goes without saying that researching the language of gamers is inevitably a crucial part of the study of computer games and the relation of gamers to society and vice versa.

3.3 Computer games as media and narration

A popular approach to computer game studies is media studies since computer games have been adopted into the rows of new media along with the Internet, television and movies. McAllister (2004: 13-14) even considers computer games as a mass media force in which real world information, news and commentary on society are possible. He points out that computer games can be regarded as a force of propaganda in that sense because they allow understanding complex phenomena of society through oversimplification. According to him, computer games and other mass media like television, film and print-media influence each other.

The interaction between different types of media is certainly relevant to computer games. There are numerous references in *World of Warcraft*® to events and persons of the real world. Celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Paris Hilton and Pink Floyd are mentioned or even represented by non player-characters (NPCs) in the game. Movies and books are referred to in the game through subtle messages, references or hints. A good example of a book reference is a quest-giver character called Hemet Nesingwary, an anagram of Ernest Hemingway, who sends you out to search the pages of a book called the *Green Hills of Stranglethorn*, a reference to Hemingway's book *Green Hills of Africa*. There is also a fishing achievement (a self-contained ingame goal) called *The old gnome and the sea* referring to Hemingway's novel *The old man and the sea*. There are plenty of references to popular culture like movies, television series and music. Many gamers enjoy finding such hidden references, hints, or in-jokes called easter-eggs.

Computer games are not only influenced by other media but influence them in return. Popular computer games are mentioned in movies, TV series and music. *South Park* is famous for its episodes commenting on computer games like *Make Love not Warcraft*, commenting on *World of Warcraft*® or the episode on *Guitar Hero*. The series *The Big Bang Theory* also commented on MMORPGs and refers to several current computer games. There have been movies based on gaming like *The King of Kong: a fistful of quarters* (2007) which can be regarded as a documentary film on the arcade game *Donkey Kong*. One of the recent Walt Disney movies *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012) pays homage to console and computer games in general. Furthermore, there are numerous online series depicting computer games like the online series *The Guild* (2007) which is based on a MMORPG Guild and their problems ingame and outside of it.

Besides the aspect of cross-references between computer games and other media, media studies offer other theoretical frameworks to studying computer games, namely narratology and narrative theories. According to Newman (2004: 91-98) the relatively young discipline of computer game studies experienced already its first schism, namely between narratology and ludology. Differently to ludic approaches which are player-centered and foreground the activity of play, narratologists regard computer games as texts to be read. Ludologists criticize that narratologists and their approach regard computer games as static texts and exclude the player. Contrary to narratologists, ludologists believe that the players breathe life into the game and create meaning in computer games. Therefore, in ludology gaming is active and the narratological approach is seen as allocating gaming as a passivity. Interestingly, Cook (2000: 40), yet discussing the relation of fiction and language play, aptly describes what narratology is about: “[...] while in both make-believe and fantasy we are participants, in fiction we are – as it were – spectators to the game rather than players.”

However, as Newman (2004: 97-98) points out, narrative does not necessarily mean passivity. “Narrative sequences can necessitate their own level of interactivity, requiring a certain degree of commitment from the player.” (Newman 2004: 97) Good examples of such interactivity of player and the game

as text are time-lines in the narration. Backward glances or anticipated conclusions require the gamer to draw meaning from the texts. What happened to my character or what will happen to it to cause such events?

An important role is played by cut-scenes and programmed events which are triggered through something in the game. They are videos or ingame sequences in which the gamer has no control over his or her character. They are used to show events, give background information or to further the plot. Newman (2004: 98-100) notes that cut-scenes no matter how interactive the narration of a game is, induce passivity. "The narrated designer's story" (Newman 2004: 98) interrupts the playing and the activity and forces the gamer into the role of the passive observer imposing the story upon him or her.

There are certainly different sorts of cut-scenes like those in which game characters only tap on the screen in order to "wake" up the player when he or she does not do anything for a certain amount of time (e.g. *Sonic the Hedgehog*). This is interesting since the real world, the non-story world (non-diegesis) and the gaming-world, the story-world (diegesis) blur. Sonic, the game character, seems to know that he is only a character in a game and the player is outside of it (see Newman 2004: 99).

World of Warcraft® provides good examples of cut-scenes. The first *World of Warcraft*®-game did not offer many cut-scenes, they were mainly introduced in the second add-on *Wrath of the Lich king*. During the Wrathgate event, the player has to witness powerless two heroes of the Alliance and Horde being killed by the Lich king and the betrayal of a part of the Horde. It is an epic scene which could be from a movie including different camera-perspectives and a soundtrack. The player or rather his or her character (avatar) is not seen in this cut-scene. The add-on *Cataclysm* introduced cut-scene in which the gamer's avatar is shown to the gamer. The questing area Uldum is a perfect example of cut-scenes in which the gamer's own character is featured in the sequences. The player sees his or her avatar moving and acting but cannot control the actions. This is exciting for a gamer at the beginning because the scenes are exciting and provide the gamer with another layer of participation in the fiction. However, the large amount of cut-scenes in Uldum gives the gamer a feeling of being powerless, a mere witness to events which cannot be influenced. This

leads to boredom and annoyance at some point. However, cut-scenes provide the gamer with different degrees of control and participation in the plot of the game.

Most computer games offer a plot to the gamer and the told story with its suspense and solutions is part of what fascinates the gamers, as mentioned before. However, a plot also limits the free activity and interactivity of the gamer to some extent. Rosenfelder (2008: 28-29) points out that a plot always has a beginning and an end and everything which happens in between is plotted and predesigned to some point. A story and plot in a game removes free action from the gamer. "Nur da, wo jede Handlung fehlt, kann sich wirklich Unvorhersehbares ereignen." (Rosenfelder 2008: 29) I believe that computer games provide the gamer with an illusion of freedom and freedom of action since all actions which the gamers can execute have to be programmed into the game beforehand. But sometimes it is exactly this illusion we desire. There is nothing wrong in feeling enjoyment in an illusion. The limits and rules of computer games are conditions of and constraints to the illusion of freedom at the same time. Sid Meier, the game developer, is often quoted to have said that a game is a series of meaningful choices. Computer games like fictions have a start and an ending, but computer games allow the gamer to decide how to get to the end. They give the gamer the illusion that the end is not yet written.

Another aspect of narratology which is of interest in computer game studies is time itself. Narratologists use the classic framework of narrations namely the story time (the time of the events told), the discourse time (the time of the telling of the events) and the reading or viewing time (the time of the reading or viewing of the text). There are researchers like Juul, who consider it impossible to have interactivity and narration at the same time. For him the story happens synchronously with the reading or viewing time; story time equals viewing time. The player experiences the story at the moment he or she plays (Newman 2004: 103-105).

Frasca's (2001) approach might be useful here since he views computer games as a process of narrative production. During this process the player and the simulation are engaged in the "emplotment" full of detours and side roads. As Newman (2004: 106) put it: "The narrative in the videogame can, therefore, be considered as machinery for the exploration of, and adventure in, cyberspace."

What the narratology approach shows is that computer games require certain skills or a special literacy in order to deal with the narration in the game and the narration the gamer might come up with. The gamer has to be able to read the computer game as a text and engage with it. If one regards computer games as media, a certain media literacy is required to understand them.

3.4 Computer games, media literacy and learning

The magical circle is not that clearly visible anymore in times of mobile gaming and online gaming as has been mentioned. This blur between different times and places can only be felt by those who experienced them. Younger people who never experienced times without computers and mobile-phones cannot relate to this feeling of blurring borders. Rosenstingl and Mitgutsch (2009: 204) speak of *digital natives* referring to people who grew up with the Internet, e-mail, DVDs, mobile-phones and computer games, and *digital immigrants* who had to tap these new resources. Even though some are native in the new media it does not mean that they require no help or that they automatically have all skills which are needed to be literate in a media. Media literacy does not mean that "old" skills are put aside but rather that they are integrated in a new setting. Today's media literacy still requires the skill to read and write. There is no surfing the Internet and no computer gaming without the ability to read what is going on or to write a comment of your own. Furthermore, research skills and critical analysis skills are required. It is important to learn how to find information and data as well as how to treat and evaluate them. Clearly, technical skills are also needed in order to use new media (see Jenkins et al. 2009: 28-31). How do gamers acquire all these skills which are needed for the computer game discourse, to understand, use and be "literate" in computer games? How can these skills be fostered in non-gamers to make them gamers?

Jones (2008: 145-146) in her paper on media education and media literacy, applies media literacy approaches to computer games and suggests to shape media literacy in youths. She provides guidelines and suggestions to teachers on how they can integrate critical analysis skills and media literacy skills in their lessons.

First, questioning the representation of the real world and the ingame world in the game is required. What does the world in the game represent and which references are made to the real world. How are the characters represented and how can they be manipulated?

Second, the language of the game is worth discussing. Language does not only mean the language in the game or of the gamers but also the programming language which is used to design the rules, the aims and the obstacles. How is language used in the games? Is there only text or voice? Narration also falls into this category. The gamers should be made aware of the different modes of communication available to them and how they can use them for their needs.

Third, institutions involved in the game can be dealt with like the authors, the gaming industry, the game designers and technology itself. The gamers should also be made aware what their role in the game is and how their gaming experiences shape and transform their role.

Jones' paper certainly illustrates how much effort researchers put into concepts which are supposed to provide guidelines for teaching new media to pupils or non-gamers in general. The topic of media literacy and computer games is still one of the main foci in computer game studies. The FROG (Future and Reality of Gaming) conference in 2012 in Vienna concentrated on how teachers can "teach" their pupils to use computer games efficiently and safely. It is interesting that even today computer games are given an exceptional position in the branch of new media. Yet, the skills needed are not new and have to be learned for handling all sorts of media. Critical analysis was and is of importance when dealing with any sort of text, meaning text in the broadest sense.

While Jones points out what skills are needed and should to be learned to deal with computer games, Jenkins et al. (2009) highlight what gamers and young people can learn through games. They identify several skills which can be

learned through computer games, hence developed and improved through gaming. The first skill, called play, refers to the ability to experiment with the surrounding in order to solve a problem. When playing a computer game the player is willing to repeat actions over and over again in order to achieve a goal and to solve a problem. Will Wright, the game designer of *SimCity* and *The Sims* argues that “[i]n some sense, a game is nothing but a set of problems.” (as quoted in Jenkins et al. 2009: 38). Games manage to tap a sense of engagement with learning. The abilities to solve a problem by experimenting, by coming up with a strategy and deeply engaging with a problem can be valuable in the future (see Jenkins et al. 2009: 35-41).

Another skill which can be acquired while gaming is what Jenkins et al. (2009: 41-47) call simulation, the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real world processes. This is linked to the problem solving ability. The gamer can form hypotheses in games and test them easily in the game. The possibility to test and simulate different hypotheses was also mentioned before in this thesis in the chapter on computer games as games (3.1). Klimmt (2006: 95ff.) refers to this as intense simulated experiences.

Similarly, Jenkins et al's (2009: 47-54) skill called performance which means the ability to adopt alternative identities, was already discussed before as a feature of computer games (3.1) in general since they allow the play with identities and roles without consequences in real-life. For example, a gamer can play the role of a criminal in *GTA* but need not fear consequences in real-life.

Another skill Jenkins et al. (2009: 55-61) identify is appropriation, the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content. Media content refers to music, videos, images, stories, blogs and many other things in which computer game content and references are used. *Machinimas* are a good example of this since most of them are made by the players. Machinimas (a combination of the words *cinema* and *machine*) are ingame movies in which the ingame surrounding and the characters of the game are used to make a movie. Similarly, there are numerous comics and web-comics based on computer games made by gamers (e.g. *Penny Arcade*, *Looking for group* or *CTRL+ALT+DEL*). This skill again highlights the participation of gamers in computer games and the using of the given fiction and making it their own.

Perhaps one of the most alarming aspects, according to some researchers, is the decline of the attention span of gamers and that computer games unearth multitasking. Jenkins et al. (2009: 61-65) do not consider this as oppositional forces. It is clear that in times in which information is everywhere and one gets input even via mobile-phones, people have to change the way they process information. The massive amount of information is scanned rather than one single element focused on. This skill certainly requires some training so that gamers know when full attention is needed during a task and when multitasking is useful. For example during information gathering multitasking is a good choice, while when working with a buzz saw, it is better to focus one's attention and not check e-mails and Facebook at the same time.

The skill of distributed cognition is about the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities. Gamers, especially of games in which specific roles exist, become specialists through technology in a certain role. This also has to do with being a team-player and being able to fulfill a task in a group. This skill is directly connected to Jenkins et al's skill called collective intelligence, the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others towards a common goal. Gamers help one another not only when playing in a team but also by offering guides on the Internet or ingame. Knowledge is shared and gamers add to it when they learn something new (see Jenkins et al. 2009: 65-78). This is discussed further in the next chapter in which the concept of participatory culture is elaborated on since it is crucial when dealing with MMORPGs.

Another skill Jenkins et al. (2009: 79) identify is "the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources". This is closely connected to the skill of critical analysis Jones proposes. However, I would argue that this skill does not necessarily develop through gaming. There are many fake websites with wrong information or gamers who intentionally give wrong information (see trolling in chapter 15.1). Critical thinking and evaluating information is certainly of utmost importance when dealing with media, not only with online media but also print-media and television. This skill certainly has to be fostered, it does not emerge from gaming.

Transmedia navigation is another skill proposed by Jenkins et al. (2009: 85) and refers to “the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities”. Since most computer games are transferred into other media this skill is acquired during gaming. When looking at *World of Warcraft*®, the gamer gets more information about the story and setting through novels, comics, mangas and card games. In order to know the full story of the game, gamers are required to move across the border of one medium to another. They are required to leave the magic circle or rather expand it. The participation in the fiction of the game is not limited to the game.

Another skill, which is actually connected to the one about teamwork, is networking as well as negotiation. By negotiation Jenkins et al. (2009: 97) mean the ability to become part of other communities to acquire other perspectives and following alternative rules. Clearly, one could argue that everyone, gamers or non-gamers, move between communities and have to learn how to fit into them and how to follow the rules and conventions in them. Yet, gaming fosters the networking and negotiation skills of gamers in the sense that in order to achieve goals in games, the gamers are forced to interact with one another. Even in single-player games, a gamer might be forced to interact with other gamers to solve problems in the game. Negotiation and positioning are important if not even the most fundamental aspects of human interaction. Hence it is also of importance in computer games.

What is of interest in this chapter is that when computer games are regarded as media the gamers play an important role. Team-working, networking and exchanging information are important factors when it comes to gaming. Media literacy requires the readers of texts, meaning also games, to interact. Interaction does not only mean the gamer interacting with the game and the story but also with other gamers. So similar to the historical approach the aspects of interaction, participation and control are of utmost importance when it comes to computer games and gaming as media.

Clearly, this chapter also shows how certain skills have to be learned in order to understand and efficiently use computer games like critical reading and thinking about the game and its content. Computer games are a discourse and discourse means making meaning of signs. This however, applies to all forms of

media. Other skills are fostered and developed through gaming like networking and multi-tasking. The next chapter discusses computer games as culture and in that sense also which role gamers and gaming communities play.

3.5 Computer games as culture

When asking a gamer if there are games which are cult, he or she will certainly be able to name some games which could be labeled as such. Computer games take on special meaning and importance in the mind of gamers. But does this also mean that computer games can be regarded as culture? This chapter deals with the question if computer games have the right to be called culture. The terms *popular culture* and *mass culture* are discussed on the basis of computer games. Finally, a term introduced by Jenkins, *participatory culture*, is drawn upon in this discussion in order to place computer games in our society.

Culture is, in Rosenstingl's and Mitgutsch's (2009: 235) view, something created by humans. It stands in contrast to nature which is unchanged. As soon as something is changed it becomes culture. Humans cultivate nature and create through this cultures like agriculture, arts, science, technology, games and other cultural tokens.

Taylor (1920: 1) provides a useful definition in which culture is seen as a complex ensemble including knowledge, belief, arts, morale, rights, conventions, practices and all other skills and practices which are acquired by people of a society. Wagner (2008: 50) notes, furthermore, that since society changes constantly, culture is also subject to constant change.

When discussing if computer games can be considered as culture one has to mention Huizinga, who has been quoted in this work many times before. Huizinga (1938) claims that games are older than culture and even that games create culture. However, he believes that culture can influence games in return. In his view culture is created aside from constraints of human life, aside of work and the survival against nature. Cultural actions develop from unproductive actions. Rosenstingl and Mitgutsch (2009: 235, my translation) conclude that "the freedom of nature opens the space of culture".

Certainly, games and play are not always free of constraints, rules and duties. Games experience, as mentioned before, constraints as soon as they are cultivated. When play becomes a game, rules and duties are added. When rolling a ball becomes soccer, when the informal soccer game becomes official and organized into clubs and leagues then rules and duties are needed (see Rosenstingl, Mitgutsch 2009: 235).

Thus, games are not only used to create culture but they are used to change, produce and reproduce culture. During a play on stage, culture is reproduced and through carnival culture is changed, at least for a short period of time (see Rosenstingl, Mitgutsch 2009: 35-36). Hence, games are fictions in the sense of idealized representations of reality.

The definitions of culture given in this chapter allow computer games to be considered as culture since gaming requires acquiring practices, knowledge, conventions and skills. Computer games create a cultural product and cultural action. There is an interrelation between computer games and culture in the sense that they influence one another and produce and reproduce one another. An example of this is the use of stereotypes in computer games. On one hand, our cultural stereotypes like the weak and passive woman are reproduced in games (e.g. the princess in *Super Mario*). On the other hand, computer games allow breaking stereotypes by creating new ones, for instance Lara Croft as an active, powerful fighter, who however, can also be regarded as a sex symbol (see Harrer 2010). Something beyond nature is created through computer games, a cultural product. However, this does not mean that everyone regards computer games as highly valuable culture.

New media always had problems to be accepted by “older” generations as culture, as practice, as product or even as a development. The divide between generations and the digital divide have been mentioned already. These divides make the establishment of computer games as valuable culture difficult.

However, computer games do treat topics and aspects of our society and new culture is created in them. Rosenstingl and Mitgutsch (2009: 237) quote Henry Lowood, a historian, who compiled in 2006 a list of ten culturally valuable

computer games. According to him, this list and its acceptance of the Library of Congress is an acknowledgment of computer games as culturally and historically valuable.

An approach which might be more accepted even by objectors to computer games as culture, is to regard them as *popular culture*. McAllister (2004: 9-10) feels that the popularity of computer games, and computer game characters is a sign that they can be regarded as popular culture. There are different definitions of popular culture, however, one of the common aspects of them is that popular artifacts evoke strong and deep feelings in a wide audience. Other aspects often named in definitions of popular culture are that the culture is widely accessible and commonly intelligible. Martinez (2001: 3) defines popular culture as “the culture of the masses; it is not about art or the intellect and is frequently held to be of no merit whatsoever.” She furthermore notes that popular culture is a culture which is consumed differently by different people.

McAllister (2004: 10-1) champions in his work Ohmann's term *mass culture* rather than popular culture. This approach takes economic factors into account and the industries. According to Ohmann, as quoted in McAllister (2004: 11)

“mass culture [...] includes voluntary experiences, produced by a relatively small number of specialists, for millions across the nation to share, in similar or identical form, either simultaneously or nearly so, with dependable frequency; mass culture shapes habitual audiences, around common needs or interests, and it is made for profit.”

McAllister certainly has a point in regarding Ohmann's view as significant to computer games. However, in times of MMORPGs with billions of gamers worldwide and gaming on mobile-phones and browser-gaming over Facebook, computer game culture is not produced by a small number of agents but by many. It might be that McAllister regards production of culture only as producing and programming a computer game and not as the production of meaning from a game. He approaches computer games from economics and from the game developing branch. For him computer games as mass culture means producing and reproducing desires for games in the audience (see McAllister 2004: 10-12).

McAllister's view does not disregard the gamer as cultural factor of computer games as culture. But it only sees the human as factor of developing a computer game and it disregards the players as agents and creators of culture. At this point an approach which assigns the player or cultural consumer a vital role in the meshwork of culture should be discussed, which relates to the notion of engagement and interaction of gamers previously made in this thesis, namely *participatory culture* put forth by Jenkins and other researchers.

Participatory culture is defined by Jenkins et al. (2009: 5-6) as a culture with

- “1. relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement,
2. strong support for creating and sharing creations with others,
3. some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the experienced is passed along to novices,
4. members who believe that their contributions matter, and
5. members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created).”

At this point it has to be mentioned that participatory culture is not exclusive to computer games since Jenkins' approach has been developed to deal with new media and all sorts of fan cultures. Raessens (2005: 373) points out that even audio/video recorders allowed people not only to record and copy but also to edit and create own material. He also identifies activities of participatory cultures in fan communities of movies and TV series like *Star Trek*. However, Jenkins et al. never claimed that their definition of participatory culture is limited to the Internet or computer games but believe that new media plays a vital role in it. New media, the Internet, mobile-phones, computers and also computer games, allow “the average consumer to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways.” (Jenkins et al. 2009: 8).

These new powerful ways to participate in participatory culture can be labeled as affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem-solving and circulations (see Jenkins et al. 2009: 9). By this Jenkins et al. add computer games to the line of new media which includes television, movies and the Internet and make them a part of the development of new media. In participatory culture the cultural agent is not a mere consumer but develops the medium further.

Affiliations means that many people using new media are members of certain platforms. These are either formal or informal memberships in online communities such as Facebook, myspace, message-boards, game clans or guilds.

The creation and production of new content like skins or mods⁶ for computer games, fan videos, machinimas, fan fiction or zines, is meant by the term *expressions*. Even though Jenkins et al. do not mention language as part of expression, it clearly belongs into this category. People create certain meanings and words when grouping up in communities. Such in-group codes forge a feeling of togetherness and solidarity. This can be seen in the language used in MMORPGs and is focused on in the later chapters.

Participatory culture also draws upon the notion of networking and *collaborative problem-solving*. People work together as teams, formally or informally, to create knowledge and complete tasks. A good example of this is wikipedia and the several wikis which come into existence for all sorts of fields (e.g. WoWwiki and WoWpedia, wikipedias for *World of Warcraft*®; wookieepedia, a wikipedia for Star Wars). Normally, there are several online databases and encyclopedias dealing with one topic area since everyone is free to start his or her own wikipedia. These information networks allow gamers to share information, collaborate to solve problems and mentor other gamers.

Circulation refers to “shaping the flow of media, such as podcasting or blogging” (Jenkins et al. 2009: 9). At this point Švelch's (2010: 265-277) research on the distribution of games as part of gaming culture in the former Czechoslovakia has to be mentioned as an instance of circulation and how games were shared in times before the Internet. Yet, it has to be mentioned that in the 1990s game piracy, copying and distributing games among friends was very common not only in Czechoslovakia but in many countries.

I want to elaborate on the concept of participatory culture illustrating it with an example, namely the community in *World of Warcraft*® even though this is an anticipation of later chapters. *World of Warcraft*® gamers do certainly feel a

6 Skinning and modding refers to modifying the graphical user interface (GUI) or functions of a game. Some games encourage gamers to skin and mod like *The Sims*, which offers the gamers even a platform to exchange the skins and mods. Other games like *World of Warcraft*® try to discourage user mods, however, this does not mean that there are no user created add-ons, mods and skins.

degree of social connection to other *World of Warcraft*® gamers, this can be seen by the numerous *World of Warcraft*® topic groups in social networks like Facebook. Moreover, gamers feel a connection based on the affiliations in the game. An informal membership would be the factions of the game, horde and alliance, which are freely chosen by the gamers. A video stream of the Blizzcon, the official convention of Blizzard Entertainment provided a good example of this. The host asked the audience who is horde and who is alliance. Based on their emotional affiliation the gamers cheered for either the horde or the alliance.

A formal membership is being in a guild. Guilds can be differently organized depending on their aims. Some guilds are rather loosely structured, others are strictly hierarchically structured with a guild-leader, leaders for the classes and even mentors. Such strictly structured guilds often have specific rules which have to be followed otherwise the members are removed (kicked⁷) from the guild. Such rules might include how events are organized and how members have to participate in them or duties like collecting materials before an event.

A certain mentorship is not only observable in guilds but also on gamer websites and wikis which offer strategy guides and walk-throughs for dungeons, guides to professions and classes, and many more. Wikis allow every gamer to participate in the creation of knowledge, everyone can add information. Furthermore, the discussion forum of every article allows gamers to compare tactics for dungeons and discuss pros and cons of them. Worth mentioning are also several YouTube videos which provide guidance for boss fights and dungeons. There are even YouTube channels which are dedicated to video guides for *World of Warcraft*®. For example, a very successful guild will, after successfully clearing a raid dungeon, record videos during the next raid, adding spoken comments with tips and hints for other gamers. Certainly, there are also numerous show-off videos by successful guilds boasting about their first down (the first kill on a server) of a boss. These videos, however, fulfill a function of encouraging other guilds and gamers to improve their gaming.

7 The command to remove a character from a group (party) or guild is /kick, hence gamers refer to removing others as kicking.

There are also several print magazines which dedicate their content to MMORPGs or even to a single MMORPG offering not only news to game developments and new patches but also guidance to new gamers (noobs, newbies) and old stagers (pros) like tips for very efficient gaming, the best talent skilling for certain classes and which items are useful and where to get them. This discourse of gaming in which gamers can reflect on the game and talk about their experiences and knowledge is referred to by scholars like Jenkins et al. (2009: 39) as metagaming.

The official message-board provided by Blizzard Entertainment allows the gamers to share their experiences, exchange their ideas and communicate about the game and other topics. Sharing knowledge and experience but also creating content on their own are driving forces in participatory cultures. Gamer made content in *World of Warcraft*® are stories, comics, cosplay⁸ and machinimas. Blizzard even sponsors machinima and artwork competitions and through this encourages gamers to immerse themselves in the game.

World of Warcraft® is in this sense a good example of participatory culture in computer games. In participatory culture the audience can also become the author of content, this might not be new to computer games or the Internet, but these media-forms offer even more possibilities to become an active author of content.

The gaming community, also of games which might not look like multiplayer games such as offline games and single-player games, is always a social, active community which encourages participation and the creation of contributions and content. Even gamers of single-player games like *Super Mario Bros* exchange knowledge and talk about their experiences. Gaming is a social action and far from solitariness. Newman (2004: 149) feels that

8 Cosplay (costume play) refers to a performance art in which people dress up and act like a character in a game, comic, manga, movie or anime. The costumes are in most cases handmade by the actors. Cosplay events are very often part of conventions like the Blizzcon (the official convention by Blizzard Entertainment, the developer of *World of Warcraft*®).

“these networks [are] supportive and non-confrontational. [...] [P]layers [...] lear[n] from others, and hel[p] others to learn, by sharing information [...] and observing of the play of others”.

Even if someone else is playing a computer game and others only watch him or her, the audience is always anxious as if playing themselves. The audience becomes part of the gaming experience.

Finally, a differentiation has to be made between participatory culture and *culture participation*. Culture participation is a very broad concept meaning the general participation in the surrounding culture, either passively and consumptive or actively and productive. Participatory culture belongs clearly to the latter group, the active and productive participation in culture (see Raessens 2005: 383).

Computer games are a social and cultural action. They offer insights into societies, cultural and historical values and practices of a culture. At the same time they do not only shed light on culture but produce culture. They are a product of culture and culture is a product of computer games (see Rosenstingl, Mitgutsch 2009: 237). This chapter also discussed how important the community is when dealing with computer games and what vital role participation plays in it. It is the connection of participation in a community with language which links these aspects together. Culture, community and language form a cycle in which each part requires the other to exist. They influence one another and in return are informed by them. In order to participate in participatory culture and to produce culture, like a wikipedia article or a machinima, it requires the cultural agent to use language, specific language which is created through gaming and for gaming.

What this chapter shows is that computer games are a culture, they are created by culture and in return create a culture of their own. The gamers come together in participatory culture. They play, learn and interact together and possibly even gain a new type of media literacy through it. Gaming is something which is deeply imbedded in the human nature and therefore it is only natural to use new media and technology in order to fulfill our needs to be entertained, to simulate experiences, feel tension but also relief.

Computer games can be regarded as a mirror of our world and thus it is important to not disregard them as nonsense but to treat them as new media and culture in order to learn more about the gamers and our society. Computer games do not only give insights into our society, culture and history but also into our language. As Aitchison (1998: 18) excellently put it, even though talking about media in the sense of journalism: "The media are therefore linguistic mirrors: they reflect current language usage and extend it." Since language has a similar relationship to culture as computer games, namely that language is part of culture and culture is part of it, it can be argued that computer games also allow us insights into the used language and how they extend it. Yet, one has to be cautious about generalizations as language is to some extent an abstraction of our thoughts and reality. "Language is, after all, already an abstraction, a second order of reality, making fiction a third." (Cook 2000: 47) What does this make computer games? If games are regarded as texts, narration or fiction as narratologists do, it would mean that computer games are a third order reality. If computer games are seen as a product or even extrapolation of a narration, they would become a reality based on fiction, so to say a fourth order reality or even a parallel reality. That said, I still believe that computer games provide insights about a "reality" and the gamer's perception of it for researchers of several disciplines. Computer games might be a mirror to our society but not a perfect one. There might be scratches and even blind spots. In spite of these obstacles, computer game studies offers valuable information for many disciplines and also to the society as such as computer games show us to some extent who we are and what we would like to be.

4. MMORPGs

The previous chapters discussed gaming and computer-gaming as discourses. Several features of computer games but also of what gaming means to the gamers and what games can evoke in gamers are described. Yet, the MMORPG discourse is a special case in this set of games. MMORPGs belong to the most successful computer games today since MMORPGs are the first game genre played by so many people. The question is what makes a MMORPG and how is it different to any other computer game. What fascinates the gamers when playing MMORPGs and why have they become such an open discussed phenomenon?

The first chapter discusses what a MMORPG is and how it originated. It highlights the differences in gameplay to other games. The next chapter ties in with the differences compared to other games and demonstrate aspects of MMORPGs which make them more than a leisure activity including aspects like holy earnestness, social play, motivation and learning. The third chapter addresses role-playing and identity in MMORPGs. It dwells on the question what role-playing is and what it looks like in MMORPGs. This chapter is particularly interesting for later section on positioning. The last chapter discusses communication ingame, in particular the formal setup of communication and which channels of communication are provided to the gamers in the games.

All this is necessary in order to have a basis to analyze the language used by gamers. It is not enough to say a certain feature or language strategy is used out of the desire to be efficient, but to understand how this is motivated and why. It is essential to know the setting in which the speakers are involved and how they tick. This chapter attempts to give an understanding of what MMORPGs are, how gamers make meaning in them, what they mean to the gamer and what it means for a player of these games to play and communicate together.

4.1 What is a MMORPG

The acronym MMORPG stands for Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game and summarizes some of the basic aspects of this gaming genre.

MMORPGs are played by many (*massively*) gamers synchronously (*multiplayer*) on servers which are *online*. While in other games such servers provide certain levels, maps or games limited to a certain amount of gamers, MMORPGs offer servers which are open for thousands of gamers at the same time. There are no specific maps or games but one game which everyone joins. As the description implies, gamers have to be online to join these servers and play on them (see Trippe 2009: 3). The final aspect of MMORPGs is the role-playing aspect which is discussed in more detail later on. MMORPGs allow their players to experience what Deutsch (1997: 98) called virtual reality and “[...] refers to any situation in which a person is artificially given the experience of being in a specified environment”. The gamer assumes the role of a person in another reality and universe.

There are two types of MMORPGs namely those where the player does not only need to buy the game but also pay a monthly subscription fee (like *World of Warcraft*®), and those which are free-to-play (e.g. *Runes of Magic*, *Allods Online*). The later, however, do provide certain content and items for payment. So while most of the content is for free, certain aspects which make gaming more comfortable or easier, like bigger bags ingame or better gear are for money. There are also MMORPGs which started out on subscription base and were turned into free-to-play MMORPGs like *Lord of the Rings Online*®. In these cases, gamers who bought the game in the first place and had subscribed are provided with special advantages compared to gamers who only registered later when the game was for free (c. f. Yee 2006a: 189; Fritz 2007: 141; Corneliussen, Rettberg 2008: 4).

Clearly, *World of Warcraft*® is the most successful MMORPGs of the last years. It had its zenith in June 2011 with 11.1 million players world-wide⁹. Since then Blizzard Entertainment, the developer of the game, had to admit high losses of player numbers (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-15672416>

9 According to Blizzard Entertainment (<http://eu.blizzard.com/de-de/company/press/pressreleases.html?id=2450471> (05.07.2012)) the number of active subscription during the release of the Addon Cataclysm was 12 millions world-wide.

(05.07.2012)). Yet, *World of Warcraft*®'s success and particularly the enormous numbers of gamers could not be reached by any other MMORPG so far. Even though *World of Warcraft*® was released in 2004, it can look back on a longer history. The genre of MMORPGs has its roots in MUDs (Multiuser domains) and tabletop role-playing games. Yee (2006a: 188-189), however, notes that

“[w]hile it is commonly thought that MUDs descended from table-top role-playing games (RPGs) such as Dungeons and Dragons, the two genres emerged around the same time and co-evolved beginning in the early 70's [...].”

While it is still debated which gaming genre was first or if they co-evolved, the influence these two game types had on MMORPGs is beyond controversy. MUDs and tabletop role-playing games have both elements in common with MMORPGs and therefore could have been used as inspiration for the new genre.

MUDs are text-based adventure computer games in which gamers interact with each other in order to achieve goals. The players have to log on at the same time to a server, hence making MUDs synchronous and online games. The first MUD called *MUD1* was created in 1979 by Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle. MUDs became popular in the 1980s and 1990s. But as Corneliussen and Rettberg (2008: 4) note, even though MUDs certainly were influential for later role-playing games and MMORPGs, they can never be compared to the mass appeal of today's games (see also Yee 2006a: 188-189).

The second influential game genre is the tabletop role-playing game which is also referred to as pen and paper role-playing game (P&P). The players create and solve adventures using miniatures, dices and interactive story-telling. One of the players has to take up the role of the gamemaster and create a story for the other gamers to play. One of the most famous table-top role-playing games is *Dungeon and Dragons*.

The influence of MUDs and tabletop role-playing games on MMORPGs can be observed when comparing gameplay aspects of these games:

“Both games allowed users to create characters based on numerical attributes (ie. Strength, dexterity, intelligence) and templated roles (ie. Warrior, Cleric, Druid) with different strengths and weaknesses. Game-play typically revolved around a combination of interactive story-telling and logistical optimizations under the guise of slaying monsters and attaining higher levels and skills.” (Yee 2006a: 189)

Similar aspects of gaming and goals in the game can be observed in the computer game genre role-playing games (RPGs) which can be regarded as the digital and graphical version of tabletop role-playing games. For example, the RPG *Baldur's Gate* is based on the pen and paper game *Dungeons and Dragons* and makes use of its attribute system and classes. The improvements of computer technology and the Internet connection led in the 1990s to a shift from text-based MUDs to their graphical conversion into RPGs and in the late 1990s to MMORPGs. Before looking at the first MMORPGs its predecessor RPGs deserves a brief treatment since many of the game mechanics are the same in RPGs and MMORPGs.

One of the main features of RPGs is the creation of an avatar (the played character representing the gamer in the game) and the development of it. Through fulfilling quests, which can be gathering information, gathering items, killing certain monsters or enemies and other tasks, the avatar gains experience and through this rises in his or her level. The higher the avatar's level is, the more attributes, skills and talents can he or she learn and use. The more often he or she uses them, the better he or she can use them. Even though the settings of role-playing games can vary for example fantasy settings, medieval settings or even futuristic settings, some elements are common in all of them. Normally, RPGs have certain fixed character *classes* or *roles*¹⁰ like close-combat fighters, healers, long-range fighters, rogues or thieves and very often mages or sorcerers (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 61-62). These basic mechanics are the same as in MMORPGs.

Another similarity between MMORPGs and RPGs is that most RPGs allow the gamer to choose the race of their avatar. If the setting is a fantasy setting like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which many role-playing games are, then there are

10 The term *role* in RPGs and MMORPGs has nothing to do with role-playing or character enactment but are expected playing styles either by gamers' conventions (e.g. a healer is supposed to heal) or by developers' programming (e.g. warriors cannot heal because they have no healing abilities and cannot learn them).

humans, elves (elves), dwarves, orcs, trolls, halflings and other fantastic creatures to choose from. Some games even allow creating hybrid characters using two races. Each race has pros and cons, for example orcs might have extra points in strength but are disliked by others which might be a difficulty when trying to get quests. Humans are normally rather neutral with no special pros or cons (see Herz 1997: 28).

There are some single role-playing games in which the player can recruit other characters which are played by AIs (artificial intelligence) but controlled by the player. In these cases it is important to have a well balanced team for example a warrior, a healer, a thief and a long-distance fighter and not four healers (see Burn; Carr 2008a: 20-21). A balanced team consisting of a warrior, healer and character classes which can cause damage (damage dealer) is also a fundamental and basic part of MMORPG group creation.

RPGs are very complex and enable the player to learn several professions like alchemy, first-aid, forging and similar. The possibility to apply certain skill and talent points whenever the avatar reaches a new level, allows the player to design a character from scratch according to his or her ideas and fantasies (see Rosenstingl; Mitgutsch 2009: 61-62). Typical attributes are strength, dexterity, agility, wisdom or intellect, spirit and charm. Depending on where the points of the avatar are placed he or she has other skills to choose from. For example the skill to wield two weapons at the same time requires a certain amount of strength, while pickpocketing requires a certain amount of points in agility.

There are numerous ways to combine certain skills and talents. It is possible to have hybrid classes like a battle mages, mage who are also good in close-combat. The fixed amount of talent points guarantees that there is no imbalance and that a gamer does not design an almighty character. But the freedom in character creations can also cause difficulties to new gamers of the genre since it is possible to mess up a character by “skilling” it in an unusual way. It can be said that role-playing games require the gamer to think and plan many things in advance. It is not unusual to find out at a late point in the game that you made the wrong decisions in the game or that your avatar is not well skilled which can

mean that you have to replay the whole game. While RPGs are extremely complex and sometimes difficult to master for new gamers, MMORPGs are newcomer friendly because lots of complexity is removed from them.

The first MMORPG was *Ultima Online* (1997) followed by *EverQuest* (1999). Besides the graphical environment, MMORPGs benefited from the improved processing capabilities of computers. Thousands of gamers could be logged in and play at the same time. Until 2004 when *World of Warcraft*® was released, *EverQuest* was the most popular MMORPG (see Corneliussen, Rettberg 2008: 4; see also Yee 2006a: 189, see also Trippe 2009: 7-9). While on Asian markets MMORPGs frequently managed to have more than a million of subscribers, it was rather unlikely to achieve this in the USA or Europe. *World of Warcraft*® was the first MMORPG to accomplish this by getting millions of people to play even in the USA and Europe. *World of Warcraft*® was, as Ducheneaut et al. (2006: 281) call it, the “magic bullet” for game designers.

Since 2004 several MMORPGs came into existence and disappeared again. While fantasy settings similar to Tolkien's books are popular (e.g. *Lord of the Rings Online*®, *Warhammer Online*), there are also other settings like science fiction and futuristic settings (e.g. *Star Wars Galaxies*, *Star Trek Online*, *Star Wars the old republic*), pre-medieval settings (e.g. *Age of Conan*), and super hero themes (e.g. *DC Universe Online*, *City of heroes/villains*) and several other themes and settings (c. f. Kramer 2008: 27).

Despite the differences in settings and theme, the setup and technical basics are the same in most MMORPGs. The first step after installation of the game and creating an account is the creation of a character or avatar. This creation process includes designing the looks of the character, picking a name for it and choosing race, gender, and a class from a set of ready-made classes. This allows the creation of several race-class combinations like in *World of Warcraft*® for example gnome mages, dwarf hunters, undead rogues, human warriors, troll shamans and several others.

Normally, there are archetypes of classes, as was mentioned before, like melee and ranged classes. Melee classes fight in close-combat against enemies like rogues, death knights or warriors. Ranged classes fight opponents from a distance like hunters or rangers. Most MMORPGs offer caster classes which

use a form of magic and can either be classes which deal damage (damage dealers (dd or dps)) like mages and warlocks or act as support characters or healers like bards and priests. A special archetype of class is called *tank* and refers to classes which are fighting in the first line and draw the attention of the enemy to them. Usually, tanks wear heavy armor and can take lots of damage contrary to damage dealers who normally cannot survive too much damage. Therefore, the task of the tank is to draw the attention of the enemy so that the damage dealer can cause damage without getting damage.

Another archetype is the *hybrid* class which combines abilities of two or more classes, however less efficiently as the specialized classes. Typical examples would be paladins who can heal and fight in close-combat and even tank. Such hybrids are a challenge for game developers since they have to balance the abilities of such classes (see Ducheneaut et al. 2006: 283).

The classes can therefore be labeled according to range (melee or ranged combat) and their main-function (tank, damage dealing, healing, hybrid). This is exemplified in the table below labeling the classes of *World of Warcraft*®.

	Tank	Damage dealers	Healers/ support	hybrids
Melee classes	warrior	rogue, warrior	-	paladin, druid, death knight, monk
Ranged classes	-	mage, warlock, hunter	priest	druid, shaman

Table 1: the classes of *World of Warcraft*® labeled according to range and function

According to the class chosen the avatar has its attribute points assigned. While warriors have many points in strength, mages have many points in intelligence. Different to RPGs where the player has to distribute attribute points himself or herself, the computer does this automatically in MMORPGs. This makes MMORPGs easier to play for newcomers to the genre. The attributes can be improved by using special gear which gives extra points to attributes. With every further level the attribute points increase (see Götzl, Pfeiffer, Primus 2008: 77-78).

Furthermore, most MMORPGs provide the gamers with specific talents for each class. These talents, structured as a tree therefore often referred to as talent trees, offer the players the chance to specialize and individualize their characters. For example, in *World of Warcraft*®¹¹, mages can become specialized on fire magic, ice magic or arcane magic. Each tree offers other advantages. While one tree might improve defensive skills others strengthen offensive skills (see Götzl, Pfeiffer, Primus 2008: 78). There is much debate on the best and most efficient talent tree skilling on community websites and message-boards for each respective MMORPG.

Another aspect of MMORPGs is the profession system. MMORPGs offer professions to the characters. Normally, one can choose two primary professions and several secondary professions. Secondary professions include normally cooking, fishing and first-aid. Primary professions have to be chosen more carefully since they can be very useful to specific classes. Blacksmithing is usually more useful to plate or mail armor wearers than to classes who cannot wear this gear. However, there are professions which are economically worthwhile like herbalism, mining and other gathering professions since the gathered resources can be sold to other gamers. This aspect is discussed later on in more detail (4.2). In order to train one's profession, the character has to perform the profession. For instance, for each picked herb the character receives one point on the profession scale. Through continuous exercise, the character rises in ability. The better one is in a profession the better items can be produced or special herbs or ores can be collected. The profession system in MMORPGs does not only allow customization of ones avatar but can also help to improve ones efficiency in playing (see Götzl, Pfeiffer, Primus 2008: 73-75).

This shows that the creation of a character involves previous planning to some extent especially if the gamer wants to focus on a specific game aspect. These game aspects are noticeable when looking at the different server types offered. Most MMORPGs offer different server types focusing on specific game aspects. RP servers provide the players with a focus on role-playing. Depending on the game and the community role-playing is strict on such servers. *World of*

11 This refers to gameplay in *World of Warcraft*® before the addon *Mists of Pandaria*, since with this addon the former talent tree structure was removed.

Warcraft® is particularly known to be less about role-playing than about other aspects and therefore the RP servers of *World of Warcraft*® provide role-players the chance to be amongst like-minded people. PvE (player versus environment) servers offer a focus on questing and solving tasks. When a player meets another player from an enemy faction (e.g. in *World of Warcraft*® this is Alliance and Horde) they cannot attack one another without consent. Contrary to PvE, PvP (Player versus Player) servers center on fighting the other faction and other gamers. When meeting another player from the other faction ingame, one can attack or be attacked even while fulfilling a quest. Normally, there are hybrid servers in some games like RP-PvE and such (see Ducheneaut et al. 2006: 283; Götzl, Pfeiffer, Primus 2008: 64-66). Based on the chosen server-type some gamers will also create their characters fitting the gaming aspect, for example characters which can deal lots of damage and can therefore fight back when attacked on a PvP server.

After creating a character and choosing a server-type to play on, the gamer joins the game. While in the game, players are in a real-time 3D world in which their avatar acts, moves and interacts with the world and other gamers.

MMORPGs are played through a combination of keyboard commands and mouse-clicking. The interface of the game offers a bar (actionbar) which holds the possible actions and abilities (e.g. attacking in close-combat, special attack moves, spells, etc.) for the gamer. By pressing keyboard buttons or clicking on the ability the respective ability is used (c. f. Yee 2006a: 289-290). Every avatar starts at level one and has to rise in level throughout the game until the highest possible level is reached. In order to progress and get better gear for future fights one has to fulfill quests or kill enemies. The fastest way to progress is, however, to fulfill quests.

A quest is a task which the player is supposed to fulfill. Quests are given to the character by NPCs (non player-characters) or as they are called when they fulfill the role of giving quests, quest-giver. Jill Rettberg (2008: 170) notes that normally in classic literature but also in traditional computer games, quests used to be grand, overarching challenges with an ultimate goal and a clear end, like the search of the holy grail by King Arthur, the Odyssey of Odysseus or saving the princess in *Super Mario*. However, MMORPGs are so to say endless. Even

when the character reaches the highest level the game is not over, it actually only starts at that point since many places can only be visited and quested in with a certain level. Therefore, quests in MMORPGs are not the ultimate goal as in narrations or traditional games but means to an end to progress and improve one's character.

The game mechanics do not provide the gamers with many different settings for quests and questing becomes a very repetitive action throughout the game. Normally, there are quests which can be either fulfilled once or repeatable quests without limits or on a daily basis. The quest types are very similar in all MMORPGs, namely killing quests in which the gamer is supposed to kill a certain enemy or number of enemies, collecting quests in which the gamer is supposed to collect items and traveling quests in which the gamer is sent from one NPC to another. If a narration threads quests together in a certain sequence researchers and gamers refer to it as quest-chain. Jill Rettberg (2008: 167-184) discusses in her article if narration and story background are needed or wanted by the gamers. Many gamers do not even read the story for the quests but just scan the text for the objective in question. Yet, game developers go to great lengths to provide a plausible story for every task in the game no matter how small the task is.

As mentioned before, even after reaching the highest level possible, there are further quests to do. Daily quests in which the gamers receive gold, reputation with a certain faction or better items. In order to improve and optimize one's character, gamers continue to play and repeat the same quests over and over again. This can be regarded as tiresome grind, ordeal or work and yet the gamers do it.

The endless questing observable in MMORPGs is also discussed by Jill Rettberg (2008: 176) who argues that MMORPGs provide humans with endless desire. She compares MMORPGs to the paradox of narrative in which readers read out of desire to know the end of a story but when the end is reached there is nothing more to consume. Therefore MMORPGs are games with "no end; it is an endless deferral of an end." (Rettberg, Jill 2008: 176). The gamers want more and they get more in MMORPGs. There are constant additions to the content. This is what makes MMORPGs so different to other computer games,

there is no end to them. While other computer games have an end and can be played through completely, there is no such thing in MMORPGs. The desire for closure is fueled in the gamers by constantly feeding them with new content and new challenges, keeping them hooked to the game. But the desire is never fulfilled.

Some of the quests and challenges can only be fulfilled in larger groups. This makes gamers form groups, guilds, clans or other alliances of characters in order to deal with more difficult challenges. Such ingame groups lead to strong group relations between the gamers which often go far beyond the game. Guild members meet in real-life, become friends and intimates. Guilds can be highly motivating for gamers. This leads to the next section in which motivations and social play are dealt with.

4.2 Time is money: More than a game

MMORPGs are played by millions of gamers world-wide who invest money, time and energy in them. But why should a gamer buy a game and pay a monthly subscription fee in addition to the game purchase? Why do MMORPGs hook so many gamers even though they are a promise with no fulfillment and fuel desires for closure and end which will never be satisfied?

First of all, it has to be stated that the average MMORPG gamers are not only teenagers. Certainly, there are teenagers and adolescents playing MMORPGs, yet Yee (2006a: 196) found out that “[m]any MMORPG users have stable careers and families of their own. 50% of respondents (n=2846) worked full-time, 36% were married, and 22% had children.” It can be noted that MMORPG gamers are, contrary to common cliches, not necessarily young males without job and social ties.

The motivations to invest so much money, time and emotion into a game are multi-faceted. Normally, gamers have not only one motivation to play MMORPGs but several ones which are also to some point interrelated. Burn and Carr (2008b: 105-108) identify, amongst other motivations, a representational one in MMORPGs referring to the possibilities of creating a character from scratch. Gamers decide upon the looks, clothes and possible

even the history of the character they play. The gamer can choose, customize, create and control the avatar completely. Yee (2006a: 202) calls this motivations the story-telling aspect of games.

Another motivation which can be identified is *escapism* which refers to “using the virtual world to temporarily avoid, forget about and escape from real-life stress and problems.” (Yee 2006a: 202). Escapism is a well known factor in research of several media-forms like TV, reading books and other leisure-activities. Trippe (2009: 38-40) highlights that escapism is a compensating gratification, a substitutional satisfactory which is created by immersing into a fictional world and identifying with fictional characters of this world. Gamers who are motivated through escapism search distraction from everyday life, want to experience situations which would not be possible in real-life and in order to do that assume different roles. Furthermore, *abreaction*¹² of negative emotions could be subsumed under escapism. While Trippe combines *escapism* and *immersion* in her account, Yee (2006a: 202) differentiates between escapism, escaping the real world and its problems, and immersion “enjoy[ing] being in a fantasy world as well as being “someone else””.

A very common motivation to play any sort of game is entertainment. Our society is full of entertainment possibilities, causing us to forget that it is an important motivation of activity by itself. Enjoying something, feeling diversion and relaxation and having a good time are driving motivations in playing computer games and MMORPGs (see Trippe 2009: 40-41). As one of Yee's research participants stated:

“I play MMORPGs with my husband as a source of entertainment. Overall it can be a cheaper form of entertainment where you can spend quite a bit of time with a significant other.” (Yee 2006a: 198)

Trippe (2009: 41-42) also mentions the desire to explore and discover as a possible motivation for playing MMORPGs. Clearly, MMORPGs offer an enormous virtual world which can be explored and visited. There are gamers who enjoy discovering new and hidden places, who want to find the way up on a mountain or a way to get to this airfield one flies over with the scheduled flight every time. “They want the world to be very big, and filled with hidden beauty

¹² Abreaction is a psychoanalytic term referring to experiences which relieve one from emotional excesses. It is comparable to catharsis.

that can only be unlocked through persistence and creativity” (Castronova 2005: 72). This motivation is partly connected to the practice of playing against the grain mentioned in chapter 3.1.

Yee (2006a: 202) identifies another motivation which he calls *manipulation* which “measures how inclined a user is to objectify other users and manipulate them for his personal gains and satisfaction.” Gamers who are motivated by this, enjoy exercising power over others by taunting, deceiving, harassing and dominating them. It could be claimed that a supporting aspect to such behavior and motivations is the seeming anonymity of the gamers. The illusion of anonymity as well as such obvious offensive and impolite behavior are discussed further in later chapters on politeness and negative behaviors ingame (15.1).

One of the most discussed motivation in MMORPGs is *achievement* or *progression*. Gamers desire to become more powerful, get better gear, rise in level and progress in the game and character development. Gamers accumulate gear, money, points, tokens and other items which represent progression and prestige ingame (see Yee 2006a: 202; see also Trippe 2009: 42-45). Trippe distinguishes between power-competition and power-wealth, basing her labeling on Castronova's account who identifies the gamertypes controllers and achievers:

“Controllers: People who come to dominate other people. They are happiest with challenges that involve competing with others and defeating them. Also described as 'griefers', they want worlds that allow users to intervene in the activities of other users, so that a record of domination and control can be established. To them, it is all sport.” (Castronova 2005: 72-73)

It has to be noted that such behavior is referred to by Yee as manipulation. Yet, competition and offensive behavior, as mentioned here as *griefing*, do not have to go hand in hand. It is possible to have fair competition and sportsmanship in PvP fights like in arenas or battlegrounds or between rivaling guilds fighting to be the first guild to finish a dungeon on a server (referred to as first-down). The term *griefing*, referring to negative gaming behavior is discussed in chapter 15.1.

Castronova's definition of the achiever is the following:

“[...] People who come to build. They are happiest with challenges that involve the gradual accumulation of things worthy of social respect. They want the world that allows all kinds of capital accumulation and reputation-building. They want the ability to increase the power of their avatar, to build new structures, to hoard wealth, and to change the world itself.” (Castronova 2005: 72)

Both gamer types, controllers and achievers, aim at efficiency and progression to the best and highest level of character development possible. It has to be highlighted that the motivation of progression and the desire to be efficient in gaming is deeply rooted in gamers. The desire to have the best gear available allowing the character to make as much damage as possible makes the character not only as efficient as possible but by this also provides high prestige amongst other players. This means that achievement and efficiency is linked to prestige in the gamer community and the gamer's pride. The desire to achieve something and to strive for efficiency is also linked to the notion of holy earnestness discussed in chapter 2.1. Gamers who want to achieve and progress in the game regard gaming and all actions in the game with earnestness. For them gaming is not mere entertainment but a serious matter. Inefficiency is seen by them with profound aversion and the game is not just a game but a cultural space in which they can fuel their desire for perfection, efficiency and prestige. Since in most MMORPGs this level of progression, gear, wealth and power is only possible with the help of others it is tightly interrelated to the next motivation relationship and social play.

Certainly, there are two different factors involved in social play as motivation. One is “the desire of users to interact with other users, and their willingness to form meaningful relationships that are supportive in nature [...]” (Yee 2006a: 202). The second is playing together with others in order to progress. Yee also found out that MMORPGs feature a high frequency of romantic and platonic relationships. It is his belief that this finding has to do with the hyperpersonal effects of computer-mediated communication. According to him interaction in MMORPGs is more intimate, intense and salient than interaction in real-life for several reasons. First, gamers have the chance to optimize their representation because there is a certain time-delay in computer-mediated communication.

Second, gamers create idealized images of the other gamers based on bits of information the interlocutor optimized before giving them. Third, while many regard the absence of extralinguistic cues as disadvantage, this absence can lead to more focus on the content of the message itself which can result in more personal and intimate information communicated. Finally, since gamers tend to give personal information in their communication or at least this comes across to the interlocutor, the interlocutor will give intimate information in return. This causes a loop which results in more personal and intimate communication throughout the conversation (see Yee 2006a: 204). Yee's assumption is worth to be kept in mind when discussing language in MMORPG since according to my gaming experience in MMORPGs and my previous research of netspeak this point appears to be valid. Using chat and other typed communication channels combined with the seemingly anonymity can cause some speakers to loose their inhibitions or at least be less careful concerning information. Suddenly, one has given away more intimate information than wanted. This notion will be returned to in the section on the linguistic perspective.

According to Yee's study 15,7% of the male respondents and 5,1% of the female respondents dated someone they met in a MMORPG. But it is not only the communicative setting of computer-mediated communication which leads to intimate and romantic relations between gamers but also

“[...] the fantastical metaphors employed in these environments encourage idealizations that parallel cultural myths of chivalric romance – knights in shining armor, clerics with glowing auras. Thus, these metaphors also encourage idealization in addition to the underlying inflated sense of compatibility due to hyperpersonal interaction. MMORPGs are environments where users are in fact falling in love with knights in shining armor.” (Yee 2006a: 205)

It happens that gamers fall in love rather with an idea, the illusion of a romantic and idealized love story than with the other gamer. It has to be mentioned at this point that romances and love relations have already occurred between gamers in MUDs, as Rheingold (1994: 208) notes. It is probably not unusual that people who share the same interests and come together to exchange about it fall in love with one another.

Clearly, there are not only romantic relationships in MMORPGs, but also partnerships of convenience in order to progress in the game. This does not mean that there are no bonds between the gamers. Yet, the bonds are not romantic but created through experienced challenges, high-stress scenarios which were solved together. Eklund and Johansson (2010) note that gamers in MMORPGs “are dependent on high levels of trust and co-operation in order to function”. Yee (2006a: 204) compares this sort of relations to boot camps and fraternity initiations in real-life. The experiences, challenges, failing and success weld the gamers together, create friendships, and deepen existing ones in MMORPGs. Williams et al. (2006: 346-347) found out that smaller guilds (fewer than 10 members) often have strong real-life bonds meaning that the gamers know each other outside the game. They are either friends, family or co-workers. It is not unusual to discuss everyday life in such guilds and have strong emotional ties. Medium-sized guilds are tightly-knit but less personal. “Some members in this range care less about social support and are using their membership as a resource until they can achieve their true goals elsewhere.” (Williams et al. 2006: 347). Therefore, medium-sized guilds are often steppingstones to larger guilds.

Large guilds have more than 35 members and there is, according to Williams et al., less sociability in them. Yet, playing a part in the guild, chatting in the guilds VoIP channel and socializing with the other guild members is seen as advantage. Large guilds require organization and formal rules. Mentorship, politics like elections for certain positions and often military hierarchies are normal. New members have to go through interviews before being allowed into the guild and probationary periods before becoming a full member. There are attendance policies and formal sign-ups for activities. Gamers who do not fulfill the expectations during activities or do not participate in enough activities are removed from the guild (see Williams et al. 2006: 347). Large guilds are normally very competition-, performance- and efficiency-oriented. A useful analogy given by Williams et al. (2006: 347) is “that this level of guild is more like a team within a recreational sports league than a small group of friends who play casually.” This ties in with the discussed difference between *play* and *game*, as well as *casual* and *professional* gaming. As soon as professionalism is a guiding principle in a guild, rules, organization and structure are necessary.

Trippe (2009: 46) notes that gamers who are motivated through social aspects to play MMORPGs desire to play with other people, have contact to other gamers and meet new people. They want to belong to a community, be part of a group and feel appreciated. Williams et al. (2006: 351) also identify maintaining and strengthening existing ties as a social motivation to play MMORPGs. They mention gamers who are geographically dispersed who use MMORPGs as a way to still spend time with one another. Furthermore, they mention gamers who use MMORPGs to have an additional activity to share with their family and friends. At this point an objection has to be made to a notion given in Rheingold's (1994: 208) account on MUDs and fan-culture, where he states that people who are involved in fan-culture and MUDs live not really glamorous lives, that they are lonely, scared, shy and unattractive. Such valuations are soaked with prejudice and cliches. Several studies like those by Nick Yee (2006a) show that gamers are integrated in society and many are very conscious about themselves and also self-confident. In anticipation of the results of the collected data for this thesis which are discussed in the next section, it can be stated that the gamers participating in the survey for this thesis are also not lonely outcasts of society. It is also interesting to mention that there are many gamers who just log on to MMORPGs to chat with their friends and not play actively. As an active gamer and game researcher I would claim that there is not much difference between a games evening with friends and family, and an evening of playing MMORPGs together, both are social interaction. In the words of Martin et al. (2011) "WoW [*World of Warcraft*®] grabs many players' attention not because of the differences between it and their real lives, but because of the similarities."

The discussed motivations can also be crucial factors concerning the language choice and usage. It has to be kept in mind that the choice of language, its features and strategies, is tied to the function it fulfills. The gamer logging in to chat with his or her friends uses language differently compared to the gamer who is in a raid with his or her guild. The gamer motivated by efficiency and the desire to progress will speak in a different way than the gamer motivated by immersion.

Motivations like achieving something, progressing, gaining power and even being socially accepted (as guild-mate or good gamer) are also factors which can lead to an escapism of another kind, namely addiction. In MMORPGs, gamers can achieve things they possibly would never achieve in real-life like slaying dragons or becoming rich. They experience an acceptance which is maybe denied to them in the real world. Tikvic (2007: 54-55) further notes that gamers find satisfaction in games because there are clear rules and structures, challenges and moments of satisfaction, adventure and entertainment. Many computer games allow for overcoming dangers and fears, control over a situation and provide gamers with good examples. Gamers can acquire skills, knowledge and abilities which cause them to be proud of themselves but also to be respected by others. Götzl, Pfeiffer and Primus (2008: 283) also highlight the role of hormone release which happens while gaming. The notion of tension, release, and peak enjoyment was already mentioned in the chapter on computer games (3.1). It has to be highlighted though, that there are many gamers who do not play in order to compensate for a lack of something in real-life but in order to entertain themselves and play together with others.

Certainly, MMORPGs consist of play mechanisms which cause immersion and the potential to force people to play in order to achieve certain goals. The engaging design includes concepts of repetition and the quantifiable aspect. MMORPGs are based on several metrics and numbers, the so called stats (statistics). Every attribute, ability, level and reputation is calculated and displayed through numbers. The higher the numbers the better for the gamer because he or she is mightier in the game, endures more, makes more damage or heals better and by this the gamer is more efficient. The quantifiable aspect of reputations with factions and the repeatable quests cause gamers to strive for the highest possible metric even if this includes fulfilling the same handful of quests every day for months. With the highest level of reputation the gamer can get better gear with even better stats. It is an endless circle as mentioned before when discussing the quests, because there is always better gear with even better statistics (stats) which can be acquired. The gamer, however, needs the best gear in order to survive in the high-end raids. Hence, to be allowed into raids the gamer is required to have high stats. Thus, the pursuit for better stats and other quantifiable aspects is needed to be able to go to even higher levels

of the game in order to get even better gear. It is a vicious circle which plays with the desire of and promise to the gamers, to be better or the best even if this means painful grind. Through painful and repeated grinding everyone is able to improve, acquire better gear, more reputation or more money (which can be used in turn for better gear).

Scott Rettberg (2008: 20) goes as far as to call MMORPGs “a capitalist fairytale in which anyone who works hard and strives enough can rise through society's ranks and acquire great wealth.” The notion of Weber's *Protestant Work Ethic* was mentioned in this work before but it is certainly most obvious in MMORPGs. Weber regarded luxury, idleness, more sleep than necessary and sociability as deadly sins and a waste of precious time in the short human life. Playing certainly would fall into this category, yet, MMORPGs manage to bypass this through its concept of leveling and questing. The daily quests with its tiring, ever repeating requests only to receive points on the scale or a token which can be exchanged for an item, is regarded by many gamers as work or painful grind. When play becomes a form of work, of daily chores then it is not a luxury or a deadly sin as in Weber's work.

“When play feels like labor, and one toils to achieve objectives, play does not feel like a waste of time. Play that feels like frivolous entertainment would be intolerable for the good capitalist. Play that feels like *work*, on the other hand, must be *good*.” (Rettberg, Scott 2008: 32)

Scott Rettberg (2008: 19-38) explains in his article how MMORPGs make gamers good capitalist citizens by teaching them that work is rewarded and that through saving your wealth you can afford things. Furthermore, MMORPGs teach the gamers many useful things about economy. Since there are items in all MMORPGs which are needed for producing other items, there is a certain demand for them. Thus, gamers learn to trade in games. Most MMORPGs even offer auction houses which work like Ebay. Items are auctioneered by gamers in the game and can be bid on or bought directly by other gamers. This creates an economy with a vital market ingame. Gamers learn fast how to trade and play the market and how to manipulate the prices.

An example from *World of Warcraft*® can illustrate this. A certain herb is needed to produce potions which are essential for raids. As most raids are in the evening it is a good idea, if you are an herbalist, to pick the required herb in large amounts and then auctioneer it about one or two hours before raids normally start. By looking at how much gold other gamers want for the herbs, you can decide upon the price. But since there is a high demand in the herb, one can dare demanding a high price. Consequently, gamers can play the market based on supply and demand. If too many gamers offer the same good, the price drops. Sometimes there are gamers who beat down the price and offer something which is in great demand very cheap. It might happen then that another gamer buys out all auctions only to regulate the market again. There are several accounts on economy in MMORPGs and Rettberg certainly has a point when he states that MMORPGs teach gamers more about economy and the market than a course at university.

Clearly, it is paradoxical that many gamers claim to play MMORPGs to escape work and the stress at work only to flee straight into games which are labor intensive. The escape of these gamers, who desire to escape the real world is then “a kind of escapism into a second professional life, a world of work” (Rettberg, Scott 2008: 26). Could it be that MMORPGs are to some extent nothing else but the modern cinemas of Adorno's notion which cause through entertainment an adaption of capitalistic ideology? Donald Duck who gets beaten to work harder and more properly is history. Today people are raised as capitalists through MMORPGs which propagate that hard work, achievement and discipline lead to wealth, prestige and epic shoes (see Rosenfelder 2008: 57).

Yet, MMORPGs and its mechanics of becoming better does not only lead to knowledge about how markets work, but also to a real world problem namely Chinese gold farmers or sweatshops. Some players are ready to pay real money for ingame gold and this lured unscrupulous companies to MMORPGs. Since many, but certainly not all companies of this type, can be found in China, the employees of these companies are called by gamers *China farmers*. Their job is to play the whole day and make money in the game. They do not level or fulfill quests but collect herbs, mine ore or kill enemies for gold. This repetitive

action to gain gold or resources is referred to by gamers as *farming*, hence the employees of these companies are called *China farmers*. The earned gold is then sold on the Internet to gamers. Selling ingame items or characters for real money is forbidden. Furthermore, the companies exploit their employees, thus China farmer companies are regarded as sweatshops. The employees receive little payment, yet they have to obtain enough gold or resources in the game. The game developer companies take legal action against such companies probably because they do not want other companies to make money with their product (see Rettberg, Scott 2008: 27). Certainly, this is a mere supply and demand situation, as long as gamers are willing to pay real money for ingame goods, as long will illegal companies provide ingame goods for real money. Blizzard Entertainment learned from this experience and implemented a real auction house in their game Diablo III allowing gamers to sell ingame items for real money. By this they attempt to push Chinese gold farmer companies out of business. This shows that MMORPGs are not a trivial activity but that they are emersed and produce virtual goods which gamers are ready to buy for real money.

As this chapter shows there is clearly more to MMORPGs than mere entertainment. The way MMORPGs are designed, they are highly engaging and cause gamers to play often, for a long time and even work hard in the game. The wish to reach the top or the end makes gamers continue to play and work. The high stress created in dungeons and raids welds gamers together. They strive for perfection and efficiency and by this also for prestige and appreciation. Engaging mechanics and work ingame can be regarded as making gamers good capitalists but can also create games which immerse gamers. The motivations to play MMORPGs are manifold like escaping the real world, achieving something, entertainment, playing together with other people, spending time with friends or manipulating and dominating others. All aspects mentioned in this chapter are tightly interconnected. It is like in the real world always about “us” and “the others” and how we want them to see us, how we want to be accepted by them, be part of the group or by our own decision do not want to be part of the group. It is about people and how they interact with one another. It is about positioning. All these motivations and desires shape to some extent the way gamers communicate. Even the economical aspect is mirrored in

the language used, because the language used to do business in the game is unique as can be seen in the section on acronyms (12.3). The aspect of work ingame shows particularly well that the ingame world of MMORPGs is not that different compared to the world outside the game. It is in that sense not a different world but rather a mirror of the real world since the gamers are at their core the same persons they are outside the game.

Yet there is one aspect which needs more consideration, namely role-playing. Since role-players openly play someone else and represent something else in the game. Therefore, it is of importance to look at this aspect in order to be able to discuss communication ingame. How can anyone make any claims for communication in MMORPGs if people play someone else there?

4.3 Role-playing, identity and socialization

When dealing with role-playing in role-playing games (RPGs) or in particular MMORPGs one runs into an oddity, namely that there is very little role-playing in these games. As Nick Yee (2006a) states:

“I had always assumed that “RP” in MMORPG was ironic. After all, most MMORPGs have had to deliberately set aside designated role-playing servers, and these have always been in the minority. This suggested that role-playing wasn’t something most players wanted to do in an MMORPG. At the same time, it was clear that a role-playing subculture existed that operated with its own rules and etiquette.”

It certainly depends on the MMORPG. While *World of Warcraft*® is known to be less about role-playing, some MMORPGs like *Lord of the Rings Online*® set high value on role-playing of the gamers. As MacCullum-Stewart and Parsler (2008: 225) point out there are difficulties with the term and the definition of role-playing. It appears to be difficult to define what role-playing means and it becomes even more problematic when it comes to role-playing games, as many of them do not include any particular role-playing by the gamers.

“This confusion can leave players perplexed: some want to role-play, but do not really know what it is, some have no desire to pretend to be someone else when playing, some may see role-playing as esoteric or elitist, and some may simply assume that it must be role-playing because it says so on the box.” (MacCullum-Stewart; Parsler 2008: 225).

This account includes many notions of the complex of problems surrounding role-playing. First, the problem what role-playing actually means and how it is done. Second, the problematic relation between role-playing and role-playing games in which the former sometimes is not really required. Third, the notion of role-playing as an activity which is labeled as odd or elitist.

It seems useful to approach these problems by extracting the activity of role-playing from role-playing games as they rather deal with mechanics and settings of former role-playing scenarios like pen and paper games or LARP (Live action role-playing). It might then be useful to elaborate on these settings in order to find out what role-playing is.

In the previous chapter the mechanics of traditional role-playing games were mentioned and how they have been integrated into computer role-playing games. MMORPGs could be seen as a natural successor of the former role-playing styles. Yet, while MMORPGs use the mechanics and settings like calculating events based on dice-rolling and level-based character designs using points in attributes, the real acting out of a character and the telling of a story is missing in them. The stories are ready-made by the developers. Quests and quest-chains have story-lines written into them and there is not really much a gamer can do differently in them. Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that many gamers of MMORPGs come from computer games in general rather than from pen and paper role-playing or LARP. This might explain why so many MMORPG gamers are actually not interested in role-playing in these games (see MacCullum-Stewart; Parsler 2008: 226).

In pen and paper role-playing games (P&P), role-playing can be defined as

“an episodic and participatory story-creation system that includes a set of quantified rules that assist a group of players and a gamemaster in determining how their fictional characters' spontaneous interaction are resolved.”
(Mackay 2001: 4-5)

The gamers and the gamemaster create a story by narrating the actions, thoughts and feelings of their character and by this generate a story like authors of a book. When the gamers tell the story of their character they speak as it is called *in-character* (IC), so they act like their character in that moment. When a gamer does not act like his or her character it is referred to as *out-of-character* (OOC). Even though the action takes place only within the imagination of the gamers, the verbal exchange allows for in-character acting like using a certain accent or choice of words (see Mackay 2001: 5-7).

LARP adds another dimension to role-playing since the gamers meet to enact their adventures by dressing up in certain clothes or costumes, which sometimes are even made by the gamers themselves, and using props like weapons, books or bags. During LARP the gamers do not only narrate the story of the session but enact it by improvisational performance just like in an improvisation theater. The gamers so to say perform a play which they create while acting (see Mackay 2001: 182).

Even though P&P role-playing games are not limited to a fantasy setting, many role-playing games set in a preindustrial society. Fantastic creatures known from mythologies like dragons, basilisks, dwarves and trolls are common in these games. In LARP especially swords and sword fights are popular. Even games with other settings like *Shadow Run*, which plays in the future, includes aspects like magic and mythological creatures. Thus, all types of role-playing, P&P and LARP, are fantastic and magical to some extent.

At this point it is worth focusing at the performance and narration of role-playing since role-players in MMORPGs also use similar techniques when role-playing. The performance during role-playing is closely linked to identity which is diegetic (in the game) as well as nondiegetic (in the real world). There are identities which are created within the narrative performance for example the player's social identity and the fictional identity of the player's character. “The

efficacy of the role-playing performance is determined by the role-playing game's relation to the broader cultural climate of which it is a part.” (Mackay 2001: 48).

Mackay highlights that while drama, according to Schechner's account, is “a tight, verbal narrative [which] allows for little improvisation” (Mackay 2001: 49), it shares some similarities with role-playing even though the latter is driven by improvisation. One of these similarities is a set of rules which binds the performers. The rules can certainly be flexible but they exist and give the performers and role-players the security to play and perform. In drama the dramatic text offers this common ground for the performers to work out a play, while in role-playing the shared set of rules provides the security for further action. The shared set of rules in role-playing games offer the gamers a framework and a background story for their own narrative. “The shared experience of a particular role-playing game becomes the nucleus around which role-playing game groups, or idiocultures, form.” (Mackay 2001: 50). This is to say, that working out and playing a narrative is not only the creation of a story or a game but also the creation and sharing of a discourse, of shared knowledge, customs, behaviors and beliefs, and therefore of a culture. Role-players, even of other role-playing games, feel that they still share knowledge and experiences with one another, namely the one of creating a narrative (see Mackay 2001: 176).

It is important to mention that even though role-playing includes a narrative, the narration “does not exist until the actual performance. It exists during every role-playing game episode, either as a memory of or as an actual written transcription by the players or gamemaster.” (Mackay 2001: 50). In other words, even though the shared set of rules and the gamemaster's preparations for a possible storyline and certain elements of the narration (e.g. characters the players will meet in the story or places they will travel to) are created beforehand, a large part of the narration is worked out by the players themselves throughout role-playing. The narration evolves while narrating it (see Mackay 2001 50-51). In German there is a fitting word for this namely *erspielen* which means developing and achieving through playing. This word is certainly appropriate to describe the process in role-playing games.

At this point it is worth noting, that in traditional role-playing the gamemaster has to put much effort in preparing a role-playing session. As mentioned before he or she has to prepare a scenario and a certain underlying story or quest for his or her role-players. Places, items and characters which the group of players could or certainly will encounter have to be created before the session in order to not slow down the flow of the story. Some gamemasters even go as far as to prepare maps, drawings of items or complete background stories for elements of the session.

In MMORPGs the gamemaster, as known from role-playing games, does not exist anymore. The fixtures of the narration as well as other characters (NPCs, non player-characters) are programmed into the game. Every gamer of MMORPGs is really a player and no one needs to fulfill the role of the traditional gamemaster. Yet, there are possibilities to become a traditional gamemaster¹³ when gamers create their own role-playing events in the game. This can be illustrated by an example. It is not unusual to have ingame weddings in MMORPGs. Two characters decide to get married and want to have an ingame wedding. Normally, the player performing the role of a clergyman will be to some extent the gamemaster of this event. He or she will be in control of the ceremony and the actions. Well-prepared wedding ceremonies ingame have an underlying script which might include someone who objects the wedding. Such ingame role-playing events can be compared to LARP, as they are often (improvised) enactment of (prepared) narrations. It is not unusual that a MMORPG gamer bursts by accident into an ingame wedding. Decent gamers will make an effort to conceal their faux pas by coming up with a solution to the situation. For example, when I burst into a wedding by accident, I quickly changed my clothing to something festive, and just took a seat at the back whispering excuses for being late. My character was even invited to the feast afterwards.

The already mentioned concept of the frame cannot only be used to describe levels of social interaction and communication but is also particularly useful to discuss role-playing and its levels of enactment. Mackay (2001: 53-57) utilizes

13 The term *gamemaster* refers in MMORPGs to employees of the game developer company who provide ingame support for technical issues, act as overseers and enforcers of the terms of use of the game.

Goffman's concept of the frame, refined by Fine in order to enhance it for the purpose of role-playing games. Even though the concept of the frame was already introduced in section one, it might be useful to have a closer look at what Goffman means by frame:

“It has been argued that a strip of activity will be perceived by its participants in terms of the rules or premises of a primary framework, whether social or natural, and that activity so perceived provides the model for two basic kinds of transformation – keying and fabrication. It has also been argued that these frameworks are not merely a matter of mind but correspond in some sense to the way in which an aspect of activity itself is organized – especially activity directly involving social agents. Organizational premises are involved, and these are something cognition creates or generates. *Given their understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These organizational premises – sustained both in the mind and in activity – I call the frame of the activity.*”
(Goffman 1986: 247, my emphasis)

It is important to note, that Goffman's role and frame definitions are not exclusive to theater or other artistic activities but that they are to be applied to all activities in social life including common roles like pupil, child, student at a university, parent, customer, patient, shoe clerk and several others. In all these activities people play a role, interact in a frame and so to say perform. However, “[p]erformances vary in the degree of sincerity with which the actor play them, but insincerity is not necessarily undesirable” (Bainbridge 2010: 174).

The example of the ingame wedding ceremony which I interrupted illustrates how I, making use of my character ingame, adapted my actions to fit into the frame of the role-playing event. I made use of my understanding of the social event of a wedding and joined into the frame provided.

Many scholars took up this concept, refined it and applied it to particular settings. Mackay (2001: 53-57) uses it to label role-playing sessions. He designates five frames which are active during role-playing:

1. the social frame inhabited by the person
2. the game frame inhabited by the player
3. the gaming-world frame inhabited by the character
 - 3.1 the narrative frame inhabited by the raconteur
 - 3.2 the constative frame inhabited by the addresser
 - 3.3 the performative frame inhabited by the character

During role-playing sessions, as well as role-playing in MMORPGs, the players inhabit and might speak in the frames listed above. The social frame includes conversations in which the players address another as persons outside the game and talk about events outside the game like a new movie at the theaters or another game. The game frame in which the player is addressed is one step closer to role-playing. The player talks about his or her character but does not perform as such (*out of character*). Conversations in this frame are often about statistics and gear of the characters. The frame of the gaming-world refers to actions and conversations of characters with other characters being *in-character*.

Mackay refined the last frame by differentiating between three sub-frames. The narrative frame occurs when a gamer is taking the role of a storyteller (gamemaster in the traditional sense). He or she narrates events to the players. It is important to note that in this frame the 3rd person is used to refer to the other gamers. In MMORPGs this frame can be used by a player acting as a storyteller or by using the emote function (12.7) or can be enforced by the game using cut-scenes, which have been discussed before (3.3). In this frame the player is merely audience to the actions. The constative frame is the domain of the gamemaster in which he or she describes the actions of the players using the 2nd person. The performative frame is inhabited by the character of each player. Conversations in this frame are always *in-character* and in 1st person. The player performs as his or her character and speaks as such (see Mackay 2001: 53-57).

While the constative frame is rarely used in MMORPGs, the performative frame and the narrative frame are the most frequent choices to role-play in MMORPGs. These frames are important when analyzing log files of ingame conversations which show clearly how players move between the frames. It is not unusual to see the use of different frames in one conversation.

The indication of frame changes are made through *keys*, either up-keying or down-keying. According to Goffman (1986: 43-44), a key is set of conventions which allows the transformation of an action into another action with another meaning. For example, addressing the player with his or her real name works as a key to transform the question uttered into a question in the social frame. Another possible key in MMORPGs is marking an utterance as *out-of-character* by either writing it in brackets or by adding the acronym OOC (out of character). The following example shows how frames and keys can be utilized in MMORPGs.

Example (2)

Rajesh is getting drunk off of Caraway Burnwine.
Rajesh is completely smashed from the Caraway Burnwine.
Tyreea seems to be sobering up.
Tyreea dances with Moonkin Hatchling.
Rajesh says: Sorry
Roinna says: ...
Roinna holds her Kaldorei Wind Chimes
Rajesh says: I shee weird birdsh...
Tyreea says: That are the waitresses.
Gezklena dances with Moonkin Hatchling.
Rajesh says: Wha?
Tyreea dances with Moonkin Hatchling.
Rajesh looks drunk.
[Guild channel] Tyreea: OOC: I log over.
Tyreea says: So I have to leave now, see you.
Tyreea waves goodbye to everyone. Farewell!
Roinna says: Byebye
Rajesh says: Hiya!

The example above shows a conversation at an ingame party after a formal guild meeting. The meeting was labeled as role-playing event. As can be seen, the narrative frame is used to describe the actions of the characters. Rajesh gets drunk, Tyreea dances and Roinna holds her Kaldorei Wind Chimes. These descriptions are in 3rd person and the players used the emote functions to enact

these actions. The conversation takes place in the say-function, which is described in the next chapter in more detail, at this point it is interesting to note that the players speak in 1st person and therefore use the performative frame.

Furthermore, it can be seen that Tyreea speaks in the game frame when he or she announces to log over to another character. He or she keys this utterance by typing OOC (out of character) marking it as being not in the gaming-world frame but in another one. Additionally, he or she uses another chat-channel namely the guild-channel. By this he or she also excludes the utterance spatially from the other frame. Tyreea, therefore, announces his or her leave in several frames. First, in the game-frame signaling the logging over to another character. Second, in the gaming-world frame, in particular in the performative frame telling the other characters that he or she has to leave now. Third, in the narrative frame by waving goodbye to everyone.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, role-playing in MMORPGs is a difficult issue not only because many players do not role-play in MMORPGs at all, but also because there is no real definition what role-playing in these games means. There are several shades of role-playing in MMORPGs. Is wearing a beautiful but actually too low leveled dress in a city and walking (rather than the standard running) through a city already role-playing?

Yee's (2006b) study on role-playing shows that about 60% of his participants role-played at some point in their MMORPG history but only about 20% of the gamers role-play regularly. It is interesting to note that players of the age group 12 to 17 years are less likely to role-play but beyond that age there is no significant difference in gaming behavior. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that there is also no significant difference between the gender of the players. Yet, female players tend to involve other players more in their role-playing for example by creating events or background stories in which other characters and gamers are involved.

Another finding in Yee's study identifies three character-types which role-players in MMORPGs tend to create. First, the "Tragic" referring to a commonly used theme in role-playing which means characters with a tragic history, slain family, orphans, poor families, problematic past and psychological problems.

As one of Yee's participants put it: "On WoW, everyone is an orphan. Well, that's true of most places where you roleplay because it's easier than having any kind of relationship with ... parents. *gasp*" (Yee 2006b: 7). The tragic type is also the most well-described type by the participants of Yee's study.

Second, the "Zany" or humor-driven type can be identified in role-play. "These characters typically do not have elaborate background stories as much as they have incredibly quirky characteristics or beliefs (typically comically delusional)." (Yee 2006b: 8). It could be claimed that players come up with such twisted and comical background stories as a reaction to the commonly tragic background stories of other players.

Third, the interaction-scripted character which is not really a character type but rather a playing method. Characters of that type are "with unremarkable personalities and [allow] the ensuing role-playing to guide their character development." (Yee 2006b: 9) Therefore, such characters develop throughout gaming and through their experiences and the decisions taken.

It comes as no surprise that these character-types give rise to typical tropes. One is the "Drama Queen" referring to characters striving for high-strung drama including blood, sweat, tears, treason and death. Certainly, this sort of trope is typical for the tragic role-play character. Another is the "ultra hero/villain" characters which are role-played as purely evil or good. This is a very inflexible type of character. Another striking trope is attractiveness which allows role-players to describe their character as blessed with flawless beauty. All these types and tropes are also, according to Yee's study, a source of frustration (see Yee 2006b: 10-11):

“I think the main source of frustration with these tropes is that they render the extraordinary as conventional. It gets tiring to live in a world where everyone's family was slaughtered, where everyone is tragically beautiful, and everyone you meet is either an ultra-hero or an ultra-villain. Thus, ironically, it is the ordinary (i.e., lepers or bakers with interesting personalities) that oftentimes sticks out as the extraordinary in role-playing. After all, being a princess is special only when everyone else is not a princess.” (Yee 2006b: 11)

Yet, one has to come to the defense of role-players in MMORPGs who use such conventional or even banal types and tropes. It is not easy to come up with a creative and unique background story for every character. Moreover, one has to be honest, while it might be very extraordinary to role-play a baker in a MMORPG, one has to wonder why a baker would suddenly become an apprentice to magical arts and leave his or her job to slay dragons. What could affect someone in such a deep way that he or she leaves behind his or her peaceful life?

An important aspect of role-playing in MMORPGs is that, while in other role-playing the narration is a spoken story and telling of events, it is in most cases written and therefore textual communication. It was already mentioned that players indicate other frames by using brackets or the acronym OOC. Yet, it is according to Yee's study (2006b: 14-15), important to stay in character and perform constantly as your character to create a proper role-playing atmosphere. Most gamers also find it important to use proper spelling and grammar during role-playing. In anticipation of my survey and the analysis of it later on, certain stylistic features like acronyms, smileys or leet during role-playing are frowned upon. Some MMORPGs communities like the one of *Lord of the Rings Online*® are very strict in this sense. If someone uses an acronym, the other players will react to this in their role-playing performance and accuse the other character to be possessed by a demon or under a witch's spell.

Even though gamers claim that proper spelling and correct grammar is important in role-playing, unusual spelling and grammar can also be used as a means of it, for example in order to mimic a dialect or role-play someone who is uneducated. As could be seen in example 2, drunkenness is very often performed by role-players by adding slurring to the language, as could be seen when Rajesh spoke.

The example below illustrates how dialects, in this case the commonly used Scottish dialect by dwarves, are used in written text. It shows the quest-text by the dwarf Fargo Flintlocke before he flies you to the Twilight highlands in *World of Warcraft*®.

Example (3)

Right then, just hop in the seaplane behind me and I'll fly yeh to the Highlands.

We're to report to a feller named "Lieutenant Fawkes." I've promised the King we'd get there lickety-fast, so I took the liberty of ditchin' any excess weight. Like seatbelts. Parachutes. Maps. Stabilizers. Landing gear. I never actually "land" these things anyways.

It is not unusual to see players in *World of Warcraft*® role-playing a dwarf using typical Scottish words or spelling to convey the dialect. Similarly, trolls in *World of Warcraft*® appear to have a Caribbean and Draenei an Indian linguistic background. But the gamers are not restricted to this and can integrate all sorts of dialects and registers to the language of their character. For instance, there is a Draenei shaman in my guild who speaks Viennese dialect.

The etiquette and conventions of role-playing which require players to stay in character ties in with two concepts Schick (2008) highlights in her article on role-playing and socialization in them, namely *breaking frame* and the *bad subject*. It has to be noted that Schick discusses role-play as a useful training tool for language socialization which can be used to "teach and learn a variety of skills and competencies" (Schick 2008: 189) including linguistic competence. According to Schick (2008: 190-191), the linguistics competence is acquired through socialization by using language. Being exposed to language and participating in language-mediated activities helps acquiring linguistics competencies and knowledge how to use them in contexts. It is her belief that:

"[...] Role-play simulations are understood to be particularly useful for teaching communicative competences. This usefulness is directly related to the way that these role-plays simulate socially and culturally embedded interactional routines." (Schick 2008: 191)

Using Schick's notion of breaking frame leads back to the concept of frame. The concept of breaking frame refers to happenings in role-playing in which a participant does not follow the usual behavior of a role or convention. Normally,

there are certain behaviors and conventions which are part of a role. If a participant does not comply to these behaviors and possibly acts in his or her own character, he or she is breaking the frame (see Schick 2008:193).

The following example should illustrate how someone is breaking the frame and obviously forgetting that the whole situation takes place in a frame, namely in the frame of role-playing in *World of Warcraft*®. The conversation took place in a town in *World of Warcraft*®. One of my characters, a female Tauren warrior named Lonaras was approached by another person and asked a favor:

Example (4)

Lorelei: Excuse me, would you be so kind to sign my guild charter?

Lonaras: Oh sorry I can't.

Lorelei: Why not?

Lonaras: I am illiterate.

Lorelei: What?

Lonaras: I cannot write nor read.

Lorelei: That is nonsense! You are reading at this moment! How could you read what I write?

Lonaras: But we are speaking and not writing. I of course can hear!

Lorelei: But ... you are an idiot!

It goes without saying that I enjoyed this short conversation. While my character was strictly played *in character* and I used a very creative excuse to not sign a guild charter and by this join the respective guild, the other gamer broke the frame by not role-playing and by blurring the reality of the computer game and its written communication and the ingame reality. Hence, mixing up the performative frame, in which Lonaras is an illiterate, and the gaming-world frame, in which Lonaras is a character and the gamers are typing to communicate or even the game-frame in which two players wrote to communicate.

Certainly, there are differences in MMORPGs depending on their point of view on role-playing. While in *World of Warcraft*®, as mentioned before, role-playing is not a main focus, other games like *Lord of the Rings Online*® are stricter on happenings which are openly breaking frame. An anecdote can illustrate this. When my friends and I tried out *Lord of the Rings Online*® we ended up in a town in the Shire trying out different functions and animations of our characters. I tested the animation of fainting. When my character fell to the ground, another character approached us running and asking what is going on, what happened

and why my friends do not help me after collapsing in front of them. I let my character stand up immediately and came up with a story to explain this incident. I apologized to the other character and told him that my friends and I are actors from a traveling theater group and we were just practicing for a play. My friends and I were unintentionally breaking the frame trying out animations. Of course it is alarming to pass out on a busy street in a town and even more shocking that friends and acquaintances nearby do not react to it. We were not acting in the frame of being hobbits in Middle Earth but rather breaking this frame acting like players testing functions of a game. Certainly, in *World of Warcraft*® no one would be bothered by something like that. Players let their characters stand on tables, hop from one house to another or speak in public about happenings in the real world.

However, while in some MMORPGs breaking frame is not frowned upon, being a bad subject is. This concept does not refer to players who role-play a “bad” or unfriendly person but “rather the term is used as a way to identifying people who respond in ways that ignore or even rebel against socially ideal or expected ways to participate in routinized socialization practices.” (Schick 2008: 193). While breaking the frame refers to not acting as expected in the frame or blurring several frames unintentionally or triggered by emotional involvement, the bad subject is a behavior which is intentionally against the rules or conventions by not responding to a role the person is expected to play.

The character roles in MMORPGs, which have been discussed earlier, like tank, healer and damage dealer include certain behaviors. A healer is supposed to heal the other group members during a fight and not stand in the first line to fight. Some classes are, even though they can fulfill several functions, expected to take up a specific function. In *World of Warcraft*® priests are expected to take the role of the healer and not, even though they can, the role of a damage dealer. When a group with a priest goes into a fight, the other group members will expect the priest to heal them and not stubbornly deal damage and let them die. In such cases, where the priest refuses to heal and insists on being a damage dealer, he or she will be seen by others as a bad subject.

Other bad subject examples become apparent when looking at negative behaviors in MMORPGs, these are discussed in more detail in section 15.1. For instance, *ninja-looting* is an example of a bad subject and refers to a player who takes loot which is not entitled to him or her. In earlier games it was possible to do this by looting the dead enemies faster than the other players of the group. The first person to take the loot off an enemy got the items. In most current MMORPGs there are loot systems which prevent this, for example the need and greed system. This system allows all party members, no matter who looted the item first, to roll dices on them. The players have the possibility to roll a dice for need, meaning that this item is really needed by and useful to the player, or roll a dice for greed, meaning that the item is only interesting to the player out of greed maybe to sell it later on. Need rolls have priority over greed, so if one player rolls need and the others greed, the player in need will get the item. If more players roll need, the player with the highest rolled dice number will receive the loot. However, this system does not prevent players to roll need on an item they do not require. It is not expected to have a hunter roll need on a healer's robe. Such behavior is clearly bad subject behavior as it is not expected and not acceptable.

What is important to remember when dealing with MMORPGs is that the character or avatar is a vehicle. Mia Consalvo (2011), during her keynote at the FROG (Future and reality of gaming) conference in 2011 in Vienna, summed the difficulty of identity, role-playing and the avatar up by concluding that avatars are vehicles which might include the gamer but not necessarily need to and that the self can rise through this creation. During her research she found out that avatars can be tools, pets, creations but also our self. This certainly makes it hard to draw any conclusions about gamers, but it is an honest one. It is almost impossible to make generalizations about gamers based on their gameplay, their characters and the way they role-play them.

Yet, there are several studies dealing with identity in MMORPGs and of its gamers. Bainbridge (2010: 174) goes to lengths to discuss theories by scholars like Cooley and Blumer and how they could be applied to MMORPGs. Summing up Cooley's concept of the social self, humans derive their social self and their

set of ideas about themselves by how others react and respond to them. This means that other people could be regarded as mirrors in which we see our reflection. Bainbridge (2010: 174) concludes

“[i]n the real world, humans try to manage the impression they give others, and in WoW [*World of Warcraft*®] they can do so possibly even more powerfully by selecting particular kinds of characters to represent them.”

Furthermore, Bainbridge discusses Blumer's approach to symbolic interactionism quoting Vivian Che and Henry Dush who applied this concept to *World of Warcraft*®: “Social interaction in MMORPGs is viewed as a dynamic process of meaning-making occurring within a historical context and examinable through the analysis of in-game language and in-game joint actions of players” (as quoted in Bainbridge 2010: 175). This quote certainly highlights an important point which leads to the section on the linguistic perspective of MMORPGs. People make meaning through interaction within a historical context. Our language and our use of language are like microcosms in which we can see the underlying meanings of our world. Speakers use language to express their inmost feelings. It is expression and impression at the same time and therefore an essential part of the inmost core of being. Since the gaming world is a mirror of the real world, researching language in them allows insights into underlying structures of our culture and our current state, hopes and fears. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss how communication tools work in MMORPGs, which is done in the next chapter.

4.4 Communication setup in MMORPGs

Communication in MMORPGs is like the games itself not only entertainment but also means to socialize and to achieve goals. As mentioned before many gamers go online in MMORPGs not to play but to communicate and socialize with their friends and fellow gamers. Peterson (2011: 57) even asserts that

“[t]he powerful combination of communication tools provided by MMORPGs, coupled to the opportunities they offer for purposeful and highly engaging social interaction with a wide range of native speakers in the target language, have led to claims that they present optimal environments for computer assisted language learning”

In how far MMORPGs can be used to acquire and practice a language still needs to be researched. It is not the aim of this thesis to explore the language learning potential of MMORPGs, even though it would certainly be worthwhile. Noteworthy in Peterson's account is that he mentions the powerful potential of the communication tools in MMORPGs to socially interact and communicate. But what are these powerful communication tools?

The game developers provide the gamers with several tools or channels of communication not only to socialize but also to further the flow of the game for example asking for help, finding other players for quests or trading items. The used language depends to some extent on the channel of communication used and its goal (see Kramer 2008: 28).

Before discussing the explicit channels of communication in MMORPGs, it is worth highlighting some characteristics of computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC)¹⁴ which should be kept in mind when dealing with communication in MMORPGs. CMC is often referred to as communication in “multidirectional, interactive and multimedia-based context [...] between two or more people through programs provided by computers” (Kramer 2008: 10). Similar to certain traditional types of communication such as letters or telephone, CMC allows overcoming distance. The interlocutors do not need to be physically present at the same place (see Kramer 2008: 10, see also Dittmann 2001: 27-28).

¹⁴ At this point the term CMC will be used for all types of Internet communication situations. A thorough discussion of the term CMC and the research in this field is provided in chapter 11.

Another characteristic of CMC which is of interest for later discussions on language usage in MMORPGs is that all but two types of CMC exclude paralinguistic cues such as facial expressions, gestures and the sound of the voice. The two exceptions to this are VoIP (Voice over IP) and video-conferences (video-chats). While during VoIP-chats the interlocutors speak through headsets with one another and therefore have the sound of the voice as reference point, video-conferences add the visual component to this by using webcams. In the context of MMORPGs only VoIP is used, since a video-conference would be counterproductive if not pointless since the player has to focus on the happenings on the screen and does not need to see the interlocutor (see Kramer 2008: 10). Even though, VoIP is a commonly used channel of communication by guilds and friends playing MMORPGs together, this communication channel is not represented through data in this study, as the predominating types of communication between strangers in MMORPGs are still written forms of communication and not spoken ones. Therefore, the missing extralinguistic input is of great importance in MMORPG communication and gives rise to strategies to overcome it.

While CMC in general allows overcoming distances, some communication channels allow overcoming time as well. In CMC studies, this distinction is made clear by subdividing the communication channels into asynchronous and synchronous types of communication. Asynchronous communication refers, as the term implies, to a delay between composing and receiving the message. This does not only refer to a time delay, even if it might be only some seconds, caused by technology, but also to the fact that the interlocutors do not need to be present at the same time. Therefore, there can also be a certain time delay before the interlocutor answers the message. The message is stored on a server and the recipient requests it either by checking the mailbox or by reading up on it on a message board. Since the interlocutor is not necessarily present at the same time, meaning that he or she does not need to be online, this type of communication allows the speaker to take his or her time writing a message. Typical examples of asynchronous communication are e-mail, message-boards and websites especially wikis which allow interaction (see Crystal 2006: 12; see also Kramer 2008: 10).

The opposite of asynchronous communication is synchronous communication which refers to communication without time lag and requires the presence of the interlocutors online at the same time. Certainly,

“[t]here is always a certain time lag resulting from response time and typing speed, as not every single letter typed is shown to the interlocutor, but only the message after the enter key was pressed.” (Kramer 2008: 11).

This fact can lead to misunderstandings, confusions and overlapping conversations. It happens that an interlocutor is impatient and does not wait long enough for an answer and types already another message (see Haase et al. 1997: 56). Typical synchronous forms of online communication are chats either chat-channels (chat-rooms) or private chats (instant messaging).

There is a further distinction which is worth mentioning namely the possibility of one-to-one communication and one-to-many. One-to-one communication refers to conversations between two persons. E-mail is a perfect example of this, as ideally one person writes an email and sends it to the recipient, who in return reads it and writes a reply. But even e-mail allows sending one e-mail to several recipients at the same time and therefore allowing one-to-many communication. Yet, a better example of asynchronous one-to-many communication is the message-board on which a person posts a message which is visible to all other users of this message-board, hence also everyone can reply to the message. It goes without saying that one-to-many communication can become very unstructured and that posts by different users can overlap. Such overlapping of posts can cause confusion. To highlight it, while one-to-one communication is a private conversation between two persons, one-to-many communication does not provide such a privacy (see Haase et al. 1997: 53-54). The distinction between one-to-one and one-to-many communication can also be made in synchronous communication. While private chats or instant messengers are one-to-one communication, chat-rooms or chat-channels are one-to-many communication (see Haase et al. 1997: 56-57).

The synchronous communication of private chats and chat-rooms can particularly lead to overlapping conversations and misunderstanding. Especially, chat-rooms in which many people are active pose problems. It could be compared to a large dinner party where hundreds of people are present and

several conversations are going on at the same time. To make things even worse some people partake in several conversations taking place synchronously. While at the dinner party one at least has the visual input and can see which people stand together and therefore see who talks to whom, this is not the case in the chat-room. Therefore, there are certain possibilities and strategies to lower misunderstandings by addressing persons directly in chat-rooms, this is described further in the chapter on turn-taking (8.3).

Another aspect of chat-rooms worth mentioning is that a chat-room is very busy, hence it can become difficult to follow conversations since older messages are shoved off the screen so to say. This is one cause for very fast typing speed and lack of proof-reading by the speakers, therefore, resulting in messages with typing errors, bad spelling and grammar. Furthermore, the forced speed of chat-rooms also gives rise to other features like acronyms and neologisms which save time, this is discussed more thoroughly in the chapter on stylistic features (12) (see Kramer 2008: 12).

Which of these types of communication are offered in MMORPGs and how do they function? Most MMORPGs provide similar communication channels and tools to their players. The first distinction which has to be made is the one of ingame communication and communication outside the game. Ingame communication takes place during gaming in the game itself. One has to be logged in with a character to use these communication channels. The most common ingame communication tool is the chat-channel. Most MMORPGs offer their players several chat-channels working like chat-rooms for their communication. Since chat-channels are like chat-rooms it means that they are public, synchronous and one-to-many communication. Normally, there are certain functions applied to the chat-channels, for example the general chat-channel is meant as place to exchange about ingame content or problems. Gamers can ask about quests or items in this channel. Depending on the MMORPG talking about topics which have nothing to do with the game or a current problem is frowned upon. Hence, lazy chitchat is also not encouraged but rather requesting help, asking for an answer to a problem or information exchange.

Most MMORPGs provide a trade-channel which is a platform to trade, sell and search for items, gear and resources. The specific function of this channel gives rise to different ways of using language. While some gamers intentionally use role-playing style to promote their wares, others use very efficient style utilizing acronyms. It is unclear which type of language is more profitable. But normally role-playing style ware or service promotion stands out and gets the gamer more attention than the common acronymic style (see Kramer 2008: 28-29). Example five illustrates what communication in trade channels can look like.

Example (5)

Jebrael: WTS Flask of the Draconic Mind cheap than ah /w me
Bafford: WTS Volatile Waterx10 - 8g each, Volatile Airx4 - 17g each.
Fereden: Selling Portals To and from Major cities Except Dalaran /w me.
Casien: [Poster on a Wall] Need to get somewhere fast? Casien's Portals offers safe passage to and from the cities of Shattrath, Stormwind, Ironforge, Darnassus, Theramore and the Exodar! Pay whatever you think is fair.

It is interesting to note how the player Casien competes with Fereden offering the same service in a more role-playing like style and by offering the customer to pay as much as they like for the service. On a side note Fereden responded to Casien's competition and adjusted his or her offer. But as can be seen in the given example it is also very common to use acronyms like WTS (want to sell) to do business in the trade channel.

Another commonly offered channel type is the LFG channel, referring to *looking for group*, in which gamers can search for a group in order to fulfill a difficult quest, go into a dungeon or raid. The same channel is also used by groups of gamers to search for particular members or classes (LFM, looking for member). While some MMORPGs offer a recruitment channel in which guilds can search for new members, some guilds use the LFG or trade or even the general channel to do so. Normally, an acronymic language style is used in the LFG channel as it allows requesting help in a precise and efficient way. Differently, recruitment calls are very often written in a role-playing style (see Kramer 2008: 28-29). The following example illustrates how a gamer is looking for group members by using acronyms and at the same time two other gamers are advertising their guild in a role-playing style:

Example (6)

Radje: LF 1 Healer, Rest DPS (Ranged DPS)

Thranor: "The Blacksong Company" is recruiting! We're looking for able-bodied men and women, unique and skilled to the core. Join the free company, see the world and fight for gold and glory. Contact Thranor or Korús for an interview, become a mercenary today!

Darkwínd: Lurking within Stormwind, <The Cult of Aca'Loci>, one of the few cults left in Stormwind, surface to recruit new members into their folds. Pledge your life to the demonic overlord, Aca'Loci, and be rewarded for eternity. Seek us out, join our ranks...

While the chat-channels are public channels, hence visible to everyone who is online at the respective server, party-channels are not open to everyone. As the name implies, the party-channel is only public to members of the same group (party). It is normally used when gamers group up for a quest or dungeon. A special case of a group-channel is the raid-channel for raid groups (up to 40 players). The conversations in these channels can be very different depending on the gamers, their goals and aims. It can be used for lazy chitchat, role-playing episodes or for efficient strategy talk.

The guild-channel is similar to the group-channel. It is a restricted chat-channel only open to members of the same guild. Hence, it can only be read and used by gamers who are part of the same guild (see Kramer 2008: 30). In one of the previous examples, example 2, it could be seen how the character Tyreea used the guild-channel to announce his or her logging over to another character, while using the say-function to remain in character.

A quite different tool of communication is the *whisper*, *tell* or *private message*. It is a synchronous type of communication which can be equated to instant-messaging. Two persons chat privately with one another. This type of communication is also very common to address a stranger with a request or question (see Kramer 2008: 30). Whispering, and the privacy it offers, is also a used by gamers to solve problems with other gamers. Chapter 18 illustrates how gamers make use of whispering in problematic situations like a wipe (the death of all party members).

The chat-channels and whispering are communication tools overcome distance in the game. This means that independent of your location ingame, you can read the main channels¹⁵ and whispers. Contrary to this, the say-function requires closeness. When a player writes something using the say-function by typing /s and then the message, it is displayed on the screen, right above the character in a speech bubble. Messages written using say are only visible to characters who are nearby. This makes the say-function a partly public, synchronous one-to-many communication tool which is mainly utilized by role-players as it mimics real talking of the characters (see Kramer 2008: 30). This function is also used in example 2, when the characters communicate with one another after their guild meeting.

Similarly, the *emote-function*, allowing gamers to utilize prefabricated animations which display emotions like laughing, dancing, fainting and others, can also be seen by any characters nearby. By typing the command, the character will execute the emotion typed (e.g. /laugh). It is also possible to write own emotes, this however is dealt with in more detail in the chapter on emoting and actionmarkers (12.7). The ready-made animations and sounds which are caused by using a prefabricated emote can be seen by every character standing nearby. This makes emotes also a public means of communication (see Kramer 2008: 30). As is illustrated in example 2, emotes are commonly used by role-players to let their character act on the screen for example dancing, laughing or fainting (as in the anecdote told before).

As mentioned before, VoIP is not a focus of this thesis, nevertheless for the sake of completeness, it can be said that VoIP is a synchronous type of communication which can be either used between two or more gamers as well as either while gaming or outside the game. Interestingly, even during VoIP conversations gamers use acronyms, neologisms and even emotes by just saying the emote command. Hence, VoIP can be regarded as a hybrid form of communication in MMORPGs.

15 There are certain "regional" zone chat-channels based on places in the game, for example geographical areas or cities. The main channels are visible no matter where the player is in the game, while the zone-channels change when leaving the zone.

The only asynchronous ingame communication tool in MMORPGs is the ingame mail. It is so to say ingame e-mail, or rather an ingame letter as there is an intentional time lag until the letter arrives in the mailbox of the recipient. The game provides the gamers with an interface which allows writing a letter and attaching items or ingame money to it. The letter is kept for 30 days in the mailbox of the recipient to be picked up, if it is not picked up within 30 days it is returned to the sender. According to one of my studies (2008: 31) the main function of ingame mail is item trading whereas the item is sent without further message to another gamer. There is also the possibility to use the ingame mail for role-playing purposes, however, this is rather uncommon.

Outside the game, official website with information and news are available which provide the gamers the chance to react to the articles by writing comments. However, websites are very often only a one way communication device meaning that information is given by the authors. While gamers can react to the information it is very unlikely to get any reaction from the authors in return. Instead, message-boards provide the gamers with the opportunity for meta-discourse. There the gamers can exchange opinions and information and even have the chance to get reactions from gamemasters or the game developers. Message-boards are websites with web-interfaces which allow communication between users. Common other names for message-boards are forums, bulletin-boards or discussion-boards. "Users can post messages on existing threads, also called topics, or open new threads. Replying to existing posts is possible by using 'reply functions' that might also offer to quote a previous post." (Kramer 2008: 16). Message-boards are public, asynchronous, one-to-many communication which are permanent, meaning that other people can read up on a discussion even days or months after it was posted. This allows other gamers to join into discussions even days after it started. Furthermore, since there is not such an immense time pressure as in a chat, gamers can take their time writing a post. They can proof-read and edit their messages. While in a chat, a gamer has to be fast to keep up with the speed of the conversation, this is not necessary on a message-board. However, as noted before the missing time-pressure does not prevent misunderstandings or overlapping conversations. It can happen that two gamers reply to a question of a third gamer at the same time.

It is not possible to make any generalizations about the used language style on message-boards, since, even though gamers can take their time to write a post on message-boards, they still use features which might give the impression of being used only to save time and speed up conversations like acronyms. The posts on message-boards certainly differ in style, register, length and planning. Some gamers write very well-planned and carefully written role-playing style posts or carefully worded discussion contributions, while others write short and telegraphy style messages.

The official message-boards of MMORPGs allow gamers to discuss ingame content at lengths which is discouraged in ingame channels. Message-boards are the place where gamers can have the chitchat which is discouraged in ingame chat-channels. It does not only provide a platform for gamers to exchange their experiences and knowledge about the game, but also allows them to contact game officials concerning ingame content or problems which might be interesting to other gamers as well (see Kramer 2008: 16-19). It goes without saying that there are several unofficial message-boards of MMORPG gamers like guild-message-boards or gamer communities.

Finally, another tool of communication of MMORPGs which was mentioned before should be noted, namely wikipedias and other information portals (like WoWwiki, WoWpedia and similar). Gaming wikipedias are unofficial, online encyclopedias made by gamers for gamers. They provide guidance and help to new and advanced gamers, information about changes and alterations as well as a platform for knowledge exchange of gamers. Wikipedias are a perfect example of the participatory culture of MMORPGs. Furthermore, they are a source of language in use of MMORPG gamers as such because specific features and vocabulary of MMORPG gamers are not only used by the gamers communicating there but also very often explained on such wikipedias. Wikipedias are a communication tool outside the game, they are public, asynchronous, many-to-many communication as there is normally more than one author and every gamer can become an author himself or herself.

The following table sums up the formal features of the discussed communication tools in MMORPGs.

communication tool	sender	recipient	type	privacy	location
chat-channels (general, trade, LFG, etc)	one	many	synchronous	public	ingame
party-channel	one	many	synchronous	open to group members	ingame
guild-channel	one	many	synchronous	open to guild members	ingame
whisper, tell or private message	one	one	synchronous	private	ingame
say-function	one	many	synchronous	public (location bound)	ingame
emote	one	many	synchronous	public (location bound)	ingame
VoIP	one	one/many	synchronous	open to channel users	ingame/ outside game
mail	one	one	asynchronous	private	ingame
message-board	one	many	asynchronous	public	outside game
wikipedia	many	many	asynchronous	public	outside game
website	one	many	asynchronous	public	outside game

Table 2: communication tools and their characteristics in MMORPGs

This chapter described MMORPGs and their characteristics in particular, what a MMORPG is, what it involves and its technical aspects. Furthermore, it was highlighted why MMORPGs are so popular at the moment even for people who did not play computer games before. The highly engaging nature of the game was illustrated by showing how different motivations and gameplay make gamers play longer than expected or longer than they actually want to play. The motivation of achievement and progression should be highlighted at this point again as a driving force when it comes to playing and communicating. The desire to progress in the game as well as be efficient and by this gain prestige and appreciation from other gamers is a factor which influences the language used by the gamers. It is also part of the holy earnestness involved in MMORPGs. For MMORPG gamers, these games are not mere entertainment

but a serious matter. Moreover, role-playing was described and how it is present or absent in MMORPGs as well as how it can influence language usage in the game. The notion of frame was dwelled on since it is used in MMORPGs in several ways.

The thorough discussion about gaming, computer games and MMORPGs are necessary to prepare the ground and set up a frame for the language used in MMORPGs since the formal settings and characteristics of MMORPGs cause some features of the language used in them. The need to be efficient and to professionalize gaming leads to very efficient language which is discussed in chapter 12. It is apparent in the use of acronyms and neologisms. Similarly, the formal setup of chats, the fast speed of the conversations in them, the fear to miss a message as it can be shoved off the screen leads also to a need to speed up the communication using certain acronyms and abbreviations. However, it seems not only to be about efficiency and speed, as was mentioned in this chapter, socializing is a prominent factor in MMORPGs. Hence, it is not unusual to feel a desire to be part of a group and to be integrated in it.

This chapter should be kept in mind as language is never separated but embedded in contexts and situations. One cannot discuss the language or discourse of a setting or genre without describing the setting itself. It is crucial to know what motivates and moves gamers, what a MMORPG is and what it means to the gamer in order to understand the language of the gamers. The context causes language realizations to some extent as well as they are a result of it. They are interwoven and cannot be treated without the other. Similarly, MMORPGs provide not only insights about language usage and about how language shapes the game but also about our society and culture. What is important to us is encoded by us into our language, and our language shapes our world.

5. Section summary

This section illustrated and described the discourses of game and play, computer games and MMORPGS, but the question remains: what makes these discourses special in comparison to other discourses like reading a book or watching TV.

The point most worthy to highlight is that interaction and participation are driving factors in making meaning in these areas. When playing a game like basketball the players have to interact with one another. They make meanings by creating and interpreting the rules. They interact with one another and with the gaming item, a ball in this case. They are actively involved. If they only consume passively, they probably only watch a match of basketball but do not play themselves.

In general play, like playing house, the active participation is also of crucial importance. When the players do not actively create meanings while playing and only consume and watch passively they are most likely at the theater and not playing house or taking part in an improvisation like LARP.

Freedom, free will to participate, fun, the magic circle as virtual border between the game world and the real world as well as rules are the defined aspects of what makes a game. But they also influence the discourse. The magic circle provides a frame for the discourse of play and game by creating a sphere which is different to the real world and in which certain rules apply. The magic circle gives the gamers a frame and the security that actions and interaction within the frame are “as-if actions” and not to be taken literally.

Computer games, as could be seen in the chapter above, take active participation and interaction a step further. Even the first computer games allowed the player to interact with the medium, the coin opt-machine or the TV. Computer games are as Sid Meier is often quoted to have said a series of meaningful choices. A choice not only implies but includes active meaning-making and interaction. Throughout the history of computer games the aspect of participation, control, gamer co-operation and interaction were improved and intensified. While the first computer games were still rather static taking place at arcades or computers or consoles at home, the Internet and the evolution of

computer hardware allows gamers to connect and to interact with one another and with the games. The technological developments blur the borders of the magic circle in the sense that the meanings of the games do not stay in the game anymore. Searle's notion of "X counts as Y in context C" is not necessarily true anymore since the context expands and the borders blur.

The computer gamer does not only interpret the tokens in the games but can by decision making create new meanings. Conventions of gaming, best practices, strategies but also insider jokes which become tokens of the gaming culture are not merely consumed passively but shaped by the gamers themselves. Gaming memes¹⁶, running gags in the gaming culture, illustrate how discourse works in computer games, namely that gamers take up tokens like a sentence *All your bases are belong to us*¹⁷ and change its meaning, remove it from the context of the particular game and add new meaning to it.

The aspect of active participation and meaning creation rather than just making meanings by interpreting them is taken yet another step further in MMORPGs. As the chapter above shows MMORPGs allow gamers several freedoms and to make choices. They have a big, open world to discover and explore, there are quests and stories to follow and through the role-playing aspect they can also create their own stories. The player becomes co-author of the story and part of the fiction presented. While most games allow the player to take choices to reach their goal, MMORPGs do not have a proper end. The gamers have to decide for themselves what their goal is, if it is reaching the highest level, getting the currently best gear or following other goals.

The community in MMORPGs is of crucial importance in this discourse. The gamers do not only interact with one another, but also mentor and teach one another and hence create and affirm conventions in the community. They also become to some extent co-developers by reporting bugs and by giving suggestions to the developers how to improve or change the game as well as their rules. This is a strong difference from other types of media like reading or watching TV. The audience might have a say sometimes but in the end they

16 Gaming memes are like Internet memes cultural information in the form of images, videos, texts or websites created in and distributed through the Internet. Gaming memes are often running gags or quotes from games.

17 A poorly translated sentence said by the enemy in the game Zero Wing (1989). The game mainly stood out because of the poor dialogues and translation from Japanese.

remain passive consumers of the product produced by someone else. During reading a book one is an emotional hostage, a passenger and an observer of the happenings and events in the story. Clearly, as reader one can write a letter to the author and complain about the content. Sometimes the overwhelming reaction of an audience can make the author change aspects of a story. However, normally the reader can only consume the story passively.

The gamers, especially of MMORPGs, become co-developers and co-authors of the medium, they participate, shape, create and alter meanings. Instead of only making meaning by interpreting the existing and provided tokens, gamers are active participants of a rich experience. This makes MMORPGs also a perfect example of the participatory culture.

It is crucial to highlight that games in general, computer games and MMORPGs are not only discourse in the sense that the gamer makes sense of the fiction and the meanings of and in them, but games provide them with a projection screen to make meaning of the real world. Games are, as mentioned numerous times in the chapters above, catalysts, reflections, projection, opportunities and choices for the gamers. Gamers can make use of games to make meaning of the world as such, to find out who they are, what they would want to be but also what they can become (e.g. RPGs or simulations). Games show the innermost mechanisms of society and social life as such because they are imbedded in them. They are a product which provide a discourse made by inhabitants of the real world and not of a fictional world. That makes them a very special discourse because they reflect but also alter other discourses. A reflection can only show something which exists somewhere already, an alteration requires a counterpart. Games as well as fictions cannot exist without the real world. The discourse of gaming requires the frame of the reality even if it is only as a contrast.

Finally, it has to be noted again that games and by that also computer games and MMORPGs are mass phenomena which provide rich experiences. They are pervasive, sophisticated and diverse. As discourse they allow a new level of interaction and participation other forms of media lack. The interaction refers not only to the interaction with the medium, the game as such or the digital medium, but also between the gamers. Gamers play together or against each other and

they exchange their experiences. Computer games and MMORPGs provide perfect examples of taking the experience out of the magic circle and the virtual world into other areas like message boards, magazines, comics and cons¹⁸. Gaming is participatory culture and hence these discourses are not just deriving meanings but creating and altering them. This makes these discourses so special compared to conventional discourses. They frame specific aspects of a globalized society and allow insights into interaction and in particular positioning.

¹⁸ Cons (conventions) are meetings or gatherings of fans to exchange about their hobby. Amongst the most famous and professional cons are the ComicCon for comic fans, BlizzCon the convention held by Blizzard Entertainment to promote their franchise, and many other conventions.

Intersection: The survey

This intersection allows to shift the view from a theoretical approach to a practical one and prepares the ground for discussing the linguistic realizations and practices of the MMORPG discourse. There are several practices and aspects of language which are made use of in MMORPGs. My argument is that each of them are used to position oneself in conversations. The paramount use of the linguistic choices made by gamers are in order to position themselves in interactions with other gamers for different reasons and goals. However, in order to research the language use and the gaming discourse data is needed. The following chapter (6) describes the survey carried out in order to gather data for this thesis.

6. The survey

It is not enough to research a topic or look into a matter only by reviewing literature but rather by using a hands-on approach and actively researching a speech community. It is essential to remember that researching culture and language

“[...] involves first and foremost field work, including observing, asking questions, participating in group activities, and testing the validity of one's perceptions against the intuitions of natives” (Saville-Troike 2003: 3)

even if one is a native in the language.

As a preparation for the following chapters, this chapter specifies the data used in this thesis. It discusses which data sets were used, how the data was gathered and which methods were used to analyze it. Since three different types of data were used in this thesis, they are dealt with in detail in the following of this chapter. Especially, the online survey is elaborated on. Furthermore, there is a chapter which discusses data considerations. It also addresses known disadvantages and weaknesses of the used methods and approaches as well as deals with the topic of objectivity, realism and truth. Finally a summary of the results of the raw data in form of a statistical report and a brief analysis of them is given. However, the results of the questionnaire part devoted to language usage and use are treated in the next section. These

results are interwoven into the discussion of the language used in MMORPGs. Therefore, the results of this subsection only deal with the gamer profiles and gaming behavior of the participants.

6.1 Research settings and data sets

At the beginning of the data collection process, research questions or rather question clusters arose. How do gamers of MMORPGs use language? How do they use stylistic features? Does politeness exist in MMORPGs? How are all these aspects used to position oneself in conversation. It would be dishonest to claim that there were no hypotheses before conducting the survey setup for the thesis. Although, handbooks for ethnographers and researchers in general call for openness, objectivity and not presupposing anything (see Bell 2006: 16-19; see also Saville-Troike 2003: 3), one is not an empty sheet of paper before starting out with research. There are certain hypotheses and beliefs one has when starting to research in an area. These are certainly in flux during research. Researching is in that sense like a journey. It might be fitting to quote here from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*: "It's a dangerous business [...] going out of the door[...] [y]ou step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to." (Tolkien 2001: 72). In research it is similar, one starts out with one research question but while researching the questions and foci alter and change, and in the end one might face completely different questions.

It was my master thesis on the language used in Internet communication situations which led me to gaming and language usage in MMORPGs. When I started out designing my PhD thesis project I shifted my focus on pragmatic issues. How do gamers use language? What do they want to say when they use certain language? At the beginning this led me to the hypothesis that the anonymity in MMORPGs causes gamers to loose their inhibitions and, therefore that gamers are impolite per se. Negative forms of play like flaming, trolling, ganking and griefing seemed to confirm my hypothesis. But just like Tolkien's character Bilbo discovered that leaving home is a dangerous business, I found out that the focus of research and hypotheses are similarly subject to change.

This research started out by asking how gamers of MMORPGs speak, how they use linguistic features and if there is politeness in the worlds of Azeroth, Middle Earth or Star Wars. During the research the focus shifted to the question of how gamers position themselves in conversations and how they use certain features and strategies to do so, including stylistic features and politeness strategies. But as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter such questions cannot be answered by lucubration of books and studies by other scholars, especially when there are no accounts of these questions in books on MMORPGs, computer games or language usage. Therefore, it was necessary to collect data. For this thesis three different data sources were used.

The first approach used in order to collect data is introspection. In introspection the researcher is a member of the speech community researched. Thus the difference from the participant-observation method is that the researcher does not research “others” but his or her own culture and speech community. A similarity between participant-observation and introspection is that the researcher participates in group activities and “is [...]able to test hypotheses about rules for communication, sometimes by breaking them and observing or eliciting reactions” (Saville-Troike 2003: 97). The advantage of introspection compared to participant-observation is that the researcher is not a stranger or outsider and does not need to struggle with building relationships and winning the trust of the speakers (see Saville-Troike 2003: 96-98).

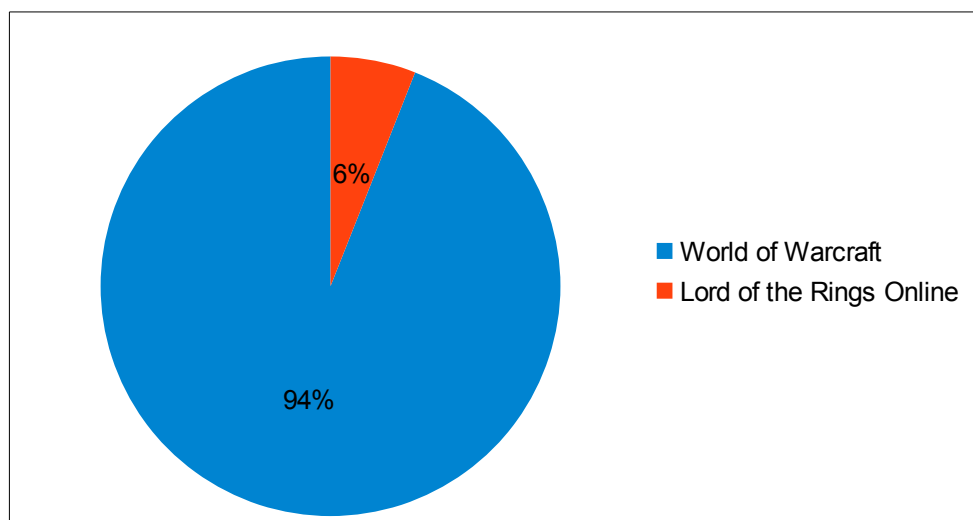
As a gamer of computer games and of MMORPGs I have insights into the culture, history, language use and usage as well as behavior of the speech community of gamers. While other researchers have to tediously learn and research about cultural and linguistic tokens in the speech community, I have this knowledge as I have been acculturated in this community. I know what is meant when a *World of Warcraft*® gamer refers to Leroy Jenkins or Hogger. While other researchers possibly would cast aside utterances as typing mistakes like *di af*, I understand this utterance as acronym for *die in a fire*.

The data collected through introspection was structured using a critical incidents log in which incidents of interest for the research were recorded (see Bell 2006: 186-194). This log includes as much information as available on the involved speakers, the background of the incident, the nature of contributions as well as

the interaction. These critical incident logs very often include discussions, arguments, role-playing events or private chatting from ingame communication as chat-logs and private messages as well as messages from message-boards.

I follow a qualitative heuristic approach while researching, observing and discovering language usage of gamers. In particular the core rule to this methodology is to remain open to the research subject, this is also crucial in my research. This type of observed data gives not only information of the used language from an insider perspective but also provides authentic examples of real language usage compared to other approaches which use artificial examples. Clearly, there are disadvantages to this approach. One of the problems of this approach is certainly that the researcher runs the risk of overlooking tokens and incidents as he or she is too involved in the processes. Distance is missing in this approach. The issue of objectivity is discussed later on, however, it should be mentioned here that I am aware of the weaknesses of this approach.

The second data source is a self-compiled corpus of communication ingame as well as outside of the game. The ingame communication data refers to log-files taken while being in the game. Since most game developers allow taking log-files while playing, the recording happens automatically and simultaneously while gaming. If no automatic recording device was provided by the game developers, a gamer-made modification (mod) was used. All in all, log-files of 1776 hours of communication were taken in games, primarily in *World of Warcraft*® and *Lord of the Rings Online*®. As can be seen in the graphic below 106,56 hours equaling 6 percent of the corpus come from *Lord of the Rings Online*® log-files and 1669,44 hours equaling 94 percent come from *World of Warcraft*®.



Graphic 1: apportionment of the corpus log-files by game in percentage

Furthermore, the corpus consists of communication from official game message-boards and official game websites. Whole message-board discussion threads as well as website texts and comments by users were saved. Summed up, the data collected from outside the game equates 300.000 characters. However, it has to be mentioned that these numbers have to be taken with caution as they include for example also the names of the persons posting on the message-board and signatures of these persons in repetition.

The observed and qualitative data was analyzed using grounded theory. Hayes gives a concise description of what grounded theory means and how it is applied:

“The process of conducting grounded theory research isn't just a matter of looking at the data and developing a theory from it. Instead, it is what researchers call an **iterative** process – that is, a cyclical process in which theoretical insights emerge of are discovered in the data, those insights are then tested to see how they can make sense of other parts of the data, which in turn produce their own theoretical insights, which are then tested again against the data, and so on.”
(Hayes 2000: 184)

This approach allows context-specific observations in certain situations. However, the corpus does not only provide examples of real and contextualized language in use but also allows testing hypotheses. At this point I want to stress that the corpus is used in order to provide illustrative examples and to test hypotheses and findings of the questionnaire. While it would possibly be

worthwhile to analyze the corpus in a quantitative way, this was not done in this thesis but rather a hermeneutic approach used. Instead of using the corpus as a source for more numerical output, it is used as a vivid repository of language in use.

The corpus includes several text types and genres ranging from conversations, discussions, role-playing events, stories, news and advertisements (for example ingame advertisements and trade offers). This range of text types also offers different domains and language styles. While official news on the official game website are written in informative style, a story by a gamer posted on a message-board allows insights on prosaic language usage. Similarly, ingame language ranges in styles, hence, the corpus includes short, telegraphic style, elaborated role-playing language, as well as colloquial chit-chat.

It is important to mention that while many grounded theory researchers use specific computer software to find categories and develop theories, this was not the case in this thesis. Rather than categorizing and labeling, meanings and usage were analyzed using tools and theories of pragmatics including different frameworks and concepts of conversation analysis and politeness theory. These frameworks were adapted, altered and refined to fit the medium and situation of MMORPGs. However, a more detailed account on the frameworks and theories of linguistics and in particular pragmatics is given in the next section on the linguistic perspective in particular in chapter (10) where they are discussed, applied, altered and exemplified by the data collected.

The third data source is a questionnaire. To be precise, it is an online questionnaire which can be called a self-selected survey as the participants decided themselves to partake in the survey. This also means that there was no artificial sampling used. It was set no great store by selecting participants based on their age, gender or nationality. These characteristics were not the focus of this study. Rather than limiting the number of participants and the variation of the results, the self-selected survey is based on the free choice of the participants to be part of the survey.

The details about how the survey was carried out is treated in detail later in chapter 6.3. But to anticipate the structure of the questionnaire it should be said that it consists of three parts the gamer profile, the gaming behavior and the language behavior. All in all the questionnaire was made up of 50 questions including rating questions and open questions.

The questionnaire provides elicited data and therefore information on the perception of the gamers. It is important to keep in mind, that a questionnaire with questions about behavior, state, orientation and opinion can never give a fixed truth but only impressions on perception. The gathered data has to be treated with care as perception is always a matter of subjectivity and closely related to how people want to be seen by others. Yet, through subtle questions and by comparing the received data to the data of the other sources interesting findings were made.

While the questionnaire provides quantitative and elicited data, the corpus offers qualitative and the introspection observed data. These data sources cover a wide range of data types and allow a more precise treatment of the research topic. The introspection allows statements about the used language from an insider perspective and offers background and historical information. The corpus provides insights into real language usage, while the questionnaire offers elicited, perceptual information about the language used by the gamers. The self-compiled corpus provides a complementation to the elicited data of the questionnaire. This mixture of data sources and data types allows a more authentic account of what the linguistic “reality” in MMORPGs is like. The several data types allow cross-checking hypotheses which are made in one data source. Furthermore, the collected data allows describing, structuring, categorizing, particularizing and to some extent generalizing language usage, communicative behavior and positioning strategies. The following table sums up the data sources, data types, the outcome and the methods used to analyze the data of the thesis.

Data source/approach	Data type	Outcome	Analysis method
introspection	qualitative, observed data, insider information	critical incident log, examples of language use	qualitative heuristic approach
corpus	qualitative, observed data	log-files, examples of language use	grounded theory, hermeneutic approach, pragmatic frameworks
online questionnaire	quantitative, elicited data	statistics, examples of language use	statistical evaluation, pragmatic frameworks

Table 3: summary data sources

So far the advantages of the used data sources were discussed. However, there are always also downsides to an approach and disadvantages which have to be taken into consideration which is done in the following chapter.

6.2 Data considerations

There is no data collection method or approach which is one hundred percent perfect. Every method has its downsides and problems. This does not necessarily need to be a negative aspect as long as one is aware of certain shortcomings.

One of the major shortcomings and dangers in researching using ethnographic approaches like introspection or grounded theory, but also when compiling a questionnaire, is bias. The danger to be biased and not objective enough to research and analyze data is said to be the biggest disadvantage of these approaches. When using introspection one is always in danger of overlooking behaviors or other findings because one is too involved in the researched group. Negative aspects of the respective group could be ignored because the researcher, who is also a member of the particular community, might not want the community to appear in bad light. Objectivity is also necessary when compiling and analyzing a corpus. As researcher one should not try to be led by subjectivity and it is clear that one should be open to the data even or especially

when it disproves hypotheses. Similarly, compiling questionnaires is criticized as being subject to bias since imprecision and leading questions can distort results.

It is clear that objectivity is a virtue researchers strive for. Yet, one has to consider that there is no complete subjectivity. As Droysen (1977: 10), a German historian, said there can be no objectivity when humans research. Humans are never completely objective. As soon as one makes a choice, objectivity is already blurred. Even though Droysen spoke of objectivity in history and historical sciences his view can be adapted to every kind of research, namely that one should not attempt to research something completely objective or in its completeness since this would be in vain. Rather one should use sciences and research to deepen, broaden, correct and amend findings (Droysen 1977: 27).

There is however one claim by Droysen which is wrong, that the essence of science is to search and find truth (Droysen 1977: 27). There is nothing as one truth, one reality or complete precision in research. To quote Karl Popper (1976: 24): "The quest for precision is analogous to the quest for certainty, and both should be abandoned." Clearly, it would be convenient if there was one answer to a question especially in research. But as soon as individuals are involved, all researchers can do is provide snapshots of moments. What can be done is making several snapshots over and over again which can be put together into a collage which shows a blurred version of a reality. Gödel (as quoted in Horgan 1997: 238) is often quoted to have said that nothing can be proven. Hence, researchers should depart from the belief to find truth, discover what a language is *like* and especially make generalizations. If researchers are aware that what they research is always to some extent subjective and only a snapshot of a moment in time, the results can be used to broaden one's horizon.

Another consideration about the data is the sampling for the questionnaire. As the questionnaire was a self-selected survey one could argue that not all MMORPG gamers had knowledge of the questionnaire and that only people with certain preconditions had filled it in. Such preconditions could be that only hard-core players filled in the questionnaire or only gamers with enough knowledge and skills of other Internet technology (e.g. using message-boards,

surfing the Internet). Moreover, the small sample size (324) could be criticized. However, it is impossible to question every single MMORPG gamer on this planet. The possibility to force every gamer to fill in a questionnaire using a co-operation with the game developers was excluded by me. It is always better to have people fill in a questionnaire voluntarily because they are interested in the topic rather than forcing them to do so. A mandatory questionnaire could have influenced the results to that effect that participants would fill in random answers just to be done with the task.

Researchers are neither omnipotent nor omniscient. One cannot force everyone to fill in a questionnaire just to have complete representativeness. It is also unclear in how far a survey can provide complete representativeness as it only provides the opinion and data of the participants at that moment in time. The gamer, who filled in to be unemployed could be employed tomorrow. Neither can one be completely sure if what the participants filled in is the *truth*. A researcher is reliant on the fidelity of the participants when using questionnaires. If one keeps in mind the weaknesses of questionnaires which also include the already mentioned problems of participants' perception and how they want to be perceived, the results can be fruitful. The results have to be taken with a pinch of salt and compared to the findings of the other data sets to rule weaknesses out.

It goes without, saying that bias and strong subjectivity should be avoided in research. This was attempted in the data collection for this thesis. 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 real effigy. This research was done in all conscience and with knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches and methods used.

6.3 Carrying out the online-survey

The online questionnaire was designed using the open source online survey application LimeSurvey. This application allows the creation of online questionnaires by using or modifying ready-made templates. The questionnaire which I designed for the data collection consisted of three question sets with a total of 50 questions (for the full questionnaire see appendix A). The question sets are concerned with the gamer profile, the gaming behavior and the language behavior of the participants. Each of the question sets includes several question types to ensure a balance in the answers. The first question set, the gamer profile, and the second, the gaming behavior, require the participants to fill in category questions, lists and quantity questions. In the category questions the participants are provided with certain categories to choose from, this is used for example when eliciting personal data like the age of the gamer. Ready-made lists are used to gather information about the MMORPG played by the gamers, the country of origin, the native-language and other languages spoken by the participants. In order to elicit the amount the participants play a quantity question is used.

Scale questions are used throughout the questionnaire in order to allow the participants to rate the use of stylistic features or attitude towards a statement according to a five point scale or four point scale. Questions about the use of a stylistic feature or a technical function provide the following point scale: not at all, not very often, occasionally, often and always. Scale questions are also used to let participants scale their attitude towards an example of the corpus. The scale included the following points: impolite/offending, inappropriate/awkward, appropriate and very polite. For expressing attitudes towards a statement like “do you react more positively to a polite request than to an impolite one ingame?”, the participants had the choice between strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. It is made sure that throughout the survey layout, the question and answer layout is consistent, for instance the most negative rating is always on the left and the most positive on the right. In most of the questions the participants are given the choice to give no answer

and options like “I do not use this function” or “I do not know this feature”. Clearly, there are also questions with only two options (yes or no) for example in the question if the participant is a member of a guild.

Besides using scale questions or as I refer to them in the following as rating questions, open questions are used to give the participants the chance to express their attitudes towards a question or subject in more detail. This question type is used in one of the main questions referred to as the wipe, which is analyzed in detail in chapter 18. The open questions do not only give insights into the perception and attitudes of the participants towards a topic but also into language usage. Many participants give examples of what and how they would reply to other gamers in the game in the open question format. Hence, certain stylistic features of MMORPG language can be observed in the answers of the participants. The open question format is especially used in the question set concerned with language behavior.

The questionnaire consists, as mentioned before of three question sets. The first question set allows the creation of a gamer profile by asking the participants about personal data including age, gender, country of origin, profession, native-languages, other languages spoken and which MMORPG they play.

In the second question set, the gaming behavior, is drafted by asking the participants how many hours they play per week, how they label themselves regarding gaming behavior (hardcore player, professional player, casual player), what type of playing they pursue (PvP, PvE, RP) and similar questions. The results of this data set is supposed to provide support when correlating language behavior and gaming behavior. A hypothesis here is that role-players in MMORPGs are more polite than gamers who prefer playing PvP.

The third question set, the language behavior, focuses on the language used by the participants. There are two foci in this question set stylistic features, like smileys, leet, acronyms, as well as politeness. The participants are asked to rate their use of stylistic features in certain communication situations like how often they use a smiley when whispering a stranger or when using the public chat-channels. They are asked to rate examples from the language corpus based on their attitudes concerning politeness. There is also an attempt to elicit

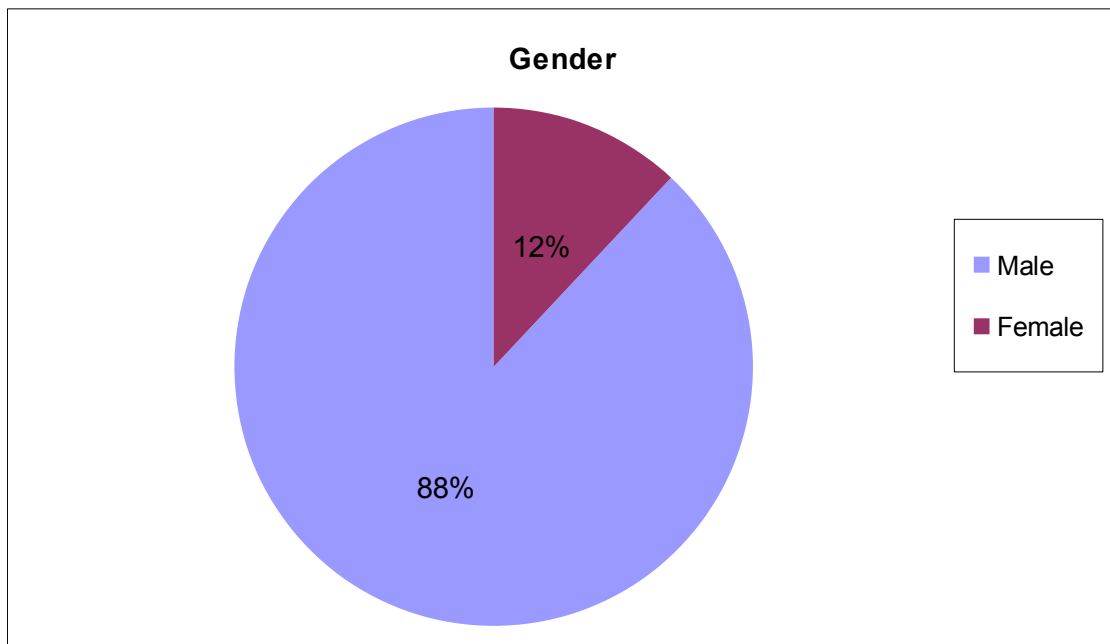
a correlation between language usage and positioning strategies concerning power relations. For example, if gamers react differently when talking to their guild-leader (see chapter 17).

The questionnaire was online from 1st June 2009 to 30th June 2009 on my university's homepage. The survey was propagated on the official message-boards of MMORPGs, on gamer-portal websites and by word of mouth advertising. It is a self-selected survey in which no artificial sampling is used. Whoever wanted to participate in the survey, filled in the questionnaire. This resulted in questionnaire answers which are earnest and detailed. In the following chapter the results of the raw data of the first two question sets are given. The results of the third question set (language behavior) are interwoven into the next section.

6.4 Raw data results and analysis

A total of 324 people completed the questionnaire.¹⁹ The first part of the questionnaire dealt with general questions and helped to create gamer profiles. From the 324 participants 285 (88%) are male and 39 (12%) are female. This unfortunately confirms other surveys which show that gaming is still to some extent a domain of men. While the result of the question concerning the gender of the gamers could be regarded as a confirmation that gaming is still a male domain, it also demonstrates a change in this domain. These 39 female gamers do not only illustrate that there are female gamers but also raises hope that the cliché of the male gaming domain is smoothed out.

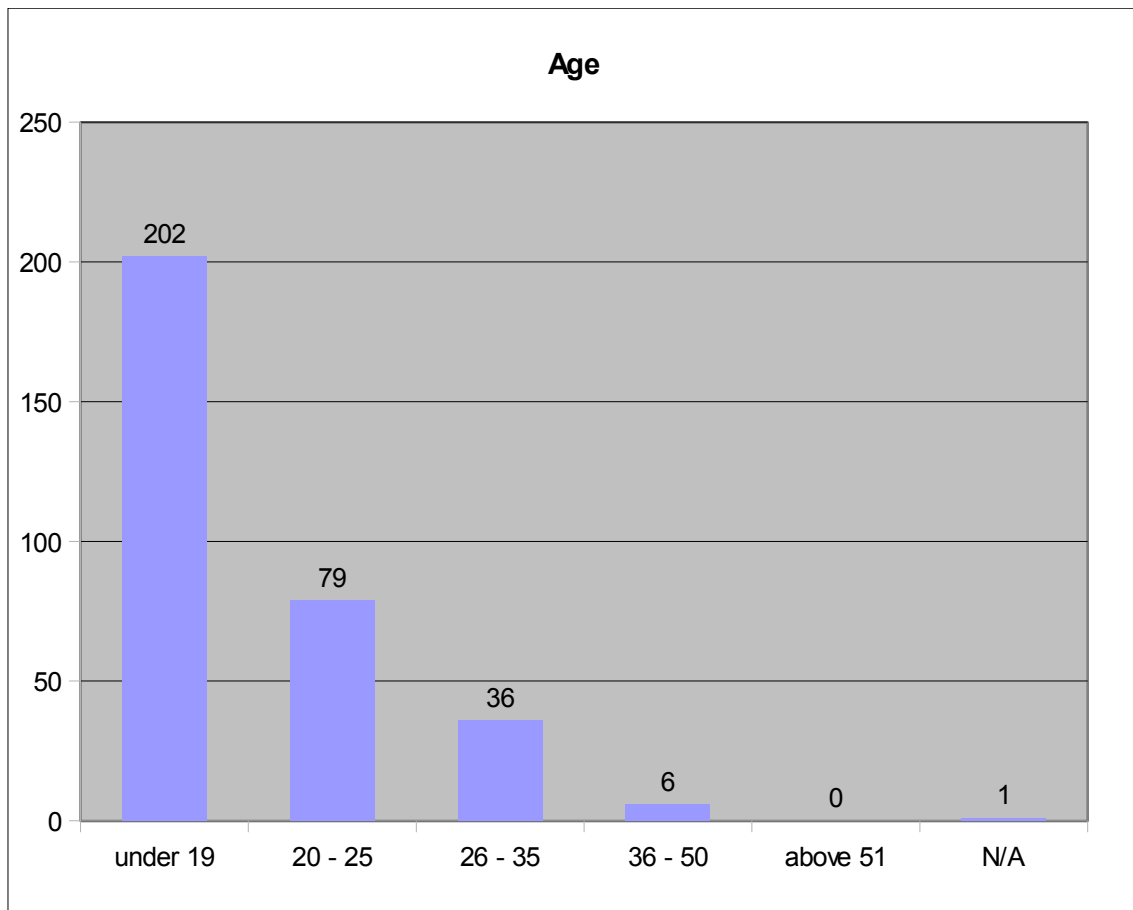
¹⁹ Parts of the results of the survey have been published in previous articles like Kramer (2010, 2013a, 2013b).



Graphic 2: participants by gender

Furthermore, more than half of the participants are under the age of 19, namely 202. The age group 20-25 is represented by 79 gamers and presents the second largest group of gamers questioned. Following this group is the age group 26-35 with 36 gamers. Only six gamers are between 36 and 50 years old and none are older than 51. There is also one gamer who did not give his or her age. The youngest gamer participating in the survey is 13, while the oldest is 41. The average age calculated is 20, the median 18.

Despite the fact that the total of gamers in the age groups 20-25 and 26-35 cannot keep up with the number of gamers in the age group under 19, the amount of gamers is still remarkable. The 36 gamers of the age group 26-35 and the 79 gamers of the group 20-25 show that gaming is not a phenomenon exclusive to children or teenagers.



Graphic 3: participants by age-groups

The question of country of origin offers an enormous range of answers including unexpected ones like Aland Island, Gibraltar, Malta, Israel, Singapore, Bangladesh and Tanzania. All in all, gamers from 42 different countries participated in the survey. Most participants come from the United Kingdom (88). The second largest group is Netherlands with 33 gamers. Other countries of origin named are Denmark (32), Sweden (27), Finland (20), Germany (20), Norway (17) and USA (15). Obviously, there is a majority of European gamers in this survey which could have to do with the separation of most MMORPGs in European and US servers and forums.

The results of the question about the profession of the participants mirrors to some extent the findings of the question about age. Since most participants are under 19, it is not really surprising that the vast majority of participants (213) are either pupils or students. However, it has to be mentioned that a wide range of studies by the participating university students are named including medical studies, humanities, technology and natural sciences. It is also worth noting,

that the word *student* is used differently by the participants. Some participants clearly use it meaning a pupil before A-levels, while others definitely use the same word to refer to undergraduate and higher education.

The second-largest group, with 27 participants, is the group of unemployed gamers. It is noteworthy that if all the other profession groups are summed up they present a larger group than the unemployed. This is interesting since a common stereotype of gamers is that they are unemployed, male gamers. The third-largest group is gamers working in the IT and media branch (24).

Remarkably, there are also two housewives and mothers among the gamers. Apart from that, the range of professions named by the participants is manifold including workers, employees, self-employed and even volunteers in social facilities. The common assumption of the public that gamers are loony, unemployed and addicted is not confirmed by the study. The gamer stereotype does not exist in the study as the results show that the participants come from a wide range of professional backgrounds and have social ties being family fathers or mothers, husbands or wives and play together not only with friends, siblings but also with their romantic partners.

The different nationalities of the gamers offer a wide range of native languages spoken by the participants. The question setup allowed the participants to enter more than one native language taking into account gamers who are bilingual or multilingual. This choice has proven as a good one as the results illustrate. The most spoken native language by the participants is English (126) which is not surprising as 88 gamers come from the United Kingdom and 15 from the USA. Many participants from no-dub countries like Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Finland also name English as mother tongue. Moreover, it comes as no surprise that the named native languages correspond to the named countries of origin. Therefore the sequence is similar: Dutch (41), Swedish (31), German (30), Danish (23), Finish (20), Norwegian (17). The question why there are for example more Dutch speaking gamers than gamers from the Netherlands can be explained by language minorities in the neighboring countries as well as migration.

There are native languages named by the participants which are particularly interesting like Afrikaans (3), Cantonese (1), Catalan (1), Hebrew (1), Hindi (1), Icelandic (3), Maltese (1), Mandarin (1), Sarnami (1), Tagalog (1) and Visayan (1). These languages also give insights into the multicultural and multilingual landscape of Europe but also of gaming in MMORPGs. In spite of the division of the world into regional gaming-servers and gaming areas, migration and globalization in real-life still allow European gamers to play together with gamers speaking languages which are not indigenous in Europe like Mandarin, Hindi, Tagalog and Visayan.

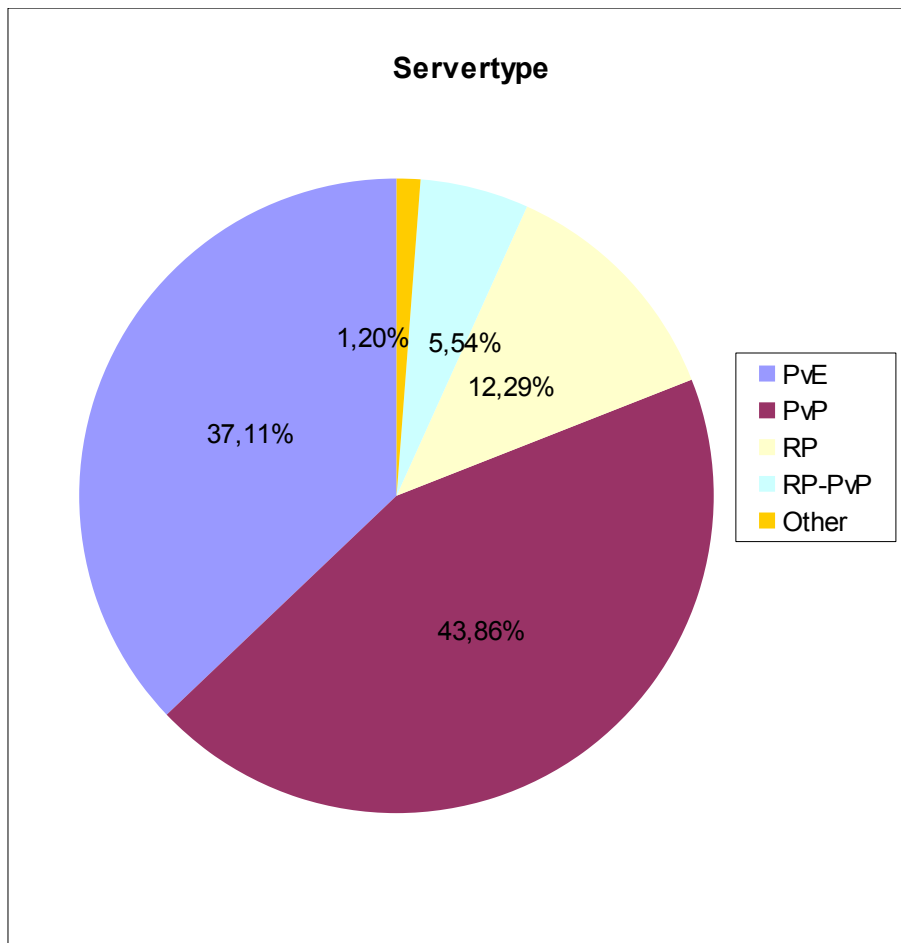
The participants are also asked if they are able to speak other languages besides their native languages. 252 gamers answered with yes to this question, 72 with no. The answers given include second languages and foreign languages as well as all sorts of proficiencies. Some gamers note that they have only school knowledge of a certain language, others mention that they are using the language constantly for work. Therefore, the results to this question are no claim according to the proficiency of the gamers in the respective languages. Not surprisingly, the most common second language is English with 197, as English is the most taught second language and used widely as a lingua franca nowadays for business, tourism, education and other areas. The notion of English as a lingua franca in the gaming context is discussed in more detail in a later chapter (12.1). It is very interesting that German is named 95-times and French only 75-times. This could have to do with the rather large amount of Scandinavian and Benelux gamers who learn German for economical reasons because of the proximity of Germany. The prominence of Swedish (38) could also be explained with the large amount of Scandinavian gamers. Other noteworthy answers are certain regional languages like Scottish, Farsi (Persian), Punjabi and Gaelic. It is also interesting that seven gamers mention Latin and one ancient Greek as spoken language. A quaintness worth mentioning is that one gamer named Quenya as a language spoken. This gamer is clearly a *Lord of the Rings Online*® gamer and it appears that the fictional language by Tolkien became second nature to him or her.

It comes as no surprise that most participants answer the question about which MMORPG they play most with *World of Warcraft*®. On one hand this has to do with the fact that *World of Warcraft*® is the most successful and most played MMORPG of the world at the moment. On the other hand it probably has to do with the large and helpful community of *World of Warcraft*® gamers who were eager to support me in my research. My plea on the general discussion forum of *World of Warcraft*® to fill in the questionnaire resulted in many useful and helpful replies by gamers of that community. I also posted the link to the survey on the *Lord of the Rings Online*® forum where I was also received kindly but the feedback was clearly less compared to *World of Warcraft*®. Far behind *World of Warcraft*® with 269, comes *Lord of the Rings Online*® with 29 participants. *City of villain/heroes* (9) and *Warhammer Online* (4) have to be mentioned as answers as well. The answer option 'other' is made use of 8 times. This can be explained by the large amount of MMORPGs today and the impossibility to offer every game as answer option. Amongst the eight other MMORPGs mentioned are *Final Fantasy XI*, *Runes of Magic*, *Anarchy Online* and *Guild Wars*.

Most MMORPGs divide the world into regions and offer gaming servers for their games in these geographical areas. Therefore, most gamers are forced to play a MMORPG in the regional area and on the regional servers the game designers have created. Normally, there are three to four areas: Europe, USA, Asia and sometimes Pacific. The borders between these areas can be different from game to game. Most participants of my survey are gamers from European servers (303). 18 gamers are from US-servers, one from an Asian server and two choose other and explained that their game does not appear to differ between geographical regions.

When it comes to the server type, referring to the gaming focus of the server (see 4.1), the answers are very clear. PvP (Player versus Player) is chosen by 43,86 percent of the gamers, closely followed by PvE (Player versus environment) chosen by 37,11 percent. Role-playing-servers (RP) appear to be less popular and are only named by 12,29 percent of the gamers as being played on. The combination RP-PvP is only picked by 5,54 percent of the participants. 1,20 percent of the participating gamers picked other and named

certain other combinations of servers types like PvE-PvP and similar. Therefore, the majority of the participators either focus on questing, raiding and dungeon runs (PvE) or on competing and killing other players (PvP).



Graphic 4: server-types played on by the participants in percentage

The question about the official server language, this means the language which is spoken on the server also by the gamemasters, results in a clear majority of English as server language (291). Only 27 of the participants are from German language servers, one from French, two from Spanish, one from Mandarin and two choose other. These two gamers note that their game does not have any official server language. These results illustrate that most of the participating gamers have to use English to communicate in the game even though it is not necessary their mother tongue. The notion of English as a lingua franca in MMORPGs is, as mentioned before, returned to in chapter 12.1.

From the 324 participants 289 are guild members and 35 are in no guild. The majority of the gamers claim that their guild colleagues do not speak the same language (182). 99 gamers state that their guild colleagues do speak the same

language. The language used most in guilds is English (242) followed by German (24). The 24 German guilds are easily explained by the possibility to play on German language servers. The other answers show, however, that it is not unusual that friends or gamers from the same country or language background team together and form a guild even on English language servers. When asked if the participants use more than one language in the game, 173 answer with yes and 151 with no. The 151 gamers who use only one language ingame use the following languages: English (135), German (14), Mandarin (1), French (1). The gamers who answer the question with yes are asked in more detail which language they use in certain situations. It comes as no surprise that the range of answers for the situation “playing with their friends” is wider than for other situations like “playing with strangers”. Still English is the most spoken language when playing with friends (86) followed by Dutch (31), Swedish (22), Finnish (18), German (16), Danish (15), and Norwegian (14). This also shows that playing MMORPGs is a very social activity where friends from different language backgrounds come together to play.

When it comes to the language used when playing in a group, this also includes random groups, the range of answers becomes smaller. English is again the most given answer (162), followed by German (11). The other answers are insignificant. When asking which language is used to make statements in public for example in the general chat-channels in the game the majority picks English (161), 13 German and a handful of gamers answer with Dutch (1), Romanian (2), Spanish (2), Italian (1), Finnish (1) and Afrikaans (1).

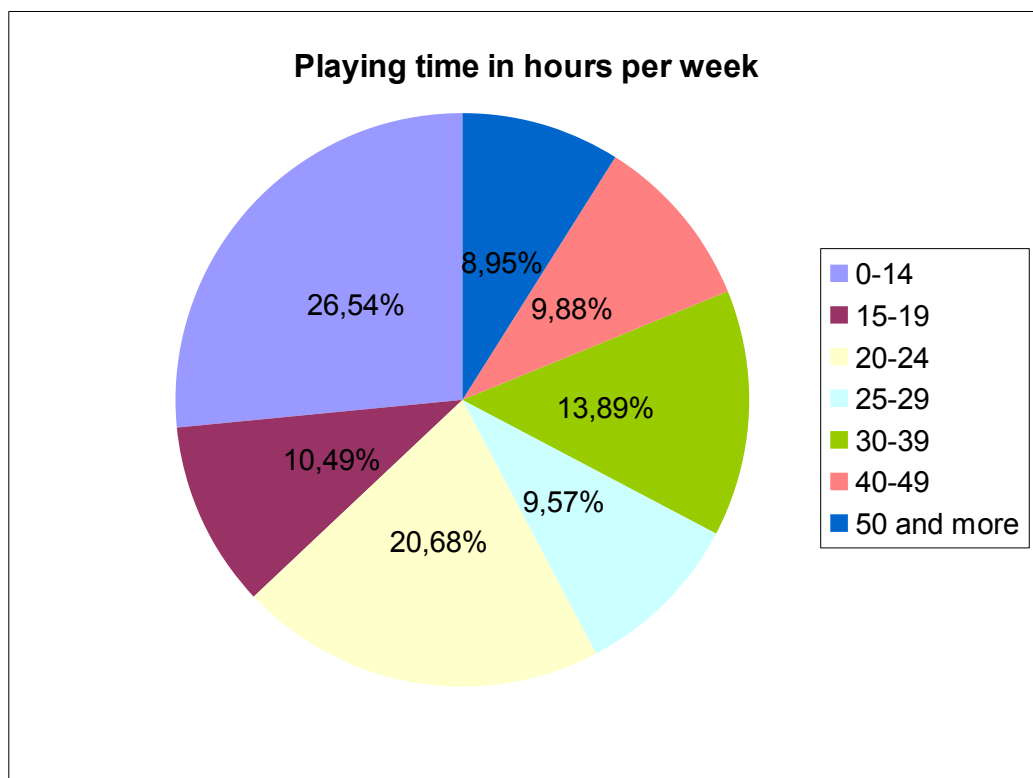
The question about the language used in larger groups (raids) shows that again English is the major choice (159) but also that there are many raid guilds and raid connections based on nation or language. Other answers to this question include German (12), Bulgarian (1), Swedish (1), Spanish (2), Italian (1), Finnish (2), Portuguese (1) and Greek (1).

Another interesting question is what communication channels the gamers use in their guilds. The question allows multiple answers. The most used communication channel is VoIP (Voice over IP)(221), followed by websites (201), message-boards (194), ingame chat (189), chat-room (31), mailinglist (4), newsletter (3) and other (3). The three other answers include facebook, real-life

meetings and RSS-feeds. It is common that a raid guild requires the players to use VoIP in order to be as efficient as possible in their undertakings. The use of websites includes also the use of schedules and calendar tools to plan events and raids. This range of communication illustrates that gaming in MMORPGs is not only about playing but also about socializing and organizing.

The results of the first part of the survey, the gamer profile, show that there is no stereotypical gamer. There is a wide range of age, profession and languages. Clearly, there are certain trends which can be seen. For example, that the majority of the participants are male and that English is widely used or that the majority of the gamers play *World of Warcraft*®. Yet, the gamer profile results allow the conclusion that there are many different gamers. The loony, unemployed, male gamer with no social ties does not exist in the survey. Just like Yee's findings (2006a), the results of my study show that the participants enjoy playing and spending time together with others in the game.

The second part of the questionnaire focuses on the gaming behavior of the participants. The first question asks about the estimated playing time per week. It has to be mentioned that the given answers can be inaccurate because gamers often perceive their playing experience differently than it really is.



Graphic 5: playing time of the participants in hours per week

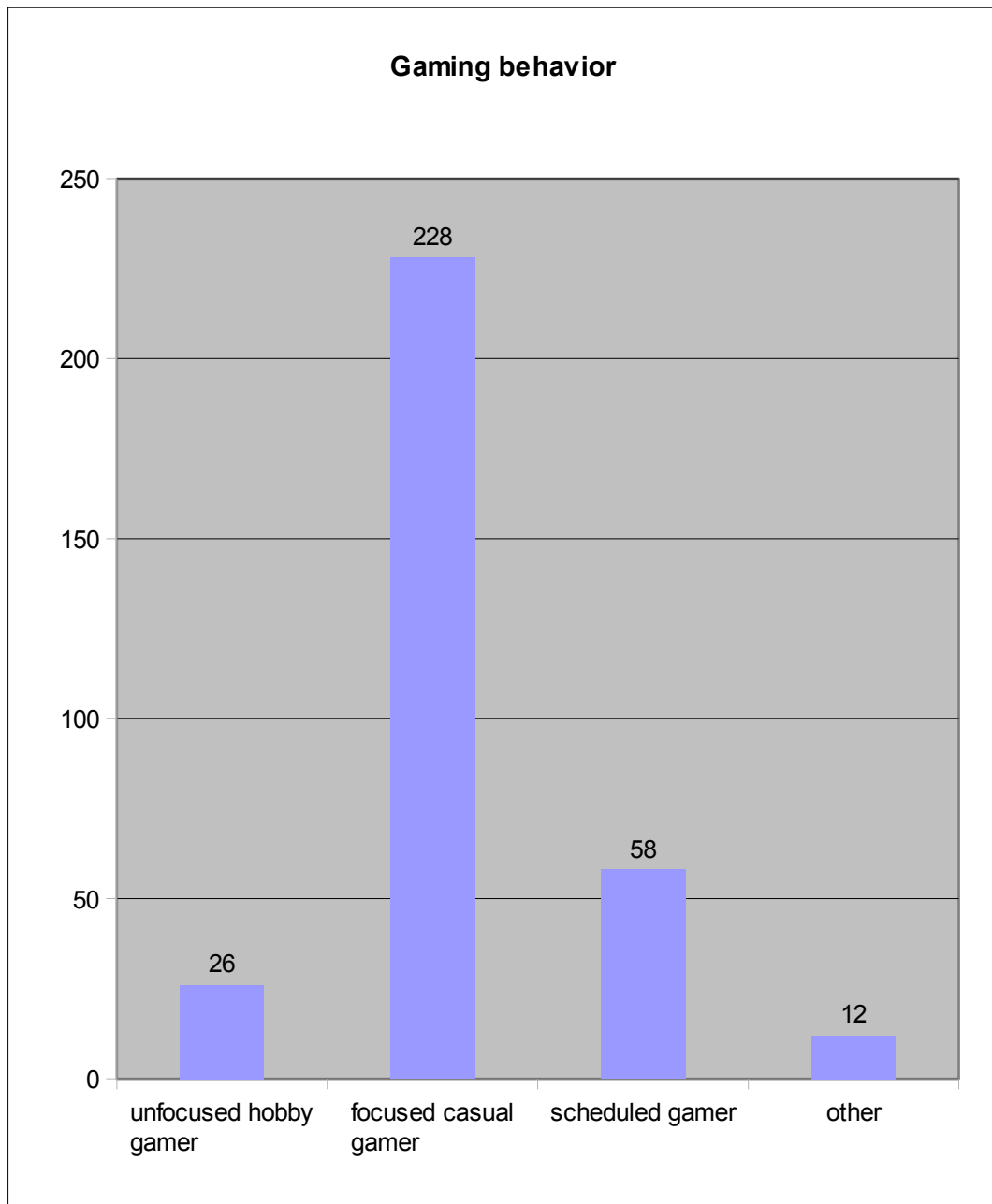
The average playing time of the gamers is 25, the median is 20 hours per week. Most of the gamers (26,54%) belong to the category of zero to 14 gaming hours per week, followed by players who play 20-24 hours per week (20,68%). Gamers playing 30 to 39 hours per week rank on third place with about 13,89%. The categories 15 to 19 hours (10,49%), 25 to 29 hours (9,57%) and 40 to 49 hours (9,88%) are almost equally chosen by the participants. The top playing time 50 hours and more is only chosen by 8,95% which is still remarkable. These results show to some extent that the perception of the public concerning MMORPG gamers is not accurate. The majority of the participants play less than 15 hours a week. This seems comparable to any other hobby including sports, reading or playing a musical instrument.

Many questionnaires equalize playing time, gaming style and gaming behavior of gamers. The fact that someone plays 50 hours per week does not necessarily mean that he or she is a good player, nor that he or she is a focused player. There are gamers who spend many hours online but do not play but chat, sell items or watch the auction house in order to make a good bargain.

The question about gaming style should provide a glimpse at the self-perception of the gamer's skills. How good do they play? The answers are certainly very subjective and strongly bound to one's self-perception but also to the community and its convention. Who would admit to be a newbie? Interestingly, five participants actually claim to be beginners. The majority (170) state to be professional and 149 participants are humble and claim to be amateurs. It is worth mentioning that four of the five beginners are female. This could have to do with the still predominant belief in our society that women do not play computer games and if they do, they are not as good as men. One could also argue that this exemplifies the cliché of women lacking self-esteem, while men are more self-conscious. Yet, it has to be noted that of the 39 female participants 23 state to be amateurs and 12 to be professional. These results show that the mentioned misconception of the humble and not that skilled female gamer is starting to crumble and change.

Other questionnaires equal professional gamers with raiders (gamers who predominantly participate in raids) which is an oversimplification. There are very skilled gamers who prefer playing in smaller groups and there are also less

skilled gamers who join raids. Therefore, another question setup is used in the questionnaire. The question offers the following answers: unfocused hobby gamer, focused casual gamer and scheduled gamer. Unfocused hobby gamer means that the gamer does not follow any specific aims in the game. Focused casual gamer refers to a gamer who follows aims but does not force himself or herself to play. Scheduled gamer means that a gamer plays with a certain schedule (e.g. raid schedule) no matter if he or she feels like it or not. The definitions to the answers are listed in the questionnaire so that the participants know what is meant by the terms. There is also the possibility to choose “other” and type an own definition. Surprisingly, the majority, 228 gamers, state to be focused casual gamers. Since especially the content of *World of Warcraft*® focused, during the time the survey was conducted, more and more on raiding content which requires scheduled play, it is certainly a surprise to see that so many gamers pick focused casual gamer. I expected to see the trend of raids being reflected by a large number of scheduled gamers in the survey. 58 of the participants are scheduled gamers and only 26 are unfocused hobby gamers. 12 participants make use of the other option and offer detailed explanations how they fit into more than one category.



Graphic 6: gaming behavior of the participants

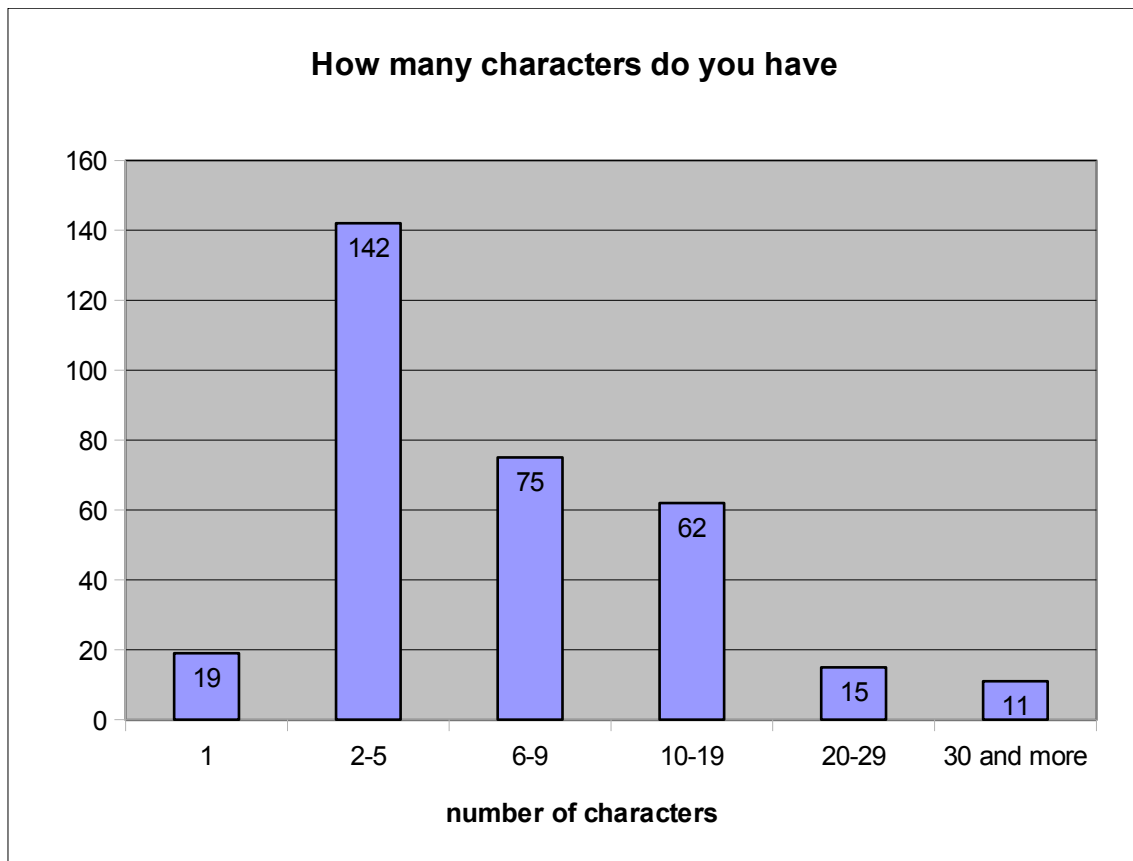
Even though the server-types were already mentioned before, gaming styles like player versus player or role-playing are not necessarily bound to the server. People playing on role-playing servers also do PvP. Hence, the participants are asked to rate the playing styles according to their use of them. The results to this question show how the focus of MMORPGs shifted from role-playing to other aspects like PvE especially questing, dungeons and raids as well as PvP. The name giving gaming style for MMORPGs role-playing, is the playing style most frequently labeled as not played at all (139). PvE focusing on questing is pursued by 119 participants always and often. 132 participants often visit

instances (dungeons). While the majority of the participants use the PvE playing styles always or often, PvP is a playing style which is mainly used occasionally by the participants. 89 participants occasionally do open PvP, 83 join battlegrounds (BG) and 61 practice arena or team PvP. The following table summarizes the results to this question.

	role-playing	PvP (BG)	PvP (team/arena)	PvP (other/open)	PvE (quest)	PvE (instance)	PvE (raid)
not at all	139	21	92	47	1	4	33
not very often	85	60	83	94	27	34	49
occasionally	43	83	61	89	56	67	67
often	28	113	47	64	119	132	71
always	22	38	34	24	119	85	101
I dont know this gaming type	3	0	2	2	0	0	1
no answer	4	9	5	4	2	2	2

Table 4: playing style of the participants

Another question asked is how many characters a gamer has. The majority of participants claim to have between two and five characters (142). The second largest group is the category of six to nine characters which is picked by 75 participants followed by 10 to 19 characters chosen by 62 participants. Only 19 participants claim to have only one character. 15 gamers have between 20 and 29 characters and still 11 state to have more than 30 characters. The average number of characters is 8, the median 6.



Graphic 7: number of characters of the participants

Certainly, there is a difference in having created a character and playing it. Therefore the participants who state to have more than one character are asked how many of these characters they play frequently. The narrow majority of the participants claim to play two of their characters frequently (92), followed by three characters played (88). 69 gamers assert to play only with one character. Five to nine characters are played by 31 gamers. Four characters are only played by 19 gamers and still six gamers play with more than 10 characters frequently.

Another interesting question is to find out if the gamers have characters for certain activities. One could have for example a certain character only for raiding and another one for role-playing. 105 participants agree with this and state that they have characters for certain activities, while 200 claim that they do not differentiate between their characters.²⁰

²⁰ 19 participants do not answer this question

The 105 participants who do have characters for certain activities are asked whether these characters also differ in their use of language. 68 of the gamers disagree with this statement while 37 agree. The 37 gamers are furthermore asked if they could state how their characters differ in the language used. Since their answers are very detailed and contain several notions the answers are categorized and treated as multiple-choice question. 27 note that the language choice of their characters is connected to the server type they are playing on. Six claim that it depends on the language they use while gaming, if it is their native language or a second language. Five gamers mention that the race of the character is an important aspect concerning language choice, while three state that the character's class influences the language. This notion of differing language based on role-playing is deepened in chapter 16. It is interesting that one gamer mentions that he or she has characters for socializing and, therefore, the language of these characters is more casual.

The results of this part of the questionnaire also show that the stereotypes of MMORPG gamers cannot be confirmed by this study. A common stereotype is the addicted gamer who spends almost 24 hours a day online playing in a hardcore, professional and scheduled way. However, the results illustrate that most of the gamers are rather casual gamers who regard themselves either as amateurs or professionals but do not play the whole day. Furthermore, some participants underline the social aspect of gaming and mention that they come online in order to meet their friends and chat with them instead of gaming actively. This illustrates that playing MMORPGs does not mean the same to every gamer but can take on different shapes. Some gamers socialize ingame while others enjoy role-playing or completing quests and tasks in the game.

The results of the questionnaire illustrate, so far, that the common cliches of the gamer are not existing in this survey. Gamers are not lonely, unsocial, addicted (teenage) males but humans of both gender who have social ties, family background and come from a wide range of professional backgrounds. But not only the gamers provide different facets of personal background but also their gaming behavior is varied and includes many different styles of playing.

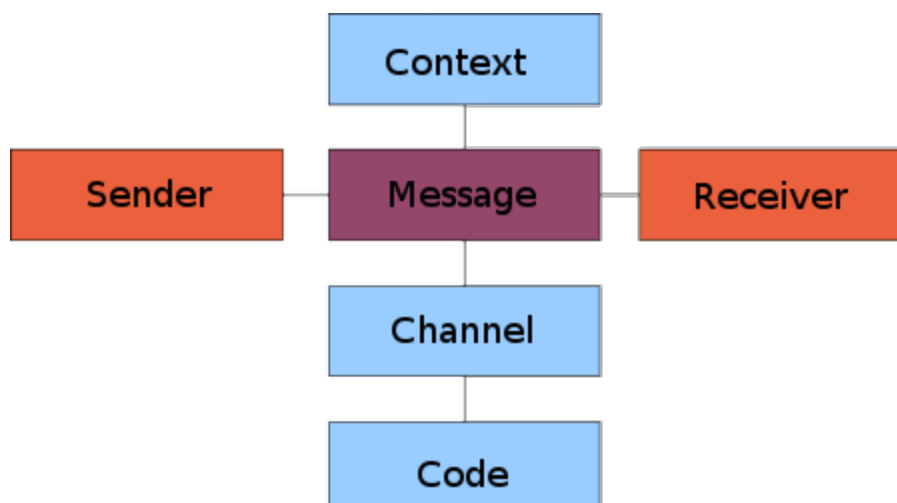
The results of the third question set, the language behavior, are not listed and analyzed like the previous ones, instead the results are interwoven into the next section on the linguistic perspective. This allows going into detail when linking pragmatic theories and discourse analysis to the results of the questionnaire and the corpus. It further allows to dwell on and develop the notion of positioning in communication by means of linguistic features and communicative strategies.

Section II: MMORPGs: playing the game

After moving from theory to practice in the gaming discourse, the following chapter (7) concerns itself with the linguistic practices of the language used in MMORPGs. Throughout the thesis the strong interconnection between gaming and language is highlighted. This interplay in which language informs gaming and the game informs language and its usage has to be kept in mind in the following section as well. The same relationship can be seen in regards to culture and language, whereas language shapes culture and is an expression of it but at the same time cultural tokens influence the way language is used. Similar to the complexity of gaming and their mechanics, the mechanisms of the used language are strongly connected and complex which makes separate discussions of them difficult. Yet, a thesis and writing in general is linear and therefore a certain sequence has to be established. The structure of the following chapter is an attempt to create a linear sequence while paying attention to the interconnection of the topics. The wide range of language use in MMORPGs is shown by discussing not only obvious linguistic choices like stylistic features, but also politeness strategies, turn-taking, ceremonies and ritualized behaviors which can be linguistically but also paralinguistically expressed. Each of the chapters offers insights into the pervasive practice of positioning in conversations.

7. MMORPGs as speech event

How should one attempt to discuss language use and usage as well as positioning in any language without getting entangled in interconnections and relations between aspects? Looking back into the history of linguistics and language philosophy provides solutions to this problem. Jakobson, who was influenced to a large extent by Bühler's Organon-model, offers an attempt to structure communication and its functions. According to Jakobson (1960) there are six factors which are present in all (verbal) communication: the sender (addresser), the context, the message (parole), the code (langue), the channel (contact) and the receiver (addressee). While Jakobson asserts these factors to be fundamental in all speech events, regarding them as verbal, it can be claimed that the described factors are necessary in all forms of communication. The following graphic illustrates the factors of Jakobson's speech event model.



Graphic 8: Jakobson's speech event model (based on: Jakobson 1960; see also Waugh 1980: 57)

Applying Jakobson's model to MMORPG discourse allows dealing with aspects of its communication which inevitably influence the act of communication. The *context* was already discussed in this thesis to some extent, namely the gaming discourse and in particular MMORPG discourse (section 1). Chapter 8 provides other aspects of the MMORPG context which are closely connected to gaming and communication ingame, namely conventions, schemata, the conversational maxims and turn-taking. The *channel* plays a particular role in MMORPG communication. The features of the channel provide the gamer, hence the *sender* or speaker, with special *encoding* possibilities. The *message*, the text, is

the form language takes in MMORPG communication it is informed and influenced by the encoding possibilities of the *channel* as well as the *context*. They give rise to stylistic features used by the speaker and yet arise from the *code*, the system and basic structure of language.

The speakers, the *senders*, clearly have the last say when it comes to communication. While context, channel, code, message and receiver are certainly of importance, it is the sender or speaker who takes the (linguistic) choices. Positioning only exists when there are participants in a conversation. There is no positioning without another person to position to. Therefore the speaker and the interlocutor (*receiver*) receive particular attention in this section. All the elements of MMORPGs as speech event are regarded in relation to participant positioning. The channel, the code or message even the speaker's considerations are discussed in the light of positioning. But in order to analyze communication in MMORPGs based on positioning the concept has to be explored in more depth so that it can be applied. Chapter ten therefore provides a theoretical base for applying the concept of positioning. It describes several approaches and concepts which link the context (8) and the participants (9) together.

8. The context: contextual factors

Section one describes what playing MMORPGs means not only for the gamers but also the nature of the game as such. But there are other contextual factors which influence and partly motivate the speech event and hence the choices of the speakers. First, linguistic ceremonies and rituals, so to say conventionalized ways of communication affect communication and therefore also positioning. Second, the maxims put forth by Grice's co-operative principle as well as relevance theory influence the gamers in their choice of language and in their speech event. Third, turn-taking, timing the flow of conversation and paying attention are dealt with as another schemata of communication. These aspects can be regarded as the social structure of communication. The conventions, the process structure of conversations into turns and the conversational maxims form the schemata and the most fundamental context of communication. The contextual factors therefore provide the speaker with basic guidelines and expectations of communication.

8.1 Conventionalized schemata: ceremonies and rituals

A fundamental structure of interaction is the creation of conventions, rituals and ceremonies. "In any society [...] it seems that a system of practices, conventions, and procedural rules comes into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages" (Goffman 1967: 33-34). Such conventions and rules organize the course of actions but also categorize which actions are appropriate or not (see Harré; Langenhove 1999: 4-5). Scollon and Scollon (2001: 66-70) refer to such conventions or rituals as cognitive *schemata* and *scripts*. Žegarac (2000: 61) outlines the concept by stating that

"knowledge is organized into mental structures called schemata. [...] The knowledge associated with types of events is stored in mental structures called 'scripts'."

According to Scollon and Scollon (2001: 66-70) the concept is rather vague and deals with several different phenomena like world knowledge, adjacency sequences and general patterns of actions or sequences such as the actions a customer takes in a coffee shop. Widdowson (2004: 43) also regards *schema*

as a “cognitive construct, a configuration of knowledge, which we project on to events so as to bring them into alignment with familiar patterns of experience and belief.”

A similar description of such a system of conventions is Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* which is

“a complex of internalized dispositions to specific forms of action; as such, it is generative of specific forms of social practice, such as table manners, the use of a particular dialect or sociolect, or the tendency to speak at a specific level of politeness.” (Leezenberg 2002: 899)

This quote also ties in with Brown and Levinson's (2009: 43-47) account on politeness as *ritual*. They note that many researchers especially anthropologists and sociologists have discussed the ritual character of politeness. Amongst them Goffman, Durkheim and Coulmas. While in many theories politeness and interpersonal rituals are derived from former public rituals, Brown and Levinson reverse this view and see interpersonal rituals as the informants of larger ceremonies.

Even though, politeness could be regarded as a ritual itself, I understand both (politeness and rituals) as different layers and strategy clusters of positioning. Rituals are communication sequences and interactions which are based on conventions or rules which take place in social contexts like family life, social occasions, religious ceremonies but also in individual behaviors like personal rituals (see Goffman 1967: 47-49). If a course of action is conventionalized it can be regarded as a ritual like certain rituals in a lecture at university or in game. It is then up to the speaker to either position oneself within this ritual and so to say play along, or to position oneself outside the ritual and breaking with the convention. One either reassures a conventionalized sequence and follows the *habitus* which is created by repeating these sequences, thus takes the position of a member of the community; or one breaks the rules and by this possibly creates a new convention.

Goffman (1967: 54-55) stresses that his notion of *ceremony* does not mean highly specified or highly “symbolic action performed by august actors on solemn occasions when religious sentiments are likely to be invoked” (Goffman 1967: 55) but rather conventionalized practices and means of communication

which help speakers convey meanings and express their character. This notion of ceremony includes the rituals he constituted. In similar vein, this chapter deals with conventionalized or even ritualized sequences especially in ingame situations. Complying with conventions and following rituals is not only means to position in the community or outside of it but can be utilized also in other ways to position oneself in a conversation.

Typical communicative rituals, described by researchers are greetings and farewells. They are regarded by Scollon and Scollon (2001: 69) as adjacency sequences which give predictable and regular order to conversation and are “formulas of cohesion”. It is this regular order and predictability which underlies rituals and makes them a defense against vulnerabilities (see Rampton 2009: 160). Therefore, they are crucial for positioning as they offer well-known and secure pathways through conversations. As Rampton (2009: 160) summarizes “[g]reetings, for example, use well-known formulas to resolve the indeterminacies that arise at the opening of an encounter, leave-takings provide reassurance against what's unknown in the period of separation coming up [...]”. Furthermore, Goffman (1967: 41-42) notes that greetings clarify and fix roles in the conversation at hand and can be used to apologize. Similarly farewells give the speakers the chance to apologize for ending the conversation and thus “their display of solidarity” (Goffman 1967: 42) no matter if the interlocutors are warmly related socially or not. This assures that interlocutors will continue to engage with other speakers.

This can also be noted in MMORPG communication when addressing a stranger in particular with a request. Certain ritualized phrases provide the gamers with an ordered and predictable communication as can be seen in the following example:

Example (7)

Greetings adventurer. I am sorry to bother you but could you be so kind and give a traveler something to eat and drink?

The request starts out with a formal greeting and addressing the other gamer as adventurer, followed by an apology for the disturbance and the request.

Example seven is regarded by the majority of my participants of my

questionnaire as a normal way to request food in the game. 206 participants find this rather role-playing style request very polite, 59 feel that it is appropriate. Only 42 participants believe it to be awkward.

While in example seven the greeting is used as a way to introduce the request for food, greetings of gamers when coming together to form a group for a quest fulfill a different role:

Example (8)

Michonne: huhu

Namoria: huhu

Loríane: huhu

Samtlaub joins the party.

Roinna: hello :)

Michonne: huhu^^

Samtlaub: hi

Namoria: huhu

The greetings of the gamers are short but warm and fulfill the function of recognizing the other gamers in the group. This can be seen particularly when the gamer with the name Samtlaub joins the party later than the other party members and is greeted again by all the other gamers who, before already greeted one another. The repetition of the greeting for a new group member is used to welcome the new gamer Samtlaub in the group, show solidarity, warmth and recognition. This is also underlined by the use of positive smileys emphasizing the positive emotions towards the other gamer. The way in which the gamers of the group copy the greeting words of the previous speaker is also interesting to note. A reason for this is the reassuring of the role and the relations of the gamers to one another. The greetings set the standards for the style of the communication in the group. It is likely that if Michonne used a role-playing like greeting, the other gamers would have adapted this type of language rather than using a laid-back language.

The same group had to take their farewells from one another after finishing the quest which provides a good example of taking leave from other gamers one just met in the game and played together with.

Example (9)

Namoria: well then I thank you :)

Loríane: take care and thanks

Roinna: Supi thanks :)

Namoria leaves the party.

Loríane leaves the party.

Roinna: So long

Samtlaub: thanks too. Bye

Example nine illustrates quite well Goffman's belief that farewells are used to compensate for the harm the end of the conversation and relation means. The gamers thank one another for helping in the quest as well as congratulate one another for the success of the undertaking by stating *Supi* meaning *super*. Moreover, the gamers wish the others the best for the following gaming. All this is meant to show gratitude and solidarity towards one another reducing the harm done by the separation of the group. Another aspect involved is that parting on good terms provides good chances that the same gamers will be willing to help one another in possible future adventures.

The question why the gamers dissolve the party even though the quest was fulfilled successfully could be answered by the wish to attend to the other gamer's and your own sense of independence. Being in a group can delimit one's gaming experience since one has to arrange with the other gamers and possibly subordinate to their tasks and needs. Therefore, it is quite common that gamers of MMORPGs who play alone but require help for a quest, join a group and after fulfilling the task leave again. This is in no way regarded as impolite or rude but mutually accepted and even expected.

Joining together as a group is a common action in MMORPGs, thus it is not surprising that asking for help or looking for a group to fulfill a quest with is highly conventionalized in them. The following example illustrates several ways to request help in the public chat-channel in the game. It is noteworthy, that the gamer in the example uses several ways to ask for a group.

Example (10)

Halliday: LF Heal for [Setting the trap]

Halliday: Healing hands needed for [Setting the trap]

Halliday: Healer needed for [Setting the trap]

The gamer named Halliday is looking for a healer for the quest called *Setting the trap* and uses three different ways to find another gamer who is able to heal during this quest. The first request is a rather acronymic way to ask for a healer, whereas *LF* stands for *looking for* and *heal* is an abbreviated version of the class healer. In his or her second attempt, he or she uses role-playing style to request help paraphrasing healer as *healing hands*. Finally, he or she writes a plain request stating that a healer is needed for the quest *Setting the trap*.

All these ways of requesting help are conventionalized and common in MMORPGs. Yet, requests in a role-playing style are, while regarded as very polite, often also felt to be inappropriate and awkward. Probably since they often do not provide all the necessary information on one glance. The request: *My companions and I require aid in a dangerous quest for glory* was rated by 156 (48%) participants of my survey as very polite, by 92 (28%) as appropriate and by 61 (18%) as inappropriate. Clearly, such a request does not provide sufficient information about the quest. What is the quest objective? Which classes are needed? However, some participants also note that they use role-playing style to stand out of the mass of requests made in the general chat-channels of the game.

The most common and conventionalized way to ask for help is using an acronymic request similar to version one used by gamer Halliday in example ten. Normally, these requests are even more cryptic and condensed to information like in the following example.

Example (11)

LFG heal and DD for ICC10

Here, a gamer is looking for a group (*LFG*) in particular for a healer (*heal*) and a damage dealer class (*DD*) for the ten person dungeon Icecrown citadel (*ICC10*) in *World of Warcraft*®. This is definitely an elaborate and long-winded sentence compared to the acronymic version of the utterance. The acronymic way of looking for a group is the common and preferred way of searching for other gamers, as the participants of my questionnaire state. 79% (257) of the participants rate such an acronymic sentence appropriate, only 11% as inappropriate. Even though efficiency is not necessary when searching for a group, it is still preferred by the gamers. However, the reasons for the use of

acronyms are discussed further the chapter on stylistic features (12.3). At this point it should be stressed though that acronyms are a very basic and conventionalized part of requesting help in MMORPGs. They provide gamers with clear structures and information on what is requested of them as well as defined sequences for following interaction with the gamer.

A change in the game mechanics of *World of Warcraft*® led to gamer co-operations even though they are not in a party of gamers. Before this change of mechanics, the killing of an enemy only counted as successful quest objective if you *tagged* the enemy by dealing damage to it first. This led especially in crowded areas to aggression and frustrating encounters between gamers when their enemies were snatched away by other gamers. Grouping up allowed up to five gamers to profit from the killing of a quest mob²¹ (enemy). The developers of *World of Warcraft*® changed this, allowing everyone who dealt damage to an enemy to profit from its death. This eased a lot of tension but also led to less grouping of gamers in the conventional way. But new groups developed out of this change, namely that gamers even of different factions co-operate in fights without joining a party.

This development is particularly interesting when thinking of gaming characters of the Horde and the Alliance co-operating, as the game does not allow them to communicate using the chat. Yet, there are certain mutually developed tacit rituals which allow communicating non-verbally with one another. An anecdote should illustrate such rituals.

The isle of thunder is a quest area in *World of Warcraft*® which provides daily quests for both factions. A certain amount of the quests are more difficult and can be fulfilled better with the help of other gamers. When I face such a difficult quest with my gnome mage I just wait with my character in front of the quest enemy until other gamers, who will have the same quest, arrive. Often Horde characters with the same quest appear and sometimes certain non-verbal interaction starts. When an orc warrior showed up in front of the quest enemy, he turned towards my character, then towards the enemy. He continued this behavior twice. By this the orc showed recognition of me and my character as well as implying an interest in the quest enemy. What I normally do in such

21 Mob stands for mobile object and refers to enemies and monsters ingame

situations of pause is that I let my gnome jump up and down a couple of times to reassure the orc that I am at my computer and that I pay attention to him and the situation as well as that recognize him. The cheerful jumping up and down of my character displays that I am on friendly terms with him. I then start to buff (enhance my skills using magical spells) myself which is visible to every character nearby no matter which faction. By this I indicate that I am ready to fight. Buffing oneself and members of the own faction is an indication for other gamers that one is ready for battle. This also assures the orc that he will not end up fighting the enemy alone but that my mage will support him. At this point the orc starts the fight and my mage joins in.

What this anecdote shows is that gestures and non-verbal behavior can be used for rituals not only in real-life where this is quite common thinking for example of motioning other road users to take priority. The behavior my mage showed towards the orc positioned myself on same ground with him. I indicated that I pay attention to him hence that I am at the computer and not away from it (afk), at the same time that I am interested in killing the enemy and by this show solidarity towards him. All these cues and gestures position me in the orc's territory, claiming common ground, sympathy and solidarity.

At the end of such a successful co-operation it is common for characters of different factions to use ingame emotes to thank the other gamer for their co-operation, to wave at them or use the emote to say good-bye, which normally is either a bow or waving. This fulfills the same function as the spoken farewells, hence reduces the harm of the separation and displays gratitude for the received help.

Such tacit co-operation between gamers can also be seen between gamers of the same faction when killing a quest enemy or when gamers help someone who is in a tight spot. It is very common that the gamer who received help shows his or her gratitude either verbally or non-verbally by using emotes or by jumping up and down. In *World of Warcraft*® gnomes are stereotypically known for this practice. Jumping up and down appears to be a quite conventionalized practice when interacting with members of the other faction or when one does not want to write a statement. Jumping up and down shows sympathy, solidarity, good mood, appreciation and other positive emotions which are motivating

positioning. It could therefore be regarded as an interaction strategy and means of positioning. A more detailed discussion of emotes and actionmarkers is provided in chapter 12.7.

There are several other rituals and conventions gamers create, repeat and by this pass on to their fellow gamers like buffing your group mates, providing your team-members with buff-food, potions or other useful items before dungeon-runs or difficult encounters. All these rituals are tacitly performed and carry ceremonial messages. They can be linguistic, gestural, spatial, task-embedded or part of the communication structure. Such rituals are part of the code of conduct and communication in all communities and they are followed by their members often without request (see Goffman 1967: 55-56). It is rare having to ask for a mage to conjure food and water for the group. Such rituals, clearly, do not only have the aim to provide comfort and sympathy to your team-members but also to improve the chances of the group to successfully fulfill the task. Such behavior “assures that [humans] will act more ready to enter into contacts than they perhaps really feel inclined to do, thus guaranteeing that diffuse channels for potential communication will be kept open in the society” (Goffman 1967: 42). By providing something for the group, gamers show their gratitude and humility to the others. They offer something helpful and make themselves useful and valuable for the group. By this they increase the chances of the group to succeed but also the chances to be helped by these gamers in the future.

But there are also instances in which gamers just show their fellow gamers sympathy and praise them, for example when congratulating them after a level-up or after being successful in an achievement. It is not unusual to be either whispered by a stranger with a friendly *gz*, *gratz* or other friendly words to congratulate you after receiving a level-up. Such niceties do not offer any advantage to the other gamer but are mere displays of sympathy and appreciation towards other gamers.

Conventions and rituals help speakers and therefore also gamers to allow other people to invade their territory. The possibility to predict the sequence of such rituals provides the speakers with a certain sense of security. The embedded rules of such rituals constitute an order and also a fixed end of the interaction by which the other speaker will retreat from one's territory. Yet, the conventions

also attend to the deeply enrooted desire to be appreciated and involved with others therefore farewells include very often statements of praise, gratitude and possible promises of repetition of the interaction. All these elements are also observable in MMORPG communication. Especially the display of praise and gratitude after a successful undertaking and the showing of sympathy by wishing the other gamers a pleasant and successful day, is also means to position oneself on friendly terms with the other gamers. A possible reason for this is a rather egocentric motivation since gamers want to ensure that the other gamers will help them in possible future adventures when necessary. This egocentric motivation is further discussed in the later chapter on politeness (10.3), at this point it should only be mentioned that tactical thinking is obviously a driving force when it comes to positioning in conversations especially in MMORPGs.

Rampton (2009: 172) regards interaction rituals as “fundamental to human sociality in general” and this appears to be true also for MMORPGs. Rituals and conventions provide gamers with a scaffold for social interaction which attends the needs and desires of humans. The clear structure of rituals allow gamers to play and communicate with one another without risking too much and with the security to withdraw themselves at a given time.

8.2 Conversational maxims and relevance theory

Another fundamental contextual factor, motivation and driving force of positioning can be seen in what Grice (1991) calls the co-operative principle and the conversational maxims. These maxims are “an essential feature of human communication” (Wilson; Sperber 2004: 607) and provide speakers a common basis for communication and positioning. According to Grice's (1991: 22-40) theory, speakers provide evidence for the meanings they want to convey on basis of expectations triggered by utterances. These expectations which guide the interlocutor towards the speaker's meaning are described as the conversational maxims and the co-operative principle. One could therefore claim that by the same token positioning conveys meanings on the basis of

expectations, in other words on the basis of the maxims. Hence maxims are the manifestation of the basics of communication as such and of positioning in particular.

Grice (1991: 26) believes that talk exchanges

“are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction.”

These directions are not fixed or static but shifting, alterable and almost fluid. It is this claim which leads to Grice's theory of the co-operative principle which he formulates as follows: “Make your conversation contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice 1991: 26). The relation to conventions of genre and society are obvious by stating that the utterance should be chosen based on the required, accepted purpose and direction of the talk. Hence, there are sets of predefined purposes and directions with contributions fitting them, so to say “over-arching assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation” (Levinson 1983: 101). The conversational maxims are formulated as being based on the co-operative principle and include the maxims of quality (truthfulness), quantity (informativeness), relation (relevance) and manner (clarity) (c.f. Wilson; Sperber 2004: 607).

“In short, these maxims specify what participants have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, co-operative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information” (Levinson 1983: 102).

It can therefore, be said that three basic notions guide and motivate communication between the speakers relevance, efficiency and co-operation. Co-operation is of particular interest when it come to positioning as will become apparent in a following chapter. Every conversation requires a certain amount of co-operation between the speakers. It is always a give and take between the interlocutors in a conversation. The topic of negotiation and co-operation is returned to in chapter 10.

Scholars and researchers following the relevance theory are particularly interested in the maxim of relation thus in relevance. Basically, in relevance theory the assumption is that every input is relevant. Inputs can be utterances, visual input, memories or other cognitive stimuli. "Input [...] is relevant to an individual when it connects with background information he has available to yield conclusions that matter to him" (Wilson; Sperber 2004: 608). For example, when someone asks another person if a visitor finally left, and observes the other person placing the index finger towards his or her lips, this visual input is observed and processed. The input is relevant, hence the person begins to connect the gesture to meanings. By this gesture the other person obviously wants the interlocutor to be silent, possibly because the visitor is still somewhere within earshot.

Particularly interesting is regarding positioning moves as input and applying relevance theory to it. It allows treating positioning moves as relevant input observed by speakers or relevant output produced to convey meaning. By positioning the speakers consciously or unconsciously, actively or passively convey a position or are put into a position by others. The processing of positions taken helps the interlocutor to make sense of communication. They guide the speaker towards meanings or into directions of meanings.

In MMORPGs, gamers react to stimuli received in the game. If a gamer is jumping up and down agitated in front of a quest enemy another gamer will recognize this behavior and regard this stimuli as relevant. Instead of ignoring this type of behavior, the other gamer processes the input and connects it to memories and background knowledge. Since this type of behavior is, as mentioned before, a typical way to interact with other gamers, the other gamer obviously takes a certain position and conveys meanings by this behavior. He or she is ready to fight the enemy and wants the other gamer to engage in this.

There is yet another aspect of Grice's theory, besides co-operation and relevance, which is of interest when dealing with gaming, namely efficiency. Even though Grice (1991: 28) qualified this aspect: "I have stated my maxims as if this purpose were a maximally effective exchange of information; this specification is, of course, too narrow [...]". However, it appears that efficiency is of utmost importance in gaming. Throughout this thesis, the paramount

importance of efficient gameplay and communication ingame is stressed. Often it is a matter of ingame life or death to be fast in reaction and communication. This aspect is dealt in more depth in chapter 14 when the gamer's position is as efficient gamer is described.

Yet, communication is not a matter of blindly abiding by maxims or rules. Even though the deathly threat of flouting maxims ingame is mentioned already, there are clearly exceptions. Human communication is filled with figures of speech, metaphors, language play, lying for different reasons and so on. As anticipation of the chapter on stylistic features (12), the motivations to use certain features are diverse. One cannot claim that humans strive only for least effort or time saving. Leet (12.5) exemplifies how intentional complex and creative use of language can also be motivations for using a stylistic feature even though it clearly flouts the maxim of manner as it is a source of ambiguity and misunderstandings. Grice (1991: 31-37) offers in his account several examples of how the maxims are flouted in communication. Clearly, such instances occur also in gaming language like irony, figures of speech and politeness. But there are more illustrative example of flouting maxims ingame than this.

Strict role-playing can be regarded by other gamers as flouting of maxims since the make belief and acting out a role is not true and flouts the maxim of quality. This can be illustrated by recalling the anecdote of my Tauren who was asked to sign a guild charta and answered that she is illiterate and hence cannot sign the charta. The other gamer, who was obviously not a role-player, was taken aback and confused by this. In his or her opinion my Tauren obviously was not telling the truth and therefore flouting the maxim of quality. Role-playing, especially when role-players and non-role-players speak to one another, is a source for flouting the maxims, in particular the overall maxim of efficiency, the maxim of quantity, quality and manner.

Another example of flouting maxims is trolling, which also is discussed in more detail in a following section on negative behaviors (15.1). Trolling, which can be described as behavior that "should provoke or offend others for one's own amusement" (see Kramer 2013a: 49), is a typical example of flouting various maxims since the form of trolling can be different. For instance, the maxim of quality can be flouted when a person who trolls intentionally gives falsehood

and by this hopes to provoke other gamers. Other typical trolling messages flout the maxim of relation by uttering irrelevant nonsense, or flout the maxim of manner by being intentionally ambiguous or unclear. When the maxim of quantity is flouted, the borders between trolling and spamming overlap.

Spamming in this sense would mean flooding a communication channel, either a chat-channel ingame or a message-board, with the same or similar messages. The content of the message can, of course, also additionally to flouting the maxim of quantity, flout the maxims of relation, manner and quality.

Clearly, there are utterances which could be regarded as flouting the conversational maxims if additional knowledge of a community or the communication in it is missing. At this point relevance theory comes in handy with its explanation that inputs are processed by connecting them to background knowledge and other knowledge one has. If someone is missing the additional knowledge and the context then the evidence and the directions given through the input cannot be understood. The position taken by a speaker is not recognized by the interlocutor. The following example should illustrate this. The situation is the following: a group of gamers is in a dungeon and one of the party members, Carlin, starts the fight before the others are ready, and by this causes problems:

Example (12)

Ambi: WTF what are you doing?! Why dont you wait

Roinna: ...

Carlin: You are just too slow

Akaido: diaf

The gamer named Roinna uses three dots which indicate pause or silence. One could just remain silent by not typing any response. Someone who is not familiar with language usage in online communication situations might not understand this use of punctuation and be irritated. For a gamer, and probably for anyone who uses online communication, this input provides relevant meaning and conveys certain positions. Roinna is obviously not amused and speechless in a negative way and conveys this by typing out the awkward silence. Akaido, on the other hand, types a sequence of letters which could be regarded by interlocutors, missing the knowledge, as mere outrageous typing of any keys like in comic books where swearing is often symbolized by

unintelligible symbols and letters. However, an experienced gamer or user of online communication can connect this sequence of letters to the acronym meaning *die in a fire*, which should tell off Carllin in this situation.

What this illustrates is that even though speakers want to believe and expect (based on the conversational maxims) that utterances and input by others is relevant, missing knowledge of additional information, conventions, the context or the community can make it impossible to interpret the meaning in the way the interlocutor meant it. While the input received and the output given, is in many cases based on the conversational maxims, it is still a matter of decoding and interpretation to identify the intended meaning, if this is ever possible.

Speakers and therefore also gamers are influenced by assumptions which guide the conversation. Gamers are no exception, on the contrary the notion of efficiency is of particular importance to the gamers as is discussed in the course of this thesis. Relevance, co-operation and efficiency provide the base of communication, also in MMORPGs.

8.3 Turn-taking, timing and attention

A basic structural element of conversation is the turn, thus making turn-taking a fundamental aspect of communication. But what is often disregarded is that turns, timing of turns and paying attention to speakers who are taking a turn is inherently also a way to position oneself in a conversation. They are conventionalized schemata derived from the context of communication.

“Conversation is composed of speech between at least two people, organized by turns. The turn is the period of talk for each speaker; ideally, only one person talks at a time.” (Panyametheekul; Herring 2007: 235) This is the theoretical view of conversation and how the floor is taken by speakers. Reality certainly looks different. Clearly, there are formal situations like rituals or meetings which have a fixed structure or a moderator who organizes the allocation of turns. But unstructured conversations, as the name implies, have neither structure nor a moderator. The speakers have to determine for themselves when to take the floor. They do so by looking for transition-relevance places (TRP). In face-to-face conversation, TRP can be determined by extralinguistic cues such as

prosody, gestures and facial expressions. A pause in speech, the falling intonation of the last word spoken, eye-contact, a hand gesture and many other cues can be interpreted as TRP or even as a turn allocation. According to Sacks et al. (1974: 704) there are three strategies to allocate turns. First, the current speaker selects the next speaker directly either by naming him or her or by other means. Second, the next speaker selects himself or herself. Third, the current speaker continues to speak since no one was selected to speak or self-selected to do so.

Sacks et al's concept is appealing in theory but difficult to apply in reality. Everyone who has been at a regular meeting or discussed with family members will know that the *one at a time principle* rarely happens, nor does turn allocation following Sacks et al's strategies take place. It may happen at the dining table of a family, that the mother asks the child to tell the father about something that took place during the day. Tannen (2006) discusses several studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka: 1997; Ochs, Taylor: 1992) which identified such behavior labeling it as "Telling your Day". In these situations the mothers take an active role to pass the turn to the child in order to report events to the father. But otherwise a conversation at the dining table where the speakers always select the next speaker and neatly speak one at a time, appears rather artificial and comparable to black and white movies depicting bourgeois families.

While in face-to-face conversation the strategy to select the next speaker is rarely used, it is commonly used in online communication, especially in chat-rooms and therefore also in chat-channels of MMORPGs. Since the extralinguistic cues are missing in online communication, TRP are not that easily determined in chats. The speakers do not have prosody, gestures or facial expressions to find out if the other speaker is done talking and therefore if there is a TRP. Furthermore, some scholars like Lunsford (as quoted in Panyametheekul; Herring 2007: 234) believe that in chats principally everyone is free to self-select at any point in conversation, also because the messages are democratically posted in order they are received by the system. But Panyametheekul and Herring (2007: 238) correctly point out that "[...] the technical *ability* to take a turn must be distinguished from the social *appropriateness* of doing so[.]"

What online communication provides researchers with is a manifestation of the floor. The chat-room or chat-channel of MMORPGs is a visual manifestation of the linguistic floor of a conversation. Yet, the linear display of the conversation, since the system will display the messages according to the time they were received, is an illusion of an ordered and neatly structured conversation. Speakers in chat-rooms do speak at the same time, just like in face-to-face conversations, the system just displays it in a linear fashion. This linear display poses a problem for researchers because it can be difficult to trace back problems of overlapping messages. The linear display can also lead to disrupted adjacency, as can be seen in the example below.

Example (13)

Thelormos: Whats better

Desverger: Netherweave Bag *24 @ AH for 16G each - BARGAIN

Thelormos: Survival or Marksmanship?

Xantie: selling Bone-Inlaid Sarcophagus Key for 200g!! 150g if you are quick!

Neyrian: MM

Thalerien: holy:D

Kuz: both are good

Kuz: at your level probably sv

Eleanôra: Do research about your class. and take what you more like.

The example shows an extract from the trade channel of a server of *World of Warcraft*®. It illustrates the disrupted adjacency of turns in chat-channels. Even though some scholars regard a chat-message as equivalent to a turn, this example clearly shows that this is not necessarily the case. Theolormos starts his turn by asking “whats better”. Instead of instantly stating in the same message the object of his question, he sends the request in two separate messages. His turn is therefore interrupted by Desverger who posts a message advertising a netherweave bag. The starting conversation based on the question of which specialization, survival or marksmanship, is better is interrupted by Xantie who advertizes a bone-laid sarcophagus key. This interruption disrupts the adjacency of the conversation, for the researcher. However, Thelormos uses the strategies of splitting up his or her utterance into two messages in order to get the attention of the other speakers. The notion of

attention is returned to later on in this chapter. Before discussing the attention of the speakers it is worthwhile investigating how speakers in chat-channels and chat-rooms know when to take the floor.

As mentioned above selecting the next speaker or directly addressing a comment to a person, also in reply to a question by another speaker is a common way to speak in chat-rooms, especially crowded chat-rooms. Yet, very often speakers take the floor when a TRP seems to appear. Contrary to face-to-face conversations, TRPs in online communication, chat-rooms or also in instant-messaging (whispering in MMORPGs) cannot be prosodic cues or gestures. It is sometimes even unclear when a turn starts and ends in online communication. As could be seen in example 12, speakers sometimes deliberately break up the messages into several parts, which are then interrupted by other messages from other speakers (see Quan-Haase 2009: 40). TRPs in online communication can be longer pauses or when a turn appears to be finished based on the content, so to say a completed thought. In example 12, the other gamers knew that Thelormos' turn was over when the object of his or her question was stated, namely survival or marksmanship. If he or she did not send the second message, other gamers would have waited a certain amount of time and then probably asked him or her what he or she meant by what is better. Time or rather speed plays an important role in holding the floor in chat-channels and chat-rooms. Breaking up messages into smaller transmissions hence helps the speaker to hold the floor, because the other speakers wait for more information and for the end of the statement, therefore also for the end of the turn.

Another strategy for a speaker to hold the floor is to use ellipses (like ...) at the end of a message. This technique is supposed to tell the interlocutors that the speaker is still writing, that more is to come and thus he or she is still holding the floor and not providing a TRP (see Quan-Haase 2009: 40-43). The use of ellipses is very common in MMORPGs when whispering to others and writing longer messages for example when telling the interlocutor about a happening. It is also usually used in role-playing events where gamers write lengthy messages which might include detailed descriptions of situations. In order to not get interrupted in the acting out of one's character, gamers use ellipses to hold

the floor. Nevertheless, it is not unusual to be interrupted either by other gamers who do not participate in the role-playing event or by the use of emotes and action-markers by fellow role-players. This is a result of the linear display of the floor and the absence of gestures. If the role-playing event took place in the real world like in a LARP performance, there would be no need to write “I smile at you with sympathy” because the action could be seen. It would definitely be equally disturbing in the real world if interlocutors stated their gestures instead of making them.

Another factor of importance in communicating online which is linked to turn-taking, is attention. In MMORPGs, gamers do not only have a conversation with one interlocutor but engage in several activities at the same time. They might participate in several conversations at the same time, do some quests which might involve reading quest descriptions, fight a monster and compare items in their inventory. The very same problem was discovered for all online communication settings.

“Therefore, conversation partners need to not only negotiate turn-taking, but also need to sustain the attention of their interlocutors during an IM [instant messaging] exchange through, for example, backchannel behavior, such as adding short reactions- “yeah” and “right” -to the conversation as it unfolds.” (Quan-Haase 2009: 41)

As Jones (2009: 22) points out “[a]ll interpersonal communication is fundamentally based on attention: getting attention and “paying attention”.” Successful communication requires sustaining attention either by providing feedback to the speaker or by checking the interlocutor's attention. This feedback or back-channel can be provided in face-to-face conversation through cues like gazes, facial expressions, gestures, non-verbal sounds or minimal responses. In online communication, speakers use minimal responses like *I see*, *right*, *oh my* to do this. Furthermore, onomatopoeic expressions are utilized in this way like *hmmm*, *haha*, *ooh* or *mhm*. Similarly, other features also have a back-channel function, these features are discussed in more detail later on (chapter 12), but to anticipate this it can be said that smileys are also used for back-channeling. The back-channel does not only signal attention and listenership but also encourages the speaker to continue as well as it heightens the interactivity in the conversation (see Quan-Haase 2009: 41). Thus, the

back-channel is a vital tool to position in a conversation. It helps the speakers to position themselves by showing sympathy, closeness, support and advertence towards the other speakers. Positioning in order to show closeness and sympathy should encourage the other speaker to continue and it displays that one is not only paying attention to the interlocutor but is emotionally involved with him or her.

When it comes to attention, time or rather speed is again a crucial marker. Despite the speaker holding the floor while messaging, he or she will wait from time to time for a reaction of the interlocutor. This checking for attention of the interlocutor can also be a reason why some speakers split their messages into smaller pieces and provide the interlocutor only with bits of information. Quan-Haase (2009: 43) also notes the technique of withholding information by splitting up messages in order to hold the floor and add tension to the conversation: "In this way, their communication partners would not switch attention to another online or offline activity, but would wait for the message to be completed." Thus, speakers want to hold the floor, sustain attention but at the same time also check for the attention of their interlocutors by splitting messages or pausing. To illustrate this, one could say that the floor is like a stage and the speaker holding the floor is on in. In some conversations the speaker does not want to leave the stage, yet wants to ensure that the audience is still paying attention. The back-channel then could be compared to the applause of the audience or a comment from off-stage.

Yet, I disagree to Quan-Haase (2009: 47-48) who believes that these techniques are particularly common in online communication. It is my understanding that such techniques are not exclusively linked to a medium used to communicate but rather to the goals behind the conversation. What does the interlocutors aim at? Clearly, if a speaker wants to tell a story in face to face communication and wants the complete attention of the interlocutor, these techniques will probably be used as well. Similarly, a role-player who is unfolding a detailed role-playing event will certainly use these techniques to hold the attention and the floor. However, if there are other aims and purposes

to the conversation, the interlocutors might not cling so much to the floor, for example the gamers advertizing items in example 12. They gave their statement, left the floor and did not really care if it was their turn or not.

In other words, turn-taking and its functions might at the first glance look different in MMORPGs and online communication to conversation in real life. However, the underlying structures are the same, the purpose and aim of the conversation guides the speakers through communication. Based on the aims, he or she will choose techniques and language. It is an active means to position in a conversation with other gamers and to find out how the interlocutor positions. It allows the speaker to identify the interlocutor's stance towards oneself. If the other person is providing sympathy or antipathy, if he or she is paying attention or ignoring one. Paying attention and showing emotional closeness and sympathy but also antipathy, for example while arguing, by means of turn-taking, attention and back-channeling are basic means of individual positioning. One of the most extreme expressions of position in regards to turn-taking and the floor is definitely leaving the floor in order to distance from the interlocutor.

This chapter illustrates how contextual factors provide stakes and base for general communication. Conventionalized schemata like conventions and ritualized speech, the conversational maxims and turn-taking strategies provide the speakers with expectations and general assumptions of the direction of the conversation. They help guiding the speakers through a talk, by this influence and motivate certain language and positioning in the gamers. It is the speaker who has to interpret the indications given through conversation and synchronize expectations, conventions and the used language to make meanings. The next chapter focuses on the speaker as meaning maker in a community.

9. The participant: The gamer as speaker in a community

A crucial factor for any speech event is the participant, the sender and receiver because they accept the conventions constitutive of the game. By accepting the conventions and schemata they become a community. Clearly, there is not *the* speaker or *the* gamer since there is no homogenous speaker-type such as *the gamer*. Yet speakers, and in that sense also gamers, group up and therefore create communities. The language used in these communities is to some extent based on conventions the group even subconsciously conform to. Conventions as mentioned in the introduction to section one are crucial for human relations. However, as Eckert (2000: 45) points out

“[c]onvention is not a thing but a process, and the possibility of convention resides in the speakers' ability to hypothesize about others' behavior and to take interpretable action, along with a commitment to doing so within a particular social unit. Our speaker, or speaking subject, can not be a clone but must be an agent in a process of convention-making.”

The conventions which amount to what a community or group of speakers is, are created through processes. They are constructed, reconfirmed or changed by the speakers of the community. The construction of conventions is not an official happening in which the members of the group sit together to discuss which conventions to use, but rather a subconscious process of meaning making, whereby they confirm, adapt and alter them. Searle's (1995: 23) often mentioned notion of collective intentionality also takes effect in the process of convention making and becoming a community.

Since many gamers regard themselves as such and therefore accept to some extent the existence of a community of gamers, it is useful to probe the linguistic concepts of communities and groups of speakers as such. According to Hymes (1977: 51) a *speech community* is “[...] a community sharing knowledge of rules for conduct and interpretation of speech”. Yet, in many accounts (e.g. Labov 2001) the physical presence of the speakers is a necessary factor in defining a speech community. Speech communities are conventionally defined in terms of a shared physical space. A town, a city or a region in which the speakers are either born and therefore member of the community or take domicile there, are

basic factors of studies researching speech communities (e.g. Gal 1979; Blom and Gumperz 1972). Furthermore, Eckert (2000: 32) claims that making sense of behaviors and meanings in speech communities requires face-to-face interaction.

This clinging to spatial proximity and face-to-face interaction poses a problem to the setting of MMORPGs and the gamer community. One could only try to sidestep this issue by claiming that the proximity is achieved by a virtual locus rather than a regional one. Yet, this does not grasp the essence of the gamer community which is not only about the same game. As the questionnaire demonstrates, many gamers of different MMORPGs and therefore of different loci use similar conventions. The locus cannot be the essential, common denominator. This demonstrates again that conventional concepts need to be revised in order to describe the changed uses of language in electronic media and in games.

Hence, it might be better to approach this subject by looking at the practice, the subject matter, the socio-psychological space or conceptual space, rather than the physical location. Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of *imagined communities* offers such a viewpoint. Even though Anderson researches nations the concept provides useful aspects also for other areas of research. *Imagined communities* are socially constructed communities which are not based on everyday face-to-face interaction but on shared socio-psychological commonalities (c. f. Anderson 1991). Coming from a linguistic background, the concept of the *community of practice* is similar in this sense:

“A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around some enterprise. United by this common enterprise, people come to develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values – in short, practices – as a function of their joint engagement in activity.”
(Eckert 2000: 35)

The focus in this approach is on the activities which spawn social relations and in return activities which are created around the relations. Eckert furthermore points out that it is not the purpose or the members as such which define the community but rather both elements together which are inseparably interwoven. The shared practices and meanings the members make of them are the driving forces in communities of practices.

However, a community of practice does not necessarily need to be an engagement in a shared interest like a band, a tennis club, but it is all sorts of communities or networks like the family, research groups, business partners or parents from the kindergarten class. This is a strong resemblance to the *network* concept Milroy (1992) put forth which regards speakers as members of several networks at the same time which are either loose or dense, simple or multiplex. Thus, while someone might have very weak ties to his or her colleagues at work, the connection to the bowling club is probably stronger. What is interesting is that moving between networks, especially being part of different networks, allows speakers to change conventions or make new meanings in other groups. It is clear that the borders between networks are not clear-cut and that it is likely that some speakers meet in more than one network. Speakers are therefore members of multiplex social network clusters meaning that the communities of practices significantly overlap (see Eckert 2000: 34-36).

It is possible to apply the social networks and the community of practice concept to MMORPGs. A MMORPG gamer will be part of the community of practice and the network of the respective MMORPG he or she plays. An analysis of my social network involvement can serve as an illustration. I play *World of Warcraft*® which means I am part of the *World of Warcraft*® community of practice, which is a rather loose network since not all players know one another but they still share beliefs and practices. Since I am in a guild I have a rather dense network connection to my guild colleagues. There are additional meanings we share, for example insider jokes, histories, happenings, successes and failures. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, these successes and failures tie members together. I am, furthermore, playing exclusively Alliance characters and I would regard myself as a member of the Alliance rather than the Horde. Thus, the faction can also be a sort of community of practice, but it certainly is not for every *World of Warcraft*® gamer. For instance, Goldshire, a small town near Stormwind is probably known by every *World of Warcraft*® gamer as a low level town in Elwyn Forest. But for players of the Alliance, Goldshire means a place where people waste their time by trolling, spamming, flaming and dueling one another.

The meanings are quite different depending on the network the speaker is in. Since I would regard myself as MMORPG gamer and gamer in general, I am also part of the larger MMORPG network cluster in which *World of Warcraft*® is set as a community of practice besides other MMORPGs. Furthermore, MMORPGs are a sub-network of the larger gaming cluster or computer game discourse. While for me the phrase “an arrow in the knee” immediately triggers a meaning which originated in the game *The elder scrolls V: Skyrim*, for another MMORPG player this might not make any sense. This ties in with Widdowson's (1984: 150ff.) account of the *index* which can be regarded, contrary to icon and symbol, as an implication. The indexical value of a linguistic expression, its pragmatic meaning, cannot be directly derived from its semantic meaning (the encoded symbol) or its form. The context and additional knowledge is required to decode the index. While for me the “arrow in the knee” can be decoded as an index referring to an insider joke of Skyrim players, other players lack the knowledge and therefore regard it as an icon, the mere statement of someone getting an arrow into the knee.

Widdowson's approach to meaning making is therefore very suitable to deal with shared practices and captures the essence of the structure and functions involved. While for someone who is part of a community of practice and strongly involved in a network, a practice has a particular meaning which the community constructed, another person will not be able to capture the indexical meaning. For this person the practice does not point to anything because he or she is missing the shared contextual knowledge.

What this shows is how the communities of practice and the networks speakers are involved in influence the process of meaning making. As Eckert (2000: 34-35) aptly said: “Meaning is made as people jointly construct relations through the development of mutual view of, and relation to, the communities and people around them.” It is clear that this process of constructing, confirming, reconfirming and altering can also lead to indexical variation.

The notion of community of practice is also evident in Swales' (2006: 24) concept of *discourse community*. It is similar to the concept of *community of practice* but also includes written communication. A discourse community is a *specific interest group* with specific goals. He identifies six characteristics which

designate a discourse community, namely common goals of the members, intercommunication, mechanisms for information and feedback, more than one communicative genre, group specific lexis and experts amongst the members (see Swales 2006: 24-27). The concept of Swales appears to be a bit too much bound to are of business communication. Especially, the characteristics of feedback, information and experts appear to be comparable to professional settings where providing information is much more important than socializing. The absence of the social aspect misses the point of what is crucial in any speech community no matter if one regards it as community of practice or social network.

The social aspect as well as the shared knowledge are, however, key aspects of the concept of *semiotic domain* put forth by Gee (2003). According to Gee (2003: 17) semiotic

“is just a fancy way of saying we want to talk about all sorts of different things that can take on meaning, such as images, sounds, gestures, movements, graphs, diagrams, equations, objects, even people like babies, midwives, and mothers, and not just words.”

A semiotic domain is therefore, a set of practices in which practices stand for particular meanings in particular settings. In order to understand and make meaning of a practice, one needs specific knowledge of the domain. Similar to the aforementioned *index* of Widdowson, a practice of a semiotic domain points towards something in a certain context which can only be read and understood with knowledge of the index. Gee points out the importance of the situation and the context in order to decode a practice, thus a practice has not a general meaning but always a situated meaning. Speakers who can recognize, understand and create meanings in a semiotic domain are referred to by Gee as *affinity group*. Members of an affinity group share the same practices and can detect others as insiders or outsiders of the group. Clearly, one is member of several semiotic domains throughout his or her life. Similarly to the approach of *social networks*, a person has varying knowledge of a variety of semiotic domains and is part of several affinity groups. The principles of what is and what is not acceptable as a practice in the domain is called by Gee *design grammar*.

These design grammars are so to say conventions of the affinity group (see Gee 2006: 24-30). It could be claimed that the members of a community create conventions and principles in order to separate insiders from outsiders.

Since Gee designed his concept to fit computer games, or as he calls them video games, it comes as no surprise that it can be applied easily to MMORPGs. An example can illustrate Gee's semiotic domain concept. Based on Gee's approach, a MMORPG is a semiotic domain since there is a set of practices which has specific meaning in a specific context. When a character rises in level in *World of Warcraft*®, which is called level-up, the player hears a sound notifying him or her of this. The sound is a “ding sound”. Hence, many gamers, especially when being in a guild started to write *ding!* in the guild-channel to let their guild mates know that they had a level-up. The other guild members then normally answer with *gz* or *grats* in order to congratulate the player on his or her progression. The notification sound for a level-up was integrated into the language of the gamer by using an onomatopoeic expression. Meanwhile, if a gamer has a level-up in *World of Warcraft*® the player does not only hear the sound but the word *ding!* is also written on the screen. Thus the game developers integrated a practice of the gamers into the game itself.

For a member of the affinity group of *World of Warcraft*® *ding!* refers to a level-up, to progress, and if one gamers writes to another *ding!* it is like saying “I just had a level-up”. However, this is only the case if one speaks to another member of the same affinity group and because of the context. Someone who is an outsider will not understand what *ding!* means and interpret it differently maybe as the sound in cartoons when someone has an idea, the sound of the microwave, or in German one would wonder why the other person says *thing*. It is therefore, essential to know the context, to be part of an affinity group and to know the design grammar of a semiotic domain to be able to understand, decode and use certain practices in a semiotic domain.

What this chapter shows is that several concepts and approaches to the issue of the speaker in a community treat crucial points for studying language. First of all, that speakers are not isolated but members of communities. Second, speakers are not only part of one speech community but naturally partake in

several communities and have ties to other networks. All these ties and connection can be either weak or strong, the networks can be dense or loose. There are clusters of networks and the borders are not clear-cut. Clearly, the other communities and networks of a speaker also influence his or her language. Third, meaning creation is a process which is constantly evolving. This means that meanings are not stable but are constructed, reconfirmed, altered, abandoned, revived and so on. These processes do not take place in an official setting but happen subconsciously whenever speakers of the community talk to one another. It is a constant negotiation between speakers. This process requires the speakers to co-operate²² with one another. Speakers, hence gamers, accept the conventions of the community but they do not only conform to agreed conventions but they also have the power to change them. There is always room for individual maneuver. Fourth, since speakers participate in several communities, practices of other communities leak and can therefore also influence the practices of other groups. Last, the context or situated meaning is crucial in order to be able to recognize an index. A practice has never a general meaning, but meanings are applied to it. Only through the knowledge of the context and the practice or the community recognition, understanding and creation in the community is possible. As Wittgenstein (2003: §432) put it “[j]edes Zeichen scheint *allein* tot. *Was* gibt ihm Leben? - Im Gebrauch *lebt* es. Hat es da den lebenden Atem in sich? - Oder ist der *Gebrauch* sein Atem?”. Signs only live and exist in their use. They are meaningless when they are removed from their context and use. They only live and receives meaning through the use by speakers.

It is clear that there is not a homogenous speech community, community of practice or affinity group called gamers or MMORPG gamers. But still there is a set of practices bound to MMORPGs and certain knowledge the gamers acquire in order to play and communicate in this community. While every gamer is still an individual with an individual style and language background, he or she is still playing according to conventions and sets of practices which came into origin because gamers created, confirmed and changed them. Just like stereotypes which are mentioned in section one, language and meanings are created, and

22 The notion of co-operation and in particular the co-operative principle is discussed in the next chapter (10.1).

through use confirmed, by this they become conventionalized. Even though this process looks like a linear one, this is not the case in reality. Everything speakers do in conversation is negotiating with the interlocutor in order to be understood by, and exert an influence on the other. It is the speaker who takes linguistic choices influenced by context and medium. Hence, the creation of stereotypes and situated meanings is also a matter of positioning to bring about an effect. Positioning is essentially speaker's positioning. Speakers position themselves as part of a community, in contrast to other speakers. This makes the speaker, hence the gamer, a central character in MMORPG discourse and in positioning in the game. This however raises the question: What is positioning?

10. What is positioning?

Throughout the thesis the notion of positioning and negotiation during conversation became significant. The context and several contextual factors as well as the speaker provide input, guidelines and motivations for the encoding of the message and by this influence positioning. This chapter explores the concept of positioning, its nature and the act of positioning. The concept of politeness is also dealt with in this chapter since it is strongly connected to positioning and provides frames for studying positioning.

10.1 *The nature of positioning*

Recalling the definition of positioning of the introduction, I define position as a place in social space in relation to others. Some scholars like Harré and Moghaddam (2003) 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, as they refer to it, story line like being a judge in the story line of a court trial. While not completely disagreeing with such a view, my focus is on the perlocutionary effect which is caused by positioning and the motivations causing it. This chapter explores the notion of positioning in more depth and prepares the ground for exploring examples of positioning moves and strategies used by gamers of MMORPGs.

The concept of positioning does not exist in a vacuum. As Irvine (2009: 53) points out “[t]his concept is perhaps better thought of as a family of concepts, because it finds genealogies in several academic traditions”. There are many approaches, theories and notions in several disciplines comparable to positioning. Even in natural sciences the concept of positioning which is fundamentally connected to the notion of territoriality is not unknown. Terkourafi (2008: 50ff.) argues that there is a biological grounding for the concept of the face namely the deeply engrained reactions of approach and withdrawal. The choice to either approach something, letting down one's guard and taking the risk of possible harm or to withdraw, choosing security over risk but possible passing on a chance is basic. This evolutionary based mechanisms are anchored even in organisms like bacteria. Should a bacterium approach

another cell or withdraw. Should a rabbit go for food and risk being eaten by a snake, or let it be but remain hungry. This can be extrapolated to humans and less life-threatening situations like a conversation as “variously referred to as positive versus negative 'valence' or 'affect', the dimension of approach/withdrawal has been proposed as the common substratum of all human emotions[.]” (Terkourafi 2008: 50-51). As Terkourafi (2008: 51) further proposes “[t]hese properties make approach/withdrawal a natural candidate to provide the basis for a universalising notion of Face₂[...]”. Should a speaker offer another person a chair and risk being rejected, or just keep quiet and in social security but alone.

While Terkourafi sees politeness theory and the social concept of face being informed by this basic and evolutionary anchored principle, I go one step further and regard this biological grounding as a possible basis for several social and therefore also linguistic concepts. The dichotomic setup of several approaches concerning positioning, politeness and face as well as their similarity cannot be disregarded but suggests they developed from one another and in return inform one another. The later on discussed concept of face according to Brown and Levinson (2009: 61) separated in positive and negative face, the notion of other politeness theory researchers of involvement and independence (e.g. Locher 2004: 55) and Widdowson's²³ (1984: 85) concept of the territorial imperative and co-operative imperative, basically correspond to the biological grounding of approach and withdrawal. In similar vein, Goffman's (1967: 5-45; 47-95) notion of facework and his theory of deference and demeanor in which he discusses familiarity and privacy, is a take on this dichotomic setup of approach and withdrawal. The following quote illustrates how Goffman describes the risk of endangering one's security and territory by interacting with someone else. “There is an inescapable opposition between showing a desire to include an individual and showing respect for his privacy.” (Goffman 1967: 76). Widdowson (1984: 85) makes a similar observation:

23 According to Widdowson (1984: 85) the notion of territoriality refers to the speaker's “own circumscribed life space of ideas, values, beliefs within which they find their essential security”.

“co-operation can only occur if those co-operating allow entry into each other's individual world, and this calls for caution. Human beings, in common with other animals, have a strong sense of private territory, their own circumscribed life space of ideas, values, beliefs within which they find their essential security.”

Yet, while Goffman's ideas are not that straightforward discussed as in Widdowson's account, similarities are visible especially when it comes to the necessary co-operation (Goffman 1967: 27ff.) between the speakers in an interaction and the process of developing positions in an interaction (Goffman 1967: 9). The table below illustrates the dichotomies and the obvious similarities between the concepts.

<i>biological grounding</i> (Terkourafi 2008: 50-51)	approach	withdrawal
<i>face</i> (Brown; Levinson 2009: 61)	positive	negative
<i>social/paradox of face</i> (Locher 2004: 55; Scollon, Scollon 2001: 46-51)	involvement	independence
<i>imperatives</i> (Widdowson 1984: 85)	co-operation	territoriality
<i>facework</i> (Goffman 1967: 5-45; 63-73)	familiarity	distance/privacy

Table 5: concept comparison based on similar dichotomies

Clearly, this table could be expanded easily, nevertheless what can be seen is that there appear to be two fundamental concepts in common. These fundamental concepts could therefore be regarded as the initial position, starting point or the hardwired urges of humans. 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.” So on one hand, humans want to be independent in their own territory and have privacy. On the other hand, they desire the closeness of others, they want to be involved and co-operate with others.

Coming from this biological starting point, the next step is to advance to theories anchored in social sciences and humanities. Social constructionism provides a good starting point for exploring positioning. Harré and van Langenhove (1999: 4) give an apt description of the setting in which the concept of positioning is embedded:

“Its starting point is the idea that the constant flow of everyday life in which we all take part, is fragmented through discourse into distinct episodes that constitute the basic elements of both our biographies and of the social world. The skills that people have to talk are not only based on capacities to produce words and sentences but equally on capacities to follow rules that shape the episodes of social life. Not only what we do but also what we can do is restricted by the rights, duties and obligations we acquire, assume or which are imposed upon us in the concrete social contexts of everyday life.”

This illustrates the importance of the context in which conversation takes place and that the knowledge of certain skills, rules and expectations make discursive processes possible. Meaningful and successful communication can only take place when the interlocutors have the skills and the knowledge to communicate and this includes information on the *story line* (Harré; Moghaddam 2003: 9) or *genre* (Swales 2006) or setting. These settings include schemata and conventions and therefore certain roles, expectations, behaviors, rules and even speech acts. For instance, to recall the example of the introduction, in the setting or story line of a court trial a typical and expected role is the judge and the accused. There are rules, conventions and behaviors the accused has to follow in this story line. The genre sets the conditions. Communities determine genre conventions, following the conventions becomes a marker of community membership. Yet, as Widdowson (2012) remarks “there is always bound to be variation in the way social constructs are realized by individual users.” Thus, conventions and therefore also genres are changeable. However, in order to change something one must know the rules and conventions. The information of the genre and the context as well as the involved knowledge of rights, rules and conventions are part of discourse, the process of meaning making. This social and linguistic setup of the discourse is the grounding for the concept of positioning.

Whenever dealing with social interaction, it is worthwhile to turn to Goffman's works. It is not surprising, that Goffman offers several concepts which are in similar vein to the concept of positioning used by psychologists. Goffman's (1967: 5) notion of *line* which is “a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which [the speaker] expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself” appears to be comparable to positioning.

This concept includes two fundamental aspects which are also crucial in positioning, namely the expression of one's self as well as the evaluation of the other speakers. Another point mentioned by Goffman is that there is no neutral act or an act without effect. In his words (Goffman 1967: 5) “[r]egardless of whether a person intends to take a line, he will find that he has done so in effect.” Jaffe (2009: 3) takes a similar view stating that “there is no such thing as a completely neutral position vis-à-vis one's linguistic productions, because neutrality is itself a stance.”

To return to Goffman, another concept is also noteworthy in connection to positioning, the idea of *footing*. In conversations, social groups and other places of social interaction speakers gain, lose or change footing. A metaphor which describes this would be gaining and loosing footing on a muddy slope (see Goffman 1981). As Davies and Harré (1999: 44-45) note Goffman's idea, while promising, is rather vague relying on several other notions like *frames* and *keying* (see 4.3). They see a decisive difference in Goffman's notion of *footing* and in the concept of *positioning*, namely that “[footing] takes for granted that alignments exist prior to speaking and shape it, rather than that alignments are actual relations jointly produced in the very act of conversing.” (Davies; Harré 1999: 45). This is clearly a valid point of criticism since also in my understanding of the concept, positioning is a dynamic, fluid and relational sequence which evolves, develops, and changes throughout conversation.

A final concept by Goffman (1986: 40ff.), which is often referred to in accounts on positioning is the concept of *keying* which has been already mentioned in the discussion of *frames*. Jaffe (2009: 10-11) regards keying and rekeying as a shift in stance or position. Yet, I believe that keying is not the shift of position itself but rather a strategy or tool to mark an utterance as belonging to another frame or signifying something different than the obvious. Thus, while Goffman's notion of *line* and *footing* can be compared to position as such, keeping in mind the valid criticism by Davies and Harré, his idea of keying rather falls into the category marking and indexing utterances within a frame.

At this point performance theory and the notion of *voice* should be mentioned as similarly connected to positioning. Bauman (2000: 1) points out the fundamental connection between language, identity and performance by stating:

“[...] identity is an emergent construction, the situated outcome of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources and craft these semiotic resources into identity claims for presentation to others.”

The performance theory, similar to the notion of frame, comes from arts and dramatics but can definitely be applied to any interaction in general. According to Bauman (2000: 1), performance can be understood as “a special mode of situated communicative practice” which puts “the act of expression [...] on display, objectified, marked out to a degree from its discursive surroundings and opened up to interpretive scrutiny and evaluation by an audience.”

As noted in the chapter on role-playing (4.3) in this thesis, taking up and enacting a role is a fundamental part of social life. Every person enacts and performs certain roles. Every act of speaking is so to say a performance. This is an intersection to the concept of frame and footing. Yet performance theory also provides aspects which overlap with positioning theory like the idea of the situationally motivated choices from several repertoires. These choices provide the interlocutor with an image of the speaker, his or her identity and position in the very moment.

What seems also to be implied in performance theory is a notion which Bakhtin (1981: 353) formulated referring to it as *voice* being the speaker's world-view and values. Bakhtin regards utterances inherently as multivocal and dialogic. This means that an utterance is always multifunctional since several positions are negotiated with it in a conversation as well as that it is always set in a dialogue or a sort of language history, thus in the biographical language history of every speaker. There are texts prior to the utterance as well as texts following it. Utterances add up to another, reflect another, mingle and intertwine. This clearly ties in to the discussion of discourse, context and genre where one is embedded and interconnected with the other. Language is not produced by speakers in the void or in a language vacuum but is always embedded in a historical and biographical sequence.

Another concept namely the concept of *stance* or *stancetaking* as it is used in sociolinguistics overlaps in large parts with the concept of positioning. It is difficult to differentiate between both concepts or find borders between them as

they appear to be blurred. The following definition of stancetaking gives a taste of this blurry area: “Stancetaking – taking up a position with respect to the form or the content of one's utterance – is central because speaker positionality is built into the act of communication.” (Jaffe 2009: 3). The synonymous use of the terms stance and position suggest that both concepts are in essence one and the same concept with two different names. In this thesis I will use the term *position* and positioning. The connotations evoked by the term positioning appear to suit my concept better than stance. Furthermore, the term positioning can be associated with the notion of territoriality which is crucial in my understanding of the mechanisms and functions of interaction. Moreover, the term *stance* is often used in MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*® to refer to certain specializations in fighting styles of some classes like battle stance, defensive stance and berserker stance of warriors. In order to not confuse ingame mechanics and linguistic theories, the term positioning is used in the rest of the thesis.

10.2 The act of positioning

So how then can positioning be defined? The following definition by Du Bois (2007: 169) can be used as a starting point for exploring the concept further:

“I define [position]²⁴ as a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of value in the sociocultural field.”

Du Bois' definition draws attention to the active and public aspect of positioning. As he states (2007: 171) “[Position]²⁵ is not something you have, not a property of interior psyche, but something you do – something you take. Taking a [position] cannot be reduced to a matter of private opinion or attitude.”

Positioning is regarded by Du Bois as the smallest unit of social action, yet one of the most fundamental ones. Therefore it is not surprising that positioning is complex. He identifies three key aspects which appear to be particularly

²⁴ Du Bois uses the term *stance* in his article and not position.

²⁵ As above.

noteworthy. First, positioning is an act in public space in a dialogical interaction. Hence, positioning is always in relation to another speaker or speakers and their positions. The relational aspect also implies a dynamic and fluid characteristic of positioning. Second, positioning means responsibility. This ties in with the before quoted statement by Jaffe noting that there are no unmarked positions or neutral ones. Every position has certain consequences the speaker has to take responsibility for. Third, Du Bois regards value as a key aspect of positioning meaning the speaker's values while positioning as well as evaluating the values of the interlocutor and according to this positioning in return (Du Bois 2007: 173-174).

These three aspects appear to be valid and are described, yet termed differently, by other researchers as well. But when comparing Du Bois definition to one by Harré and Moghaddam (2003: 5-6) some differences can be found, they define position as:

“a cluster of rights and duties to perform certain action with a certain significance as acts, but which also may include prohibitions or denials of access to some of the local repertoire of meaningful acts. [...] realized in current practices, which people can adopt, strive to locate themselves in, be pushed into, be displaced from or be refused access, recess themselves from and so on, in a highly mobile and dynamics way.”

Harré and Moghaddam see position as a place in a moral and social space with a strong focus on hierarchies, while Du Bois emphasizes the sociocultural component of positioning. While both approaches offer a triangle for analysis, these could not be more different. Harré and Moghaddam's positioning triangle deals with the formal setup of positioning offering the following cardinal points position, speech and other acts and story line (see Harré; Moghaddam 2003: 5-6). Du Bois' triangle describes the positioning acts by offering the cardinal points subject one, subject two and objects which are connected with one another by positioning acts. The two subjects are connected by alignment. The subjects are connected to the object by the act of evaluation, the object in return is linked to the subjects by positioning, which in Du Bois' understanding is the act of situating an actor according to an object or position in general (see Du Bois 2007: 143-165). What appears to be similar in both approaches is that

positioning is an active act by social actors, that the actors can do several things while positioning or be positioned, the intersubjectivity or relational aspect of it and the dynamic character of positioning.

In the following the most salient features of positioning are described which add up to my definition of positioning. It goes without saying that the features are partly extremely interconnected and one feature leads to another. First, positioning is not detached or on its own but always embedded in a context. On one hand it is embedded in a conversation or a social episode (Harré; Langenhove 1999: 5) or a sequence of utterances. On the other hand the conversation is part of the genre or story line which is part of the discourse. In this setup every conversation is part of a social flux which does not exist in a vacuum but has been nurtured by history and personal biographies of the speakers and society. "Within conversations, social acts and societal icons are generated and reproduced." (Langenhove; Harré 1999: 15) This leads back to Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic and multivocal nature of conversation.

"Positioning always takes place within the context of a specific moral order of speaking." (Moghaddam 1999: 80). In this context and personal biographies of the speakers, the positions always add up to one another. One does not start from scratch but comes with a biography and knowledge of the context and the genre into a situation. Speakers are not empty sheets of paper.

The multivocal aspect of positioning leads to another very general feature namely that the act of positioning and positions are not transparent. Jaffe (2009: 4) points out the multiple, complex and sometimes even ambiguous character of positioning. The complexity and nontransparent character of positioning is apparent in that the speakers have to infer and interpret meanings from the utterances of others. Furthermore, speakers can express multiple and ambiguous meanings and identities by positioning. Several layers of positioning can cause different effects, yet they are done simultaneously in one utterance (see Harré; Langenhove 1999: 1-2; see also Jaffe 2009: 4; see also Moghaddam 1999: 78-80).

Another aspect of positioning is that the act of positioning is active. Even if one is forced by someone else into a position, this has been the active choice of the interlocutor. At this point we can remember the aforementioned statement by

Jaffe (2009: 3) that there is no neutral position, if so it is an active choice to be neutral. This entails that positioning carries certain values and thus can lead to particular consequences, as Du Bois (2007) illustrates.

Positioning is always relational, meaning that it always takes place in relation to another speaker or speakers. There is no need to take a position when one is alone. While Harré and Langenhove (1999: 2) believe that “[i]n some cases the relations are deductive, in others classificatory, so that generic attributions sustains a specific demand on or right to be exercised by an author”, this seems to be a too hierarchical view. Instead of regarding positioning and the relations expressed by it as a dichotomic relationship, other scholars highlight the aspect of negotiation.

Negotiation or co-operation is another feature of positioning which is tightly connected to the relational character of it. “For there to be any communication at all, there has to be some positional convergence, some give and take. In other words, communication depends on co-operation” (Widdowson 2012). Hence, “social contact calls for a social contract” (Widdowson 1984: 85) which is a mutually and tacitly contract of co-operation. The process of negotiating and jointly producing a sequence or story line appears to be a fundamental element of positioning which ties in with another feature of it, namely dynamics (see Moghaddam 1999: 79; see also Davies, Harré 1999: 37).

Positioning is not a clear-cut action but a dynamic process in which the relational aspect is of great importance. Positions can be changed, negotiated and challenged throughout conversations. A conversation is a constant flux (see Davies; Harré 1999: 37-41; see also Moghaddam 1999: 77-78). Speakers position themselves in relation to another person, in return the interlocutor positions in relation to the speaker.

“Thus, an action always leads to a reaction in the interlocutor(s). Like in a dance in which the movement of one dancer causes the other dancer(s) to move as well, the positioning movements of one speaker leads to reactions in the other speaker(s), even if it means that the other speaker(s) or dancer(s) leave the (dance) floor. Crucially, like dancing, communication requires co-operation to some extent.”
(Kramer 2013b: 2-3)

A final aspect of positioning has to be mentioned even though it is hard to grasp, namely situational or contextual aspects. Several points can be subsumed under this umbrella term like individuality, mood and other aspects which can influence the reaction of persons in a conversation. According to Moghaddam (1999: 77) “[...] positions are always emerging, changing and shifting based in part on how a person's utterances are hearable to oneself as speaker”. This highlights the very subjective and individual character of positioning but also of making meaning. The very same utterance by the same person can be understood differently by the same hearer. The personal experiences, biographies, socio-historical background, emotional state and the mood play a major role in this game of meaning making and positioning (see Moghaddam 1999: 77-78). While the self might appear to be constant, it is always shape-shifting back and forth, and transforming constantly based on everyday experiences, changes to socio-cultural and socio-historical background, emotional state, mood, the situation and other circumstances. Such an ever-changing self necessarily leads to different actions and reactions in similar situations.

Summing up, positioning can be regarded as complex, not transparent, active, relational and dynamic acts. It is crucially interconnected to negotiation and co-operation. Hence positioning can only exist when there are other participants. It is a process of dynamic negotiation which is in constant flux. Likewise it is also always embedded in a context, not only in the context of the situation but also in a biographical context of the speaker, hence other factors like socio-cultural aspects, socio-historical biography, individuality and mood influence how speakers position themselves and others and how they decode meanings.

After discussing the salient features of positioning the question arises how speakers position. First of all, positioning is done by communicative means. Du Bois (2007: 169) points out that positioning is achieved through “overt

communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms)". While one could argue how overt certain communicative means are or if they have to be overt in the first place, one certainly can approve of the list including not only verbal communication but also extralinguistic cues. Especially, for the following chapters discussing positioning in MMORPGs, communicative means and symbolic forms of communication are crucial to position. Positioning includes several layers and strategies of language use from the form language can take including lexical and grammatical choices to pragmatic and sociocultural aspects like politeness strategies, irony or showing membership. Positioning acts include all sorts of interaction strategies and linguistic resources which make up the linguistic matrix of speakers.

Many researchers like Jaffe (2009), Du Bois (2007) or Langenhove and Harré (1999) go to lengths to describe the modes or types of positioning. They categorize and label them as well as connect them to certain grammatical or lexical features. While the categorization of positioning into self-positioning and other positioning is obviously relevant as it describes two distinct types of positions appointed or taken, other types deal with the effect caused by the act. Such a fixed and inflexible categorization does not seem appropriate for a concept like positioning which is characterized by its strongly interconnected, dynamic and fluid features.

The differentiation between self-positioning and other-positioning is certainly useful as it again stresses the relational aspect of positioning (see Langenhove, Harré 1999: 22). Langenhove and Harré (1999: 20-31) provide a detailed discussion of intentional positioning which they categorize according to the dimension of self and other as well as performative and accountive positioning. Performative positioning refers to acts of positioning which cause a perlocutionary effect in the interlocutor. Accountive positioning involves the challenging of a position in a conversation or as Langenhove and Harré (1999: 21) refer to as "talk about talk". The following table illustrates the complex categories and dimensions of Langenhove and Harré's account concerning positioning:

	Performative positioning	Accountive positioning
Self-positioning	Deliberate self-positioning	Forced other positioning
Other-positioning	Deliberate positioning of others	Forced positioning of others

Table 6: types of intentional positioning (Langenhove, Harré 1999: 24)

A typical example of self-positioning forced by others would be to follow conventions and rules in a certain genre or setting like being the accused in a court trial. If an accused does not deliberately follow the rules of the court trial, this position can be forced upon him or her by the judge. Yet, the borders between the free and the rule-governed positions as well as the dimension of self-positioning and being positioned by others are clearly blurred. Sometimes it appears to be comparable to the famous egg-hen problem. You cannot tell what was first the convention which forces you into a self-positioning or the deliberate self-positioning which creates the convention. Thinking of the dynamic and relational character of positioning as well as the embeddedness of it in context and social space, it is possibly not relevant to categorize positioning into such types. The possibility to position oneself and others as well as being positioned by others seems to be of relevance though. Depending on certain hierarchies and power constructions in a setting the positioning can be either done by oneself or others and with more freedom or less.

Jaffe (2009: 5-7) provides other categories of positioning acts which are based on the motivation of the speakers and the effect they want to achieve by them. Her category of evaluation integrates the notion of assessment and alignment or disalignment. Evaluation “takes place within and invokes moral and social orders, systems of accountability, responsibility, and causality” (Jaffe 2009: 5) and is an index of the value systems of communities as well as individuals. It can be tightly connected to ideological and political struggles. Positioning acts which evaluate also simultaneously align and disalign the speaker with other subjects or objects (Jaffe 2009: 5).

The differentiation between affective and epistemic positioning is another category put forth by Jaffe which is also “socially grounded and consequential” (Jaffe 2009: 7). Affective positioning refers to emotional states of speakers by which they display self-presentation, evaluation but also social and moral indexicalities. This type of positioning is tied to the speakers identity and desire

of self-identification and self-presentation. Epistemic positioning expresses the speaker's degree of certainty about his or her statement. It is bound to authority and power. Knowledge, authenticity and reliability are important factors in epistemic positioning acts since they help to legitimate further evaluation (Jaffe 2009: 7). While Jaffe's affective positioning is connected to the speaker's emotions and feelings, epistemic positioning is more rational and bound to statements of information.

Du Bois (2007: 142-145) distinguishes between evaluation, positioning and alignment. According to Du Bois (2007: 143), "evaluation can be defined as the process whereby a stancetaker orients to an object of stance and characterizes it as having some specific quality or value". He links this to the use of demonstrative pronouns. His category called positioning refers to affective and epistemic acts of positioning by which speakers situate themselves on an affective scale (e.g. *I am glad*) or on an epistemic scale (e.g. *I know*).

"[T]he speaker who is taking the [position] is indexed via a first-person pronoun in syntactic subject role(*I*), while the [position] predicate (adjective or verb) specifies the nature of the stancetaker's position whether with respect to an affective (*glad*) or an epistemic (*know*) state, or both (*amazed*)."
(Du Bois 2007: 143)

Du Bois' third kind of positioning act is alignment which calibrates and regulates the relation between two positions as well as speakers. A fundamental aspect of this kind of positioning is addressing the other person either by the use of personal pronouns, names, or gestures (Du Bois 2007: 144).

One has to give credit to Du Bois' attempt to label different kinds of positioning. But it is a moot point whether such labels and categories are applicable. Du Bois also raises the question if during positioning speakers do more than one thing. It is my understanding that whenever one speaks, one does not only convey several meanings by using different layers and acts of communication but also that one pursues several goals at the same time. Communication does not work linearly and is not flat but a nexus of motivations, effects, reactions and acts.

This section shows how complex the notion of positioning is but helps to come up with a clearer definition of position and the act of positioning. Concluding my definition of position is the following:

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 co-operate 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.

Essentially, “all discourse, spoken or written, involves interpersonal positioning, with each participant seeking to have an effect on the other” (Widdowson 2012). Thus, the communication between gamers in MMORPGs is also imbued with acts of positioning since gamers, like speakers in general, wish to have certain effects on their interlocutors.

10.3 Positioning and politeness

Several concepts of politeness are connected to positioning and the notion of territoriality like face, politeness strategies, hierarchies and power. Clearly they are significantly intertwined with the concept of positioning, hence this chapter returns to many notions of positioning discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Politeness is a topic area which has kept numerous scholars and researchers busy. Several attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon and uncountable approaches have been put forth to deal with this interesting but yet difficult and complex topic. Watts (2003: xi) aptly wrote “[w]riting an introduction to politeness is like being in mortal combat with a many-headed hydra. You've barely severed one head when a few more grow in its place”. Clearly, this statement hits the mark since the phenomenon called politeness includes very

often numerous aspects which are not always clear cut like behavior as such, language usage, cultural and social conventions and issues which are dealt with by sociologists like the self, the other, identities and communities. There is no easy answer to a complex question even if it is formulated as a simple one like what is politeness. It is clear that a thesis of this scale cannot provide a perfect treatment of this phenomenon but only be an attempt to describe and discuss it in the context of MMORPG gaming. It can only tackle some of the heads of the hydra. Therefore, I want to provide my own definition of politeness which is used as a basis for this chapter. It is informed by Watts (2003), Locher (2004), Brown and Levinson (2009) and Scollon and Scollon (2001). Furthermore, it is influenced by the following definition by Holmes (1995: 5) in which politeness “refer[s] to behaviour which actively expresses positive concern for others, as well as non-imposing distancing behaviour [sic]”. Hence my definition is the following:

Politeness is a complex system of linguistic and behavioral strategies to position oneself in conversations, whereas the motivations and aims of the strategies can differ tremendously including rapport creation, conflict avoidance, repaying, receiving or giving emotional support and satisfaction or guiding the interlocutor towards one's meaning. While these strategies are actively and intentional expressed there is not necessarily a conscious effort behind the positioning acts, hence the strategies are often subconscious expressions of human co-operation, attending to both needs of the speaker and the hearer(s) to be involved and independent manifested in the concept of the face.

This rather bulky definition becomes clearer in the following chapter which deals in particular with face and facework. This chapter provides a concise discussion of some of the approaches towards politeness and politeness strategies, especially those which led to the previously given definition. This theoretical discussion prepares the ground for the treatment of politeness ingame (15) and the analysis of the questionnaire question called the wipe which illustrates in a following chapter (18) positioning and also politeness in use.

10.3.1 Face and facework

First of all, it is important to confine the politeness phenomenon into politeness₁ (politeness of the first order) and politeness₂ (politeness of the second order).

Politeness₁ refers to the social and cultural evaluations which are connected to politeness as such, while politeness₂ means the strategies used for construction and reproduction by means of politeness. As Watts (2003: 49), however, points out “[t]here is, *per definitionem*, no way of lifting (im)politeness₁ out of the social world in which it realises various social values and reifying it as (im)politeness₂ [sic]”. While many scholars in their attempts to describe and analyze the politeness phenomenon separated it into these two orders, it obviously is not a clear-cut matter. Similar to most aspects of life politeness also, while clearly having both mentioned dimensions, cannot be taken apart and dealt with separately since the concepts merge into another showing no clear borders.

This chapter deals basically with facework which is treated by many scholars as politeness₂, namely with politeness strategies and linguistic and behavioral interaction strategies. Yet the concept of the face itself, what face means to people and the evaluations it entails belongs rather to politeness₁. Hence, it is clearly not that easy but maybe also not so important to attempt to label everything according to these categories. That said, the spotlight now moves to the often referred and also in this thesis already mentioned concept of the face.

Some scholars, like Watts (2003: 117) stress the point that “[p]oliteness [t]heory can never be fully equated with Face Theory”. While this is understandable to a certain point as politeness theory, which in my understanding is imbedded in positioning, is more than face theory, one cannot take them apart. It is my belief that the concept of the face is one of the most accurate basic concepts scholars put forth to discuss and analyze human interaction. It provides a frame to describe and treat several aspects of interaction, especially the basic needs of humans which drive them.

The base for the concept of the face is Goffman's treatment of it which did not just come into existence but is itself informed by other influential sociologists of the time like Durkheim and Gluckmann. Goffman based his concept of the face on an article published in 1944 by Hsien Chin Hu in which the Chinese notion of

the face²⁶ is outlined (see Goffman 1967: 5-6). The following definition is one of Goffman's attempts to carve out the concept of the face from the structure of society:

“The term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line other assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share [...]” (Goffman 1967: 5)

This quote reflects one of the aspects most other definitions of the face build on, namely that the face is a self-image of a person which is claimed. This is underlined by Goffman's (1967: 10) belief that the face is while it is the “center of [the speaker's] security and pleasure, it is only on loan to [a person] from society [...]”. Hence the face of every person is pieced together and constructed only during interaction with others and while interacting. Such a construction along the way of interaction also means that the face of every person is not permanent but unstable and changeable. Additionally the construction of the self-image is dependent on the interpretation of the interlocutors.

“One's own face and the face of others are constructs of the same order; it is the rules of the group and the definition of the situation which determine how much feeling one is to have for face and how his feeling is to be distributed among the faces involved.” (Goffman 1967: 6)

It is this unstableness which also influences politeness strategies or positioning strategies in general. If the face which is the base of such facework strategies and face-saving acts is not permanent, it is logic that the same face-saving and positioning strategies can be interpreted differently by interlocutors in different situations.

While Goffman (1967: 12) believes that “[t]o study face-saving is to study the traffic rules of social-interaction [...]”, it appears rather that face-saving and positioning is more the study of how to drive a car whereas there are different vehicles which have to be operated differently. Additionally, the traffic rules can also differ enormously. As Watts (2003: 49) points out “(im)politeness is the

26 As Watts (2003: 120) explains the Chinese concept of face is derived from the terms *lien* and *mien* and linked to the Mandarin word *mianzi* (so to say “face”, “reputation”, “prestige”). These translations show the conceptual closeness between the terms in Mandarin. The concept of the “face” is also existent in other Asian cultures and languages which is reflected by similar terms in Asian languages e.g. *minji* in Cantonese, *mentsu* in Japanese or *chae myon* in Korean (see Scollon and Scollon 2001: 44)

clothing! As such it is open to changes in fashion [...]”. Only this could explain why the very same sentence and hence positioning strategy as well as face-saving strategy between the same speakers leads sometimes to different outcomes. The car (face) has changed from the last conversation to the current one. Moreover, not only has one of the speakers now a sports car and the other a truck, the traffic rules (conduct) might have changed as well. Clearly, the cultural traffic rules can influence how face is constructed and interpreted. There is plentiful research in not-euro-centric focused, mainly Asian, research on this for example on the Japanese concept of *wakimae*. It would go beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the very interesting findings and concepts put forth by colleagues working in that research area.

As mentioned before in this chapter, the concept of the face joins the dual setup of human needs. Mostly Brown and Levinson (2009) are quoted when it comes to the two sides of the face, however it should be mentioned that Goffman (1967: 73) himself also notes the dualism in his concept splitting his notion of deference up into two types whereas presentational rituals work on the urge to be appreciated and avoidance rituals work on the need for distance and independence. The very same setup is described also by Durkheim who classifies rituals into positive and negative rites (see Goffman 1967: 73). A similar terminology is used by Brown and Levinson who's concept of the face consists of two parts, a positive and a negative face attending to the same needs as Goffman's rites, namely the need for approval and appreciation hence closeness (positive face) and the want for freedom and independence hence distance and territoriality (negative face) (Brown; Levinson 2009: 61). The terminology of positive and negative has, however, nothing to do with an evaluation of the needs they stand for. The underlying metaphor is magnetism whereas positive magnets are drawn towards one another and negative magnets repel one another (see Scollon; Scollon 2001: 46-47). Scollon and Scollon (2001: 46-48) and Locher (2004: 55) refer to these two aspects of the face in terms of involvement and independence. This terminology is more intuitive and shows that a speaker wants to be involved with others but at the same time also independent and free.

This dualism of the face leads back to the discussion of the paradoxical relation of positions since clearly both needs, closeness and distance, cannot be combined completely at the same time. Just like in the already mentioned notion of territoriality by Widdowson (1984: 85), one wants to protect one's personal, private space and yet in order to communicate and interact with others, which is another human urge, one has to lower the barrier to allow entrance. Scollon and Scollon (2001: 48) note this paradox of face and the conflict of both aspects of it:

“If I show you too much involvement, you are likely to feel that your independence is being threatened. On the other hand if I grant you too much independence, you are likely to feel that I have limited your involvement.”

Hence, when speaking to others it is always a balancing act, as both sender (addresser) and receiver (addressee) have these two sides of the face and neither of them wants to threaten his or her own face nor the face of the other person. Yet, threats to faces or, as Brown and Levinson (2009: 65) call them, face-threatening acts (FTA) are committed to some extent in every conversation as “there is no faceless communication” (Scollon, Scollon 2001: 48).

“Every disapproval or criticism threatens the hearer's positive face while orders threaten the hearer's negative face. The speaker's positive face is threatened by apologies, while the negative face is threatened by excuses.” (Kramer 2010: 143)

Therefore, speakers develop strategies to redress and minimize the threats they commit. By this they actively position in conversations according to face needs, their own and those of the interlocutor(s) (see Kramer 2013b: 14).

Brown and Levinson's treatment of face-saving and politeness theory from 1978 is one of the most cited works when it comes to researching politeness (see Brown, Levinson 1978). Even though their theory faced much, and sometimes justified, criticism, one has to admit that their treatment of this phenomenon and their developed theory is, in spite of everything, the yet most detailed and best attempt to tackle politeness and the linguistic strategies involved (see Locher 2004: 68-70). It provides, when used with caution, a sound foundation for researching politeness and for exploring positioning in conversations. Hence, it is also of importance in the analysis of politeness and positioning in this thesis.

According to Brown and Levinson three factors are crucial to calculate the risks of FTAs, namely social distance (D), relative power (P) and relative ranking (R). Similar aspects are used by other scholars of the field like Scollon and Scollon (2001: 52-54) who build their theory on power, distance and weight of imposition. Brown and Levinson use these factors (P, D, R) as a base to explore possible counter-strategies for FTAs. Their strategy figures for realizing and redressing FTAs are detailed and often cited by other researchers (see Brown, Levinson 2009: 102, 131 and 214). Yet, these figures are not recited in this thesis. While the depicted depth of labeling redressing strategies in the figures is appealing on first glance, it appears that they are overgeneralized and not close to linguistic reality. However, interesting is that positive politeness strategies which attend to the positive face of the hearer, are labeled by them as approach-based and negative politeness as avoidance-based (Brown, Levinson 2009: 70). Even though, scholars like Locher (2004: 67-68) regard this categorization as vague, I believe that it connects very well with the already discussed notion of the dichotomy of approach and withdrawal. Brown and Levinson categorize utterances in FTAs and not FTAs as such, whereas utterances threatening the face are split into saying something on record or off record. While on record utterances directly state an intention, off record strategies are indirect.

A typical example of this from the ingame context is saying "Looks like I am out of healing potions" and by this hoping that others would provide some potions, instead of directly asking for them. When using on record strategies one can go bald on record and not redress the utterance ("Give me potions!"), use positive politeness redressing strategies ("It would be good for the next encounter if I had some healing potions") or negative politeness redressing strategies ("Could you spare some healing potions?"). Clearly, these examples illustrate already the difficulty and vagueness when it comes to label politeness strategies.

Normally, speakers do not use only one strategy in an utterance but mix several strategies and layers. This will be more obvious when discussing the situation of the wipe (18).

Other scholars tried to tackle the politeness phenomenon in other ways than Brown and Levinson. Scollon and Scollon (2001), for example, put forth some typical linguistic strategies for involvement and independence as well as three politeness systems which could be seen as three categories of conversational setups. Even though they call the given ten types strategies of involvement or independence, they sometimes rather read like a code of conduct. Strategies like “[b]e optimistic” (Scollon, Scollon 2001: 50) or “[u]se own language or dialect” (Ibid: 51) appear more like entries of a manual to minimize threats in conversations. Their three politeness systems are based on the already mentioned factors, power, distance and weight of imposition. The latter can be compared to the cost benefit scale by Leech (1983: 107ff). The three systems by Scollon and Scollon are the deference politeness system (-P, +D), solidarity politeness system (-P, -D) and hierarchical politeness system (+P, +/-D). While in Scollon and Scollon's deference politeness system power is absent for the speaker, the distance between the speakers is apparent. A typical situation in this setting would be an employee talking to his or her boss. The same situation looked at from the boss' perspective would be a hierarchical politeness system. The boss is in power, and distance can be there but does not need to. The solidarity politeness system could be exemplified by two colleagues speaking to one another, they are on the same level of power and close to one another. What these systems highlight, similar to Brown and Levinson's theory, are power relations and hierarchies, which can hardly be applied to the MMORPG setting. Yet, the question of power and hierarchies is dealt in a separate chapter in this thesis (17).

Tackling the question of politeness from another angle, amongst others, Leech (1983) and Lakoff (1973) started out from the co-operative principle by Grice. Lakoff's theory of pragmatic competence received strong criticism and should only be mentioned here for the sake of completion. Leech developed the politeness principle adding it to Grice's co-operative principle. According to him the politeness principle is “to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place” (Leech 1983: 82). The principle is made of the following six maxims: tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim and sympathy maxim. The cost-benefit scale, the optionality

scale (the amount of choice given to an interlocutor) and the indirectness scale influence the choice and degree of use of the respective maxims (see Leech 1983: 123-132). It is often criticized that Leech's approach is too theoretical and can not be applied properly. Clearly, everyone who tried to label utterances according to Leech's maxims will stop frustrated at a point. It appears that the maxims provided by Leech illustrate to some extent certain motivations for the use of certain strategies rather than politeness strategies themselves. Locher (2004: 65-66) notes however, that Leech's maxims are useful to describe culture-specific notions of politeness. Therefore, Leech's framework and maxims are also integrated to the analysis of gamer's positioning.

Leech's approach has been referred to as an illustration of motivations for certain behaviors which are often labeled as politeness strategies. But what are the reasons for polite behavior and in this sense for positioning as polite? Watts (1992), amongst others, differentiates between unmarked and marked behavior. Unmarked, appropriate behavior is referred to as politic behavior whereas polite behavior is a marked version of politic behavior. Watts' approach appears rather goal oriented which becomes obvious when he defines linguistic politeness:

“a marked extension or enhancement of politic verbal behaviour, as a conscious choice of linguistic forms which, in accordance with the dictates of the time and fashion, are conventionally understood to be an attempt on the part of *ego* to enhance her/his standing with respect to *alter* – for whatever reason. It is thus not deviant behaviour; it is not in other words non-politic. However, it is certainly marked, and its functions may easily be non-altruistic and clearly egocentric.”
[sic] (Watts 1992: 69)

Watts sees egocentric motivations as one of the driving forces for polite behavior. This could also be transferred to positioning in general, meaning that positioning moves are active interaction strategies to manipulate the interlocutor towards one's intended meaning and to manipulate the interlocutor's opinion of oneself (c. f. Watts 1992: 51). This aspect is returned to in the chapter on politeness ingame and the attitudes of gamers towards it (15).

Another motivation which is according to Locher (2004: 75-76) often neglected is the pro-social aspect of politeness. At this point, one can return to Holmes' (1995: 5) definition of politeness as “[...] behaviour which actively expresses positive concern for others, as well as non-imposing distancing behaviour [sic]”.

Instead of regarding politeness strategies as mere avoidance of friction or egocentric driven effort, some researchers like Holmes and Hill et al. (1986) believe that involvement itself, so the human urge to be involved with others, is a driving motivation. Hill et al. (1986: 349) note that “[p]oliteness is one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider other's feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort, and promote rapport.”

I would argue that each of mentioned motivations, egocentrism, friction avoidance and pro-social behavior, do not contradict one another. Similar to redressing strategies of FTAs, several aspects can be involved simultaneously. Hence, one motivation does not necessarily rule out the other. Sifianou discusses this multiple reward and motivation setting:

“People tend to be considerate because this repays them with a pleasant feeling of satisfaction; furthermore, they receive consideration in return and at the same time satisfy the needs of others. *It is a multiple reward*. This obviously does not mean that they behave in the way that they do because they have any ulterior motives (although this may be true in a few cases), or that they expect any tangible reward. It simply means that they have internalized the fact that in order to live in a harmonious society *you give and take* and thus participate in maintaining the necessary equilibrium of relationships.”
(Sifianou 1992: 83, my italics)

Many of the aspects described by Sifianou are returned to in the chapter on the gamer's attitudes towards politeness (15). Yet, it can be noted that being social and getting involved with others, thus being considerate towards others repays double as the interlocutor will be more positive towards one as well as it provides oneself with a feeling of satisfaction. This shows how pro-social motivations and yet also egocentric motivations are often combined and intertwined and cannot always be separated from one another. In same vain as the numerous times referred to concept of co-operation, Sifianou refers to *give and take* as a crucial aspect of a harmonious society.

To resort to the metaphor of dancing introduced for positioning, if a dancer leads his or her dancing partner making him or her look like a good dancer, he or she will also profit from this. Dancing is like politeness and therefore also positioning a joint venture in which there is always a give and take, a shifting and transformation of positions. The motivations behind it are multitude.

In the following chapters I base my analysis of ingame communication on a strongly connected net of approaches whereas Brown and Levinson's politeness theory provides a strong frame for discussing examples. Yet, I do not see redressing strategies as occurring singularly but that several strategies and positioning acts are taken simultaneously for various effects. Several other aspects put forth like Leech's concepts or Locher's attempt to deal with politeness inform my own analysis of politeness and positioning ingame.

This chapter gave a concise overview of concepts and approaches which are tightly linked to the concept of positioning, its nature as well as its connection to politeness and facework. It is important to lay the theoretical basis before putting such a concept into practice. Clearly, positioning is more than politeness and facework, even though in many studies these notions are mixed. But frameworks of politeness theory can be made use of to explore positioning in conversation.

In the following course of this thesis several ways of positioning in MMORPGs are be described. As has been mentioned before in this chapter, positioning is done by communicative means and through linguistic acts which go far beyond the use of language, spoken or written. The following chapters illustrate how speaker's positioning in MMORPGs is done and what it looks like. Thus the channel is explored in the next chapter since it alters the message form and by this influences the mode of communication, positioning and negotiating of meanings. The channel and its considerations provide encoding possibilities for the message which become manifest in stylistic and orthographic features. Clearly, all these aspects are complex and intertwined making their treatment in single chapters difficult, yet a structuring into certain chapters based on Jakobson's speech event model is attempted in the interest of clarity.

11. The channel: medium considerations

An important part of considering MMORPGs as speech event is the channel because the medium provides the speaker, hence the gamer, with unique possibilities of expression. While some paralinguistic cues and ways of encoding meaning are missing in MMORPG communication, other forms of encoding have arisen.

MMORPG communication is set in a tradition of communication studies which deals with online communication or electronic communication. These areas have to be taken into consideration when describing MMORPGs as speech event. The chapter comments on the terms used for communication using computer and other electronic media. It provides a discussion and a literature review of this research area as well as own definitions for language use and usage in this channel. Furthermore, the highly controversial issue of writing and speech is dealt with. The aspect of writing and speech gives rise to the message and the ways of encoding it.

11.1 Coming to terms with Netspeak, CMC, EMC

Research in MMORPG communication is also to some extent research of communication on the Internet. There are several terms which are used for this research field. The most common nowadays is *computer-mediated communication* (henceforth *CMC*). When in the 1980s communication through the Internet became common, the term *CMC* originated as umbrella term for several online communication platforms and channels. In 1995 the *Journal of Computer-mediated communication* was published and provided a platform for research in this area ever since (Herring 1995). Milestones in the field are, amongst others, Herring's *Computer-mediated communication: linguistic, social, and cross-cultural perspectives* (Herring 1996), Crystal's *Language and the Internet* (Crystal 2001) and Baron's *Alphabet to Email, how written English evolved and where it's heading* (Baron: 2000). Ever since the field is extended and several aspects of online communication have been researched like multilingualism online (Danet; Herring 2007a), e-mails (Baron 2000), IRC chat-rooms (e.g. Dittman 2001) and several other topics (see Baron 2008: 11-12; see also Baron 2009: ix-xi).

What changed meanwhile is the fact that being online is not anymore restricted to a computer at home. Since the 1980s and 1990s communication technologies have improved. While in 2000 it could be expected that if someone answered an e-mail he or she was at his or her computer at home or work or at his or her laptop, today this is not necessary the case anymore. Smartphones, tablet-PCs, mobile consoles and handhelds are usually web-enabled. If someone answers an e-mail today, he or she could be on the tram using a smartphone. Internet communication is not stationary anymore and it is not computer-mediated anymore. This results in a new term coined by researchers, *electronically-mediated communication (EMC)* (see Baron 2008: 12).

Another term, I favored in my own master thesis (Kramer 2008), is introduced by Crystal, namely *Netspeak*. In his *A glossary of Netspeak and Textspeak* (2004: 78) he describes netspeak as a

“[t]erm[...] used by some commentators, devised on analogy with such words as *doublespeak* (as in George Orwell's novel 1984) and *airspeak* (for the language of air-traffic control), to describe the kind of distinctive language found on the Internet”.

While the term appears to be a preferable alternative to CMC as it obviously focuses more on the Internet rather than computers, it does not signify the cultural and discursive aspects of communication in it. The terms refer to the texts occurring in the media rather than the discourse the speakers are engaged in. It appears to be disregarded that the communications and their technical setup provide different linguistic forms as well as discourse functions.

The problem of the terms *Netspeak*, *CMC* and *EMC* is that they indicate a direct, perpetual relation of the medium and the language. The aspect of the medium used to communicate in CMC, EMC and Netspeak is predominant. The term *Netspeak* consists of the word *Internet* and thus focuses on the medium Internet through which speakers communicate. Similarly, CMC and EMC focus on the mediation of communication, as is clear in their composition. The medium is the center of these terms. This however is problematic, especially, when dealing with MMORPGs and gamers since the language of them is not bound to a medium. The language is taken outside its original surrounding. What these terms lack is a focus on the language as expression of culture,

hence on the discourse. The medium has such a dominant role in these terms that the speakers and the contexts in which the speakers communicate are disregarded.

As Jones (2009: 15) points out, CMC studies concern themselves mostly with isolated conversations disregarding that “the context of CMC can be extremely rich, and extremely physical”. What he means by this is that while speakers talk in an Internet communication situation they are involved simultaneously in other interactions with other speakers, media and their surrounding. All these activities influence the way speakers communicate and act. Jones (2009: 15-16) refers to this as *inter-activity*, contrasting it to interactivity and multitasking. *Interactivity* refers to separate tasks engaged in at the same time while *inter-activity* means that “multiple activities can flow together and affect one another” (Jones 2009: 16).

MMORPGs are particularly inter-active in the sense that during gaming numerous actions are taken. During fights one is not only busy operating one's avatar but at the same time has to keep an eye on the surrounding in order to alert the other players if more enemies arrive. Furthermore, one watches his or her own healthbar, the healthbar of the other group members and the healthbar of the enemy. During a fight party members communicate with one another, noting changes in the fight, alerting others as in “I have aggro!” (I have the attention of an enemy), “Mob on healer!” (an enemy attacks the healer), “Resheep!” (transform an enemy into a sheep again).

If it is a demanding encounter it can involve a lot of moving the avatar, avoiding attacks and spells which are bound to an area. Since I play a mage I am very often in charge of controlling the crowd (crowd-control, CC) of enemies since I can transform one humanoid into a sheep (or other animal) and thus take it out of the fight for a certain amount of time. This is an essential strategy in fights against more than one enemy. While the enemy is a sheep, I have to help the rest of the group to fight the other enemies. However, as soon as the sheep transforms back into the enemy, I am supposed to re-transform into a sheep, as long as the group fights other enemies. Therefore, I am always watching the sheep, ready to transform it, fight at the same time the other enemies, have an eye on the surrounding and my team-mates and on my healthbar. Fighting

encounters in MMORPGs are high-stress situations with a high amount of interactivity which also includes communication of crucial information. The context and the surrounding of the gamers shape their language and their meaning making of language.

This is what discourse is about, as was mentioned in the introduction to the first section, and this is exactly what should be focused on more when dealing with conversations from Internet communication situations. Therefore, the center of attention should not be the medium but the speakers and what they do in their conversation, namely negotiate. Calling to mind the discussion about discourse from the first section, as Widdowson (1984: 87) noted discourse is a process of negotiation in which “[t]he language user [...] does not deal with text as linguistic data [...] but as indications of communicative intent which have to be interpreted in flight, as it were, during the discourse process.” When reading “*Sheep!*” in the party-channel during a fight, a gamer will interpret this as an order to transform an enemy into a sheep and not as a statement about the fauna.

As noted in section one, I adopt this view that communication is a process and in particular it is a negotiation process which can only be partially expressed. The language user negotiates meanings continuously during conversation. The terms Netspeak, CMC and EMC all lack the inclusion of contextual factors that come into play in Internet communication situations and therefore in MMORPGs. They focus only on the channel. But discourse and speech events consist of more factors. The notion of discourse is taken up by Ferrara et al. (1991) who refer to language usage in multimedia settings and especially in the Internet as *interactive written discourse*. This appears to be a step in the right direction, yet, the word written is a stumbling block. Especially, when dealing with MMORPGs, communication is not necessarily written language but spoken. Despite the fact that spoken data is not represented in this thesis, the language of gamers is neither only written language nor is it only in the game but also outside the game. When two gamers meet at a dinner party, they will both use language from gaming to show one another their gamer community membership. They use certain features of gaming language to position themselves in the conversation.

For these reasons, I would refer to language use in MMORPGs as *gaming based language discourse*. This term should indicate that the language used is based on gaming but not necessarily bound or restricted to this channel. The term discourse should point out that language use is a process of negotiation and therefore in flux.

What is shown in this chapter is that the terms used to describe the setting (channel) and the communication in Internet based situations are diverse and not unproblematic. Previous approaches are non-satisfying when applied to the discourse of MMORPGs. In this work I attempt to shift the focus from the medium to the speakers, therefore to the gamers and what they do with language and for what purpose. This shift is also the reason why the channels of communication, their features and mechanics like asynchronous, synchronous and one-to-one or one-to-many are discussed in the chapter dealing with MMORPG communication. This chapter should focus on the channel and the speakers not on technical basics. Yet, it cannot be denied that the channel and its features give rise to certain linguistic forms and behaviors.

11.2 Writing vs speech

It is convenient when analyzing data to generate categories to label it. Most comfortable is to categorize the world in terms of dichotomies. Black and white, loud and quiet, langue and parole or writing and speech. The parts of the dichotomies are said to be clear cut and non-overlapping. Despite the fact that there are rarely two clear-cut categories, researchers invest a lot of time to explore these dichotomies. From the very beginning of CMC research, the question of writing or speech is pursued. Before investigating these categories in the context of gaming based language discourse, it is useful to summarize the features and differences assigned to writing and speech. The following table, based on Baron's (2008: 47) account, gives an overview of the features.

	Speech	Writing
Structural properties		
number of participants	dialogue	monologue
durability	ephemeral (real-time)	durable (time-independent)
level of specificity	more vague	more precise
structural accoutrements	prosodic and kinesic cues	document formatting
Sentence characteristics		
sentence length	shorter units of expression	longer units of expression
one-word sentences	very common	very few
initial coordinate conjunctions	frequent	generally avoided
structural complexity	simpler	more complex
verb tense	present tense	varied (esp. past and future)
Vocabulary characteristics		
use of contractions	common	less common
abbreviations, acronyms	infrequent	common
scope of vocabulary	more concrete more colloquial narrower lexical choices more slang and obscenity	more abstract more literary wider lexical choices less slang and obscenity
pronouns	many 1 st and 2 nd person	fewer 1 st or 2 nd person (except in letters)
deictics (e.g., <i>here</i> , <i>now</i>)	use (since have situational context)	avoid (since have no situational context)

Table 7: features and differences between speech and writing (Baron 2008: 47)

In addition to the features demonstrated in table seven, Crystal (2006: 31) notes that speech often has a social role. He also points out that while it is immediately revisable, a mistake cannot be corrected completely. Furthermore, speech is spontaneous and dynamic which results in no time lag between production and reception. This fast pace of the conversation makes long planning of complex structures impossible, thus speech is characterized by loose structure and long, intricate utterances and repetitions (c. f. Crystal 2006: 31, see also Kramer 2008: 39-40).

“Writing is often regarded as a way of recording facts or communicating knowledge” (Kramer 2008: 40). Clearly, writing is not only used to report facts and happenings, there are also written texts which have a social and personal function such as personal letters or notes. Yet, the characteristics in the table

above, such as the fewer use of 1st and 2nd person pronouns or the varied use of tense, point towards the predominant function of writing as a tool to report and record happenings. The unnecessary presence of the interlocutor and the possibility of revision, gives the writer the opportunity to organize the text and use more complex and elaborate structures (c. f. Crystal 2006: 31).

When it comes to communication on the Internet, the label of writing and speech appears to be very vague. As Baron (2008: 46) notes the “differences between speech and writing lie along a continuum rather than being absolutes.” Just like outside the Internet, communication on the Internet can also not always be categorized as purely writing. While a good portion of communication on the Internet and in MMORPGs consists of written texts, chats are as mentioned before synchronous, ephemeral dialogues or talks. The speakers are present and immediate response is expected by the other interlocutors. This leads to communication strategies one recognizes from spoken conversations like asking *Hello? Well? Still there?* after a certain amount of time, in order to find out if the interlocutor is still paying attention. Similar situations happen during phoning, when the speaker is not receiving feedback and therefore asks if the other person is still there. As chapter 8.3 illustrates, back-channeling and paying attention are crucial for interaction and positioning.

Márton (2005: 58) feels that: “Die Sprache [des] Chats (“Chatspeak”) entspricht einem getippten Sprechen. [...] Chatspeak, sei es in IRCs, MUDs oder MMORPGs zeichnet sich durch eine hohe Fehlertoleranz aus.” Normally, spelling or grammatical mistakes are disregarded in chats and MMORPGs by other users. They are not seen as a sign of ignorance but rather as typing mistakes (typos) or errors happening because of the fast pace of interaction. This is another similarity to speech in which grammatical mistakes or wrong pronunciation are disregarded (Kramer 2008: 40).

However, such observations can mislead researchers and even tempt them to regard communication on the Internet as speech. Crystal (2006: 32) for example concluded:

“The situations are not all equally 'spoken' in character. We 'write' e-mails, not 'speak' them. But chatgroups are for 'chat', and people certainly 'speak' to each other there – as do people involved in virtual worlds. [...] These are 'speech acts', in a literal sense. The whole thrust of the metalanguage in these situations is spoken in character.”

Crystal mitigates his statement by concluding that Netspeak in general is more like written language which is closer to spoke language, than spoken language which has been written down (Crystal 2006: 51-52). Baron (2008: 48) notes that her earlier studies, which do not consider instant-messaging, provide similar results, namely those of mixed modalities:

“It resembled speech in that it was largely un-edited; it contained many first- and second-person pronouns; it commonly used present tense and contractions; it was generally informal; and CMC language could be rude or even obscene. At the same time, CMC looked like writing in that the medium was durable, and participants commonly used a wide range of vocabulary choices and complex syntax.”

Baron in her study (2008) of instant-messaging concludes concerning writing and speech that it is “[s]ome of both, but not as much speech as we've tended to assume” (2008: 70). Such generalizations appear to be a difficult matter especially in regards to communication in MMORPGs. This should be illustrated by the following example taken from the general chat-channel of *World of Warcraft*®.

Example (14)

Hongahr: Young Tauren Looking for a Good RP Guild (First Horde Rp char. Ever)

Colomis: LFM Tempest Keep, 70+ RP Rolls allowed. Come get your tier and RP gear today. /w me

Malorneh: LOOK A VIRGIN

Mevroc: MILK IT

Colomis: Where?!

Thefrostér: lol

Malorneh: xD

Yaxin: TAKE A COOKIE

Fragglax: I lol'd... Welcome though

Swizzey: <Tale of the Dragon> is recruiting! We are a casual & friendly newly made lvl 3 guild looking for mature, easy going people to join us having fun in dungeons and pvp together, maybe a raid now and then aswell. Whisper me if you are curious :) [sic]

This extract of a chat shows a conversation evolving between the gamers Colomis, Malorneh, Mevroc, Thefrostér, Yaxin and Fraggilax after Hongahr's request for a role-playing guild. They make fun of the fact that Hongahr is searching for a role-playing guild stating that it is his first role-playing character and that he is a Tauren, a race which resembles cows. This makes him a role-playing virgin which is pointed out by Malorneh. Other players join into this prank and add the component of milking a cow. This conversation is according to its characteristics rather speech than writing. It is a spontaneous prank and the dynamics are obvious since other players react to it, some only by laughing or by writing a smiley. The other utterance by Swizzey is not linked to the conversation of the other players. Swizzey is making a recruitment call using clear sentence structure and acronyms. It is a planned utterance and does not seem spontaneous or dynamic. Similarly, Colomis' first utterance in this extract, which is a call for players to join him or her in a dungeon, does appear to be planned and not spontaneous. He or she is looking for members (LFM) to Tempest Keep. Both these utterances would fall into the category of writing rather than speech according to the features discussed before.

This means that in this chat session and therefore probably in every type of chat there is the possibility to have utterances which fall into the category of speech and writing. Since chats are synchronous and time-governed, they are said to resemble talking. The logic consequence would be that chats are more like speech. This example however demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case.

The difficulty of applying the categories of writing and speech is not only present in synchronous communication. Even though one expects clearer boundaries in an asynchronous situation like message-boards, this is not the case either. As discussed before, message-boards are not time-bound, the speakers are not present. The formal setup would favor written language. However, the following examples illustrate messages from a message-board and the different forms they take:

Example (15)

IM GOING TO QUIT IF THIS HAPPENS HAVE NEVER SUDDENLY
HATED MORE ON A GAME BECAUSE OF A UPCOMING
EXSPANSION! [sic]

Example (16)

I very much agree with you, dear sir! We deserve more of a background and I, for one, would like to know more about my own history. Maybe there is a chance there will be archaeological discoveries about our origins in the near future?

Asynchronous communication situations allow the speakers to plan and revise their utterances and therefore one would expect messages like in example 16 to be found on message-boards. Example 16 is a perfect example of written language and of role-playing, since the speaker is certainly in character speaking about his or her race and archeological discoveries which could shed light on the history of the respective race. The player uses clear sentence structures and punctuation. It seems as if a lot of thought went into this message including the choice of words and addressing the other gamer (*dear sir*).

On the other hand, example 15 is unstructured and obviously was not revised before it was posted because there is a lack of punctuation, spelling mistakes and the fact that the message is written in capital letters. The capital letters, as is discussed later on in more detail (12.8), could be an expression for strong emotions. The speaker is apparently furious about the upcoming expansion to the game and does not care to spend a minute to revise the message before posting it on the message-board.

What these examples illustrate is, that even though the preconditions of a message-board would suggest that the language used in this setting is written language, the examples show that this is not necessarily the case. Neither chats from MMORPGs nor message-board posts appear to be fitting clearly into the categories of writing and speech. It even happens that in the very same conversation or message-board thread, one can find utterances of both categories. If this is the case, how can any generalizations about writing and speech be made about chats, message-boards, language on the Internet or in MMORPGs?

It appears as if a dichotomic system is not very useful in MMORPGs, nor does it seem to be of much use in any other linguistic situation. As the quoted statement of Baron points out writing and speech lie rather in a continuum than

in absolutes. Moreover, it seems as if one of the major flaws in the differentiation between writing and speech is the lack of differentiation between the medium and the language used. In order to make this differentiation it might be useful to look at a concept used by Koch and Oesterreicher (1994: 587-604). The concept of medial and conceptual speech and writing is particularly used by German-speaking CMC researchers. This concept highlights the problems of the terms *speech* and *writing* since they are used without making a distinction between the realization and conception of language. In Koch and Oesterreicher's concept a distinction is made between the medium and concept. The term *medial* refers to the medium in which the text is realized and produced, while the term *conceptual* refers to the concept of the language used (Kramer 2008: 41).

Clearly, Koch and Oesterreicher are not the only ones to realize this problem. Halliday reacted to this lack of distinction by introducing the terms *medium* and *mode*. The term *medium* can be equated with the term *medial* in Koch and Oesterreicher's concept. The *medium* deals with the manifestation of language and its actual production. It is so to say the product, while the term *mode* or, as Koch and Oesterreicher call it, *conceptual* refers to the used language. Hence "we can have spoken language designed to be read, written language designed to be spoken [...]" (Widdowson 2002: 550). It is important to note that there is intricacy in each mode, hence generalizations such as for example regarding written language as more complex than speech cannot be made. Essentially, modes are not dependent on a specific type of media (See Widdowson 2002: 549-550).

What makes Koch and Oesterreicher's concept interesting is the used continuum model. While other concepts make use of absolutes with two fixed end-points, Koch and Oesterreicher's continuum model allows gradation between medium and concept or mode. In order to pin down the conceptual realization of texts, Koch and Oesterreicher (1994: 588ff.) use the concept of communicative distance and closeness. Factors which influence the distance and closeness are the public, familiarity between the interlocutors, emotionality and spontaneity (c. f. Kramer 2008: 41ff.).

Haase et al. (1997: 60ff.) refined this concept by categorizing communicative closeness and distance into a textual-pragmatic layer, syntactic layer and lexical-semantic layer. The following table summarizes the characteristics of each layer.

	Communicative closeness	Communicative distance
Textual-pragmatic layer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structuring signals (e.g. deictic expressions) • turn-taking signals • hesitation • correcting signals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text coherence • structured semantics • linking devices
Syntactic layer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paralinguistic cues • non-verbal signals • poor syntactic correctness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syntactic correctness • well-formed sentences • precision
Lexical-semantic layer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word choice is as important as other factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word choice is essential

Table 8: characteristics of communicative closeness and distance (Kramer 2008: 43)

While the features of the layers may appear intuitive at first glance, one wonders about the applicability of this concept. For instance, how would one label a text, for example a prepared lecture in which a very coherent text with linking devices and non-verbal signals is used. What would happen if during this lecture a person from the audience lifts his or her hand to signal that he or she has a question?

Furthermore, is the choice of words really only essential in situations of communicative distance as when talking to a superior at work, a stranger on the street and so on? When talking to close family members about a controversial issue or a topic which is known to cause arguments, one will not go without choosing one's word with care, therefore making word choices in this situation of communicative closeness. Communication is always a matter of positioning and negotiating, clearly the factor of closeness or distance influences the choices made but word choice is always essential.

It looks as if the concept of communicative closeness and distance and especially the layers provided by Haase et al. are nothing more than the dichotomic system of writing and speech in disguise. The layers very much resemble the characteristics of writing and speech which Baron and Crystal summarize and are discussed above. Moreover, it seems as if the terms communicative closeness and distance mix again different concepts in themselves. On one hand features of the communicative closeness category like paralinguistic and non-verbal cues appear to have more to do with spatial proximity than with communication. On the other hand there is the word choice which seems to have more to do with an emotional and cognitive proximity.

The real question is if such categories and models concerning writing and speech are really needed. Instead of studying the where (medium) and which type (concept or mode) of language is produced and realized, it would be more useful to look at how and why the speakers choose to make the choices they make. When looking at the corpus and the data collected for this research it appears that there is a wide range of different realizations of language in MMORPGs. It would be possible to apply Koch and Oesterreicher's concept or the dichotomic concept of writing and speech to these situations. But it would be either an oversimplification of the data or it would be absolutely useless because every single utterance would need to be placed in the continuum. What seems to be more important than the distinction between writing and speech is that other factors influence the speakers when they make their linguistic choices. Factors like who the interlocutors are, what the goal of the speaker is and the effect he or she wants to achieve. These factors subconsciously influence our linguistic choices.

The speaker's goals and effects they want to achieve can be traced back, in the case of MMORPG conversation, to the motivations gamers have to play the game. As is discussed before in the chapter on MMORPGs (4.2) there are gamers who are motivated by achievement. This motivation also motivates and influences the language they use. Since these gamers want to achieve something in the game and want to progress, their language is aimed at being efficient and precise. To anticipate the following chapters, this can be seen

when gamers use acronyms in order to search for a group or raid. Such gamers want to go into a dungeon or raid and need a group for this. They do not want to waste time by writing a fancy role-playing like message.

Similarly, gamers who are motivated by the social aspect of the game have other goals for communication. They want to be social and spend time with their friends. Their language choice is very different from the one of gamers with the goal to achieve something, or to find a group to play with.

In later chapters diverse motivations which are driving forces to use certain stylistic features like displaying that one is part of the group or that one is efficient can be seen. Negative forms of play like trolling, flaming and griefing show how the motivation to provoke, offend and harm others and the goal to destroy the fun of other gamers can lead to a specific use of language.

This chapter shows the inadequacies and shortcomings of conventional categories when it comes to innovative ways of using language. The aspects of language use cannot be satisfactorily discussed unless related to other factors of the speech event for example the code of and the message by the speaker. The latter is of particular interest and importance when it comes to positioning. It is time to focus on the effect speakers want to achieve with language and how they position themselves while communicating with others by making use of (preconditioned) aspects of the medium (channel) and the message. Their strategies to do so are tightly bond to positioning. The problem of interconnection between aspects leads to the next chapter in which preconditions of the channel and the speakers results in the use of English as lingua franca.

12. The code: message encoding

After discussing the medium and the channel, the next step is to explore the encoding resources available to gamers in MMORPGs. Several examples in this thesis showed already instances of the use of certain expressions which are commonly used in Internet discourse like smileys and acronyms. These instances exemplify ways in which the message ingame can be encoded, influenced by conventions (context), the speakers (participants) and channel considerations such as writing and speech and the absence of paralinguistic cues.

Such expressions are not only means of representing style and individuality but they are tools of communication and active interaction strategies. There is always a reason behind the linguistic choices speakers take, even if the choice is sometimes unconsciously taken. Researchers (Danet, Herring 2007b: 12) regard two forces as crucial motivations to use stylistic features, namely “a tendency toward reduction in the number of keystrokes typed, to increase speed and efficiency of communication, and a tendency toward expressivity and creativity, to convey social and affective meanings.”

This chapter provides a discussion of encoding resources available to the gamers. Most striking and frequently used are stylistic and orthographic features of MMORPG communication. It is discussed how they are used, for what communicative and interactive reasons as well as how they are used to position oneself in conversation. They arise from the unique setting, the channel, which the MMORPG speech event provides but it is clearly also influenced by the speaker and other aspects which are later on discussed (section III). In the following course of this chapter smileys or emoticons, anime smileys and ASCII art are described. Furthermore, differing from other accounts of such features and linguistic expressions, this chapter differentiates between acronyms, logograms and leet. Moreover, neologisms, actionmarkers or emotes, orthography and onomatopoeic expressions are dealt with.

All these features provide tools and layers to position oneself in conversation in one or another way. It is important to mention that not all gamers use all these expressions to the same extent, nor all of them at the same time. Similarly to

the discussion of positioning, the use of such expressions is influenced by various factors in particular situational and contextual factors. These features are part of the gamer's faculty of expression and part of the linguistic matrix in which every person maneuvers. It is the gamer's choice which features and expressions to use. This chapter illustrates how identity, variation, innovation, creativity but also other interactive requirements shape and influence the choices speakers take ingame. Before turning towards the stylistic and expressive resources of the gamers, another encoding factor has to be discussed, namely the used language as such, which is in many cases English, but not English as a native language but as a *lingua franca*.

12.1 English as Lingua Franca ingame

The use of English as a *lingua franca* (henceforth ELF) is a factor which is tightly interconnected to the *participant*, the speech community, but also to the *channel*, and influences the *code*, the *message* as well as the encoding of it in MMORPGs. It is clear that speakers and therefore also gamers need a shared code to draw on in their communication. The shared code is crucially influenced by the channel, this becomes particularly apparent in the channel setup in MMORPGs.²⁷

The first division of gaming in MMORPGs is segmenting the gamers based on region. Europe, United States, Asia and Pacific are the normally provided regional servers of most MMORPGs. Regardless of their language background, gamers are forced to play on the server of their region. The second division is that the regional servers are divided into language servers. Different language servers are offered depending on the MMORPG. Usually, there are English, French, German and Spanish servers. *World of Warcraft*® additionally provides the gamers with Russian and Italian servers to play on. The server language refers to the official language of the server. Therefore the server language is expected to be used in the chat-channels and support by official gamemasters is only provided in the respective language (see Kramer 2013a: 47).

27 The findings of this section were also summarized in a paper presented at the 5th Brno conference on linguistic studies in English (17th – 18th September 2012) (see Kramer 2013a).

Clearly, no gaming company can provide game servers for every language, therefore it comes as no surprise that the English language servers are the most frequently used servers. The results of the questionnaire show that of the 324 participants 291 play on an English language server. While the vast majority of the survey participants, namely 291, play on English language servers, only 126 of them regard themselves as English native speakers. As mentioned before, gamers from 42 different countries stating to be native speakers of 36 different languages participate in the survey. There is a wide range of spoken native languages. Following English as the most widely spoken native language are Dutch (41), Swedish (31), German (30), Danish (23), Finnish (20) and Norwegian (17). This finding also highlights that gamers can draw upon several linguistic resources while communicating.

It is not surprising, that English is the most spoken other language²⁸ of the participants with 197 gamers, followed by German (95) and French (75). 31 languages are listed as other languages spoken by the gamers. It is important to mention again at this point, however, that the answer to this question does not allow any conclusions on the proficiency of the gamers in the given languages. The prominence of English as the most spoken other language of the gamers combined with the fact that 291 gamers play on English language servers, allows the conclusion that English is one of the primary resources of gamers. However, the gamers do not draw upon English as a native language (ENL) as resource but upon English as a lingua franca.

Following the definition given on the VOICE website ELF is “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer 2011: 7). Unlike Firth (1996: 240; emphasis in the original) who regards ELF as “a “contact language” between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture and for whom English is the chosen *foreign* language of communication”, I follow the notion of ELF being different to English as a foreign language (EFL). I agree with the view of ELF scholars like Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011: 283ff.) who differentiate between ELF and EFL and therefore also do not exclude English native speakers from ELF. While

28 There was no differentiation made in the questionnaire between second or foreign language.

the use of the term *foreign* in EFL obviously excludes everyone but the native speaker, ELF is an all-embracing notion which stresses the use of a language as a resource in order to communicate.

Furthermore, it is important to state that while ELF can clearly be different to English as a native language (ENL), it does not mean that it is deficient. This is crucial to keep in mind also when researching language usage in MMORPGs. The used language in MMORPGs is sometimes not in the strictest sense correct. As the examples which have been given so far in this thesis and coming examples illustrate, there are sometimes typos, misspellings, and departure from standard language. Agreeing with Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011: 284) “[...] differences from ENL are not assumed to be signs of incompetence”, neither in ELF nor in language usage in MMORPGs in general. As I have mentioned before, the gamer's proficiencies in English range from beginner levels to native like competence. This has to be kept in mind as another factor influencing communication in MMORPGs: not all gamers are equally skilled in English and yet they are forced to use it in order to communicate in the game with one another.

Regarding speakers as highly skilled communicators who use several resources to make communication successful rather than using language “correct” (see Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey 2011: 284) can also be observed in MMORPG communication. ELF interactions are described by some scholars as “being overtly consensus-oriented, co-operative and mutually supportive” (Seidlhofer 2003: 15). Hence it could be claimed that the use of ELF in MMORPGs is a matter of positioning since it allows negotiating and co-operating with other gamers of other linguistic backgrounds. ELF in MMORPGs allows the gamers to support one another and play together, by this also furthers more efficient gameplay and helps gamers to achieve their goals ingame.

The ELF factor on the English language servers leads to many mixed language guilds. The majority of the survey participants claims to be in a guild in which not the same native language is spoken. In these cases English is the favorite choice of the gamers to communicate. There are, of course, also guilds on English language servers which choose their members based on language

background, therefore there are Dutch or Danish guilds on English servers. Yet, many gamers focus on achieving something in the game, hence the gaming skills are often more important in a guild than the language background of the gamers. Many gamers are ready to join mixed-language guilds because the respective guild has a certain prestige on the server. Their desire to progress in the game and achieve something makes them overcome their linguistic inhibitions and join guilds in which English is used as lingua franca no matter of their proficiency in it.

Similar to guilds, English is also the favorite choice of communication in random groups and in raids in which not the same native language is spoken. 162 participants use English when playing in a group, 159 when playing in a raid. Some gamers mention that their language choice depends on the other gamers. If one gamer of the group or raid cannot speak their language, they will switch to English. This does not necessarily have to do with politeness towards the other gamer, but rather practical reasons. It is highly inefficient and difficult to play together without being able to communicate. Clearly, there are dungeons and raids which are known to most gamers, therefore the gamers know what to do. In such instances it can happen that no communication is needed at all. However, normally gamers do prefer to exchange information and thus use the same language.

Interestingly, 86 gamers also claim to use ELF when playing with their friends. This shows that MMORPGs are a social activity in which gamers from different countries and language backgrounds meet and become friends. Hence, relationships in MMORPGs are not based on the same native language or cultural background but independent of these factors.

Gamers are confronted with the fact that they very often have to communicate in a language which is not their mother tongue. This also includes the difficulty of different levels of proficiency in English which could cause problems while communicating. Yet, it would be unjust to refer to gamers who use ELF as “failed native speakers” or incompetent speakers. The research also shows that there are seldom communication problems which can be traced back to the use of ELF. Conventionalized forms of communication ingame such as looking for group conventions as well as neologisms (12.6) bridge possible language

proficiency divides. It can be claimed that gamers of MMORPGs use the available resources, including ELF, other languages as well as the code in MMORPG speech event, in a highly skilled, inventive, creative and efficient way for their purposes. The desire to achieve something in the game and be efficient but also to socialize with like-minded people makes gamers also cross linguistic borders. Expressing identities and positions is a vital argument in this thesis. A common means of expressing identity, style but also variation is the use of stylistic expressions which are now discussed.

12.2 Smileys, emoticons and ASCII art

Smileys, also called emoticon, belong to the most common and used features in communication in MMORPGs and in Internet communication in general. Crystal (2004: 38-39) defines smileys as: “a sequential combination of keyboard characters designed to convey the emotion associated with a particular facial expression.” The term *emoticon* includes two important aspects of this stylistic feature by compounding emotion and icon. Essentially, smileys are icons or glyphs which have to be learned to be understood as Haase et al. (1997: 64) point out. This might not be clear at first glance especially when one only thinks about the simple forms of smileys like :) or :(, However, there are numerous more complex examples which require certain effort and knowledge to decode them like XD which can be read as laughing with closed eyes. This aspect points at the creativity which is involved in the creation and use of smileys by speakers. There is no end to the inventive creation of smileys leading to a vast range of different emoticons (see Kramer 2008: 57; see also Kramer 2010: 138-139).

The other part of the word *emoticon*, namely emotion, provides another function of them as linguistic expression. Smileys add another layer of meaning to language in MMORPGs and help speakers to convey emotions and meanings. There is an agreement amongst researchers that the main function of smileys is the compensation for the lack of paralinguistic cues like gestures, facial expressions, the sound of the voice and similar in Internet communication (see Crystal 2006: 38-39; see also Dittmann 2001: 72). Smileys have an emotive function and can help gamers to make rapport by using them. Furthermore, the

additional meanings conveyed by smileys help the speakers to express attitudes and opinions easier than writing long-winded explanations. This can help speakers to avoid misunderstandings, since a smileys can attenuate harsh comments or allow speakers to mark an utterance as a joke or prank. Smileys, therefore, save speakers' time during conversation and allow more efficient communication. Yet, misunderstandings inhere in even the most conventional and simplest smileys since various emotions and attitudes can be conveyed by the very same smiley. A smiling smiley can mean general sympathy, good mood, joy, happiness or amusement. Thus, the interpretation of smileys rests with the interlocutor, but clearly the context is of great importance in order to decode the meaning of a smiley (Kramer 2013b: 9).

Smileys also have a communicative-regulative function (Dittmann 2001: 74) which was already hinted in the chapter on rituals and conventions (8.1.1), as well as turn-taking (8.1.2). Gamers use smileys particularly often in greeting and farewell sequences to express gratitude for help and co-operation, general friendliness, politeness, approachability and other positive feelings. Thus, smileys help to regulate the flow and direction of the talk. Furthermore, smileys have a back-channeling function, as was mentioned in the section on turn-taking and attention. The use of smileys in conversations encourages the interlocutor to continue talking, they convey sympathy and closeness as well as signal attention.

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. Runkehl et al. (1998: 98) note how speakers in CMC situations use smileys in order to mitigate and emphasize statements. Communication in MMORPGs does not exempt itself from this as can be seen in the following example:

Example (17)

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

Example 17 illustrates, besides the mitigation by using a positive smiley (: , also the creativity involved in the use of smileys since the reading order of them is changed. Normally, smileys are read side-ways from left to right starting with the symbol depicting the eyes. In this example the order of eyes and mouth has been changed. At this point it should also be noted that the symbol choice for depiction of eyes, mouth and nose are up to the speaker. Noses, as can also be seen in the given example, are not mandatory but can be omitted. In the given example, a gamer warns a fellow gamer who made a mistake that continuous malpractice will lead to his or her removal from the group (kick). 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.

All these layers of meanings created by the use of smileys are means of positioning. The speaker 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. Thus, 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.

Besides the typical smileys there is also another smiley type which is Asian inspired. This Asian-inspired smiley is referred to as “Anime-Smiley” (Kramer 2008: 58), “Kaomoji” (Nishimura 2007: 172) or “Bixies” (Runkehl et al. 1998: 64). Anime-smileys are horizontally read and focus on the depiction of eyes (e.g. ^^ ^_^ O.o 0_0) but sometimes also symbolize other body parts like arms as in the example below:

Example (18)

>(^ _ ^)> Free huggles! No meanies!

Example (19)

d=(^o^)=b

Example 18 and 19 illustrate the playful character smileys, in particular Asian-inspired smileys can take. In example 18, the depicted arms of the smiley should represent hugging. It evokes closeness, sympathy and conveys humor.

Example 19 shows a smiley which has both thumbs up and calls out to the other gamers, as if cheering at them. Thus it conveys enthusiasm and encouragement.

Noteworthy are Kaomojis which become lexicalized, thus treated as a word itself like QQ as in the phrase QQ *more*. The use of the letter Q is supposed to depict crying eyes, hence the phrase QQ *more* means *cry on* or *whine more*. The smiley is sometimes used by gamers who want to overtly show their sadness about something and maybe want to evoke sympathy and compassion in others. But it can also be used as a taunt towards whining or complaining gamers. The latter can also be seen as a variation of the phrase *Some cheese to the whine* which plays on the homophones *whine* and *wine*. It is a language play using the habit of offering wine to cheese, hence when someone is whining about something in the game, gamers will “offer” cheese to his or her whine. Showing compassion or sympathy for an upset and whining player is often displayed by using smileys, at the same time smileys can also be used to make fun of and taunt such gamers.

Clearly, gamers also mix conventional smileys with Asian-inspired smileys as illustrated below, recalling the example from the introduction.

Example (20)

eh i gess you wiped us^^ can you pls do it better next time ? :p [sic]

Here a gamer notes that a fellow gamer caused a wipe (the death of all party members) and asks if he or she could please (pls) do it better next time. The request and the negative emotions conveyed by it are attenuated by the use of a smiley sticking out the tongue (:p), also referred to as razz smiley, as well as an Anime-Smiley (^^).

According to Crystal (2004: 116) smileys are not used frequently and if they are used only two types of them are in use, namely the positive smiling smiley (:)) and the negative smiley (:(). His observation cannot be confirmed neither by my experience online nor by the data of the online questionnaire. Similarly, Runkehl et al's study shows that while smileys are only used rarely in e-mails (15%), they are the most used feature in chats (28,5%) (Runkehl et al. 1998: 37 and 68).

The results of the questionnaire demonstrate that smileys are known and used by all participants in almost all communication situations. In the given question of the questionnaire the participants are supposed to rate the frequency of use according to certain communication situations. The table (table 9) below summarizes the results of the question. The results indicate that the less familiarity a situation offers the fewer smileys are used. Thus, smileys are only rarely used in the general and public chat-channels where the speaker does not know the audience. 70 of 324 participants claim to not use smileys at all in this situation, 89 do not use them very often, 81 occasionally and only 55 often. The say-function is another situation in which smileys are not commonly used. This could have to do with the role-playing aspect since smileys are frowned upon in role-playing contexts and by strict role-players, especially in *Lord of the Rings Online*®. Another possible reason for the rare use of smileys in the say-function could be that nearby characters in the game can read a say-message. Since privacy is missing as well as knowledge of possible bystanders, smileys are not used in such situations. It is not surprising, that in situations of high familiarity like messaging a friend (149), groups of friends (140) or guilds (145) smileys are often used.

Situation	Not at all	Not very often	Occasionally	Often	Always	I do not use this function	No answer
Whispering/ messaging a stranger	36	67	95	92	31	2	1
Whispering/ messaging a friend	10	25	53	149	83	1	3
General/public chat-channels	70	89	81	55	24	4	1
Guild/clan channels	18	35	66	145	53	4	3
party-channel of a PUG (pick up group)	31	56	108	100	25	1	3
party-channel of a group of friends	14	27	57	140	81	2	3
Any other way of communication outside the game (e.g. message-boards)	30	65	83	92	44	8	2
Using the say-function (/say)	66	80	72	71	25	6	4

Table 9: use of smileys relating to situations ingame

Generally, gamers react more positively to requests when a smiley is used. It is regarded good manners to show gratitude or sympathy using positive smileys in conversations ingame, particularly when playing or interacting with strangers. A request towards a rogue for lock picking of a locked chest is more successful when asking friendly, offering tip and adding positive smileys.

When the participants of the questionnaire are asked to rate the following situation: *Someone asks in the public channel: "Does any1 know where the inn is here :)"*, the majority (165) regard this as appropriate and 50 even as polite. 63 participants feel that this is inappropriate or awkward, which could have to do with the use of a logogram (*any1*), or possibly with the use of a smiley in a public channel. Strict role-players, as mentioned numerous times before, might feel offended by the use of a smiley in a public channel.

An exception to positive reactions towards positive smileys is when the smiling smiley conveys irony, sarcasm or malice. It is not surprising, that when the participants of the study are given the following situation their reactions are in no way positive: *“You are struggling with an enemy but lose, when a stranger messages you “n00b :)”*. Clearly, the smiling smiley following the term *noob*, meaning a newcomer to the game, is not meant to convey sympathy or claiming common ground. In this example the smiley does not mitigate the negative effect of the comment but emphasizes it. By using such a malicious comment, the speaker looks down on and debases the other gamer. This puts the speaker in a superordinate position and the other gamer in a subordinate one. 220 of 324 participants (68%) regard this statement as offending and impolite, 64 as inappropriate or awkward, only 34 as appropriate. Hence, a smiling smiley does not necessarily convey positive emotions. The context is crucial in order to infer the meanings conveyed.

Smileys can be regarded as small ideograms, a graphic representation of a face or body, but there are even more detailed graphic representations online and ingame like ASCII Art. ASCII stands for American standard code for information interchange and refers to a set of keyboard characters. ASCII Art, hence, uses these keyboard characters to create art, in particular images. This can be small graphical representations like a heart (example 21) or a rose (example 22):

Example (21)

<3

Example (22)

----;---@

The depiction of the heart is particularly common in Internet communication to show love, passion, enthusiasm or to generally convey that one likes something. ASCII Art can of course be much more complex and bigger. While smaller types of ASCII Art are also used in chats, on message-boards or in other Internet situations like facebook or twitter, bigger pictures made of keyboard characters are only rarely used. But sometimes they can be found in signatures on message-boards. Some rather small examples of ASCII Art used in the public-chat-channel (image 1) and on a gaming message-board (example 23) are given below.

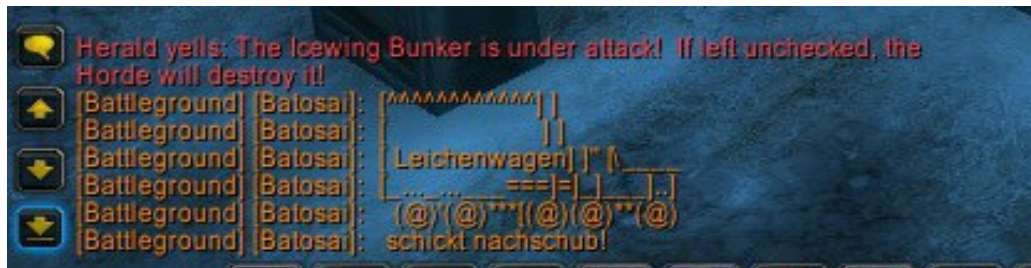


Image 1: ASCII Art

Even though the image exemplifying ASCII Art in the chat-channel of *World of Warcraft*® is from a German server, it shows that on rare occasions ASCII Art is even used ingame, like on a battleground as in the given picture. The image depicts a hearse (German *Leichenwagen*) with a request for ordnance, referring to more characters, since the troops at the position were all killed. This is a rather humorous way to cope with a defeat in battle and to request aid at the position. While humorous, it clearly stands out from the other messages on a battleground and therefore receives more attention than normal requests.

Example (23)

```
(\__/)
( o.O) Happy noblegarden!
(")_(")
```

Example 23 is taken from a message-board thread in which the ingame Easter event, noblegarden, in *World of Warcraft*® is discussed. A gamer uses ASCII art to give the other gamers his or her Easter wishes. The illustrated bunny is a creative way to give season greetings and allows to show sympathy towards the fellow gamers.

Clearly, there are even larger ASCII Art images, sometimes even created using a software. However, ASCII Art which is larger than six lines is almost never used ingame as it would be regarded as spam. Similarly, it is also only rarely used on message-boards. In most cases it is used for humor or to show certain attitudes like enthusiasm or antipathy. But as the example in image one illustrates, ASCII art can be used by gamers to attract the attention of other gamers and to stress their points. ASCII Art can therefore also be used in order

to position oneself in a conversation, it can help a gamer to claim common ground with the interlocutors, evoke positive emotions or at least get their attention.

Emoticons, it can be concluded, fulfill various purposes and are used by gamers for different reasons and to achieve numerous effects.

“They can be used to evoke sympathy, closeness as well as antipathy and distance between interlocutors, convey emotions, avoid misunderstandings but also cause them. Emoticons are a vital element for gamers to position [themselves] in a conversation by either displaying their sympathy for their interlocutor or their antipathy.”
(Kramer 2013b: 9-10)

The examples 16 and 19 demonstrate the mitigating effect smileys can have and how gamers use them to attenuate negative statements. While in these examples a positive smiley attenuates negative emotions, a positive smiley can also emphasize a negative emotion as in the statement rated by the participants of the questionnaire. Smileys can help gamers to take a position of sympathy and compassion for their fellow gamers by creating playful smiley (e.g. examples 17 and 18). Similarly, ASCII art can help gamers to position themselves in conversation with others by evoking certain emotions and conveying attitudes. While smileys also fulfill other functions like speeding up communication, as they allow conveying emotions better, compensating for missing paralinguistic features and provide efficiency, the main aspect of ASCII Art is creativity and playfulness. Therefore, both smileys and ASCII Art can be regarded as features used to position oneself in the territory of the interlocutor. However, the context is crucial to understand the conveyed meanings of smileys and ASCII Art.

12.3 Acronyms

Abbreviating words, phrases or whole sentences by creating an acronym is a fundamental part of the language used in MMORPGs and on the Internet but also in other communication settings. There are three ways to form acronyms by using either initial letters (e.g. *wb* welcome back), syllables (e.g. *pala* paladin, *lock* warlock) or only consonants of a word (e.g. *p/s* please). A further distinction can be made by differentiating the acronyms formed using their initials into pronounceable and non-pronounceable ones. The latter is also referred to as *initialisms* since every initial of the acronym has to be pronounced separately like in *brd* (Black Rock Depths), compared to other acronyms which can be used as words themselves like *rofl* (rolling on the floor laughing). Clearly, there are also acronyms which can be both like *omg* (oh my god) or *WoW* (*World of Warcraft*®) (see Kramer 2008: 64-67; see also Haralampieva 2004: 46).

Another distinction is of particular interest to this thesis, namely differentiating between acronyms which are commonly known and used also by non-gamers, in particular people who use the Internet and community specific acronyms. Acronyms like *lol* (laughing out loud) or *btw* (by the way) are good examples of such generally used acronyms online. Even though Baron (2008: 179-180) notes that she has “not observed the letters uttered by anyone over the age of thirty, and its spoken popularity may be highly regional”. This could indicate that against all odds *lol* could be either a youth phenomenon or specific to communities.

Community-specific acronyms evolve as the name implies in particular communities, therefore also in gaming-communities and in the respective MMORPGs. For example, in the area of linguistics community-specific acronyms like FTA (face threatening act), TRP (transition relevance place) and ELF (English as lingua franca) are commonly known and used, but are unknown to outsiders of the community. MMORPGs also offer particular community-specific acronyms. Some acronyms used in MMORPGs are understandable and used by all MMORPG-gamers, others are specific to a single MMORPG. The following example provides an illustration of these phenomena:

Example (24)

Tronn: LFG UBRs/LBRs
Unlocked: LF1 Mate RFC
Unlocked: LFHealer RFC last spot!
Rinona: LFG DD and heal ToT25
Shiro: LFR ToT!!

In example 24 several gamers of *World of Warcraft*® are looking for other gamers to play with, either looking for a group (*LFG*), one more mate (*LF1Mate*), a particular class like healer (*LFHealer*) or a raid (*LFR*). The acronyms *LFG*, *LFM* and *LFR* as well as *DD* (damage dealer) and *heal* (healer) are generally used by MMORPG players independent of the game. While these acronyms are known and understood by most MMORPG gamers, the acronyms abbreviating dungeons, raids and classes are game specific like *UBRS/LBRs* (Upper Black Rock Spire/Lower Black Rock Spire), *RFC* (Ragefire Chasm), *ToT 25* (Throne of Thunder 25 person dungeon) and *ToT* (Throne of Thunder). There are clearly many other commonly used acronyms by MMORPG gamers like *WTS* (want to sell), *WTB* (want to buy), *DD* (Damage dealer), *RP* (role-playing) and many more. They are often part of conventionalized forms of communication and rituals, like trading and grouping up for activities.

The phenomenon of lexicalization of acronyms can also be observed in the language used in MMORPGs, that is to say, the treating of an acronym as a single word itself as in the following example:

Example (25)

make some tea while they're quickly DoTed to death with no control over their character

The acronym *Dot* (damage over time) is transformed into a verb by adding a tense marker (-ed). This means that someone receives or gives a damage over time spell. There are several other instances where a similar lexicalization can be noted like in the acronym *lol* (e.g. *he lold hard*). It is interesting to mention that this can also be noted in VoIP settings, thus in spoken language between gamers who use acronyms instead of the corresponding word or phrase. Fascinating in this context is also the substitution of laughing for the acronym *lol* or a combination of laughing and using *lol* which actually expresses laughing (Kramer 2010: 140).

While acronyms appear at first glance to be rather complex and complicating, there are two practical main reasons to use them in MMORPG contexts. One of the reasons is the desire to speed up communication. Efficiency is a driving force in MMORPGs as has been mentioned before. Many gamers want to achieve something in the game and do not want to waste time using much words. Hence, acronyms allow fast and efficient communication.

Example (26)

INC TP!!

Example 26 illustrates how acronyms speed up communication. A gamer informs his or her fellow gamers that enemy troops are incoming (*INC*), thus arriving at tower point (*TP*) in the battleground Alterac valley in *World of Warcraft*®. Clearly a long-winded sentence like “There are enemies arriving at tower point” would take too much time writing and reading, meanwhile the troops probably overran the position and oneself is dead. It is therefore a matter of ingame life or death to use acronyms. There are numerous acronyms which are used also during fights to give fellow gamers information about happenings like *oom* (out of mana) which tells the other gamers that one of the casters ran out of mana and thus cannot cast any spells anymore. This is particularly crucial if the healer is out of mana and therefore cannot heal the other group members anymore. This information tells the other group members to speed up the fight since no more healing can be expected and to resort to any other way to heal themselves with like potions or bandages. Similarly, the next example shows how acronyms improve efficiency and speed even if gamers are not in a fight or battle yet, like in example 26.

Example (27)

CC guard, stay out of AoE

It is common to give tactics to upcoming fights using acronyms, as illustrated in example 27. One reason for this is the principle of least effort as it takes less time to type short acronyms instead of spelling them out or explaining the tactics (c. f. Kramer 2013b: 9-10). The other reason is that speeding up conversation using acronyms reduces the risk of other group members to start

the fight before tactics are given. In example 27 the other group members are informed that they should use crowd-control (CC) on the guard and stay out of area of effect spells (AoE).

Example (28)

Shiro: Res Rajesh

Ambi: CD

Tyreea: LOM

Efficiency, speed and minimizing the risk of starting unprepared into a fight are also the reasons for the use of acronyms in example 28. This conversation takes place between group members in a dungeon right after a fight. One of the group members Rajesh died during the fight. Shiro requests the other gamers to resurrect (*Res*) him in order to continue the dungeon. Ambi informs the others that his or her resurrection spell is on cool down (*CD*) and therefore cannot be used yet. Tyreea, who is also able to resurrect other gamers, is low on mana (*LOM*), thus has not enough mana to resurrect Rajesh yet.

While it is clear that the use of acronyms is useful during an ingame fight where it is a matter of ingame life or death, gamers also use acronyms when they are not in a battle and therefore not under stress, for example when searching for other gamers to play with, as mentioned before. This is again illustrated in the example below:

Example (29)

LFG heal, 2 DD for ToT25

A gamer is looking for a group (*LFG*) in particular for a healer (*heal*) and two damage dealer classes (*DD*) for the 25-person dungeon Throne of Thunder (ToT25) in *World of Warcraft*®. This is definitely an elaborate and long-winded sentence compared to the acronymic version of the utterance. The acronymic way of looking for a group is the common and preferred way of searching for other gamers as was mentioned before in the chapter on conventions (8.1) and as the data of the questionnaire shows. This is particularly interesting since efficiency is not absolutely necessary when searching for a group, yet it is still preferred by the gamers (see Kramer 2010: 139-140).

“A reason why acronyms are favored by gamers in many communication situations, also when using message-boards which allow proof-reading and planning one's messages as they are not a synchronous form of communication, is the creation of an insider code” (Kramer 2013b: 10).

It is not unusual that speech communities create neologisms and new meanings not only to make communication easier or speed it up but also to differentiate themselves from others (Dittmann 2001: 85). If a gamer answers the request for help by asking what *DD* means, he or she is revealed as noob. A gamer will think twice about taking a noob along into such a dungeon. Therefore, it is also essential to learn to read acronyms to become part of the community and to claim common ground. Thus, acronyms are a vital aspect to position oneself as part of the gamer community. By showing knowledge of the language code, gamers can position as part of the in-group which holds advantages for them such as receiving help or being accepted in groups and raids but also works on the human's urge to be involved with others and appreciated (Kramer 2013b: 11).

The examples and illustrations of acronyms indicate that acronyms are a feature which is commonly known. Clearly, the given reasons for using them also presuppose that acronyms are understood and used. It comes as no surprise that this is also observable in the data of the questionnaire. The table below (table 10) provides the questionnaire results of the participants' rating of acronyms according to situations.

Situation	Not at all	Not very often	Occasionally	Often	Always	I do not use this function	No answer
Whispering/ messaging a stranger	29	59	85	99	44	0	8
Whispering/ messaging a friend	18	40	65	131	61	0	9
General/public chat-channels	22	42	77	115	57	1	10
Guild/clan channels	22	35	66	128	59	3	11
party-channel of a PUG (pick up group)	26	42	79	113	53	1	10
party-channel of a group of friends	19	38	65	133	58	0	11
Any other way of communication outside the game (e.g. message-boards)	37	64	80	86	41	7	9
Using the say-function (/say)	64	52	79	69	41	7	12

Table 10: use of acronyms according to situation

Acronyms are according to the study frequently used by the participants. In all but one of the given situations, the majority of the participants claims to use acronyms often. The only exception is the say-function, where the answers are quite scattered and almost equally distributed. Only 69 participants state to use acronyms often in the say-function, slightly more, 79, use them occasionally. The say-function is also the situation with most participants (64) claiming to not use acronyms at all in, compared to the other situations. The insignificant majority, 79 participants, occasionally use acronyms in the say-function.

Acronyms are particularly often used by gamers in whispering a friend (131), speaking in the party-channel with friends (133), using the general/public chat-channel (115) and in the guild-channel (128). Interestingly, while smileys are

used by the participants less when a situation offers less familiarity, this cannot be observed in the use of acronyms. Even though, the number of participants stating to use acronyms often when whispering strangers (99) is lower than when whispering a friend (131), it is still the major answer namely 30 percent.

These results appear to confirm the outlined reasons for using acronyms. The use of acronyms in highly conventionalized rituals like greetings and farewells (*wb* welcome back, *brb* be right back), looking for groups and trading (using WTB and WTS) seems to influence the frequency with which they are used by gamers. At this point it is useful to mention again that when the participants are asked to rate the following situation: “*Someone searches in the public chat-channel for help: LFG 2 DD (insert dungeon/instance acronym)*”, the vast majority namely 257 of 324 (79%) participants regard this as appropriate and only 36 (11%) as inappropriate or awkward.

While acronyms speed up communication and support the principle of least effort by resorting to efficient, short and precise language, they also allow gamers to position themselves in conversation. In a game genre which is characterized by achievement and efficient gameplay, language which fulfills these criteria allows gamers to take a particular position in a conversation, namely one as a member of the group and as a pro (professional gamer) rather than a noob. A later section (17) dwells on the aspect of power and hierarchies in which the dichotomy of pro and noob is discussed further. But positioning as part of a community does not only have to do with power relations but also with advantages which can be gained through overt display of membership like being accepted in groups and being taken along to dungeons. Furthermore, using acronyms as in-group marker and by this claiming common ground and positioning as part of the group works on the very basic need and urge of humans to be involved with others and being appreciated. Acronyms therefore combine practical needs of gaming language, being efficient to achieve the optimum, with basic human needs of involvement, affiliation and appreciation.

12.4 Logograms

Logograms are similar to acronyms and many researchers (Crystal 2006: 90; Runkehl et al. 1998: 65) do not differentiate between acronyms, logograms and leet. Yet, these three stylistic features are fundamentally different in formation and use. While acronyms abbreviate words and phrases by using letters they consist of, logograms are differently formed. Dittmann (2001: 87) describes logograms as phonetic spelling. Hence, logograms use letters and numbers which are homophones and thus share the same sound with another word. This constitutes a fundamental difference between logograms and the later discussed leet. Logograms have homophonous character, leet has to do with visual analogy (c.f. Kramer 2008: 76-77).

Logograms are particularly popular in Internet contexts, texting but also in advertisements as they allow creative and playful use of words, letters and symbols. Clearly, logograms are language specific, hence the French *k7* (*cassette*) and the German *n8* (*Nacht*, especially as farewell like *gn8* Gute Nacht) are unclear to someone who does not know the respective language (see Dittmann 2001: 87). However, English has a special role as lingua franca and as global language of communication, therefore it is not surprising that most people who spend time online or ingame know and understand English logograms like *cu* (see you), *b4* (before) and similar.

English offers several homophones in the area of numbers. 1 (*one* as in *someone* or *no one*), 2 (*to*, *too*), 4 (*for*, also as in *before*) and 8 (as in *l8* for *late* or *l8r* for *later*, *h8* as in *hate* or *m8* for *mate*). Single letters with homophonous character are also commonly used to create logograms like *b* (*be*), *c* (*see*), *k* (*'kay* for *okay*), *r* (*are*), *u* (*you*) and *y* (*why*) (see Kramer 2008: 76).

Example (30)

Does any1 know where the inn is here :)

Example 30, illustrates the use of logograms in MMORPGs. The utterance is also used in the questionnaire to inquire the attitudes of the participants towards logograms. Since 195 (60%) of 324 participants regard this sentence as appropriate and 50 (15%) as very polite, it could be claimed that logograms are common to gamers. Yet, 20 percent of the participants regard this statement as inappropriate and awkward.

Example 30 and similar utterances in the corpus showing the use of logograms lead to the belief that logograms, like acronyms, are used for efficient communication and to speed up conversations. However, there are also other aspects like language play involved in the creation and use of logograms. It is not uncommon to see gamers use logograms for guild names, arena team names, characters names or names for their pets. Moreover, another possible reason could be noted. It is striking that many logograms are used for greetings, farewells and other displays of sympathy and claiming common ground like in the following example:

Example (31)

M8, I think it would be best if you'd take this advice

While it could be claimed that the logogram version of the term *mate* is shorter and more efficient than writing it out, it is still striking how often the term as such is used to refer to other gamers. It is possibly used to show a certain solidarity and team-spirit and to claim common ground. Brown and Levinson (2009: 107) regard this type of claiming common ground as showing in-group membership by addressing, which displays sympathy and familiarity. The term *m8* is used three times in the question I refer to as the wipe, which is discussed in detail later (18). However, it shows that logograms are particularly often used when it comes to positioning on common ground and when showing sympathy and solidarity. This can also be seen in the following example:

Example (32)

Y r u on a rp-server again m8?

In the example above a gamer replaced almost every word by a logogram stating: *why are you on a role-playing server again mate?* Again the term *m8* is used to refer to another gamer in a tensed situation as the interlocutor is asked why he or she actually plays on a role-playing server, after the interlocutor posted a rant about role-playing on a message-board. The use of *m8* evokes a sense of solidarity and being on common ground. The gamer asks a fellow gamer why he or she actually plays, instead of challenging him or her and possibly excluding him or her from the group.

An observation made already in my master thesis (Kramer 2008: 76-77) should be highlighted at this point again, namely the use of a certain logograms in German MMORPG gaming. German gamers sometimes refer to nightelves, German *Nachtelfen*, as *n811en*. In this logogram the homophonic value of the number 11 (*elf*) is used to refer to the nightelves. Such language play could also have to do with the number affinity prevalent in MMORPGs, since they are based to a large degree on statistics and numbers. Playing with the language in combination with numbers is a creative form of expression in MMORPGs.

In conclusion, logograms provide gamers with the opportunity to combine language play, creativity, efficiency and claiming sympathy and common ground. They are a subtle layer of positioning which is highlighted by the prevalent use of them in farewells and addressing forms. Interestingly, the common use of *m8* to refer to other gamers can be observed particularly in tensed situations like wipes.

12.5 Leet (1337)

Leet is often disregarded as a feature of its own by other researchers. For example, Crystal (2006: 94) even though he does not call it leet, refers to leet expressions as “deviant spellings”. Leet, derived from *elite*, refers to a language code in which numbers and symbols substitute letters in a word in order to visually represent them. Therefore, the transcription of the word leet is 1337 (see Kramer 2010: 141). Thus, leet differs from acronyms and logograms. Calling to mind, acronyms abbreviate words and phrases by using letters of them either initial letters, syllables or consonants. Logograms play with the homophonous character of words, letters and numbers. Leet uses the visual resemblance of numbers and symbols to letters.

Clearly, such a code allows for great individuality and variation as a number can represent more than one letter. For instance, 1 can be used as representation of I, L and T. It is up to the speaker which letters to replace by which symbols, hence leet is certainly not a feature which makes communication faster and

easier but more complex. However, normally leet is not used for every word in an utterance but only used to add some flavor to speech and as means of creativity, enjoyment and language play (see Kramer 2008: 70-73).

Example (33)

How me get c00l gr33n n4m3 on ze forums liek you ? O.o

The utterance in example 33 exemplifying leet means: *How me get cool green name on the forums like you* [sic]. The Os are replaced by zeros, the E by 3 and the A by 4. Additionally, another feature of leet can be observed namely deliberate incorrect spelling as in *ze* for *the* and *liek* for *like* (c. f. Kramer 2010: 141). The given example illustrates that leet is often used in a playful, creative way but also to provoke and to convey irony.

There are also word-formation suffixes which are frequently used in leet like *-xor* and *-age* as in *roxxor* or *ownage* or its alteration *pwnage*. Such terms are regarded by many as leet even though there is often no replacement of letters in them. Other terms which can be linked to leet are *uber*, derived from the German *über*, *noob* and *leet* for elite (see Kramer 2008: 73-74). The combination of *uber* and *leet* is in gaming particularly common:

Example (34)

That was so uber leet!

Example 34 is an expression of great enthusiasm. If something or someone is referred to as leet in the gaming context it is immensely great and elitist. *Uber* provides a comparative to the enthusiastic utterance. At this point it has to be mentioned that *uber* is increasingly used in the media and in sports outside the gaming context as well.

While leet is normally used only to spice up conversation, there are sometimes also cases of hardcore leet in which almost every single letter is replaced by a number or symbol. The following example from my master thesis illustrates this (Kramer 2008: 72):

Example (35)

4R3J0-057UP-ID14M-3RKID-L0L4S

The transcription of the sentence in example 34 is: *Are you stupid lamerkid lol*. This utterance was a phishing²⁹ attempt in *World of Warcraft*®. It was sent in the game to other gamers with the request to provide the account password. Not only was almost every letter replaced by a number, the use of hyphens should also fake a registration key. Furthermore the word *you* was replaced by the leet expression *J00* (see Kramer 2008: 72).

Besides using leet out of enjoyment of language play and creativity, there is another reason why it is used, namely the creation of an insider code. Leet is a marker of group membership and is promoted by game developers who offer merchandise with leet messages printed on them. However, a certain rejection of leet can be observed as it is sometimes regarded as immature and childish. There is a certain discrepancy between the devaluation of leet and the deliberate demonstration of it (see Kramer 2008: 74-75).

Furthermore, leet appears to be used as a stereotypical marker of gamers in popular culture. This can be seen in popular TV shows like *South Park*, in particular in the episode *Make Love not Warcraft* in which leet terms and acronyms are increasingly used by the protagonists as soon as they become more involved with gaming. Moreover, machinimas play with this cliché. One of the protagonists of a famous machinima series by Oxhorn speaks more or less only in acronyms and leet terms. A good example of this is Oxhorn's music video ROFLMAO (<http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=iEWgs6YQR9A> [22.05.2013]) which illustrates the use of acronyms and leet in spoken language and also the difficulties to pronounce them.

Contrary to the cliché of leet being used by gamers frequently, the depiction of typical gamers using it in popular culture and the use of it for merchandise, the study shows that the participants do not use leet often. When the participants are asked to rate their use of leet according to communication situations, the results demonstrate that cliché and reality drift apart, or at least the gamers' perception of it.

29 An attempt to gain information like user names, passwords, credit card details and similar in intent to defraud.

Situation	Not at all	Not very often	Occasionally	Often	Always	I do not use this function	No answer
Whispering/ messaging a stranger	255	33	17	4	6	6	3
Whispering/ messaging a friend	176	62	43	22	11	6	4
General/public chat-channels	231	47	20	8	6	7	5
Guild/clan channels	188	63	40	15	6	8	4
party-channel of a PUG (pick up group)	222	58	23	7	5	6	3
party-channel of a group of friends	189	54	37	23	12	6	3
Any other way of communication outside the game (e.g. message-boards)	213	60	20	8	7	13	3
Using the say-function (/say)	232	47	18	7	5	10	5

Table 11: leet usage according to situation

The summarized results in table 11 illustrate that in all given situations the vast majority of the participants claim to not use leet at all, on an average 66%. The situation with the highest amount of not using leet at all is whispering strangers, namely 255 of 324 (78%). When it comes to messaging friends, more participants claim to use leet. Yet, 54% do not use it at all in this situation, 62 (19%) gamers use it not very often, but 43 (13%) occasionally and 22 (7%) often which are maximum values when it comes to leet. Only 12 participants state to use leet always in the party-channel when playing in a group of friends and 11 when messaging a friend. It could be concluded by this that familiarity between the interlocutors influences the use of leet in the sense that it is used at all. Interestingly, leet is also not frequently used on message-boards which would allow well planned forms of language play since they are not synchronous, thus the speakers are not time-bound and stressed. But again the

vast majority, 213 (65%) does not use leet at all and 60 (18%) not very often. Only 20 (6%) participants state to use leet occasionally on message-boards and similar ways of communication outside the game, 8 (2,5%) use it often and 7 (2,2%) always.

The results clearly show a slightly different image than the perception of the general public which sees leet as a typical indication for being a gamer and as a marker of gaming culture. It also contrasts with the instances of leet in the corpus which can be found. Certainly, leet expressions are not as common in the corpus either and not remotely as common and popular as smileys. Yet, it exists and holds a certain discrepancy probably based on the negative and pejorative connotations applied to leet as being immature, childish, odd or even creepy. At the very same time, gamers like to show off knowledge of leet when talking to one another or buy merchandise with leet prints on them. One could argue that leet is a feature with covert prestige, while it holds a certain prestige in the community of gamers and is sometimes used when there is a need to differentiate from others, it also carries a certain stigma which makes gamers cautious to overuse it. In this sense leet usage could also be an instance of speech stylization and language crossing. Rampton (2009: 149) defines stylization as “reflexive communicative action in which speakers produce specially marked and often exaggerated representations of languages, dialects, and styles [...]”. Crossing is related to stylization, yet evoking a stronger sense of social and ethical transgression and “otherness”.

“As pointedly non-habitual speech practices, stylization and crossing break with ordinary modes of action and interpretation, invite attention to creative agency in language use, and often also contribute to the denaturalization of hegemonic language ideologies.” (Rampton 2009: 149).

The use of leet expressions could be seen in the light of stylization in particular as breaking the ordinary borders and modes of language choices. It could be a conscious linguistic choice in order to crack open fixed structures and to allow creativity and individuality to arise from it.

Leet can therefore be regarded as a very special stylistic feature when it comes to positioning oneself. On 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.

12.6 Neologisms

It is normal for a community to create and coin new words to refer to concepts and happenings of importance for the respective community. Shared and specialized terminology is a distinct characteristic of speech-communities and discourse communities. Neologisms allow easy and efficient communication about community relevant topics (see Swales 2006: 26). The puzzling effect such specialized terminology has is also part of the reason why they are used.

Clearly, MMORPGs demand a certain vocabulary to refer to the ingame reality. I differentiate between two groups of neologisms in MMORPGs: gameplay terminology and game culture terminology. This differentiation is also used in appendix B which offers a glossary of some MMORPG terms. Gameplay terminology refers to words which describe game mechanics or content which is coded into the game by the developers. Hence, such words are official terms. Game culture terms are neologisms created by the gamers themselves to describe concepts, strategies, tactics and events in the game (c. f. Kramer 2010: 141-142).

Another distinction can be made by categorizing the neologisms into game dependent terms and general gaming terminology. It is clear that there are terms which refer to concepts in a specific game or genre like proper names of races, towns, regions or classes. *Dalaran*, being a capital city in *World of Warcraft*® has no meaning to a player of *Age of Conan* since it is directly linked to *World of Warcraft*®. A hobbit, a race in *Lord of the Rings Online*®, does not necessarily mean anything to a *Star Wars the Old republic* gamer. When it

comes to the names of classes the categories can blur since even though *hunter* and *ranger* are different terms, the signified class is quite similar in several games.

General gaming terminology refers to words and phrases which are commonly understood by MMORPG gamers since they are used in most games like *tank*, *nerf* and *gank*. They refer to general tactics used by gamers or happenings. The term and practice of *ganking* is described in more detail when discussing negative gaming behaviors (15.1). *Tank*, has been mentioned before, refers to classes with lots of armor who can take a high amount of damage like a tank and thus stand in the first line in a fight. *Nerf* means the weakening or downgrading of a skill, ability or whole class.

Neologisms and coinages can belong to different categories. The term *avatar*, to refer to the gaming character and representation of a gamer in the game, is a word which belongs to the category gameplay and general gaming terminology. A class like death-knight which only exists in *World of Warcraft*® belongs to gameplay and game dependent terminology. While *corpse-camping*, another negative gaming behavior, is a general gaming term of the category gaming culture, *Oomkin* refers likewise to a gaming culture token but is game dependent, as it is a term used by *World of Warcraft*® gamers to refer to Moonkins a form of druids. The table (table 12) below illustrates again the categories of MMORPG neologisms using example words.

<i>avatar</i>	gameplay	general gaming
<i>corpse-camping</i>	gaming culture	general gaming
<i>death-knight</i>	gameplay	game dependent
<i>oomkin</i>	gaming culture	game dependent

Table 12: MMORPG neologism categories illustrated

In my master thesis (Kramer 2008: 80-82) on the language usage on the Internet, I describe several word-formation strategies. There are certain word-formations which are particularly common in the creation of neologisms in MMORPGs. One is lexicalization which has already been mentioned in combination with acronyms. Lexicalization can also be used to transform phrases or sentences into single words. The transformation from acronyms into

words is the most common lexicalization in MMORPG communication. Several lexicalized acronyms can be observed in the corpus like the already mentioned *dot* (damage over time), *lol* (laughing out loud) or like in the example below:

Example (36)

I don't PUG that often

Example 36 is an answer of a participant of the questionnaire when asked about PUG (pick up groups). He or she lexicalized the acronym PUG and transformed it into a verb, meaning that he or she does not go into dungeons with pick up groups (random group of gamers), hence he or she does not PUG. Even more illustrative is the following example:

Example (37)

Strigger prehot the tank!

A gamer commands a fellow player called Strigger to *prehot* the tank. *HoT* is an acronym referring to *healing over time*. It normally refers to a noun, namely a healing over time spell. In this example it is combined with another common word-formation structure, derivation or affixation. Affixation is the adding of a prefix or suffix to a word base (Schendl 2001: 26; Hamawand 2011: 262). In example 37 the prefix *pre-* is added to the lexicalized acronym *hot*, describing a heal over time spell which is given to another player before he or she receives damage. This should avoid damage peaks killing a player. Affixation is particularly common in MMORPG word creations. Frequently used affixes for creating new words are *-age* like in *ownage* or *pwnage* and *-ness* like in *imbaness*.

Example 37 and 36 are at the same time an illustration of another word formation strategy, namely conversion. Conversion refers to the act of changing the word-class of a word for example a noun being converted into a verb (example 36) or visa versa (see Kastovsky 1982: 78ff.). In the given example (37) the acronym *HoT* can be used as either a noun *healing over time spell* or as a verb referring to the action of casting a healing over time spell upon someone. The same conversion can be observed in the word *buff* which is a spell improving the statistics of an avatar. The word is converted into a verb *to buff* referring to the action of casting a buff on someone. Similar to example 37, the term *buff* provides a fruitful word base for the creation of several other

words using affixation and conversion like *buff* (n), *to buff* (v), *rebuff* (n), *debuff* (n), *to rebuff* (v) and *to debuff* (v). Furthermore, such words can be compounded easily, spawning new words like *buff-food* (ingame food which increases the statistics of an avatar). MMORPG communication consists of many word families which can easily be enlarged by commonly used linguistic word-formation patterns which are used in language in general.

As the examples show acronyms and neologisms are tightly interconnected also when it comes to motivation to use them. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter a major reason for using neologisms is the desire to speed up conversations and to communicate efficiently. The following example illustrates this:

Example (38)

Please don't initial aggro, keep aoe to yourself and if you get a DOT don't run away from healing range or out of sight. Ok?

A gamer gives tactics to his or her fellows. The sentence means the following: Please do not get the attention of the enemy first (initial aggro), keep your area of effect spells (Aoe) to yourself, thus do not use them at all and if you get a damage over time spell (DoT) do not run away and out of the range a healing spell (healing range) has or out of reach of the healer (out of sight). The acronyms *DoT* and *AoE* are typically lexicalized by the gamer (see Kramer 2013a). The rather long-winded translation of the utterance in example 38 shows at least how much time and typing can be saved by using neologisms and acronyms in a conversation, especially when giving tactics. Yet, even the translation of the words in the utterance does not provide a non-gamer with all the needed information of what this command actually entails since a non-gamer does not know what an *AoE* means and why the gamer should not use it at that moment, or what out of sight means in this setting and so on. Giving tactics is, of course, a matter of ingame life or death as has been mentioned before and thus calls for fast communication. By this, the use of neologisms to make communication more efficient and faster is also a way to avoid problematic situations like jumping the gun in a fight when not all other party members are ready or to avoid wipes (death of all party members) by giving proper tactics.

Furthermore, it is also a matter of in-group knowledge, and being able to understand and speak the language of a community. As Consalvo (2009: 308) points out, using neologisms and acronyms in MMORPG communication is not only a means of efficient gaming and fast communication but also a gamer community membership marker. Thus, neologisms and the conscious use of them are a tool of positioning oneself as a member of the community. A gamer shows by using neologisms that he or she is a skilled gamer and has knowledge of the insider code (see Kramer 2013a: 46). Positioning as member of the group also helps the gamers to advance in the game since they are more likely accepted in groups and taken along to more difficult gaming encounters, especially when the gamer knows tactics and the terms denoting them.

Neologisms are used by all gamers to some extent since it is not possible to play a MMORPG without complying to the terminology, at least to the gameplay terms like proper names of cities and regions or classes. Clearly, it is up to the gamer to use terms referring to gaming culture but since it helps advancing in the game and makes communication for everyone playing easier it is normal to use them. As a gamer and researcher I have never met a MMORPG gamer who did not use neologisms when talking about his or her MMORPG. It is up to the gamer to learn the terms in order to become a full member of the community. However, new gamers are not left alone with this task since other gamers often function to some extent as tutors or mentors helping them along, and the community provides new gamers with plenty of resources and guidance through the world offering them message-boards, websites, wikis, and online guidebooks. All this can be regarded as examples of participatory culture as Jenkins et al. (2009) call it (see Kramer 2010: 142), which is discussed in chapter 3.5. Positioning by using neologisms allows taking a position on common ground with other gamers. It overtly displays membership and that one is a skilled gamer who has knowledge of the conventions of the gaming world. This has to do with the desire of humans to be acknowledged, accepted, appreciated and involved in a group or community.

A personal anecdote illustrates this desire and function of neologisms. As female gamer who gives papers on gaming, I am often confronted with male gamers in the audience who are skeptical in how far I know what I am talking

about. Since I know this I include gaming terminology in my talks and have certain gaming culture tokens in my presentations which overtly show that I am part of the community. I immediately recognize when gamers in the audience realize them and by this accept my status as gamer. Hence, showing overtly gamer's pride by using specific gaming terminology is a common way to position as part of a community even in an academic context.

12.7 Action-markers and emotes

In a previous chapter in which conventions and rituals are discussed (8.1), actions ingame as means of communication are dealt with. In these examples the actual movements of the character ingame are utilized to convey meanings, for example jumping up and down. Yet, there is another way to convey meanings and positions by action, namely by describing actions using words and commands. I refer to them as action-markers focusing on the way such descriptions are marked by gamers, while other scholars use the terms *action strips*, *action words*, *action lines* or *emoting*. The later is of particular interest in this chapter since *emoting* by using emotes is part and parcel of MMORPGs (c. f. Dittmann 2001: 75; Haralampieva 2004: 33).

Chenault (1998) regards emoting as “narrative descriptions of conversational nonverbal behaviors” which allow conveying conditions, emotions and periphrasing settings and surroundings. Such descriptions of actions are also common in chats and in texting in general. Normally they are used for short and simple descriptions of emotions and conditions like laughing, grinning or irony. It is common to write single words between asterisks, brackets (angle brackets) or behind a slash to indicate action-markers like **g**, **grin**, *<grin>* or */grin* (see Kramer 2008: 50-56).

The acting out of the character's movements, conditions and emotions is clearly an important aspect of role-playing. It comes as no surprise that action-markers which have a long tradition in MUDs as well as in pen and paper role-playing games where the description of the character's actions is of importance, is also a vital part of MMORPGs. Most MMORPGs provide gamers with a predefined set of *emotes* which can be made use of with specific emote commands. But most MMORPGs also allow gamers to create own emotes. Such emote

commands start with a slash followed by a word or by an *E* for emote and then the respective action. The command creates a chat message in another color than normal utterances, indicating that they are an action. Since the command includes the writer's character name at the beginning of the command, it is wise to write emotes in 3rd person. The following example should illustrate this:

Example (39)

/e gestures you to follow her silently
*Roinna gestures you to follow her silently

By writing the command /e followed by a sentence in the chat window, the game will automatically replace the *E* with the character's name, in this example Roinna. The WoWpedia (<http://www.wowpedia.org/Emotes> [03.06.2013]), a wikipedia created by *World of Warcraft*® gamers, identifies five types of emotes in *World of Warcraft*® which according to my experience are also common in other MMORPGs. First, text only emotes like the one illustrated in example 39, but also predefined text-only emotes offered in the game. Second, text emotes accompanied by audio like vocalization or sounds, for example the emote /whistle causes your character to actually whistle a tune. Third, there are emotes with text and character animation like kneeling, bowing or dancing. Fourth, emotes which include text, vocalization and character animation like /laugh causing your character to laugh. Finally, emotes which have vocalization and character animation only, for example the emote /silly in *World of Warcraft*® causes your character to tell a joke. The joke is not shown as text and can only be heard.

It is clear that such a large set of predefined emotes allows gamers to express their character's attitudes, emotions and conditions particularly well. The possibility to create own emotes, even though they are only text-based, provide gamers with great freedom to express and convey meanings. Emoting can thus be regarded as an instance of what Goffman (1967: 132) calls pseudo-conversation in which “the token exchanged is not speeches but stylized gestures, as in the interchange of non-verbal greetings, or moves of some kind, as in card games”. Clearly, emoting can become a conversation-like exchange of actions. Role-playing sessions and events often provide lengthy examples of such emote conversations in which players act out situations using only emotes

and action-markers. But it is also not unusual to see gamers communicate using emotes in other gaming situations like when a gamer is in trouble and not able to fight off several enemies. If another gamer comes to help him or her, they often thank the other gamer using emotes. The fellow gamer then often answers to this by using the *you are welcome emote* (/yw). This is particularly interesting and often used by gamers from different factions since they cannot use the chat to communicate with one another, yet the predefined emotes can be understood.

Thus, emotes allow gamers positioning notably in contact situations when not the same language is spoken or understood. One could even argue that emotes are a sort of lingua franca of its own in MMORPGs, yet only in a very restricted sense. Emotes allow gamers to position themselves either on common ground with fellow gamers by offering support, compassion or sympathy like in the situation explained before. Another example of this can be seen below:

Example (40)

Shirokuro reached a new level. DING!

Akaido congratulates you!

Akaido: gz!

Shirokuro: thx

Example 40 shows how emotes are often used by gamers to show appreciation and to be social with other gamers like in situations of level ups. In the given example Shirokuro raised in level and communicated this to the gamers around her by using the predefined emote */ding* which imitates the sound played by the game when a gamer reaches a level up. Another gamer named Akaido notes this and uses the predefined emote */congratulate* to congratulate Shirokuro on her achievement, she also adds the acronym *gz* which abbreviates congratulations (*gratz*).

Emotes, hence, play also a social role in the act of positioning between gamers. Yet, they can also be used for the opposite in order to place oneself or others at distance, evoke antipathy and negative emotions. There are several predefined emotes which can be used for taunting and mocking others (e.g. */mock*, */spit*). This is often used in battlegrounds and arena matches to goad the other team. Using such emotes clearly helps to create a bipolar setting and dichotomy of “us and the others” and allows the gamers to differentiate from other gamers.

Troest (1998: 2.5) points out in his work that emotes also allow to “think out loud” so to say since they allow insights into the emotional and mental state of the interlocutor. Emotes like /sexy which read “[Character name] thinks [other character name] is a sexy devil” or /yay “[Character name] is filled with happiness” are examples of allowing glimpses at the innermost feelings and thoughts of a character.

While it is clear that emotes are used ingame since they are an integrated part of MMORPGs and sometimes are intricately coded into them, they are also used by gamers outside of the games like on message-boards. It appears that the use of emotes, or action-markers, allow gamers the conveyance of complex emotions, conditions and additional information in communication. They offer another layer of description and information hence also another possible means of positioning. On message-boards emotes are expressed, as mentioned at the beginning, by highlighting words using keyboard characters. They also allow to label certain utterances as jokes (e.g. <joke>, /jk for just kidding) or irony (<irony></irony>), thus help to avoid misunderstandings. The following example illustrates how a gamer named Eskola uses action-markers in her message-board post:

Example (41)

Mocks the foolishness of all who have posted before her

Points out that hunters are in fact the most balanced class in the game, and other classes should be nerfed

Quotes examples of how she has killed 7645138475145 people at once, and how that makes her 1337 and everyone else n00bs

Finishes with a long rambling comment, revolving around the fact of how people should learn to play but not mentioning it

Points and Laughs at Buka

Ends with elitist bull\$!@%

Even on message-boards which offer gamers other ways to express their opinions and thoughts, for instance allowing quite long messages to be posted, gamers use action-markers which are associated with real-time enactment of actions. But as Troest mentions, action-markers and emotes also allow insights into one's thoughts and feelings as well as offer another layer of positioning.

The gamer Eskola in example 41 notes the elitist implications action-markers can have since they are often linked to role-playing. Role-playing, as is discussed before, is sometimes regarded as an intellectual and elitist pastime. Hence, the use of action-markers on message-boards could be a way to actively position as part of the role-player community or convey certain evaluative statements about this part of the community. Whereas ingame, the use of action-markers and emotes has practical functions to position. They are yet another way to convey more than the written utterance divulges.

Action-markers or emotes are a subtle layer to position oneself in a conversation with others, since they provide extra information and insights into the feelings, thoughts and actions of an avatar and possibly of the gamer himself or herself. They compensate for the lack of paralinguistic cues in written communication and help avoid misunderstandings for example by labeling comments as jokes or irony. Additionally they give gamers the chance to use ingame sounds and gestures to convey meanings and attitudes like sympathy, antipathy, compassion or mockery. It might be that it is easier and less risky for some gamers to use the emote */mock* than to message another gamer with a message like “*oh god you suck!*”. Therefore, it could be that action-markers and emotes provide the gamers with an indirect means to comment the actions of other gamers.

12.8 Orthographic features

A striking feature for non-gamers seeing language used by gamers is the peculiar orthography. While it is probably often discarded as sloppiness at first glance, one should not be deceived by this. Clearly, there is a high rate of misspellings in the language used in MMORPG communication. The obvious reason for this is that the fast communication speed and sometimes the lack of proof-reading utterances either out of time pressure and stress, as in a fight ingame, or out of carelessness, leads to misspellings and peculiar orthography.

Yet, there is also the possibility to deliberately use misspellings and different orthography. One example is already mentioned in the chapter on leet (12.5) which is strongly informed by deliberate misspellings either out of language play as in *teh* for *the* or to create synonyms like *pwn* for *own* or to circumvent

language filters like *pr0n* for *porn*. The use of deliberate misspelled words is also an important aspect of Internet memes³⁰ like the lolcat. But it can also be used purposefully to position oneself in a conversation and to convey certain effects like humor.

As Back and Zepeda (2013: 235) point out “in CMC context the absence of more personal cues leaves vulnerable to positioning those items that are irrelevant to a face-to-face context, such as orthographic competence.” Minimal cues receive a special role in contexts lacking other extralinguistic features. In their survey, Back and Zepeda (2013), observe how orthography is used to position in a hierarchy of education in Peruvian CMC. Proper orthography is equated with higher education, deviant orthography with being uneducated. But positioning deliberately on an educational scale is not the only way to use orthography. Crystal (2006: 36) also notes that orthography takes a significant role to convey certain meanings and compensate for the absence of other features. He regards capitalization, punctuation and lengthening as primary means to convey phonological characteristics like loudness, tone, pitch, speed and pause. Capitalization is particularly illustrative for the compensation for missing phonological cues. Normally, in Internet communication situations, the use of capital letters is synonymous with shouting or yelling. It comes as no surprise that flames and aggressive rants can easily be identified by the use of capitalization in them as could be seen in example 15 repeated below:

Example (15)

IM GOING TO QUIT IF THIS HAPPENS HAVE NEVER SUDDENLY
HATED MORE ON A GAME BECAUSE OF A UPCOMING
EXSPANSION!

This flame from a message-board illustrates clearly how a gamer positions himself using capitalization. He or she is outraged and frustrated showing this by the use of capital letters. The frequent misspellings and the absence of punctuation in this message-board post could indicate the degree of agitation. In the given example the capital letters mimic loudness and aggressive tone.

³⁰ Internet memes are cultural information in the form of images, videos texts or websites created in and distributed through the Internet. They often include misspellings, awkward onomatopoeic expressions or quotes. They are used to parody or comment on news, happenings or daily issues. Famous examples are lolcats, rage guy comics, nyan cat or Gangnam Style. They are running gags on the Internet. Clearly, such phenomena are fast moving and can change quickly.

Yet, Vandergriff (2013: 10) points out that the use of capitalization in CMC does not always clearly corresponds to either pitch or loudness. Sometimes it is both and at other times non. While one can agree to Vandergriff to some extent, it seems more useful to keep in mind the importance of the context when attempting to interpret communication in general. Capitalization is just one of many layers of positioning and meaning conveyance, hence it is significant to always regard the whole utterance and the complete conversation in order to analyze the ways in which such features are used.

Capitalization can also be used for emphasis, the expression of surprise or joy and to get attention (see Kramer 2008: 48). The latter is of particular interest in ingame chat-channels of MMORPGs where sometimes many gamers talk to one another at the same time and several messages are displayed simultaneously.

Example (42)

Qurven: I NEED A PARTNER TO PLAY ARENA WITH!

Scrafi: SO DO I?!11

Example (42) illustrates the use of capitalization as means of attention getting. The player Qurven desperately looks for a partner to play arena matches with. He or she asked several times before in the chat-channel but obviously received no answer, thus he or she resorts to capitalization to highlight the utterance and to display his or her desperate position. The player Scrafi answers to the request imitating the capitalized style of Qurven. Reasons for this can be several, and clearly information is missing for interpreting if Scrafi is serious about his or her answer or if he or she is just mocking Qurven. Interesting is also the use of punctuation by Scrafi. The use of several exclamation marks and question marks after one another normally represents a certain distress, annoyance, agitation but also positive feelings like enthusiasm. While Crystal (2006: 38) believes that

“there is no system in the use of the marks – it seems likely that the number of question marks or exclamation marks reflects only the length of the time the relevant key is held down.”

one could argue that it actually reflects the intensity of emotion conveyed in the utterance. Extensive use of capitalization is often not only a conveyance of

emotional involvement by the gamer but also, similar to capitalization, a display of phonological cues like loudness or pause. Pauses are quite often depicted by the use of dots, the more dots the longer the pause. This has also to do with the already discussed phenomenon of getting or keeping the attention of the interlocutor (8.3). Clearly, example 42 illustrates a special type of iterated punctuation, since the number 1 is used. There are two explanations for the number 1 in this example. First, it could be a regular typing mistake since the number 1 and the exclamation mark share the same key. It could therefore be just a typing mistake. Second, the mentioned typing mistake is frequently known and often used as source of humor and irony, thus deliberately used either for humor, irony or mockery. A good example of this can be found in a pun by gamers *!!!11!!1!!eleven*. This pun on the common typing mistake adds another layer of parody by including the word eleven (see Kramer 2008: 50).

Closely connected to capitalization and extensive punctuation is the phenomenon of lengthening. As I stated in another work, (Kramer 2008: 48-49) lengthening is often used to symbolize lengthened intonation thus reflecting moods and emotions like annoyance or good mood. Quite common is using lengthening during greetings or farewell sequences. This should possibly indicate emotional involvement with the interlocutor thus helps positioning towards other speakers.

Orthographic features are a very subtle nuance of positioning. While many scholars discard capitalization, extensive punctuation and lengthening as peculiarities, typing inaccuracy (see Crystal 2006: 93) or sloppiness, it allows gamers subtle positioning moves. Certain lengthening of sounds or iteration of punctuation is used by gamers for positioning close to others, for showing their involvement with them by expressing and emphasizing positive emotions. In its negative form, like when using capitalization and extensive punctuation in flaming, it provides means to express strong emotions and to highlight points. Gamers are well aware of the functions of orthographic features and actively use and imitate them for humor, mockery, irony or taunt. It is such orthography which allows gamers to subtly nuance and layer their utterances, just as their voice would allow them in a face-to-face conversation offering tone, pitch, loudness, pause, speed and other phonological cues.

12.9 Onomatopoeic expressions

Imitating sounds by using an onomatopoeic expression is a basic aspect of role-playing in MMORPGs and also of positioning since it leads back to other positioning means like back-channeling and paying attention. Haralampieva (2004: 56) notes that onomatopoeia is a way to overcome the absence of paralinguistic cues in particular the sound and tone of the voice. It is often used to express astonishment, shock, surprise, joy or regret. According to Runkehl et al. (1998: 101) laughter and variations of *oh* are the most frequently used onomatopoeias in chats. A previous study by me (Kramer 2008: 78) illustrates that additional to laughter and *oh*, *grr*, *zzzz*, *roar*, *bah*, *pff*, *psst* and *sniff* are common onomatopoeic expressions in Internet communication.

World of Warcraft® provides a good example of onomatopoeia coded into the game. If a character drinks too much alcohol ingame, his or her speech is automatically altered by the game. The game adds *hic* to sentences as well as slurs the character's speech. Several NPCs who do not have voice output but only written language, show examples of onomatopoeic expressions. This probably should provide the gamer with an additional layer of character development of the NPC. It makes NPCs more special and more lively if they have quirks and also phonological traits.

When it comes to gamers, the use of onomatopoeia to represent laughter is particularly noteworthy since it provides a good example of positioning. Laughter is in any conversation a means of positioning. Yet, there is a wide range of laughter and of meanings conveyed by it. This leads from polite chuckling to malicious laughing. Wetzstein et al. (1995: 79) note the different shades of laughing and their form in chats, while *hahaha* can be regarded as joyful laughter, a short *haha* could also express irony and antipathy. *Hihihhi* could be interpreted as cheeky laughing, *hehe* as derisive, *huhu* often expresses ridicule and *hrhrhr* symbolizes malicious laughter (see Kramer 2008: 78). However, *huhu* can also be used as a greeting as could be seen in the previously given example 8. This adds in to the fact that onomatopoeia is linked to cultural and linguistic background. A good example of this are the differences in the representation of animal sounds, while a “German dog” makes *wauwau*, English ones make *woof* and Polish ones *hau*. It is the representation of one

and the same sound humans hear, yet differently portrayed. The functions of laughter are as noted also different. A polite chuckle positions the interlocutor on common ground, he or she shows appreciation for the other person and his or her humorous comment. Thus, they also function as back-channel and minimal response in communication with others. Laughter can also be used as overt display of malice or mockery, and hence allows a speaker to take a distinct position at a distance or even superordinate position.

As mentioned before in the section on orthography, iteration and lengthening (12.8) also play a crucial role in onomatopoeia as they symbolize the intensity and duration of sound. There is a significant difference between *ha*, *haha*, *hahahahaha*, *haaaahaaahahahah* and so on. Hence, these subtle nuances of onomatopoeic expression are a source of ambiguity. What is of utmost importance when it comes to the onomatopoeic expressions, in particular of laughter, is the context and also knowledge about the interlocutor. If one knows the interlocutor and is able to infer the interlocutor's feelings from his or her utterances, interpretation of onomatopoeic expressions is also easier and more correct. Onomatopoeic expressions help the speaker to convey additional meaning and help to position oneself in a conversation either on common ground or at a distance, by showing solidarity or antipathy but also as a means of back-channeling and showing that one still pays attention to the interlocutor and to encourage him or her to continue speaking. Onomatopoeia are subtle expressions which can hold great ambiguity but make a big difference in communication in general, but particularly in situations devoid of sound like online communication and MMORPGs.

The chapter on stylistic expressions shows how manifold the linguistic resources of gamers are. They make use of various features for different reasons. While the underlying motivations might be different for example expressing playfulness, compensation for missing paralinguistic features, efficiency, in-group marking and conveying additional information and meanings, all these features have in common that they are used by gamers as parts of active interaction strategies and for positioning. A crucial aspect of the use of positioning strategies is the speaker, hence the gamer, and his or her desire to be part of a community.

13. Section summary

Gamers of MMORPGs have to meet several linguistic challenges while gaming and various factors influence their language usage and use. The rich gamers' language including acronyms, smileys, neologisms and other features is a result of the challenges they have to face while gaming. The medium, the message and the speakers shape the language used in MMORPGs. The stylistic features are however not only a way to deal with the communicative and gaming challenges and obstacles but also means of positioning.

This chapter illustrates the different challenges which influence the linguistic choices in gaming for example the differences in the medium like the communicative setups of writing and speech. While writing supposedly allows longer, planned and proof-read messages, this is not the case in speech in which speed, efficiency and holding the attention of the other speakers is of importance. The factor of holding the attention of interlocutors is strongly connected to timing and turn-taking. But turn-taking is also means to position in a conversation, particularly back-channeling is used in this way. It allows speakers to convey sympathy and closeness, encourage the interlocutor to continue speaking and displays that one is paying attention not only concerning the conversation but also the gaming (by following given tactics). Knowing that the other gamers are really at their computer and attentive can save ingame lives. It might appear to be normal and not really news in the field of linguistics to point this out, however it seems to be important to highlight again the connection between these basic aspects of language (the message, the medium, the addresser and addressee) and positioning. Each part of the speech event influences the linguistic choices speakers take and shapes the message.

The same is true for conventions and rituals which are fundamental to language use and behavior in general. It is a common token of social acting which is often dismissed when researching because it is second nature to the speaker. Conventions like greeting and thanking others or communication through gestures ingame provide examples of conventionalized and ritualized positioning as part of the community. Such conventions and conventionalized

rituals provide speakers the chance to position as part of the community through displaying knowledge of ingame language (e.g. acronyms and neologisms) and overtly show sympathy towards others. Conventions are created and followed by speakers, hence the speakers as part of a community are crucial aspects when it comes to interacting with one another and positioning oneself.

The stylistic features receive particular attention in this chapter because they are by their nature obvious and striking. While conventions and turn-taking are often unconscious linguistic choices, stylistic features are intentionally and actively used by speakers. Their positioning potential is demonstrative. As could be seen in this chapter, gamers of MMORPGs use several stylistic features to position themselves and others in different ways in conversations. Evoking sympathy or antipathy, claiming common ground, displaying membership in a group and closeness but also distance are only some of the subtle nuances which can be brought about by smileys, acronyms, neologisms, leet and other stylistic features. The described features provide pointers to underlying concepts and frames like the deeply enrooted notion of efficiency, role-playing and other which are discussed in the next section. But the features also illustrate the very nature of positioning as such since they work on the desires of humans to co-operate with, be involved with others and be appreciated as well as be independent and free in one's own territory.

As Watts (2003: 263) put it, even though talking about politeness, “(Im)politeness₁ is an area of discursive struggle in social practice in every society and in every language”. I would reformulate this statement claiming that it is not necessarily politeness or impoliteness but rather positioning in conversation which is a discursive dance, instead of a struggle. Hence, positioning is a discursive dance in social practice in every society, language, game and practice in which speakers communicate with one another. Positioning, hence communication, is influenced by many aspects like the speakers, the context, the channel and the different encoding possibilities of the message. The positioning moves and the form they take are connected to politeness strategies, the conversational maxims, and conventions. The encoding resources ranging from ELF to stylistic features are instruments to

cause certain effects in the interlocutors and to achieve goals. Gamers use their linguistic faculty and the interaction strategies available to them in order to negotiate and communicate with one another. These strategies are means of positioning. Clearly, underlying concepts like in-group membership and therefore also variation, innovation, convention and psychological as well as sociological considerations of the speakers cannot be neatly separated. How innovative is the use of a feature which is partly conventionalized? How far can variation and innovation be pushed if one does not want to become an outsider?

The notion of the face with the positive and negative sides of it, is itself a perfect example of the nuances of positions and balancing acts speakers perform in communication. Since the involvement of the positive face and the independence of the negative face are two sides of the same coin or two positions, they cannot be combined easily. Yet, speakers and hearers attend to both of them. As speakers we constantly intrude the personal territory of others and let them intrude ours because we have the desire to be free and secure in our privacy and at the same time involved with and close to others.

It is this paradox interrelation, observable in the concepts of withdrawal and approach, which is existent in language and therefore also in the language used in MMORPGs. The theme of the never ending cycle appears in the research of many topics. Discourse is a process of meaning making. Similarly, conversations and positioning are processes. They are dynamic, fluid and changeable. Speakers make several positioning moves synchronously and for various motivations. It is not one by one nor can one make generalizations about the motivations of positioning moves since they change throughout conversation. This makes the context one of the most important aspects of researching language use and discourse not only in MMORPGs but in general, and positioning in particular. Without the context it is impossible to attempt to understand the functions and motivations of linguistic cues.

This chapter gives a glimpse at the creative processes and the obstacles gamers face while gaming. It cannot portrait the complete linguistic reality of MMORPGs, nor can it explore the complete notion and concept of positioning as it only scratches the surface of this topic. But it can be regarded as a starting

point for more research in this area. The language used in MMORPGs is rich and creative. The gamers are capable of linguistic choices based on several aspects. But while all gamers draw from the same linguistic resources the results are manifold. The face and the needs and urges of speakers to be involved and free at the same time are fundamental stakes of positioning. Gamers, as maybe all humans, try to achieve something in a conversation and they do so by positioning themselves using strategies and instruments, be it ingame or in the real world.

Section III: Positioning ingame

After exploring the *context*, *channel*, *message* and *speakers* of the MMORPG speech event, this section focuses on aspects which partly motivate certain positioning of the participants. These motivating aspects sprout certain interaction strategies and ways of positioning which are to some degree unique to the MMORPG discourse, especially the role-playing aspect and the efficiency aspect. Clearly, the underlying motivations like being creative and playful or saving time and being efficient are universal and can also be found in other communication settings. However, they take an exceptional (linguistic) form in MMORPGs. This section provides results from the questionnaire, hence gives insights into the perception of the gamers concerning positioning, language use ingame and other aspects like efficiency, politeness and power. The chapter called the wipe, discusses a specific question from the questionnaire which can be regarded as an illustration of ingame positioning in use. Several loose threads come together in this chapter and lead to the section summary.

14. The efficiency aspect

Efficiency is a basic aspect of gaming. Throughout this thesis the ideal of efficient and professional gaming was mentioned. The virtue of efficiency, professionalism and competence is for many gamers of importance while playing and part of the gamer's pride. The notion of efficiency is also tightly connected to the conversational maxims and relevance theory discussed in chapter 8.2. Efficiency in information exchange is one of the driving forces behind the conversational maxims. Clearly, it is in many cases a matter of ingame life and death to use efficient communication. Since stating too much flouting the maxim of quantity, being irrelevant flouting the maxim of relation, giving wrong information flouting the maxim of quality or being unclear and obscure flouting the maxim of manner can lead to the death of a character or all party members in a boss fight. As several of the examples in the thesis show, maximizing information and minimizing the output is of the utmost importance during battles and fights. Otherwise it can be that one's character is dead even before writing down the information.

However efficiency is not only informed by high stress, time pressure, costs (repair costs of characters), but also and probably even more important by perfectionism and perfection of (professional) gaming. Efficiency is an indicator of skillful gaming. Hence it is a motivator and driving force for active positioning as it allows not only to maximize one's gaming skills and experience but also positioning as skillful gamer and member of the community by displaying knowledge. The chapter on power relations (17) gives insights into the dichotomic relation between professional gamers (pro) and newcomers (noob) which are hierarchical positions in the gaming community and motivate certain language, as could be seen in the section on stylistic features.

Additional evidence for the importance of efficiency in gaming can be observed in the questionnaire. When asked about which type of communication is important to gamers while being in a dungeon, the vast majority of participants, 236 (73%) states to prefer clear and short commands but tactics are explained if necessary. 42 participants (13%) prefer efficient communication, as short as possible. Both categories provide pointers towards efficiency. Even though the majority picked the option of clear and short communication over efficient communication, the choice is comprehensible. It is clearly more efficient to give tactics and explain things in detail if necessary because it will save the group time later on. The gamer who did not know what to do before can follow the instructions. Certainly, most optimal would be that all gamers in a dungeon know what to do. If this is not the case providing the information needed, recalling the maxim of quantity "mak[ing] your contribution as informative as is required" (Grice 1991: 26), is more efficient and profitable. Only 5% (16) of the participants prefer long explanations of tactics, 2% (8) choose atmospheric role-playing style. The latter answer, the 8 gamers who pick role-playing style over clear and short communication offer a pointer towards an important aspect. Efficiency is an extreme antithesis to role-playing which is steeped in ambiguity and obscurity. Even though role-playing is discussed further in a following chapter (16) it should be named here as a striking source of flouting maxims. As an antithesis to efficiency, role-playing flouts the overall maxim of efficiency but also the maxims of quantity and possibly manner. Long-winded and flowery language or archaic terms as well as sentence structures which are commonly used in role-playing can be regarded by others as flouting the maxim of quantity

and manner since too much obscure, ambiguous or unclear information is given. A following chapter (16) discusses the role-playing aspect in more detail and how it influences positioning.

Another question of the questionnaire in which the following statement is rated “Politeness has to give way to efficiency in some situations” stresses the importance of efficiency over politeness in ingame communication. This anticipates the treatment of politeness which is offered in the next section (15). Still, at this point it should be stated that 191 participants (59%) agree and 54 (17%) strongly agree with this statement compared to 58 participants (18%) who disagree and 21 (6%) strongly disagree. The indications of the answers are discussed in more detail in the following chapter, however it provides evidence for the claim that efficiency is important in gaming and also felt to be of significance in communication ingame by gamers.

In MMORPGs the maxim of efficiency is a driving force for positioning but stands in stark contrast to playful language like leet or role-playing. Being efficient in gaming and language use during gaming is an ideal of many gamers. It is an indicator of being a pro (professional gamer) in contrast to being a noob (a newcomer). Efficiency is hence not only a motivation for positioning but also a goal of certain language use and positioning. The ideal and desire of gamers to be efficient goes beyond the principle of least effort or time saving in general. It also has to do with gamer's pride but also with the often mentioned concept of holy earnestness and with what Sutton-Smith (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 30) calls the rhetoric of play as identity. Taking pride in being a gamer and in particular a professional gamer means to be efficient in playing style and in language usage, hence also in positioning.

The participants of the survey point out their desire to bring gaming and communication ingame to its perfection in order to be seen without doubt as earnest and professional gamer. Hence, the perception of the gamers is congruent with the findings in the corpus and the discussion of the stylistic features in the previous section. Efficiency is a driving force when it comes to gaming and communication ingame. But while at first glance it appears to be out of mere practicality, other underlying motivations and urges fuel efficient language use, namely the desire to be part of a group and be appreciated in it.

It could be claimed that being polite stands in contrast to efficiency. Politeness is a strong source for flouting maxims, especially the maxim of quality. By discussing politeness, the discussion returns to the notion of territoriality and how positioning and politeness are interconnected.

15. The politeness aspect

“The [section] on stylistic features show[s] that, with all other uses of language, gaming language has to account for two essential and related communicative functions: getting information across efficiently and establishing relations between the gamers, like in-group markers, raising sympathy or mitigation of negative emotions. But does an environment in which efficiency and speed are so prevalent, allow for politeness?” (see Kramer 2010: 142)

Throughout the last years researchers' attention in CMC contexts turned towards pragmatic topics like politeness or rather impoliteness. There is already a handful of studies dealing with the phenomenon of politeness and impoliteness, the later appears to receive particular attention which underlines the common assumption that online contexts are hostile surroundings. However, most treatments of politeness in CMC work with data from e-mails (see Graham: 2007; Graham: 2008) or e-mail groups, forums (see Angouri, Tseliga: 2010) or chat-rooms (see Darics: 2010) but politeness and positioning has not received any attention when it comes to gaming and MMORPGs.

Interestingly, most studies on CMC contexts provide examples of interaction strategies which are also used in the real world outside the Internet. This stands in contrast to the assumption that the Internet is a linguistic and societal no man's land where everyone is anonymous and can loose his or her inhibitions. Yet, researchers like Hardaker (2010: 223-224) claim that

“[...] CMC can offer a very high degree of anonymity, and a great deal more control over a self-presentation than is available in FtF [face-to-face], but this anonymity can also foster a sense of impunity, loss of self-awareness, and a likelihood of acting upon normally inhibited impulses, an effect known as deindividuation.”

The myth of the loss of inhibitions and of the hostile online surrounding is wide spread as the results of the survey for this thesis shows. When the participants are asked how they rate communication ingame compared to communication in real-life according to their experience the majority, 152 participants, regard it as less friendly, 30 as impolite. Hence 56% of the participants feel that communication ingame is less polite or even impolite compared to real-life. 32% (104) believe it to be similar. Only 10% rate it friendlier and 2 participants very

polite. Summed up one can state that more than half of the participants, therefore the majority follow the common assumption that online communication is less polite or even hostile compared to real-life.

These results are particularly interesting when they are compared to the answers to the question if the participants themselves formulate their requests politely. All but ten participants answer this with yes³¹. The ten participants who disagree to the question are asked about the reasons for this. Amongst the answers are justifications like that they do not know the other people and therefore there is no point in being polite as well as that one gets answers to questions anyway no matter if they are politely formulated or not. Two gamers claim that they get more attention by being impolite. It is stated by another two participants that it is more efficient to not formulate your requests polite. This is an interesting statement which is taken up later on again. Another two participants plainly state that they “can’t be arsed” to be polite, meaning that they cannot be bothered to be polite.

So, the majority of the participants feels that the gaming surrounding is more hostile than real-life. Yet, at the same time all of the participants but ten claim to be polite to other gamers ingame. Additionally, 95% (76% strongly agree, 19% agree) of the participants claim to react more positively to politely formulated requests ingame. This constitutes a discrepancy between reality and the perception of the gamers. While the gamers state to be polite themselves, they feel that the ingame surrounding is offensive. It is difficult to say if the participants lie and portray themselves as friendlier than they are, or if impolite gamers are not participating in the survey. Following the line of the argument concerning the face as the public self-image it would be only logic to display oneself as mannered and polite. It could also be that perception and reality stand in strong contrast to one another. It might be that gamers have more vivid memories of negative experiences with other gamers than of positive ones.

The answers to the question in what way gamers use politeness ingame are revealing. One of the reasons to be polite to other gamers given by the participants is that it gets them better responses. In order to achieve what they want, they use politeness. A participant of the survey points this out by saying

31 Six participants gave no answer, thus 308 answered yes, 10 no.

“Politeness is important when searching for help. If someone is not polite, I would ignore him/her”. Closely connected to this motivation is another reason for polite behavior stated by the participants, a tit for tat system. Gamers claim to use a tit for tat system in which they are friendly to gamers who are friendly to them, and impolite to those who are unfriendly to them. As one of the participants says: “I try to be polite at all times. The rule works both ways, polite people get help, polite people gives help” [sic]. These motivations can be compared to what Watts (1992: 51) regards as a driving force for politeness, namely egocentric motivations in order to manipulate the outcome of a conversation towards the speaker's intention.

The answers to this question of the questionnaire show that the gaming surrounding is not a linguistic and societal no man's land. Similar rules like in the real world apply to the gaming world. If someone is friendly towards oneself, one is friendly in return. Politeness is, like some of the gamers say, a must when playing together with others or when attempting to join a guild. This stands in contrast to the gamers' own perception of the gaming environment as being hostile. Politeness, hence, becomes a tool of co-operation.

When the gamers are asked if the more or less anonymity ingame encourages impolite and offending behavior the vast majority agrees (148) and strongly agrees (125). Only 31 gamers disagree and 12 strongly disagree with this statement. Clearly, there is no real anonymity ingame, even though gamers might feel this way. Gamers do remember the names of impolite characters and will avoid playing together with them. Additionally, MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*® use networks which display the gamer's name. By this other gamers can link several characters to one gamer, hence also boycott playing together with that gamer if he or she is impolite. Nevertheless, there are negative forms of behavior ingame which are dealt with in the next chapter, however it appears that gamers are well aware of the benefits of politeness. Since bad reputation spreads on a server quite easily and one could have a hard time to find groups to play with when he or she is stigmatized as impolite, gamers rather act politely to leave the door open for further undertakings. Therefore, politeness becomes an active interaction and positioning strategy by gamers for their own advantage.

Interestingly, the paying-off nature of polite behavior is also noted by officials and game developers. When logging in to *World of Warcraft*® gamers are provided with official tips by the game, one of these tips is: “Being polite while in a group with others will get you invited back!”. This is clearly an instance of first-order-politeness, which mirrors the rewarding nature of polite behavior. Another tip concerning politeness is: “It's considered polite to talk to someone before inviting them into a group or opening a trade window”. Therefore it seems that politeness and polite behavior are even issues for game developers and not only for the gamers. It is a matter of co-operation and negotiation of common goals.

There is another aspect mentioned by the participants which is associated with politeness, namely using “proper” English. The following example illustrates what politeness means to one of the participants of the survey:

Example (43)

Using 'please' instead of 'plz'. Typing decent english sentences. Not spamming anyone. In roleplaying, calling people 'sir' or 'ma'am'. [sic]

It is also mentioned several times by participants that greeting other gamers when whispering them, using *please* and *thank you* as well as asking others before inviting them into a group is regarded as polite behavior. The good manners described by gamers are not that different to the ones in the real world outside the game. In real-life one would not stuff food into the bag of a stranger without asking permission. Similarly, such behavior is regarded by many gamers as impolite ingame as well.

Returning to the question at the beginning of this chapter if speed and efficiency which is of such importance in MMORPGs allow politeness, one can answer yes. But as Locher (2004: 92) says

“[p]olite behavior always has to be appropriate. Even though, it is marked, it still has to be appropriate in order to qualify as polite. Over-politeness is often perceived as negative exactly because it exceeds the boundary between appropriateness and inappropriateness.”

When asked to rate the statement if politeness has to give way to efficiency in some situations, the majority of participants agrees. Recalling the results to this question mentioned in the chapter on efficiency: from 324 participants 191

agree and 54 strongly agree making up 76% of the participants. Only 58 participants (18%) disagree and 21 strongly disagree (6%). Certainly, when it is a matter of ingame life or death there is no time for *please* and *thank you* and long-winded explanations. A good example is the situation of an ingame battleground in which the rivaling groups try to capture the flag of the other team. One of the flags is attacked. If one starts with a long-winded sentence like “I am sorry to bother you but our flag is being attacked. Maybe we should go there and do something about this.”, one is probably dead even before finishing the sentence and the flag has been taken. Like in real-life if there is a situation of emergency and urgency speakers go bald on record and commit FTAs, hence a gamer will rather cry out *Watch out! Incoming! Defend!* or plainly *Inc.* In such situations it is appropriate to not use polite language or redressing strategies but to go bald on record.

The question of what is appropriate and at what point language becomes over-polite is strongly linked to the use of politeness and impoliteness as means of role-playing. This aspect is discussed in a later chapter (16) and offers a position at the other end of the politeness continuum ingame. While efficient gaming can be placed at one end of the continuum of language use in MMORPGs, the used language of role-players with its often creative expression can be found at the other end. Similarly, the use of politeness can be categorized according to these two gamer groups. Going bald on record on a battleground is efficient, while using flowery and over-polite language is rather role-playing style.

It can be said that while gamers have a differing perception concerning politeness ingame than appears to be the case, they are well aware of it. The participants actively use politeness as means to position themselves in conversations and gaming. The tit for tat system and the assumption that politeness gets them better responses when searching for help, give insights into the gamers motivations to use politeness strategies as positioning moves. Gamers are well aware and conscious about the effect polite behavior has. As one of the participants says “making sure the person I am addressing knows that I am humble”. The gamer refers to openly displaying gratefulness and humbleness by means of politeness in order to receive more advantages. This

awareness of gamers concerning politeness is even more prominent in the answer of another participant who says: “I always try to be polite so people get the right impression of me. I will make a conscious effort if I am asking someone to give up their own time to help me.” The answer of the gamer provides an example in which politeness and face value in the sense of the public self-image is manifest as well as the cost-benefit scale, as Leech calls it. The gamer knows about the costs the request has for the other gamer, namely effort and time. By minimizing the costs of the other gamer and maximizing his or her benefit, the tact maxim is made use of. This entails conscious and thought-through positioning by the gamer. Being polite puts the gamer into the territory of the other gamer, and results often in advantages for the gamer. Polite gamers receive help and therefore achieve more in the game. This makes politeness more efficient than impolite behavior, because goals are reached easier through friendly behavior. Hence, politeness and efficiency do not necessarily stand in contrast to one another.

So rather than, what another gamer states “being polite by default”, it appears that gamers use politeness as purposeful and targeted strategy to position in order to manipulate the interlocutors towards his or her goals. This conscious use of politeness stands in contrast to the gamers' belief of the ingame surrounding being a hostile environment. Clearly, as the next chapter shows there are negative behaviors ingame. It is obviously because of these behaviors that online contexts, gaming and therefore also MMORPGs have a rather bad reputation in the broad public but also in the perception of the gamers.

15.1 Negative behaviors ingame

Most people who spent some time online probably had negative encounters like being insulted sometimes even for no reason. As stated before it is a common belief that ingame surroundings are hostile environments. It cannot be denied that there are numerous negative behaviors and forms of play in MMORPGs.

The participants of the survey feel the same and 304 of 324 (93%) say that they have been already directly insulted ingame by another player. Hence, the hostile surrounding of games is not a complete myth but clearly part of reality.

The reactions towards such direct insults are interesting. 171 of 324 (53%) participants claim to ignore insults towards them ingame, while 106 (33%) try to sort out the problem. 30% argue back or even insult the other gamer in return. Only 18% (59) report the player to a gamemaster. This is interesting since one would expect more gamers to take this official action. 17% choose the option to answer this question in an open format and specify their answers. For example some participants state that it depends on the situation, location (public channel, party-channel etc.), person or the kind of insult. One of the participants says:

Example (44)

Depending on what the insult is. Some stuff I can take and shrug off, other stuff I just won't take and so I'll report. In the case of the latter I would most likely be steaming IRL [in real-life] and wanting to tell him to go fuck himself but I'll stay calm and even polite ingame so he won't have any grounds incase he decided to report me back". [sic]

The quote shows how gamers are well aware of politeness and also utilize it as a strategy to prevent others to act against them. Similarly another gamer states: "responding in a polite way detailing how treating people that way is not appropriate." Politeness is therefore also used by gamers as a prevention strategy or tool of conflict management.

15 participants claim to mock or make fun of the insulter either directly for example "*saying 'awe', 'cutiepie' and other such endearments in response to any insults*" or in private with other gamers. Sarcasm or witty comments are also often named as a way to react towards an insult. The use of stylistic features in this situation is also frequent as some of the gamers point out just smiling or as one participant claims "doing the smiley :)" helps to deal with such situations.

While clearly negative behaviors occur, there are different types of negative forms of play and communication. *Spamming* and *flaming* are two types of negative communication behaviors which are also quite common in other online communication situations. *Flaming* can be defined as offending and insulting others for a certain reason. *Flaming* includes calling others words or shouting at them which is often depicted in online communication by using capital letters

(see Hardaker 2010: 224). A flame is an aggressive and hostile utterance and normally has a certain reason. This differentiates flames from spam and trolling (see Kramer 2008: 83). Example 14 of this thesis is good illustration of a flame.

Spam means according to Crystal (2004: 99f.) long messages which are off-topic or unwanted messages, normally e-mails (Crystal 2004: 99f.). Yet, the term is also used when referring to messages which are repeatedly sent over a longer period of time, for example sending four times in a row the same utterance in a chat-channel ingame. Spamming is used to gain the attention of others or to annoy them. It could be mentioned that spamming also flouts the maxim of quantity and quality since spam-messages provide the same information more often than necessary.

While flames are insults with a certain reason behind them, trolling lacks reason. *Trolling* describes behavior that should provoke or offend others for one's own amusement. Trolling can take on different forms. Hardaker (2010: 237-238) provides a detailed definition of trolling:

“A troller is a CMC user who constructs the identity of sincerely wishing to be part of the group in question, including professing, or conveying pseudo- sincere intentions, but whose real intention(s) is/are to cause disruption and/or to trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purpose of their own amusement.”

Important aspects of trolling are provocation and deception. Just like the term *troll*, derived from fishing, indicates, the aim of a troll is to get other users or gamers to take the bait. Obvious connotations with the mythological troll are also drawn upon. A common advice by officials on the Internet, like moderators of forums, is to not feed the trolls. Hence, to just ignore them and their statements. Normally trolls will leave and stop trolling as soon as they do not receive any attention (see Crystal 2004: 106, see also Kramer 2008: 83).

As was mentioned before, trolling can, depending on the kind of message, violate the maxim of relation, quality and manner. A provoking message can also be seen as a violation of the maxim of manner. The example below illustrates trolling in *World of Warcraft*® and how difficult it is to grasp the notion of this negative behavior:

Example (45)

Holypl: GOLDSHIRE FTW

Dracosius: Glarthir is a troll, he stoles his name from oblivion

Sukzapuusah: You can't afford a watch.

Darick: Deathwing on sigh, Erp'r i chooose you! Use cum shot on deathwing! >:D

Ísabela: elywnn used to have some gd rp in it

Sukzapuusah: Darick. Omfg err.

Sukzapuusah: :P

Darick: :D

Dracosius: The times they are a changing

Ísabela: now it is the place full of the most imature people
[sic]

The player Darick uses obscene statements to provoke the other gamers in the general chat-channel of Goldshire, a small town near the starting area for human characters in *World of Warcraft*®. On many servers Goldshire became a hotspot for trolls and gamers who just want to fool around. In example 45 the gamers react differently to Darick's provocation. While the player Isabela complains about how run-down the place has become, the player Sukzapuusah obviously finds Darick's comment funny. This could have to do with the notion of experienced users of MMORPGs. According to Hardaker (2010: 237) communities with users who are less vulnerable and more experienced regard trolling rather as “a ludic enactment of conflict, akin to a competition”. This explanation would also provide clues why other gamers also start trolling and later return to normal conversations in the chat-channel. For example, the player named Dracosius tried right before Darick to bait the other gamers by claiming that a gamer called Glarthir is a troll. However, non of the present gamers took the bait. Accusation is one of the many ways of trolling, just like provocation through obscene and offending language or giving clearly wrong and untrue statements and stating irrelevant things like in the following example:

Example (46)

Great father winter offends my religion. Please re-name to santa, and I'm buddist [sic]

In example 46, taken from the official *World of Warcraft*® message-board, a gamer complains about the Christmas event in the game which features a bearded dwarf called Greatfather Winter who supposedly is a reference to

Santa Claus. The mention of being a Buddhist appears to be completely irrelevant at this point in the discussion. If it is true is not apparent. The message could flout the maxim of quality by stating something which is not true (*I'm a buddist [sic]*) as well as relation since the renaming of Greatfather Winter into Santa Claus has nothing to do with Buddhism. The complaint as such is obviously meant to cause a discussion fueled by cultural and religious aspects, which started straight away on the message-board after this message was posted. Hence, the troll was successful. The best solution to deal with a troll is clearly to “not feed him”, meaning to simple ignore him or her.

“It seems clear that part of the human condition is to find a degree of entertainment in conflict” (Hardaker 2010: 238), obviously situations which are not face-to-face give speakers more security to live out such conflicts. Driving motivations for trolls are getting attention, provoking and deceiving others and thus gaining amusement. Some gamers also refer to trolling which involves deception and fooling others as *scamming*.

There are also other negative behaviors like *griefing* which is an umbrella term including models of gaming behavior like *ganking* and *corpse-camping*.

“Behavior summarized under *griefing* is, in my definition, forms of play used by some gamers to destroy the fun and gaming experience of others and to demoralize them” (Kramer 2013a: 49). For example, repeatedly killing another (low-level) character, referred to as *ganking* or *corpse-camping* if the offender stays at the corpse of the killed character in order to kill him or her again right after resurrection. If a gamer repeatedly takes away the enemy of another gamer, sometimes called *kill stealing*, it can also be regarded as *griefing* (see Kramer 2013a: 49). Furthermore, *ninjalooting* or *ninjaing* ranks among *griefing*. According to one of the *World of Warcraft*® wikipedias, WoWpedia (http://www.wowpedia.org/Loot_ninja [8.7.2013]),

“[t]he term originates from prior-generation MMO's, where loot was often contained in a chest or other container guarded by a mob. Players could potentially sneak around the mob and the rest of the party, taking the item without having contributed to the fight.”

In most MMORPGs the term refers to any greedy behavior of another gamer who takes away loot or enemies from others out of greed or fun and not necessarily because they need the items or have to kill the enemy for a quest. Often lazy behavior is also involved in ninjailing for example not contributing to a group but still taking the loot (*leeching*) or disturbing others during a fight and then getting an easy kill (see Kramer 2013a: 49).

Also noteworthy is the phenomenon of *ragequitting* which is often combined with *flaming*. It refers to leaving a group in rage mostly because something goes wrong or the encounter does not go as smooth as wished. Many gamers become so angry with, in their opinion, incompetent, inefficient gaming that they just leave the group after flaming and insulting the other party members. Ragequitting has often to do with lack of patience and being short-tempered. It is sometimes informed by the holy earnestness of the game, meaning that some gamers regard gaming in MMORPGs as an earnest and serious action, hence mistakes lead to extremely negative reactions in earnest gamers. Such behavior causes other gamers to avoid random groups and to not play with others they do not know because they are afraid of such outbursts and being left one member short.

Clearly, the mentioned negative behaviors overlap to some extent. But, the motivations are different. Trolling is intended negative behavior which can violate several conversational maxims like quality, when a troll speaks untruth or relevance, when he or she provides irrelevant information. A gamer who trolls positions actively and on purpose in a specific way, he or she means to provoke or deceive others for his or her amusement. A gamer who flames does not insult others out of amusement but out of rage and anger, if it is justified or not is clearly a matter of viewpoints. A flamer intentionally takes a position in which he or she insults, offends or openly threatens the face of others. By this he or she displays aversion and dislike. Similarly, a ragequitter positions very actively and distinctly by leaving a group. He or she breaks off the temporarily relationship and companionship and thus clearly shows antipathy. While trolling, flaming and

ragequitting are verbal behaviors, actions falling under the term *griefing* are often physical types of ingame behavior. All aspects of griefing are active and overt positioning moves which display attrition and dislike of other gamers. Like trolling, griefing is sometimes for the gamer's own amusement but can also be out of greed. As distinguished from trolling, griefing is overt positioning and an open display of unsocial behavior, while trolling involves deception and fraud. Fact is that these negative forms of play and behavior do exist in MMORPGs. Yet, as could be seen in the chapter before there is also politeness ingame even though gamers obviously remember negative experiences more than positive ones. This chapter also shows that politeness can be used as a strategy and tool against negative behavior. It becomes an active means of conflict management and for tactical positioning in cases of official ingame prosecution.

16. The role-playing aspect

Throughout the thesis and in particular in the chapter dealing with stylistic features (12), it is mentioned that role-playing is an aspect which influences the language used. The use of acronyms, logograms, leet and smileys is frowned upon by strict role-players. If these features are used nonetheless, role-players will react to it in a role-playing manner, for example crying out with the say-function that someone is possessed by the devil or using witchcraft and speaking in demonic tongues. On the other hand features like onomatopoeia and certain forms of playing with punctuation and capitalization are usual means to convey role-playing atmosphere. It is common to convey certain accents or speech impediments by these stylistic features, recalling example 3, in which the dwarf Flintlock speaks using a Scottish accent:

Example (3)

Right then, just hop in the seaplane behind me and I'll fly yeh to the Highlands.

We're to report to a feller named "Lieutenant Fawkes." I've promised the King we'd get there lickety-fast, so I took the liberty of ditchin' any excess weight. Like seatbelts. Parachutes. Maps. Stabilizers. Landing gear. I never actually "land" these things anyways.

One of the most important aspects in positioning as role-player using stylistic features is not mere creative and playful use of language but complying with conventions the role-players of the respective MMORPG came up with. It might be creative and playful to play a character which follows the model of a samurai including the use of Japanese honorific titles. However, such a role enactment would be against the conventions of *Lord of the Rings Online*® since there is neither Japanese culture nor anything similar to samurais in the lore of Tolkien's world. In *World of Warcraft*® such a character would be accepted by the gamers, as there are not as strict role-playing conventions as in *Lord of the Rings Online*®. While the conventions of what is acceptable and not in role-playing in a MMORPG are unwritten and unofficial, the gamers still follow them to some extent.

In the chapter on conversational maxims (8.2) it is also noted that role-playing is different to other types of playing MMORPGs. While efficiency is paramount for many gamers and hence maxims which further this cause are basic to these

gamers, role-playing appears to be on the other end of positioning continuum. Instead of being efficient and using short and fast communication, role-playing style is creative use of language. Throughout the thesis example are given of the long-winded, well thought out language used by role-players. Depending on the character enacted by the gamers, the language can be rather flowery language with many honorific titles used, archaic language with complex sentence structure but also creatively expressed accents or quirks. Especially the use of complex or archaic language makes communication more difficult and therefore in a strict sense violates the maxims of quantity, manner or even relevance. However, for the latter, it could be that a player plays a character who has the quirk to change topics. At this point, the often noted anecdote with my tauren character who is illiterate should be mentioned again. That instance clearly violated the maxim of quality and relevance, at least for the other gamer who could not understand that the character and not the gamer is illiterate.

When asked about how their characters' languages differ, the participants of my study provide interesting insights into the shades of role-playing and how positioning using language works in role-playing. The participants are very clear to differentiate between their role-playing characters and their other characters. One participant of my study states "well playing roleplay is a complete other way to play as in raid, in raids are often used shortcuts for skills [sic]". Another gamer notes that: "RP character use more elaborate and realistic language. All other characters use normal internet language, including the use of smileys and 4th-wall references." A very detailed answer is given by another survey participant which highlights the different use of language by gamers according to the characters they play:

Example (47)

My characters are spread on Doomhammer, EU and Moonglade, EU. On Doomhammer I have Mordenna, my raiding priest, as well as an 80 DK and warrior. Mordenna is a “lolwuter”, since the server is mostly PVE guys who don't put in the effort to speak English properly, let alone type it. On Moonglade, I have Spiritbane, who hasn't even reached 80 yet (he's 73). Spirit is mostly for RP and his speaking style differs from causal English. He has a full RP story behind him and his character rarely speaks (unlike myself). When he does, I like to follow the style of somebody who does not follow conventional English structure (not to the extend of, say Yoda, but you get the idea). The grammar I use in Spiritbane's English is mostly German, for example “To follow me, I ask you”. So, a typical Mordenna sentence: “Strigger prehot the tank and i'll use GS CD, mana low, kk?” A typical Spiritbane sentence: “Far and long have we travelled. To rest, I wish”. [sic]

This also shows that gamers often have characters for specific playing styles. The role-playing characters are mostly for playful exploration of the creative aspects of MMORPGs, whereas other characters are used for achieving something in the game. Based on the aims the players set with a character, the language of the character differs and therefore also the way in which they position. While positioning in role-playing, also in order to be accepted as a serious role-player, requires thinking through the character's background and history, positioning as good PvP or PvE player follows the conventions of efficient and competent gameplay. Two participants of my study point this out. One player says that “[f]or RP it's based on how the character would talk but it's always thought out by me so nothing is typed carelessly [...]” while the other gamer states that “PvP has to be fast information”. This illustrates that role-playing and PvP or PvE are two very different poles in a continuum of positioning in which the positioning moves and the used language is motivated by the underlying aims, either efficient playing and achieving something or playful exploration of one's creativity.

Besides gamers differentiating between their characters according to aim and playing style, they also distinguish between the role-playing characters. Depending on the race, class or the background story the gamer invented for his or her character, the language and positioning differs. The following excerpts of answers from my survey demonstrate this:

Example (48)

Gnome -fast, technical. Human – normal

Example (49)

Priest: Wise, spelling correctly, down-to earth. Hunter and Druid: Joking, I don't really care about big and small letters and shortened words/sentences such as please, good, at the moment, etc.

Example (50)

One of my characters is an orc, big burly guy who's gotten one too many smacks on his head. So he speaks with a broken accent, childlike words and just generally sounds incredibly stupid. "Me gonna com'up dere an'smash yer hed!". Another one, is an undead who supposedly has a mental illness, claims of voices in his head and thoughts of killing people "ngh ... We're go-going to .. eh.. can we have your ..kidney? [sic]

While example 48 illustrates how a gamer differentiates between the used language of his or her *World of Warcraft*® characters by race, namely gnomes and humans, example 49 shows how different classes can be used to differentiate between characters. Example 50 exemplifies a player who designs a background story for his or her characters and adapts language according to it. It also illustrates how gamers can convey speech impeding, dialects and accents in role-playing. The role-playing style of the gamer of example 50 is supposed to achieve a certain effect in the interlocutor and positions the player actively as a role-player. By this the other gamers know that the player is in character and hence what he or she says is not necessarily the gamer speaking but only his or her character. A final quote from the answers of the questionnaire, asking how the language of the characters of the participants differs, highlights a further influencing aspect, namely the audience:

Example (51)

Diction is the main thing that differs – one of my characters drops the 'g' at the end of most words, and shortens phrases as well as speaking colloquially. The others adjust their speech according to their audience, but usually are polite and well-spoken.

Example 51 provides another aspect which is now focused on and which has to be kept in mind for the chapter on the wipe (18) in which interaction and positioning strategies in use are discussed, politeness. Politeness and role-

playing are sometimes strongly connected with one another because the intentional use of politeness and impoliteness can become means of role-playing. When the participants of the survey are asked how they use politeness as a means of role-playing one of the most common answers is that either intentional lack of politeness is made use of or it is used in an exaggerated way.

According to the questionnaire many of the participants use different levels of politeness or impoliteness as means of role-playing based on the class or race of the characters. Certain races or classes appear to be predestined for certain behavior. Some participants note that paladins, priests or mages are more polite than other classes. In *World of Warcraft*® death knights, rogues and warlocks are often played as impolite or rude characters. One of the participants says:

Example (52)

Characterbound politeness is part of some of my chars – as well as impoliteness is. An example: A Paladin or Priest has to be polite in RPG according to his profession to the light, a Warlock is the opposite as well as rogues etc. [sic]

In a similar way the race of a character influences politeness and impoliteness. Some participants of the survey name certain races which are, according to their cultural background, perceived as impolite or rude like orcs, goblins, undead, but also as one of the participants notes night elves in *World of Warcraft*® can be played as impolite based on the lore. Following the story of *World of Warcraft*® night elves prefer to keep to themselves and therefore are often rude to “outsiders”.

It is also mentioned by some participants that politeness and impoliteness as role-playing tool has to do with the character's background, personality and history as is illustrated below:

Example (53)

If I'm playing a character with somewhat 'rough' background like a homeless street kid or a wild barbarian, this character would use an (for the role appropriate) rougher language than for example a character from a noble family with according upbringing. [sic]

Example (54)

Spiritbane is the polite one. When Mordenna was still on an RP realm (before Doomhammer transfer) she was talkable but didn't really have time for chit chat. Not rude or intentionally offensive, but to the point and stupidly honest. She didn't have a filter between her mouth and her brain.

The gamers note how they make different linguistic choices depending on the character's background story. One of the participants also states that he or she uses polite language when playing a character class or race which is normally regarded as impolite and vice versa. By this the gamer plays with stereotypes and prejudices.

It is also mentioned by some of the participants that if they intentionally use impoliteness as means of role-playing, they normally send gamers they interact with a message stating that this is part of their character's personality. As one of the gamers says: "I [...] make sure to make the distinction between IC (in-character) and OOC (out-of-character) so that the people know that my character is being impolite to them and not me." This is connected to the previously discussed reasons for being polite to other gamers, namely achieving one's goals and not damaging one's gamer reputation.

This chapter shows that the role-playing aspect has to be kept in mind when researching language use and in particular politeness strategies, as the acting out of a background story of a character can influence linguistic choices. The linguistic choices and also the use of politeness and impoliteness as means of role-playing are also at the same time a clear position taken by the gamer. Displaying oneself as a role-player and not a professional or casual gamer evokes other reactions in the interlocutors. Such reactions can be sympathy, antipathy or at least makes the interlocutor label the other gamer's utterances and actions as part of acting out a role.

Role-playing can normally be seen on the other end of a language continuum compared to other gamers who strive for efficiency. Role-players explore their character and its background and history also by means of language use. It is creative and playful language use and positioning rather than efficient communication. Furthermore, role-playing language requires conscious linguistic choices and previously thought through utterances.

17. The power aspect – Power relations

The chapter on stylistic features (12) provides many examples of positioning in a hierarchy or in the in-group. By displaying knowledge of the gamer's language like acronyms, logograms, leet and neologisms, gamers position themselves as part of the in-group and as *pro* rather than non-gamer, noob or sometimes casual player. These layers of groups can be placed in a hierarchy since the gamers regard pros as superior to noobs. This chapter picks up on loose threads from the chapter on stylistic features, role-playing, efficiency and politeness and give insights into power relations and hierarchies ingame and their impact on positioning.

Before diving into the subject of power relation in games, it is worthwhile to have a closer look at power itself and what it means in connection to language. It is no news that power and language have a connection. When researching positioning theory a great deal of research is done in the area of hierarchies and power relations expressed through means of language. Also Locher (2004: 34) claims that “[...] language is one of the most obvious means through which power is exercised.” In her work, she summarizes several approaches towards this subject and quotes Ng and Bradac (1993) who argue that language reveals, creates, reflects and obscures or depoliticizes power (see Locher 2004: 34). Power expressed through language is dynamic and negotiable. Similar to the already discussed notion of the social contract and conventions which can be challenged, confirmed or rejected throughout conversation.

It might be good to draw upon Foucault's (1983) notion of power, which is to some extent also observable in Searle's (1995: 117ff.) treatment of it, since it does not regard power as “a negative or restrictive force, but as a condition that is actually productive of social reality.” (Leezenberg 2002: 899). Power is often perceived as something negative and forceful, possibly because the notion of power is often mistaken for dominant and brutal actions of power over others. But power can also be the ability and possibility to do something, thus it can empower others. Leezenberg (2002: 906) provides a good definition of power:

“Power in this sense is not negatively characterized as domination and repression, but positively as productive of both discourse (roughly, systems of utterances) and the Subject itself. It is an intentional, but non-subjective relation, conceived of as a set of strategies rather than rules, to which resistance and struggle are internal.”

This definition highlights again the positive and productive nature of power as well as that it is dynamic and negotiable. Leezenberg (2002: 906) points out though that “[p]ower is rarely if ever simply given or unproblematically present in any individual actor; rather, it arises from interaction. That is negotiation, struggle, and challenge are internal to it.”

Fairclough (1989: 15) goes a step further and does not only see power arising through language, but claims that “language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power.”

Therefore, language is not just expression of power or a mere medium of it, but can shape, support and challenge it. Locher (2004: 39-40) sums it up by stating that “power is (often) expressed through language, [...] cannot be explained without contextualization, [...] is relational, dynamic and contestable [...]”. What appears to be evident is that power and language have a strong connection and are intertwined. Both aspects are part of the social world but cannot be separated from the other. Similar to positioning, power relations are dynamic and can be negotiated to some extent, they can be confirmed, rejected or contested. As in all treatments of social life, the context is of crucial importance. The latter is of particular interest in researching language use. Because power relations are bound to context. It is not possible to make general claims for certain linguistic strategies to be always expressions of power relations (neither as exercise of power nor accepting a power infused hierarchy). Tannen (1994: 23-24) makes this point when stating:

“What appears as attempts to dominate conversation (an exercise of power) may actually be intended to establish rapport (an exercise of solidarity). This occurs because [...] power and solidarity are bought with the same currency: The same linguistic means can be used to create either or both”.

Hence, the same positioning strategies can be used to achieve different effects and for different motivations. One of the best examples is the complete absence of a linguistic output, namely silence. Silence can be a respectful silence towards a superior, but it can also be an expression of power over others. Silence can be imposed on others, but it can also be claimed. Therefore, it is not possible to make generalizations concerning positioning moves. It always depends on the context, the situation and the interlocutors (see Harvey 2005: 170-171).

But how does power relate to ingame language? Power is often manifest in hierarchies which offer positions. It can be a dichotomy offering only a superior and an inferior position but it can also provide several layers and positions similar to a continuum. However, hierarchies are systems of order in which tasks, duties and rights are linked to a position in the system. Such hierarchies can be observed ingame as well. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter there are several hierarchies and power relations in MMORPGs. The first, and most general one is the differentiation between *gamer* and *non-gamer*. It poses the basic urge of humans to form groups and differentiate themselves from others, the in-group and the out-group, insiders and outsiders, we and the other. Clearly, in such groups the in-group always regards itself as superior, even if only morally, than the others. It provides the most obvious linguistic strategies of positioning since the aim is to explicitly take the position of an insider.

Therefore, most of the stylistic features are used for positioning in the group of gamers and to differ from non-gamers because the features are striking and distinct. This is also evident in my anecdote of presentations and talks I have given in which I overtly position myself as gamer by displaying my knowledge of the insider code.

The second power relation is a hierarchical setup which can be found in the community of gamers, namely the *pro* and the *noob*. The pro (professional gamer) is on top of the hierarchy of gamers while the noob (newcomer) is at the bottom. Similar hierarchies can be found in many communities in which newcomers are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy and inferior to the other members of the community. This becomes evident when looking at several (derogative) names for apprentices and newcomers like *rookie*, *greenhorn*,

fledgling and so forth. They have to acquire and earn the respect of the other members to rise in the hierarchy. Being a noob ingame is not only a stigma of inexperience but also of incompetence. Clearly, not many gamers claim to be noobs. As has been mentioned before, the results of the survey confirm this since from 324 participants only five claim to be beginners (noobs), 149 amateurs and 170 professional. These results also reflect the high standard and virtue of professionalism in MMORPGs and a certain notion of gamer's pride which would definitely be worthwhile a study on its own. Sutton-Smith (see Dovey; Kennedy 2009: 30) made the point of taking pride in gaming and through displaying identity to gain power and advantages in the respective (gamer) community. Displaying one's position as pro instead of noob is done by actively using stylistic features, insider information and knowledge like strategies for ingame encounters or knowledge of endgame information which is often reserved to particularly good gamers. While the use of a standard gaming neologism like *tank* allows positioning as a gamer, it takes more specific knowledge to be regarded as pro and not as noob for example knowing the acronyms referring to dungeons, classes and abilities. Having and displaying knowledge of ingame strategies of end-game encounters gives the pro prestige and makes him or her an ideal and mentor to noobs.

Another layer of power relation has to be mentioned here namely that there is also a certain tension between *professional gamers* and *casual gamers*. While it is clearly up to definition what the difference between those two is, it appears to have more to do with values applied to these concepts. Similar to the notion of gamer's pride this aspect of gaming can not be treated in more depth in this thesis, even though it could provide interesting insights. But one of the main aspects of this power relation is that, again, the professional gamer is superior to the casual gamer possibly because of his or her professionalism and earnestness in the cause of gaming, while the casual gamer only plays for fun. It is likely that a similar rivalry can be observed in sports between professional and amateur sportsmanship. The aforementioned notion of holy earnestness by Huizinga (1938: 27ff.) applies here. Gaming, for a professional gamer, is more than a fun pastime, it is a serious matter in which mastery of skills, investing time and effort are of importance. Casual gamers lack this investment of emotion, seriousness and effort and therefore are regarded as inferior.

More clear-cut power relations and hierarchies ingame can be found when looking at group structures in MMORPGs like parties (groups of gamers), raids and guilds. Clearly, one has to differentiate between random groups (PUGs) and raids which just form for an undertaking. It is likely that gamers of such random groups will not meet one another in the near future and thus there are no close and tight relations developed. More interesting are fixed groups of gamers like friends playing together in parties or guilds.

In such groups there are fixed subject positions, namely the group, raid or guild leader and the ordinary members. It occurs that the leader becomes superior to the other members of the group. This is confirmed by the survey, when the participants are asked to rate the following statement: "Do you believe that a group leader is the decision maker of the undertaking and has the final say". 177 of 324 (55%) agree to this, 54 (17%) strongly agree. 73 (23%) participants disagree with the statement and 12 strongly disagree. When the tables are turned on the survey participants and they are asked to state if they expect the other group members to listen to them and do as they say when they are the group or raid leader, the vast majority agrees. 217 (67%) participants agree, 69 (21%) strongly agree and only 26 (8%) disagree to this statement. One could assume, because the results are very clear when the participant is the leader while it is not so immensely clear when he or she is a group member, that the participants prefer to be leaders who are followed by their group instead of being followers themselves.

Even though the results of the mentioned questions give the impression of a typical superior and inferior power relation in groups, other answers qualify this. When the participants are asked if they believe that a group or raid leader is in a higher position during an undertaking and therefore allowed to decide upon communication in the group only 52,5% agree while 28,4% disagree³². It is interesting that the difference between the answers is not as significant as one would expect. Even more surprising is that 246 of 324 participants, equaling 76% claim that their behavior towards a group or raid leader is not different than towards other gamers. This result is particularly striking as one would assume that the obvious hierarchy between leader and group members leads to specific

32 11,1% strongly agree, 4,6% strongly disagree and 3,4% give no answer to this question

positioning strategies and language use. 74 of 324 participants state that they do treat the leader differently. When asked how their behavior differs 24 claim to be more respectful and polite. 18 gamers state that they treat the leader as superior to be on the good side since it is the leader's responsibility to hand out the loot in many cases. The gamers therefore adopt an inferior position in order to be on good terms with the leader to get better rewards. 11 participants state that they obey the leader, by this they highlight the leader's role to actively lead the group and being in charge of it. Other gamers note that they use more formal and careful language with the leader than with other gamers. It is also mentioned that since the leader has to organize a lot in the raid and has to deal with several things, the gamers try not to disturb him or her. Obviously, the gamers who behave differently with their leader, regard the leader as an important person who they respect for the time and work he or she puts into the raid. One of the participants even explicitly states that he or she treats the raid leader like a boss in real-life.

It is, however, surprising that the vast majority of the participants claim to not behave differently with a leader. This result is contrary to the assumption that the fixed hierarchical setup of ingame groups leads automatically to particular behavior in the gamers. It appears that the strongest power concepts are transported by the relations and hierarchies which are not coded into the game by the developers, like groups and raids with their setup of leader and members, but created and shaped through the gamers themselves like insider and outsider concepts or pros and noobs.

While the results of the questionnaire do not provide clear indications concerning behavior and language use when it comes to fixed hierarchical setups like groups, the concept of power still offers interesting points motivating positioning moves like the use of neologisms and other stylistic features. Power and power relations pose another piece in the mosaic of positioning which only reveals itself when put together. The next chapter is an attempt to put together several pieces of the jigsaw puzzle positioning in use in MMORPGs. It focuses on a question of the questionnaire called the wipe which provides a particular situation for the participants.

18. The wipe – An example of positioning ingame

One of the core questions of the questionnaire gives insights into positioning strategies and moves in use by gamers.³³ It is strongly linked to the notion of face and also to politeness strategies but by this allows commenting on positioning as well. The following situation should be imagined by the participants of the survey: They are in a random group of gamers (pick up group, PUG) and one of the party members causes a wipe (the death of all party members) by a beginner's mistake but refuses to take advice. The question is how the participants would react to such a situation. It is clear that such a situation leads to a FTA, since the participant of the survey has to impose on the other gamer since no one wants to die over and over again. Such a situation is actually described by Goffman (1967: 19) as corrective process and means that:

“when the participants in an undertaking or encounter fail to prevent the occurrence of an event that is expressively incompatible with the judgments of social worth that are being maintained, and when the event is of the kind that is difficult to overlook, then the participants are likely to give it accredited status as an incident - to ratify it as a threat that deserves direct official attention – and to proceed to try to correct for its effects.”

The situation of the wipe provides the participants with an event which is not compatible with common assumptions which are that as gamer you either know how to play and fight an enemy or you follow the guidance of other gamers who know. Causing wipes is not only critical but also strongly stigmatized and evokes normally shame in the person who caused it. It is a FTA for the causer of the wipe as well as for the aggrieved party. The situation causes shame and frustration in all involved gamers.

The question is designed as open question and therefore gives insights into the various ways to deal with such a situation. However, it has to be pointed out again at this point, that such a question provides a stage for artificial self-

33 This chapter includes findings which have been discussed to a minor extent in several papers by myself (see Kramer 2010; Kramer 2012; Kramer 2013a; Kramer 2013b).

representation. Thus, it can be that the answers show rather how gamers would like to be seen instead of reality and how they would actually react in such a situation.

This could explain the first finding. One would expect, keeping in mind that MMORPGs are games in which many gamers show signs of holy earnestness and professionalism, as well as the common assumption that these games are hostile environments, that the participants flame the other gamers by saying things like:

Example (55)

L2P FFS NOOB!! /kick

Instead of flaming the other gamer by saying *Learn to play for fucking sake noob* and immediately removing the other gamer from the group by using the command /kick, the participants use other strategies and positioning moves. Only 14 participants used flaming to react to this situation including directly insulting the other gamer, frustrated yells and outrageous outbursts with offending language. There is clearly a difference between a frustrated *ffs* (for fucking sake) and calling the other gamer *retard*. Flaming outbursts which include offending and insulting language are rarely used but occur like in the following examples:

Example (56)

Listen fuckbag if you wont take our advice then GTFO the group coz if your ignorance costs us another wipe then you'll be gone anyway.

Example (57)

FUCKING NOOB, GTFO!!!?!!?!!?111 GO FUCK URSELF N00B!!11

It is difficult to find strict bald on record strategies in the data, since many participants claim that going bald on record or even kicking the other gamer from the group would be the last option after other attempts to get him or her to follow advice failed. Sometimes it is also hard to differentiate between bald on record strategies and flaming. But about ten gamers' answers can be counted as bald on record strategy. Adding up flaming and bald on record strategies equates 24 participants of 324 (7%).

The majority of the participants use other strategies in this situation to make the other gamer follow the tactics provided by the other gamers. For example the use of sarcasm, banter and humor is noted by some of the gamers like saying in the party-channel "*IT WAS HIM!*" or "*tsk tsk, how ashamed I am of you*". This could be to loosen the tension caused by the wipe. But maybe also to prevent other gamers who have a temper to start flaming since flaming affects also other party members and not only the causer of the wipe. Flames spoil the fun of the undertaking and cause additional tension in a group.

More concrete are other strategies used by gamers in this situations, for instance strategies which Brown and Levinson (2009: 101) refer to as positive politeness. This means that the participants try to work on the positive face of the other gamer by showing that he or she is appreciated and liked as can be seen in the following example:

Example (58)

ahh no worries this time

Example 58 illustrates how playing down the incident and claiming that it is not a reason to worry, attends to the positive face of the other gamer in particular to his or her needs, feelings and want to be appreciated and liked. Following Leech's (1983: 132) terms, example 58 follows the maxim of approbation since it minimizes the dispraise of the other gamer. It is even more common to combine claiming common ground and showing appreciation for the other gamer as well as adding reasoning to the advice given. The examples below illustrate this:

Example (59)

That's no problem my friend, but please do take advice ... if you never listen you never learn, if you never learn you'll forever struggle :)

Example (60)

It's ok if you make mistake, we are all doing mistakes. But, you should accept advice because it's good for you. Not for now, but for future cases. [sic]

The gamers use a strategy towards the positive face of the other person by claiming common ground and using solidarity. By mentioning that all gamers make mistakes, the dispraise is minimized and the other gamer is shown that

he or she is still appreciated. Leech's (1983: 132) sympathy maxim can also be applied to this, since antipathy is minimized and sympathy maximized.

Furthermore, the gamer provides an incentive for the other gamer noting that following advice will pay off in the future and that he or she can learn from the mistake and following advice. In example 59, common ground is also claimed by the use of forms of address which evoke certain emotional closeness like *friend*. By this the gamer displays group connectedness and that they are all in the same boat. Also noteworthy is the use of the smiley in example 59 which is used to mitigate negative effects and emotions conveyed by the utterance.

Positioning on common ground and reasoning tactics are strategies often used by the participants. By this they attempt to manipulate the outcome of the conversation and try to make the other gamer follow their advice, which would lead to a successful end of the undertaking and would correct the wrong actions of the other gamer. Example 61 illustrates this:

Example (61)

Look, you want to get through this instance mate. Just like us. It's better to take advice from someone with more experience than just going your own way. Just don't let it happen again.

It is again noteworthy that the form of address is used to evoke a certain closeness between the gamers, calling the other person *mate*. Using the word *look* at the beginning of the utterance is supposed to get the other gamer's attention and raise his or her awareness. The reasoning is used to gain the other gamer's agreement and by this make him or her to follow the tactics.

The participants of the survey do not only attend to the positive face of the other gamer but also to the negative face, the want to be not imposed on and be free. Negative politeness strategies, as Brown and Levinson call them (2009: 129), are difficult to find in the data since they are more vague than positive politeness redressing strategies. Brown and Levinson's (2009: 131) chart of strategies gives rather unclear moves like being indirect, giving options, apologizing, using hedges and questions or impersonalization. However, there are some examples of negative politeness strategies in the data:

Example (62)

Whoever did this, please be causionous [sic]

Example 62 demonstrates two negative politeness strategies. On one hand the gamer uses impersonalized language by not naming the causer of the wipe. However, while Brown and Levinson regard this a negative politeness strategy, I would argue that it actually works more on the positive face than the negative one. By avoiding to name the causer of a problem, the person is not shamed openly and hence the positive face wants not threatened. On the other hand, the participant begs the other gamer to be cautious, hence tries to get his or her co-operation and agreement.

Begging is a common strategy used also in combination with other positioning moves. By using words like *please* or asking for improvement rather than ordering, the gamer's freedom is not constrained and the negative face not threatened. Such strategies at least give the illusion of having options. The strategy of leaving options is used in the following examples which was already used in the introduction:

Example (63)

eh i gess you wiped us^^ can you pls do it better next time ? :p [sic]

Just like in the previously given example (example 59), the gamer in example 63 uses smileys (^^ and :p) to attenuate the negative effect of the utterance. By asking if he or she could please (pls) do it better next time the participant gives the other gamer options and the freedom to decide to follow the advice or not. It is also interesting that the participant uses hedging asking for the gamer to do it better rather than requesting him or her to do it right or properly. By this the gamer minimizes the costs of the request. Another example of a negative politeness redressing strategy in which a question is used to manipulate the other gamer towards the desired outcome is illustrated in the next example:

Example (64)

Could you please just not do that anymore for everyones sake? [sic]

The gamer draws upon the common good of the group by asking the causer of the wipe to not do it again for the sake of everyone. By this the participant highlights that the caused wipe does not only affect him or her but the whole group. The question format of this request works upon the negative face of the other gamer and leaves him or her the option to follow the request.

In many cases it is difficult to tell the positioning moves or redressing strategies apart, when following Brown and Levinson's frame of politeness redressing strategies. The main reason for this is that gamers and possibly any speaker do not use only one single strategy in an utterance but several simultaneously. As highlighted in chapter 10, speakers mix the strategies of positioning and use various positioning moves in an utterance at the same time. The following example illustrates this:

Example (65)

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 participant aims at the negative face of the other person, by asking him or her if he or she could possibly do better. The co-operation of the other player 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 FTA" (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 claim 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. Furthermore, the use of a positive smiley mitigates the negative emotions caused by the utterance. Generally, gamers use smileys in such situations as my study shows and the previous examples illustrated (see Kramer 2013b: 16).

It is also common to not just give the other person the freedom to decide and act but to issue an ultimatum like in the following examples:

Example (66)

In a group we all have to work together. We don't blame you for the wipe, if you refuse to take our advice you'll have to leave.

Example (67)

It's okay to make a mistake, we all do, but you have to learn from it and take advice from us more experienced player who are successful in here..
(: so one last chance where you either do what we say or I'll kick you out, I'm afraid S: [sic]

In example 66 the ultimatum, and hence the option to either follow the tactics given by the other gamers or leave the group, is combined with other strategies. The participant positions the other gamer who caused the wipe within the group and includes him or her. The participant works on the positive face of the other gamer by assuring that they do not blame him or her for the wipe and still appreciate him or her. It is highlighted that the gamers of the party are in the same boat and that this undertaking is a joint-venture. At the same time the negative face it attended by offering the other gamer the option to just leave the group if he or she does not want to co-operate.

The other example (67), follows a similar line of argument. Common ground is claimed by stating that everyone makes mistakes and that this is okay. The recommendation to follow the advice of more experienced gamers and its face threatening potential is mitigated by a positive smiley. The ultimatum, the last chance, in which the other gamer either follows the tactics or is kicked out is mitigated by the hedge *I'm afraid* and another smiley. All these moves allow the gamer to position himself or herself as well as to position the other gamer. The participant takes the position of an authority who issues an ultimatum but at the same time evokes sympathy and closeness to the other gamer. The participant does not want to chase the other gamer off but goes to lengths to manipulate him or her towards the groups' goal, finishing the undertaking successfully.

It is, as mentioned before, difficult to tell the strategies apart and maybe it is not really necessary to strictly label an utterance as either positive or negative politeness. The examples show that one utterance can include several layers or

strategies and various positioning moves with different motivations. However, it can be estimated that positive and negative politeness strategies are used by about 105 gamers. While strategies which attend to face wants are common, off-record strategies are rare, only ten participants use them in this situation. Off-record strategies (see Brown and Levinson 2009: 211) mean that the intention of an utterance is not immediately clear and a problem is only indicated as in the following example:

Example (68)

There are strats written on (popular and well known fan site), probably a good idea to read up on them before attempting a boss

The participant implies the other gamer's mistake by mentioning that there are strategy guides on gamer websites describing difficult encounters. By this hint, he or she hopes to manipulate the other gamer to follow the advice of the other party members. Additionally, the agent is avoided. Instead of directly addressing the gamer who caused the wipe, the utterance is not directed to one single player but a general statement, making the utterance even more indirect (Kramer 2013b: 16-17).

Instead of pointing out ways to improve one's gaming, some participants use other hints to indicate the failure of the gamer, like in example 69:

Example (69)

Might be your money that pays for your account, but we pay for the other 4 members of this party

The participant in example 69 points out that many MMORPGs are not for free but cost the gamers money, hence wasting time by wiping is at the same time a waste of money. While the gamer causing the wipe clearly is accountable for his or her own expenses, the participant notes that the other four party members have the right to use their time and money to its best use and not waste it. By this the participant hopes to make the other gamer see that his or her failure to comply, costs the others time and money and that this will lead the gamer to start to follow their advice. Clearly, such an indirect statement requires a lot of interpretation and deduction, the following example takes even more deduction and even in-group knowledge.

Example (70)

Ebay got price off on XX again?

It is possible, or was possible, to sell one's MMORPG character on Ebay, even though the terms of use of most MMORPGs forbid it. Because of this it happened that gamers who had a character with the highest level possible and with the best gear available, had not the skill to play the character because they only bought it. The other gamer is so to say a noob in a pro's clothing. The participant's utterance of example 70, therefore, indicates that the gamer causing the wipe is a noob and only bought the character, lacking the skills to play it. The participant's intention could be to taunt the other gamer and by this cause him or her to play properly and following the advice of the other gamers.

According to Sifianou (2005: 217ff.) off-record strategies allow the speaker to avoid responsibility since it is up to the interlocutor how to interpret an utterance. Such indirect, careful and cautious statements to indicate a problem are not often used in this situation as my survey shows, only ten participants (3,09%) use an off-record strategy. "A possible reason for this could be that off-record strategies often fail to succeed as they are not straight forward enough" (Kramer 2013b: 17) and require, as is illustrated by the examples sometimes a lot of deduction. An unsuccessful linguistic strategy would mean an unsuccessful change in the other gamer's behavior, hence the undertaking cannot be finished successfully.

Another strategy to react in such a situation is to remain silent and say or do nothing. 21 participants claim to do or say nothing to the other gamer. However, some of the participants mention that they would complain to friends or guild members about the other gamer. One gamer explains this reaction by saying:

Example (71)

Someone else would do that anyway and I don't like doing that stuff myself

The avoidance of a discussion or to suffer a FTA oneself is also often linked to remembering the name of the other gamer to prevent being in a group with him or her again. This is exemplified in the following example:

Example (72)

Mutter groan, curse pugs at my screen and remeber there name so not to group with them again but say nothing in the game other than /sigh [sic]

The previous example also provides an answer to the question why gamers go to such lengths and use positioning strategies in such situations instead of flaming the other person. Why do they tend to the faces of the other gamer? Gamers remember the names of other gamers and how they behaved. If a gamer behaved badly, one will avoid playing with this person again. 13 participants say they would just leave the group themselves and remember the name of the other gamer to prevent him or her.

What is also observable in the survey is that some gamers try to get the agreement and support of the other group members or the group leader before approaching the other gamer with an ultimatum. Hence, the gamers position themselves as part of a group in the pick up group by means of getting agreement and support of the other party members. They so to say group up against the other gamer, as in example 73:

Example (73)

If I was the leader I'd talk to the other members and get their stance on what should be done, then with all the information either kick the player in question or not. If I wasn't the leader, i'd go talk to the party leader about it. [sic]

A final strategy mentioned by some of the participants is to whisper the gamer himself or herself instead of discussing the mistake in the party-channel. They claim to offer advice, help and reassurance to the other gamer in whisper. One of the participant's answer gives a reason for using such positioning strategies:

Example (74)

I would whisper him and try to have a conversation with him in an effort to get him to see his error and adjust his tactics accordingly

Putting some effort into a conversation to make the other gamer see his or her mistake is nothing more than active positioning in order to manipulate the interlocutor towards one's own goals and aims, in this case make the other gamer follow the advice and tactics. By whispering the other gamer instead of

speaking to him or her in the party-channel, the gamer's positive face is attended to. The following example highlights the active and conscious use of politeness for manipulating the other gamer:

Example (75)

I'd try to get through to him, possibly through a polite whisper

Several participants note that using polite language in this situation can be useful to, as one participant says, "talk him round" and make him or her see the mistake and follow the given advice. Hence, politeness is used as a tool of positioning in order to successfully finish the undertaking.

While the common perception is that MMORPGs are offensive surroundings, gamers go to lengths to use careful redressing strategies which are common in real-life outside the game as well. Instead of imposing on others, gamers use several layers of politeness strategies when communicating. Some gamers position themselves on common ground and as part of the in-group. Others take a position which leaves the interlocutor his or her freedom. One reason for this is an egocentric motivation. If a gamer insults another gamer he or she is questing with, he or she might snap and leave the group all together. This would leave the group one member short and would either slow down the group or even prevent the success of the undertaking. Therefore, it is better for gamers to use strategies to manipulate the other player towards their personal goal. As one of the participants aptly says:

Example (76)

I wouldn't start writing bad things to him since that in most cases only causes that that members of the group start leaving [sic]

Thus, it appears as if gamers are well aware of the function of politeness strategies as a way to position and manipulate the interlocutors. Politeness in such situations can be used to change the behavior of the other gamer, build rapport as well as create harmony in the group. Frustration in a group can make dungeon runs very unpleasant and even lead other gamers to leave the group.

Another reason is that gamers remember impolite players and do not help them anymore. Bad reputation spreads quite easily on a server. Thus, it is unwise to endanger one's reputation by being impolite because it lowers the chances of getting help in the game.

This chapter shows how multifaceted positioning in MMORPGs is. The situation of the wipe which poses an instance of face threatening illustrates that strategies known from politeness theory and normally from face-to-face conversations are used the same way in MMORPGs. Even though communication in MMORPGs is often regarded as hostile, the gamers go to lengths to use strategies which are used in the same way in the real world. Clearly, there are positioning moves and features which are not used in face-to-face communication like the use of smileys to attenuate negative effects or to emphasize sympathy. But other strategies like positive or negative redressing strategies are similar to those in the real world. Using specific forms of addressing others, making use of hedges, modulators and questions are common tools to position in difficult situations. However, real conversations are not as clear-cut as examples given in text books and hence it is not surprising that an utterance is not simply claiming common ground and part of positive politeness strategies, but that speakers, and in this case gamers, mix the strategies, layers and moves for several motivations.

The motivations are partly egocentric since the gamers want to achieve certain effects with their utterances, they want the other gamer to follow their lead. At the same time the gamers have a (subconscious) feeling of the face wants, the urge of involvement with others and at the same time a desire for freedom and independence, of themselves and of the other gamer. Since a speaker does not want to threaten the face of the other person nor threaten the own face, politeness strategies are used. Politeness strategies like stylistic features are instruments to cause certain effects in the interlocutors and to achieve goals. They are means of positioning.

19. Section Summary

This section shows aspects of the communicative and interactive requirements of the gamers which influence the linguistic choices they take as well as their positioning. The loose ends of the previous section, in which the speech event factors influence one another and therefore lead to specific encoding of the message, are knotted together with the gamer's perception of communication ingame.

Being efficient is a virtue posing a strong pole in the continuum of language used ingame and it is the stark opposite of role-playing which provides the other pole, by being creative and elaborate in the use of language. In order to position as efficient and competent player, gamers use certain stylistic features and other positioning moves. Acronyms and neologisms, following conventions of searching for groups or conventions of good playing are fixed parts of the virtue of efficiency. Claiming that striving for efficiency is rooted in high stress situations ingame and the desire to save time, cannot be confirmed. Efficient gameplay and language is a display of professionalism and earnestness and by this group membership. Being part of a community is a deeply rooted urge within humans.

Even though gamers are confronted with obstacles like high stress situations, missing paralinguistic cues and the desire to be efficient, they still use strategies of politeness to position themselves in conversations. There is politeness in MMORPGs. Yet, gamers do not necessarily use it in order to be nice to others, but rather as a communication strategy to achieve one's goals. While it is the common belief that MMORPGs are an offensive surrounding, this study shows that the gamers are well aware of politeness and use it intentionally and strategically as a tool to achieve purposes and to manipulate their interlocutors towards their intended goals. In that sense, using politeness strategies is more efficient than offending others.

It is impossible to treat aspects like power, role-playing, efficiency or politeness separately, because all these elements are tightly connected in a paradox way since on one hand they are incompatible. On the other hand they inform one another in a never ending cycle. Role-playing and efficiency are like two sides

of a coin. One side is being efficient and use short and informative language, the other side is being creative and use elaborate language. Both aspects are tightly connected to the community and being part of the community, which is in return linked to power and power relations in which the gamer and the non-gamer are an important dichotomy. Prestige, gamer's pride and holy earnestness are driving forces in the power setup of MMORPGs. These dichotomies inform and influence the linguistic choices gamers take and the use of certain positioning moves. All these aspects are intertwined in a never ending circle in which one aspect informs and influences the other aspect.

This is illustrated in the example of the wipe in which several strategies are used by the gamers to position themselves and the other gamers. The gamers make use of the resources described in the previous section such as smileys 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 the positioning moves of the gamers in such a situation and the strategic considerations which influence the linguistic choices taken. The strategies and positioning moves by the gamers in such a situation as well as the underlying concepts influencing them (e.g. creativity as apparent in role-playing, efficiency, rapport and power) 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.

20. Conclusion – Myths dispelled

The community of gamers is like any other group of people one with close bonds and special language usage. However, the phenomenon of gaming which clings the gamers together is an expanding one. This thesis describes the range of the gaming phenomenon in history and nowadays. Never have more people played computer games than today, in times of smartphones, mobile-phones, tablet-PCs and various consoles. Playing computer games is not as awkward anymore as in the beginning of this economic branch. Being “nerdy” or “a geek” is to some extent even fashionable. It is far from reality to regard language used in Internet communication settings or in computer games as unimportant or deteriorated language use by a handful of speakers.

MMORPGs are a discourse which is hidden in the discourse of computer games embedded in the overall discourse of games and play. This nested setup demonstrates that nothing exists in a void but that everything, every discourse, every community and every speaker is surrounded by a frame which is set in yet another frame. All the other Matryoshkas in which a speaker is hidden influences him or her and also his or her language. While the Matryoshkas look similar they are not the same and hence also provide different linguistic possibilities.

The chapter on computer games shows not only several aspects of current computer game studies and research in them but also some of the most important aspects of this area, namely interactivity and participation. These factors were and are driving forces in the computer game branch. Throughout history both aspects have been improved and allowed the gamers to participate and interact more and more with the medium, the narration and the other gamers. By this the number of gamers rises and the language used in games, also in MMORPGs, becomes more common and to some extent even mainstream. Several years ago the use of smileys was still unusual to say the least. Today it is a commonly known and understood feature even outside Internet communication. The Oxford English Dictionary added several terms and meanings created in the context of Internet communication to their dictionary like *tweet*, *follower* and so on. One could therefore claim that it is

likely that features of MMORPG or gamer language will be adopted into standard language, and normal language usage outside their contexts, in the future. Hence, it is important to treat the topic of computer games not only to set the stage for researching language usage in them but also because this area could provide insights into possible language change.

Clearly, language change has always been and will be a controversial topic as people are afraid of change. Yet, language always changes no matter if organizations lead crusades against the deterioration of language through loanwords of other languages or the use of terms and new meanings applied to existing words from other areas of language use. The language of MMORPGs as described in this thesis shows that it is a linguistic variety full of playfulness, creativity and individuality. At the same time the features have practical use like speeding conversation up, making it easier and raising efficiency. As all communities, gamers of MMORPGs create an insider code based on their needs in order to talk better about their reality but also to differentiate themselves from other groups. Becoming part of the community or as Gee calls it the semiotic domain means to learn to recognize, read and create meaning in the community. Hence, the language of MMORPGs is far from being nonsensical or deficient. This thesis attempts to not only explore the creative power of the language used in MMORPGs but also tries to fight against treating these areas of research as pariah of science and humanities.

MMORPGs are as the respective chapter shows a special example and an independent discourse of computer games since playing together and communicating with others to achieve something in the game is paramount in them. Certainly, what gamers want to achieve is different. Some gamers prefer to improve their character to utmost efficiency, others want to act out a role and create a character with a fully fledged background story. Despite the various different ways to play in MMORPGs, all play-styles have the factor of co-operation and playing together in common. It comes as no surprise that such a need for co-operation and communication also requires a proper technical setup of communication which is evident looking at the ingame chat-channels, message-boards, websites, wikis and several other channels of communication provided to the gamers and created by them. Furthermore,

MMORPGs are because of their design and setting particularly special compared to other computer games. The magic circle which normally surrounds games, which sets the frame and the borders of the gaming reality are shifted in MMORPGs. When does the gaming stop in MMORPGs? Is it when a gamer logs off? But since he or she is often communicating about the game on message-boards, preparing for a dungeon run reading a guide on a website, writing a wikipedia article about an aspect of the game, it is not clear where the magic circle ends or if it is still existent. The expanding and engaging nature of MMORPGs and its opportunities of participation and interaction of the gamers is discussed throughout this thesis and includes narrative considerations, participatory culture, the game design, the desire for diversion, entertainment, achievement, appreciation and togetherness as well as striving for professional and efficient gameplay.

It is this setting of co-operative gaming which became the focus of the survey which is the basis for this thesis. The survey described in the respective chapter combines several approaches and data sets to provide a clearer picture of the linguistic reality of MMORPGs. The corpus offers insights into “real” language, while the data from the questionnaire is elicited data about attitudes and perception of the gamers. Introspection acts as link between both data sets. Several of the findings from the datasets are described in section two in which the strong interrelation of all the previous aspects is apparent.

What becomes obvious in this thesis is that, the Internet and therefore also MMORPGs are not a linguistic or social no man's land in which the conventions and rules of the real world do not apply. While at first glance the MMORPG discourse and speech event appears estranged, it seems to be rather a microcosm of society. The used language and strategies of interaction ingame are very similar to the ones outside of it. Why is this the case? When it is possible to create a complete different social and linguistic landscape, why is the Internet and the virtual reality of MMORPGs just like a mirror of society. The answer to this is quite obvious, because the speakers are the same. The setting is different, the medium is different but the speakers or actors as well as his or her needs are the same and hence the outcome is in so many instances similar to the one outside the MMORPG discourse.

The functions and mechanisms of language are the same no matter in which context or communicative setting they are used. Clearly, specific aspects of the speech event influence the used language like the medium and the message itself, but the functions and the motivations behind their use are the same. The absence of paralinguistic cues causes the use of smileys. But while the expression or product (the smiley) is different compared to other settings, the underlying motivation is the same: achieving a certain effect in the interlocutor or even more general communicating and negotiating with others. Humans want to communicate with others, they want to be involved with them and paradoxically they also feel the need to differentiate from others. The latter of course is only necessary and possible if there are others. This is where the concept of positioning comes in, at the very fundamental base of human needs and human communication. It is a manifestation of the two wants of humans. The discursive dance of positioning, to resort again to this metaphor, illustrates all characteristics of the interaction strategies and positioning moves taken during a conversation. It is relational, dynamic, complex or even ambiguous, not transparent and not neutral. Furthermore, it requires co-operation to some extent. Whenever we dance, every movement of one dancer causes reactions in the other dancer(s). Action causes reaction, which in return leads to an action. The choreography of a conversation is a process in which all interlocutors participate and engage in to some extent. Positions are negotiated, taken, imposed on, challenged, accepted or refused. A subtle move in the choreography has already an effect on the other dancer(s) and thus is never neutral. Just like Terkourafi (2008:47) states that "all linguistic expressions do 'information work' and 'facework' at the same time all the time", I would claim that all linguistic expressions do positioning work.

Politeness and the various strategies discussed by many researchers are a good examples of positioning strategies and moves. Even though some gamers of the survey claim to be polite by default as they call it, the results show that politeness strategies are intentionally used to position oneself and the interlocutor in conversations. Interestingly, the participants of the study are well aware of the advantages of polite behavior and therefore use these strategies for their need. Positioning in this sense can be seen as a process of

manipulation of others. It is a subtle game of manipulation and strategic positioning moves. That means that positioning can be seen as a game in the game (MMORPG).

What is, furthermore, shown in this thesis is that gamers and the game form a cycle. Games influence gamers and how they play games but at the same time it is the gamer who influences the way games are designed. A similar cycle can be seen when approaching the topic from a linguistic standpoint. Speakers do not only express themselves through language. It is not only an expression of them, but at the same time language is an impression to the speakers. Both elements form a cycle of input and output, not only referring to the language produced and received by speakers but also the language as such. Speakers influence language for example by creating neologisms. Language, however, also influences the speaker providing them with a frame to think and express in. As Fairclough (1989: 19) says “[l]anguage is a part of society; linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena.” Society, language and the speakers are linked together in a continuous cycle.

The language of MMORPGs provides us with many examples of these cycles. For example, the phenomenon of *ding!* which is explained in the course of the thesis. It started with the sound of a level up in many MMORPGs which caused gamers to create this expression to convey that they managed to gain a level. It was the language of the gamers and the expression *ding!* which led the game developers of *World of Warcraft*® to include this cultural and linguistic token into the gaming code. If a character manages to gain a level up nowadays, the player does not only hear the ding-sound but a message is displayed reading ding! Hence, a token in the game created a linguistic expression, which in turn influenced the game.

It is no news that aspects like language, society and speakers are interconnected. Adding the aspect of gaming to this, does not really make this observation more innovative. However, what is worth highlighting is that these aspects are not only connected loosely but form cycles which repeat and reproduce one another by constantly informing and influencing one another. Discourses are imbedded in other discourses. A cycle structure, clearly, makes

research difficult as it would be more straight forward if aspect A influences aspect B creating aspect C. It appears that, as in many other areas of life, language and gaming are not linear processes and therefore cannot be statically described. There is not one beginning and one end. Yet, as mentioned before, the language used in gaming is in many ways similar to the use of it in the real world. It is partly a reflexion of the real world because of the humans playing these games. It could be claimed that this similarity between the gaming world and the real world realized as a reflexion of the humans is the extension of the face concept of the individual. The face, as conceptualized by Goffman, being a mask and a self-image humans create. As the author Kai Meyer (2013) says in the preface of a music album by ASP, a mask is not only a tool to hide behind but it is a projection screen of the human looking at it. It is a broken mirror with pieces missing and partly blurred and yet it allows the humans to reconstruct themselves in it. What this thesis provides is a defamiliarization with human communication by looking at an estranged version of it. This defamiliarization allows a new point of view on the most fundamental basics of human communication: positioning and negotiation.

Positioning in conversation fits into this rather complex and confusing image of the world in which aspects overlap and fuse into what the human believes to be reality. It is a “Labyrinth der Vieldeutigkeiten. Wir finden uns darin wieder und verlieren uns zugleich.” (Meyer 2013). Wittgenstein (2003: §203) observes something similar concerning language: “Die Sprache ist ein Labyrinth von Wegen. Du kommst von *einer* Stelle und kennst dich aus; du kommst von einer anderen zur selben Stelle, und kennst dich nicht mehr aus.”

If language is such a confusing area as Wittgenstein claims, and if the concept of the face is a labyrinth of ambiguity how can research in it yield any useful insights? It is exactly this ambiguity and blurriness which provides insights, namely that one should stop to rip aspects and elements from their context and researching them separately as if they are not influenced and influencing other areas of life and language. The paradox of the face illustrates well that such aspects do not only stand in one relation to one another but sometimes in rather contradicting relations like the one of involvement and independence. Just like in positioning and in Bakhtin's notion of dialogic language, in which speakers

build upon previous texts and dialogues, hence are embedded in a biography and history; language, gaming and the human as such are not deracinated. All these aspects build on one another and are embedded in one another. Each element and every speaker builds upon history, even if he or she challenges conventions or history. Therefore it was also important to describe what play and game, computer games and MMORPGs are and where they come from since each aspect is embedded in the other and is derived from a history.

At the end of this thesis one might ask what sense does it make to research games and virtual reality, so to say make belief? But in the end gaming is not more virtual reality than other aspects of our life. As David Deutsch (1997: 121) put it “all reasoning, all thinking and all external experience are forms of virtual reality.” This thesis clearly goes against many trends in research. Exploring the language used in games is not a dominant nor particularly popular aspect in game studies at the moment. There are certain points of contact with media literacy, learning or game design which sometimes make use of theories or concepts from linguistics. But applying linguistic concepts to gaming contexts for the sake of exploring the use of language is neglected and such research is rarely asked for or wished to be presented.

Similarly out of the ordinary is researching computer games in linguistics. While linguistics often uses game theory to apply it to language, it is uncommon to explore games and the gamers as speech community for linguistic questions. However, researching linguistics in the area of media and in particular computer games can provide fresh impetus to other linguistic branches.

Despite these current trends in research which go into other directions, it was attempted to make the first shaky steps into the still fairly unexplored terrain of the language used in MMORPGs. Not because it is different to the language used in the real world but rather because it is so similar to it. While the produced linguistic expressions sometimes have a different form than in communication outside the gaming world, the motivations and the underlying functions and mechanisms are the very same. MMORPGs and gaming are an extrapolation of the real world. Gamers and humans in general communicate by means of positioning in order to achieve certain effects in others.

This thesis in its scale might appear like a grain of sand in the desert of research. Yet, even a grain of sand is infused with the universe. Thus this thesis, in its small scale is infused with the linguistic and gaming reality of MMORPGs as well as the universe itself, allowing insights into the universe from a certain perspective. And that makes it worthwhile.

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Appendix A – The questionnaire

Gamer profile

1 Please enter your e-mail address. *

Please write your answer here:

Note that this is only for intern cross-reference and will not be published in any written data.

2 Please select your gender. *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Female

☐ Male

3 Please fill in your age *

Please write your answer here:

4 Country/Region you live in: *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Afghanistan

☐ Åland Islands

☐ Albania

☐ Algeria

☐ American Samoa

☐ Andorra

☐ Angola

☐ Anguilla

☐ Antigua and Barbuda

☐ Argentina

☐ Armenia

☐ Aruba

☐ Australia

☐ Austria

☐ Azerbaijan

☐ Bahamas

☐ Bahrain

☐ Bangladesh

☐ Barbados

☐ Belarus

☐ Belgium

☐ Belize

☐ Benin

☐ Bermuda

☐ Bhutan

☐ Bolivia

☐ Bosnia and Herzegovina

☐ Botswana

☐ Brazil

☐ British Virgin Islands

☐ Brunei Darussalam

- ☐Bulgaria
- ☐Burkina Faso
- ☐Burundi
- ☐Cambodia
- ☐Cameroon
- ☐Canada
- ☐Cape Verde
- ☐Cayman Islands
- ☐Central African Republic
- ☐Chad
- ☐Channel Islands
- ☐Chile
- ☐China
- ☐Colombia
- ☐Comoros
- ☐Congo
- ☐Cook Islands
- ☐Costa Rica
- ☐Côte d'Ivoire
- ☐Croatia
- ☐Cuba
- ☐Cyprus
- ☐Czech Republic
- ☐Democratic Republic of the Congo
- ☐Denmark
- ☐Djibouti
- ☐Dominica
- ☐Dominican Republic
- ☐Ecuador
- ☐Egypt
- ☐El Salvador
- ☐Equatorial Guinea
- ☐Eritrea
- ☐Estonia
- ☐Ethiopia
- ☐Faeroe Islands
- ☐Falkland Islands (Malvinas)
- ☐Fiji
- ☐Finland
- ☐France
- ☐French Guiana
- ☐French Polynesia
- ☐Gabon
- ☐Gambia
- ☐Georgia
- ☐Germany
- ☐Ghana
- ☐Gibraltar
- ☐Greece
- ☐Greenland

- ☐ Grenada
- ☐ Guadeloupe
- ☐ Guam
- ☐ Guatemala
- ☐ Guernsey
- ☐ Guinea
- ☐ Guinea-Bissau
- ☐ Guyana
- ☐ Haiti
- ☐ Holy See
- ☐ Honduras
- ☐ Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China)
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Iceland
- ☐ India
- ☐ Indonesia
- ☐ Iran
- ☐ Iraq
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Isle of Man
- ☐ Israel
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Jamaica
- ☐ Japan
- ☐ Jersey
- ☐ Jordan
- ☐ Kazakhstan
- ☐ Kenya
- ☐ Kiribati
- ☐ Kuwait
- ☐ Kyrgyzstan
- ☐ Lao People's Democratic Republic
- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Lebanon
- ☐ Lesotho
- ☐ Liberia
- ☐ Libya(n Arab Jamahiriya)
- ☐ Liechtenstein
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxembourg
- ☐ Macao Special Administrative Region of China
- ☐ Madagascar
- ☐ Malawi
- ☐ Malaysia
- ☐ Maldives
- ☐ Mali
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Marshall Islands
- ☐ Martinique
- ☐ Mauritania

- ☐ Mauritius
- ☐ Mayotte
- ☐ Mexico
- ☐ Micronesia, Federated States of
- ☐ Moldova
- ☐ Monaco
- ☐ Mongolia
- ☐ Montenegro
- ☐ Montserrat
- ☐ Morocco
- ☐ Mozambique
- ☐ Myanmar
- ☐ Namibia
- ☐ Nauru
- ☐ Nepal
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ Netherlands Antilles
- ☐ New Caledonia
- ☐ New Zealand
- ☐ Nicaragua
- ☐ Niger
- ☐ Nigeria
- ☐ Niue
- ☐ Norfolk Island
- ☐ Northern Mariana Islands
- ☐ North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)
- ☐ Norway
- ☐ Occupied Palestinian Territory
- ☐ Oman
- ☐ Pakistan
- ☐ Palau
- ☐ Panama
- ☐ Papua New Guinea
- ☐ Paraguay
- ☐ Peru
- ☐ Philippines
- ☐ Pitcairn
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Portugal
- ☐ Puerto Rico
- ☐ Qatar
- ☐ Réunion
- ☐ Romania
- ☐ Russian Federation
- ☐ Rwanda
- ☐ Saint-Barthélemy
- ☐ Saint Helena
- ☐ Saint Kitts and Nevis
- ☐ Saint Lucia
- ☐ Saint-Martin (French part)

- ☐ Saint Pierre and Miquelon
- ☐ Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- ☐ Samoa
- ☐ San Marino
- ☐ Sao Tome and Principe
- ☐ Saudi Arabia
- ☐ Senegal
- ☐ Serbia
- ☐ Seychelles
- ☐ Sierra Leone
- ☐ Singapore
- ☐ Slovakia
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Solomon Islands
- ☐ Somalia
- ☐ South Africa
- ☐ South Korea (Republic of Korea)
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sri Lanka
- ☐ Sudan
- ☐ Suriname
- ☐ Svalbard and Jan Mayen Islands
- ☐ Swaziland
- ☐ Sweden
- ☐ Switzerland
- ☐ Syrian Arab Republic
- ☐ Tajikistan
- ☐ Thailand
- ☐ The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- ☐ Timor-Leste
- ☐ Togo
- ☐ Tokelau
- ☐ Tonga
- ☐ Trinidad and Tobago
- ☐ Tunisia
- ☐ Turkey
- ☐ Turkmenistan
- ☐ Turks and Caicos Islands
- ☐ Tuvalu
- ☐ Uganda
- ☐ Ukraine
- ☐ United Arab Emirates
- ☐ United Kingdom
- ☐ United Republic of Tanzania
- ☐ United States of America
- ☐ United States Virgin Islands
- ☐ Uruguay
- ☐ Uzbekistan
- ☐ Vanuatu
- ☐ Venezuela

- ☐ Vietnam
- ☐ Wallis and Futuna Islands
- ☐ Western Sahara
- ☐ Yemen
- ☐ Zambia
- ☐ Zimbabwe

5 Please fill in your profession *

Please write your answer here:

6 Please fill in your native language(s) *

Please write your answer here:

7 Do you speak any other languages? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8 Please fill in which languages you speak *

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '7']

Please write your answer here:

9 Which MMORPG do you play most? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ World of Warcraft
- ☐ Lord of the Rings Online
- ☐ Warhammer Online
- ☐ City of Heroes/City of Villains
- ☐ Lineage II
- ☐ Ragnarok Online
- ☐ Eve Online
- ☐ Star Wars Galaxies
- ☐ EverQuest II
- ☐ Age of Conan
- ☐ Other

10 In which geographical area are the servers you play on set? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ USA
- ☐ Europe
- ☐ Asia
- ☐ Other

11 Which server types are you playing on? *

Please choose *all* that apply:

- ☐ PvE (Player versus Environment)/Normal
- ☐ PvP (Player versus Player)
- ☐ RP (Roleplaying)
- ☐ RP-PvP (Roleplaying and Player versus Player)

Other:

12 What is the official server language of the server you are playing on? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ English
- ☐ German
- ☐ French
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Russian
- ☐ Mandarin
- ☐ Other

13 Are you a member of a guild, clan, alliance or other association of players? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14 Do all your colleagues in your guild, clan, alliance or other association of players speak the same native language?

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '13']

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

15 Which language is mostly used in your guild, clan, alliance or other association of players? *

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '13']

Please write your answer here:

16 Which of the following channels of communications are offered in your guild, clan, alliance or other association of players?

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '13']

Please choose *all* that apply:

- ☐ Website
- ☐ Message board or forum
- ☐ Chat-room (e.g. IRC)
- ☐ Special chat-channels ingame (e.g. guild channel)
- ☐ VoIP (Voice over IP) (e.g. Teamspeak, Ventrilo)
- ☐ Newsletter
- ☐ Mailinglist

Other:

17 Do you use more than one language in the game? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18 Please fill in which language you use in the following situations. *

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '17']

Please write your answer(s) here:

- Playing with friends
- Playing in a group of strangers
- Statements in public (e.g. ingame chat-channels)
- Playing in larger groups for difficult ingame encounters

19 Which language do you use ingame? *

[Only answer this question if you answered 'No' to question '17']

Please write your answer here:

Gaming behavior

20 Please estimate your playing time in hours per week. *

Please write your answer here:

21 Which of the following gaming styles applies to you? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Beginner
- ☐ Amateur
- ☐ Professional

22 Which of the following gaming behaviors applies to you? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Unfocused hobby gamer (you follow no specific aims in the game)
- ☐ Focused casual gamer (you follow aims but do not force yourself to play)
- ☐ Scheduled gamer (you play with a certain schedule (e.g. raid schedule) no matter if you feel like it or not)
- ☐ Other

23 Please rate the following gaming types according to your playing habits.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Not at all	Not very often	Occasionally	Often	Always	I do not know this gaming type
RP (Roleplaying)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PvP (Player versus Player)(Battleground)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PvP (Team versus team e.g. arena)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PvP (other e.g. open PvP)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PvE (Player vesus Environment)(quests)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PvE (dungeons/instances)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PvE (raid, instances for more than 10 players)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24 How many characters do you have? *

Please write your answer here:

25 How many of them do you play frequently? *

[Only answer this question if you have NOT answered to question '24']

Please write your answer here:

26 Do you have characters for certain activities (e.g. RP, PvP)? *

[Only answer this question if you have NOT answered to question '24']

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Yes

☐ No

27 Do these characters differ in their use of language according to their activity?

*

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '26']

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Yes

☐ No

e.g. more elaborate style, very polite language, short and fast language

28 Please explain how the language of your characters differs.

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '27']

Please write your answer here:

Language behavior

29 Which of the following types of communication is important to you while being in a dungeon or instance with other players? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Efficient communication, as short as possible

☐ Clear and short commands but tactics are explained if necessary

☐ Long explanations of tactics

☐ Atmospheric roleplaying style

☐ No communication at all

☐ Other

30 Do you use smileys in the following situations?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Not at all	Not very often	Occasion- ally	Often	Always	I do not use this function
Whispering/messaging a stranger	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whispering/messaging a friend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General/public chat-channels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guild/clan channels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Party channel of a PUG (pick up group)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Party channel of a group of friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any other way of communication outside the game (e.g. message-board)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using the say-function (/say) e.g. :) ^^ :-P	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31 Do you use leet in the following situations?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Not at all	Not very often	Occasion- ally	Often	Always	I do not use this function
Whispering/messaging a stranger	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whispering/messaging a friend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General/public chat-channels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guild/clan channels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Party channel of a PUG (Pick up group)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Party channel of a group of friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any other way of communication outside the game (e.g. message-board)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using the say-function (/say)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Leet refers to expressions such as n00b, pwn and uber as well as to leet writing which refers to the use of numbers and symbols to visually represent a letter (e.g. 1337 for leet)

32 Do you use acronyms in the following situations?
Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Not at all	Not very often	Occasion- ally	Often	Always	I do not use this function
Whispering/messaging a stranger	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whispering/messaging a friend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General/public chat-channels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guild/clan channels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Party channel of a PUG (Pick up group)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Party channel of a group of friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any other way of communication outside the game (e.g. message-board)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using the say-function (/say)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Acronyms are for example LFG (Looking for group) and lol (laughing out loud).

33 Do you react more positively to a polite request than to an impolite one in game?

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

34 Do you try to formulate your request politely, when asking a question in the public chat-channel?

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

35 Please fill in why you do not try to formulate your questions politely

[Only answer this question if you answered 'No' to question '34']

Please write your answer here:

36 Please rate the following situations according to politeness and appropriateness.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Impolite/ offending	Inappropriate/ awkward	Appropriate	Very polite
You are whispered/messaged while questing with a friend: "Wanna go (insert dungeon/instance acronym)"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You get invited by a stranger into his/her party without being asked beforehand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You are in a raid (or larger group) and another person opens a trade window and puts food in it for you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You are standing in a town, when suddenly someone opens a trade window without any further comment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You are struggling with an enemy but lose, when a stranger messages you: "n00b :)"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone asks in the public channel: "Does any1 know where the inn is here :)"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your group is about to fight a difficult enemy, when a stranger messages you: "Inv pls!?!?"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You are questing, when a strange messages you: "Greetings adventurer. I am sorry to bother you but could you be so kind and give a tired traveler something to eat and drink?"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Impolite/ offending	Inappropriate/ awkward	Appropriate	Very polite
Someone searches in the public chat-channel for help: "My companions and I require aid in a dangerous quest for glory."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone searches in the public chat-channel for help: "LFG 2 DD (insert dungeon/instance acronym)"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

37 Please rate the following statement: Politeness has to give way to efficiency in some situations. *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

38 According to your gaming experience, how would you rate the communication ingame compared to communication in reallife.

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Impolite
- ☐ Less friendly
- ☐ Similar
- ☐ Friendlier
- ☐ Very polite

39 Do you play with politeness as a means of roleplaying? *

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

e.g. intentional lack of politeness, exaggerated use of politeness.

40 Please state in which way you play with politeness.

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '39']

Please write your answer here:

e.g. intentional lack of politeness, exaggerated politeness

41 A group member of your PUG (pick up group) causes a wipe (the death of all party members) by a beginner's mistake but refuses to take advice. Please state in your own words how you would express your disapproval.

Please write your answer here:

42 How important is it to you not to hurt or offend others with statements ingame?

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Not important at all
- ☐ Not very important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Very important

43 Have you ever been insulted directly ingame by another player?

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

44 How do you react in most cases to a direct insult?

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '43']

Please choose *all* that apply:

- ☐ Ignoring the insult
- ☐ Reporting the player to a gamemaster
- ☐ Arguing back or insulting the other player as well
- ☐ Trying to sort out the problem
- ☐ No answer

Other:

45 Does the fact that a gamer is more or less anonymous encourage impolite and offending behavior ingame?

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

46 Do you believe that a group or raid leader is the decision maker of the undertaking and has the final say?

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

47 If you are the group or raid leader, do you expect the other group members to listen to you and do as you say?

Please choose *only one* of the following:

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

48 Do you believe that a group or raid leader is in a higher position during an undertaking and therefore allowed to decide upon communication in the group?
Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Strongly disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly agree

e.g. not allowing chatting and Smalltalk during the undertaking.

49 Is your behavior towards the group or raid leader different than towards other players?

Please choose *only one* of the following:

☐ Yes

☐ No

50 Please state how your behavior is different.

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question '49']

Please write your answer here:

Appendix B – MMORPG Glossary

Note: Area of use terms: gameplay and game culture. gameplay refers to game mechanics or content coded into the game by its developers and referred by them as such. Game culture refers to terms which were coined and invented by the gamers.

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
achievement	achievement				Self-contained game goals that offer challenges, satisfy goal-oriented players, and allow others to see your accomplishments	gameplay
actionbar	action-bar				A toolbar in the game allowing placing actions, skills or items on it in order to have fast access to them, similar to shortcuts- Another term for it is → hotbar	gameplay
add	add				An additional enemy is called an add	game culture
addon	addon				1) official expansion to a game, offering new content to gamers 2) modification made by the gamers → mod	gameplay
aggro	aggro	to aggro		aggro-chain aggro-list aggro-management aggro-meter aggro-range aggro-reduce aggro-reset heal-aggro	Aggro means that someone has the attention of an enemy and made it aggressive	game culture
alt	alt				Alt refers to an alternative → character played by the gamer in addition to the main → character, also referred to as → twink	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
attribute	attribute			Primary attribute secondary attribute	Attributes are the basic building blocks for a character's combat ability. The five attributes are strength, agility, stamina, intellect and spirit. These are sometimes referred to as simply → stats. A number of secondary attributes affect specific areas of combat more directly. All characters inherently have some amount of each attribute that increases with → level depending mainly on → class. Nearly all combat mechanics rely in some way on one or more character attributes	gameplay
avatar	avatar				The visual representation of the player's → character ingame	gameplay
boon	boon				A newcomer to the game. A variation of the word → noob since it is written backwards, commonly used in German	game culture
buff	buff debuff rebuff	to buff to debuff to rebuff		buff-duration buff-food buff-round	A spell which improves the statistics of a player. A debuff decreases the statistics. A rebuff refers to the renewing of a buff	game culture
camp		to camp		corpse-camp	To camp an enemy or a player from another faction means that one stays there until he/she returns to kill him/her again	game culture
cast	cast	To cast		Caster casttime	Cast is the abbreviated form of spell-cast, therefore means the use of magical → spells. Cast-time is the term referring to the time it takes to cast a spell	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
character	character char			character- list bank-char	The character or in short char is controlled and played → ingame by the gamer. The term char is often used for compounds referring to characters with specific functions like bank-char, meaning a character used to store items	gameplay
class	class				Class is a primary adventuring style in MMORPGs which determines → abilities, → spells or weapons available to them. The choice of class cannot be changed afterwards and it can be constrained by the choice of → race. The names for the classes are game dependent. Typical → class roles are → melee combat, → tank, → ranged combat, → spell-caster, → healer and → hybrids.	gameplay
class roles	class roles				Class roles are specific stereotypes of classes like → tank, → healer and → damage dealers (melee combat classes, ranged combat, spell-caster) and hybrids	gameplay
cooldown	cooldown			global cooldown shared cooldown	The term cooldown is defined as a period of wait time before a → spell, → ability, or item power can be used after a prior use of it. Some → abilities or → spells share the same cooldown which is referred to as shared cooldown. Global cooldown is a cooldown which starts every time you start to use a spell or ability, and affects all of your class spells and abilities, normally it lasts 1,5 seconds.	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
corpse-camp	corpse-camper	to corpse-camp			To wait at the corpse of an enemy or players until he/she returns to kill him/her again	game culture
creep	creep				Creep is a synonym for → mob	game culture
crit	crit	to crit		crit-chance crit-rating crit-reduction	Causing critical damage to the enemy	gameplay
crowd-control	crowd-control	to crowd-control			Crowd-control refers to skills which allow to control larger groups by incapacitating them	gameplay
dailies	dailies				→ Quests which change on a daily basis and can be repeated daily	gameplay
damage dealer	damage dealer				A → class-role which makes a lot of damage e.g. mage, warlock, rogue. Damage dealer can be classified into → melee combat (e.g. rogues), → ranged combat (e.g. hunters) and → spell-caster (e.g. mages)	gameplay
dis		to dis			To disenchant	game-play
down		to down			To defeat an enemy	game culture
dot	dot	to dot			Dot comes from the acronym damage over time and means that someone casts a spell which causes damage over time	gameplay
drop	drop	to drop		drop-chance drop-rate	The items or money a killed enemy leaves behind (drops), also referred to as → loot	gameplay
dungeon	dungeon			dungeon-run	Also referred to as → instance, places which are reserved for → parties due to the large amount of enemies	gameplay
endgame	endgame		endgame	endgame-items	Content and items available after the maximum level of the game is reached	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
epics epix	epics epix		epic epix	epix-gear epix-item	Epic items are very powerful items → ingame which are difficult to acquire or craft. They are marked in violet.	gameplay
faction	faction				<p>1) faction refers to the playable factions, groups of → races which are allies. Once the character's faction is chosen it cannot be changed. In World of Warcraft® the two major factions are Horde and Alliance</p> <p>2) faction can also refer to any other → npc group or organization which allows gaining a certain reputation with them</p>	gameplay
farm	farmer	to farm		china farmer farmstatus gold-farmer honor-farmer rep-farmer	<p>1) To farm means that a player stays at a particular place to kill a special sort of enemies for money, reputation or certain items; or to collect certain resources</p> <p>2) if a place or instance becomes easy enough for the players that it is no challenge anymore the players refer to it as farmstatus</p> <p>3) china farmer or gold farmer refers to companies offering → Ingame gold or reputation against real payment. Since many of these companies are from China the term china farmer is used to refer to them</p>	game culture
flame	flame flamer	to flame		flame-thread flame-post flame-war	To verbally attack someone	game culture

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
gank	ganker	to gank			Synonymous with → corpse-camping. A player stays at a spot to kill an enemy or player over and over again	game culture
greed	greed	To greed		Greed roll	When → looting items which are bound to the person picking them up the gamers can choose either to roll dices for need, meaning they personally need this item, or to roll greed meaning they just want the item out of greed to sell it later on or give it someone else. The typical loot setting is need before greed, meaning that need rolls are given priority before greed rolls. The action to roll greed on an item is referred to as to greed	gameplay
grief	griefer	to grief			An umbrella term used for forms of play used by some gamers to destroy the fun of others and to demoralize them, for example harassing another player by taking away his/her enemies or killing him/her in order to frustrate him/her so that he/she leaves. c. f. → gank, → corpse-camp	game culture
grind	grind grinder	to grind		experience-grinding honor-grinding reputation-grinding	To repeatedly kill enemies of a certain sort to gain reputation, honor, money or experience	game culture
guild	guild			guild-leader guild-member raid-guild RP-guild PvP-guild	A guild is an → ingame association of characters of players led by a guild leader. Guilds can have different aims such as → raiding, role-playing (RP) or fighting the other faction (PvP). Another term for guild is → clan	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
heal	heal healer	to heal		heal-range	<p>1) A heal is a spell which heals friendly → characters</p> <p>2) Healer is a → class role which is capable of using healing spells like priests, druids, paladins, shamans and monks</p> <p>3) heal range refers to the range of influence of healing spells. Is a character outside the heal-range he/she cannot be healed</p>	gameplay / game culture
high-end			high-end	high-end content high-end item	Referring to items or content at the “end” of the game	gameplay
hot	hot	to hot		pre-hot	The acronym hot meaning heal over time, refers to spells providing → healing over a certain amount of time. If the hot is given before damage is taken it is called pre-hot	game culture
hotbar	hotbar				A toolbar in the game allowing placing actions, skills or items on it in order to have fast access to them, similar to shortcuts. Another term for hotbar is → actionbar	gameplay
hybrid	hybrid			hybrid-class hybrid-race	<p>Hybrids resemble two or more aspects or → races or → classes.</p> <p>Hybrid classes can fulfill more than one class role. E.g. Druids can fulfill the role of → healer, → tank and → damage dealer.</p> <p>Typical hybrid-classes are druids, shamans, monks, paladins.</p>	gameplay
imba	imba-ness		imba		Derived from imbalanced. Referring to content which is not balanced and too strong, difficult or powerful	game culture
ingame			ingame	ingame mail ingame money	Referring to inside the game such as mail or money in the game	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
kiddie	kiddie			kiddie-server leet-kiddie	devaluing word meaning that someone is immature, childish or stupid	game culture
kill stealing	kill steal	to killsteal			Referring to a player who steals the kill of another gamer, connected to → ninjainig	game culture
kite		to kite			Referring to the tactics of shooting at an enemy and then running away in order that the enemy follows. This is to either keep the enemy at distance or to distract him/her from other party members	game culture
leech	leech leecher	to leech		honor-leecher item-leecher	1) A leecher is a player who follows a group in order to get experience, money, items or honor but does not help the group. 2) To leech means to take everything out of a group which they can offer but not giving anything back	game culture
leet	leet		leet	leet-kiddie	Derived from elite meaning someone is better than the rest. Also used with a pejorative meaning referring to someone who is immature	game culture
level	level	to level		level up	Referring to the act of gaining experience in order to rise in experience levels which is also called level up	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
loot	loot looter	to loot		loot-lag loot-table ninja-looter loot-setting	<p>1) The items or money a killed enemy leaves behind, or found in a chest</p> <p>2) When looting, gamers roll dices to determine who receives the item. Gamers can decide to pass on loot, roll need or roll greed.</p> <p>3) The usual loot-setting is → need before → greed meaning that → need rolls have priority over → greed rolls</p> <p>4) Loot-table refers to a virtual list of items an enemy can drop or can be found in a chest</p>	gameplay
lowbie	lowbie				A lowbie is a → character with low experience level	game culture
macro	macro	to macro			A macro is a set of instructions which should help to speed up game performance	gameplay
mana	mana			mana pool mana potion	Mana is a magical power resource → spell-casters draw upon to cast → spells	gameplay
melee combat	meele combat			melee combat class melee damage	Melee combat refers to close combat. Melee combat classes are → damage dealers causing damage in close combat like rogues	gameplay
mob	mob			elite-mob quest-mob rare-mob trash-mob	Derived from the acronym mobile object and refers to an enemy in the game. This term is not used for players of the other faction	gameplay
mod	mod	to mod			Mod refers to a modification of the game by gamers	gameplay
mosh		to mosh			To beat an enemy into oblivion is referred to as mosh	game culture

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
need	need	to need		need roll	When → looting items which are bound to the person picking it up the gamers can choose either to roll dices for need, meaning they personally need this item, or to roll greed meaning they just want the item out of greed to sell it later on or give it someone else. The typical loot setting is need before greed, meaning that need rolls are given priority before greed rolls	gameplay
nerf	nerf	to nerf			To decrease game content in order to make it less effective, less powerful or easier	game culture
newbie	newbie				A newcomer to the game also referred to as → noob	game culture
ninja	ninja ninjaing	to ninja			Synonym for → ninja-looting or → kill-stealing	game culture
ninja-looter	ninja-loot ninja-looter	to ninja-loot			Someone intentionally taking the → loot without consulting with the rest of the party	game culture
noob	noob				1) A newcomer to the game. A variation of the word → newbie and → boon but with a negative connotation 2) Devaluing word to refer to another player meaning that he/she is unintelligent, immature or incompetent	game culture
npc	npc			quest-npc	Npc stands for non player-character and refers to a character not played by a person but operated by a computer. A quest-npc gives players quests	gameplay
nuke		to nuke			Referring to the tactics of using high damage spells to kill an enemy fast. In many cases area of effect spells are used for this tactics	game culture

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
one-hit		to one-hit			To kill someone or to get killed by someone with one single hit	game culture
patch	patch	to patch		patch notes	An update to the game files by the developers either to add new content or to improve the program is called patch, the details of the changes are listed in the patch notes	gameplay
proc	proc	to proc		proc-chance proc-rate	<p>1) Derived from an acronym, programmed random occurrence. This means that something is programmed to randomly cause an action e.g. a damage over time spell → (dot)</p> <p>2) To proc means that the programmed occurrence happens and the chance of a proc is referred to as proc-chance or proc-rate</p>	gameplay
prof-ession	prof-ession			Primary profession Secondary profession gathering profession crafting profession	<p>A set of skills that player characters may incrementally learn in order to gather, make, or enhance items that can be used.</p> <p>Normally only two primary professions can be learned, but all secondary professions (e.g. cooking, fishing, first aid). Professions can be classified into gathering (collecting resources like herbs, leather, ore), crafting professions which allow the creation and crafting of items (tailoring, blacksmithing, leatherworking)</p>	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
PUG	PUG	to pug			<p>1) PUG refers to pick-up group and means a group assembled on the spot for a → quest, a → PvP battle, an → instance or → raid.</p> <p>2) to pug means to complete a → quest or → dungeon in a pick up group</p>	gameplay
pull	pull	to pull		<p>body-pull hunter-pull pala-pull safe-pull</p>	<p>1) To → aggro an enemy from distance in order that he/she comes closer and can be killed separately from other enemies</p> <p>2) A body-pull refers to a pull not done with distance weapons (guns, bows, spells) but by running at the enemy</p> <p>3) A safe-pull refers to a pull done with safety measures to assure that the party members will not be killed if the pull fails</p> <p>4) A hunter-pull refers to a pull performed by a hunter. A pala-pull is a pull performed by a paladin</p>	game culture
PvE	PvE			<p>PvE-content PvE-guild PvE-server</p>	PvE stands for player versus environment and refers to the playing type in which players mainly interact with the environment by fulfilling quests	gameplay
PvP	PvP	To pvp		<p>PvP-guild PvP-server PvP-realm PvP-content</p>	PvP stands for player versus player and refers to the playing type in which players fight one another	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
quest	quest	to quest		Attunement-quest collector-quest daily-quest elite-quest escort-quest group-quest kill-quest pvp-quest quest-chain quest-line quest-giver quest-mob quest-log raid-quest repeatable quest reputation-quest	1) A certain task which leads to rewards such as money or items as well as experience points 2) All quests a → character has are shown in a log-file referred to as quest-log 3) Some quests are build around a story and include several quests forming a quest-line or quest-chain 4) A quest giver refers to a → npc who gives players quests	gameplay
race	race				Choosing the race of the avatar is one of the basic choices which has to be done. Based on the race the → faction membership is determined, → attributes are distributed and → class choices delimited. Typical races in MMORPGs are humans, elves, dwarves and orcs. Depending on the game these races can be different.	gameplay
rage-quitting	rage-quitting rage-quitter	to ragequit			Leaving (quitting) a group out of rage and frustration, often after → flaming the other group members	game culture

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
raid	raid raider	to raid		raid-boss raid-calendar raid-content raid-dungeon raid-guild raid-instance raid-leader raid-loot raid-quest random-raid	<p>1) An enterprise of an organized group of 10 or more players often in order to go into a raid-dungeon or raid-instance (allowing 10, 25 or 40 players in it) or fulfill a raid-quest which takes more than 10 players or kill a raid-boss</p> <p>2) The leader of a raid is called raid-leader</p> <p>3) Raider is often pejoratively used to refer to players who enjoy raiding or plan their playing or even life around raiding with their guild (raid-guilds) following a raid-calendar telling them which dungeons are planned to be visited</p> <p>4) A random-raid refers to a raid consisting of players who are not in the same → guild</p>	gameplay
ranged combat	ranged combat			ranged combat class	<p>Ranged combat refers to the battle tactics of fighting enemies at distance.</p> <p>Ranged combat classes is a class role of the → damage dealer, causing damage from a distance like hunters</p>	gameplay
realm	realm			<p>Realm-list</p> <p>PvP Realm</p> <p>PvE Realm</p> <p>RP Realm</p>	Realms are gaming servers provided by the game developers	gameplay
Reg re-generate	Re-generat-ion	to reg to re-gener-ate		reg-rate	To regenerate health and mana	gameplay
respec	respec	to respec			To reassign talent points, compare → spec	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
rezz	rezz	to rezz		battle-rezz	To resurrect someone from death	game culture
role-play	role-play role-player	to role-play		Role-player guild role-playing server	Role-playing is a gaming style with focus on evolving a → character's history and behavior	game-play
roll		to roll to reroll			1) To roll for an item in the game 2) To choose a class or race, reroll refers to starting all over again in the game	game culture
RP	RP	to rp		RP server	RP stands for → role-playing	gameplay
RvR	RvR				RvR stands for realm versus realm and refers to a type of → PvP in which large numbers of players from different → realms fight one another	gameplay
spawn	spawn respawn	to spawn to re-spawn to de-spawn		spawn-point	1) The appearing of an enemy, → npc or item. To respawn refers to the reappearing of someone or something 2) Despawning refers to the disappearance of something or someone 3)The spawn-point refers to the location an item, an enemy or a npc can appear	gameplay
spec	spec	to spec			Spec refers to the specialization on a talent or on a class	gameplay
spell	spell			spell-caster	Spells are magic incantations or effects conjured up modeled after fantasy, myth, and legend. Spells have various effects such as causing damage or healing. They can also cause beneficial effects (like → buffs) on friendly characters, or harmful effects on hostile → mobs. The use of a spell is referred to as → cast	gameplay

word	noun	verb	adjective	compound	meaning	area of use
spell-caster	spell-caster	To spell-cast			A spell-caster is a type of → damage dealer using → spells to cause damage or → heal. Spell-casters also belong to the ranged-combat classes. Typical spell-casters are mages, warlocks and priests.	gameplay
stat	stat				Stats is the abbreviation of statistics and refers → attributes	gameplay
tank	tank	to tank to off-tank		main-tank off-tank	1) Tank refers to a → class role which can take a lot of damage. The tank draws the → aggro from enemies so that other players can damage it 2) Main-tank refers to the major tank of a group, while off-tank is a secondary tank who takes over if the main-tank is incapacitated or dead 3) to tank refers to the activity of fulfilling the role of a tank	gameplay
twink	twink	to twink		pvp-twink	An alternative → character of a player. The first and most played character is referred to as main-character, while other characters are called toons or → alts	game culture
wipe	wipe	to wipe			A wipe means that the whole group dies	game culture
zerg	zerg	to zerg			The tactics of using masses of players against one single enemy	game culture

Abstract

OMG! Lol n00b :)! uber 1337! b00n you wiped us!

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 stylistic expressions such as smileys, acronyms, leet and neologisms are a deterioration of current language. On the contrary, they can be regarded as instances of creativity, efficiency, in-group markers and compensation of missing features available in face-to-face communication. Moreover, these expressions help gamers to position themselves in conversations, thus they can be regarded as active interaction strategies in the gaming discourse.

This PhD thesis investigates communication and language use in the computer game genre MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*®, *Lord of the Rings Online*® or *Star Wars the Old Republic*®. The linguistic perspective taken for this PhD project allows immersing into the linguistic matrix of these, currently popular and widely played games (*World of Warcraft*® had 12 Mio players worldwide). By linking communication aspects and strategies such as stylistic features, politeness as well as power and subsuming them under the concept of positioning, this thesis raises more general issues about the understanding of international interaction as it is enacted through an electronic medium. Since gamers of MMORPGs from all over the world play and interact with one another online, this medium provides a unique setting. The enormous number of gamers coming from numerous cultural and language backgrounds, the distinct features of online communication as well as factors like co-operation, achievement and stress make the setting of MMORPGs a linguistic and sociological testing ground of contemporary issues. It offers insights into the connection of international, intercultural communication and globalization in the game as well as outside of it. Several aspects of language use are investigated in this thesis which influence the linguistic choices by gamers: stylistic features, politeness strategies, English as lingua franca, efficiency, the role-playing aspect and power relations.

The question of how gamers make use of interaction strategies is dealt with by drawing upon empirical data from an online-questionnaire and qualitative data from a self-compiled language corpus. The results of the online-questionnaire in which 324 gamers participated, give valuable insights into the perception and attitudes of gamers concerning language use and usage in MMORPGs. The self-compiled corpus provides a complementation to the elicited data and consists of chat-logs from the chat-channels ingame as well as messages from the official message-boards.

By reference to theories of pragmatics and by putting forth an adaptation of the concept of positioning, this thesis provides insights into how politeness, stylistic features and other interaction strategies are used by gamers to position themselves in conversations. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary approach which combines frameworks of pragmatics and applied linguistics as well as game studies allows the exploration of the question if language usage and politeness strategies in gaming cultures differ from real-life usages and raises general issues of international and intercultural communication. Is the ingame world in the end even less different than expected?

Zusammenfassung (deutscher Abstract)

OMG! Lol n00b :)! uber 1337! b00n you wiped us!

Wenn Spieler, vor allem von MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) wie *World of Warcraft®*, miteinander sprechen passen sie ihre Sprache ihren Bedürfnissen an, wie alle Sprecher. Es ist ein geläufiges Missverständnis, sprachliche und stilistische Ausdrücke wie Smileys, Akronyme, Leet und Neologismen als eine Verschlechterung der heutigen Sprache anzusehen. Ganz im Gegenteil können diese Ausdrücke als Beispiele von Kreativität, Effizienz, Gemeinschaftszugehörigkeit und Kompensation für fehlende Charakteristika der Face-to-Face Kommunikation angesehen werden. Weiters helfen diese Ausdrücke den Spielern sich in Gesprächen miteinander zu positionieren. Demnach können sie als aktive Interaktionsstrategien im Spieldiskurs angesehen werden.

Diese Dissertation erforscht die Kommunikation und Sprachverwendung im Computerspielgenre MMORPGs wie *World of Warcraft®*, *Lord of the Rings Online®* or *Star Wars the Old Republic®*. Die linguistische Perspektive, die in diesem Doktoratsprojekt zur Anwendung kommt erlaubt das Eintauchen in die linguistische Matrix dieser aktuell sehr populären und weitverbreiteten Spiele (*World of Warcraft®* hatte weltweit 12 Millionen Spieler). Durch das Verbinden von kommunikativen Aspekten und Strategien wie stilistische Merkmale, Höflichkeit aber auch Machtverhältnisse und durch das Zusammenfassen dieser unter dem Konzept der Positionierung, wirft diese Dissertation grundlegende Fragen über das Verständnis von internationalen Interaktionen und wie diese durch elektronische Medien vollführt werden auf. Da MMORPG Spieler von überall auf der Welt miteinander spielen und interagieren, bietet dieses Medium eine einzigartige Kulisse. Die hohe Anzahl an Spielern, welche aus unzähligen kulturellen und sprachlichen Verhältnissen kommen, die unterschiedlichen Merkmale der Onlinekommunikation sowie Faktoren wie Kooperation, Leistung und Stress machen MMORPGs zu einem linguistischen und soziologischen Versuchsgelände für zeitgenössische Fragestellungen. Sie bieten Einblicke in die Verbindung von internationaler, interkultureller Kommunikation und Globalisierung im Spiel aber auch außerhalb. Mehrere Aspekte der Sprachverwendung, welche die linguistischen

Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten beeinflussen werden in dieser Dissertation erforscht: Stilistische Merkmale, Höflichkeitsstrategien, Englisch als Lingua Franca, Effizienz, der Rollenspielaspekt und Machtverhältnisse.

Der Frage wie Spieler diese Interaktionsstrategien einsetzen wird nachgegangen indem Bezug auf empirische Daten von einem Online-Fragebogen und qualitativer Daten von einem selbsterstellten Sprachkorpus genommen wird. Die Resultate des Fragebogens, bei welchen 324 Spieler teilnahmen, geben wertvolle Einblicke in die Auffassungen und Einstellungen der Spieler in Bezug auf Sprachverwendung in MMORPGs. Der Korpus bietet eine Komplementierung zu den erfragten Resultaten und beinhaltet Chat-logs von Chats in den Spielen sowie Nachrichten von offiziellen Foren.

Unter Bezugnahme auf Theorien der Pragmatik und durch das Einbringen einer Adaption des Konzepts der Positionierung, bietet diese Dissertation Einblicke wie Spieler Höflichkeit, stilistische Merkmale und andere Interaktionsstrategien verwenden um sich in Konversationen zu positionieren. Weiters ermöglicht die interdisziplinäre Herangehensweise, welche Theorien der Pragmatik und der angewandten Linguistik sowie der Game studies verbindet, das Erforschen der Frage in wie weit Sprachverwendung und Höflichkeitsstrategien in Spieldiskursen sich von denen im Real-life außerhalb der Spiele unterscheiden. Ebenso bringt sie das Thema der internationalen und interkulturellen Kommunikation auf. Ist die Realität im Spiel am Ende doch weniger unterschiedlich als erwartet?

Curriculum Vitae

Personal information

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Education

1989 – 1993	Volksschule Berzeliusgasse, Vienna.
1993 – 1997	Unterstufe Bundesgymnasium und Bundesrealgymnasium Ödenburgerstraße, Vienna. <i>Specialization:</i> economy and business
1997 – 2002	Höhere Lehranstalt für Tourismus Wassermannngasse, Vienna. Graduation, A-levels <i>Specialization:</i> touristic management and marketing
2002 – 2008	Master program English, University of Vienna. <i>Research focus:</i> applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, Internet studies <i>Title of the diploma thesis:</i> Lol@n00b – Netspeak and its impact on English outside the Internet <i>Advisor:</i> Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Barbara Seidlhofer
2006 – 2012	Study-program History, University of Vienna. <i>Research focus:</i> Economy and Social history, cultural history Bachelor of Arts degree
Since 2008	PhD program Philosophy, English (Linguistics), University of Vienna. <i>Research focus:</i> applied linguistics, pragmatics, computer game studies <i>Title of the PhD thesis:</i> L2P n00b – The pragmatics of positioning in MMORPGs <i>Advisor:</i> Hon. Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Henry George Widdowson

Additional certifications and workshops

2009	Participation at the Future and Reality of Games (FROG) conference, Vienna.
2010	Participation at the Future and Reality of Games (FROG) conference, Vienna.
2011	Participation at the Junior-Workshop of the Arbeitskreis Deutsche England Forschung, Berlin.
2011	Participation at the Future and Reality of Games (FROG) conference, Vienna.
2011	Workshop: "Die österreichische Forschungsförderlandschaft", Lucas Zinner, Center for Doctoral Studies at the University of Vienna, Vienna.
2012	Workshop: "Publizieren in Fachzeitschriften", Dr. Gudrun Perko, Frauenförderung & Gleichstellung, University of Vienna.
2012	Participation at the 26. Österreichischen Historikertag bzw. 37. Österreichischen Archivtag, Krems.
2012	Participation at the Future and Reality of Games (FROG) conference, Vienna.
2013	Workshop: "Open Access: Die neue Art des Publizierens", Guido Blechl, Center for Doctoral Studies at the University of Vienna, Vienna.
2014	Presentation as part of the scientific evenings of the sorority C.Ö.St.V. Maria Theresia zu Wien. "Was bitte schön ist WTF? Netspeak – Sprache im Wandel der neuen Medien".

Research grants and scholarships

2014	Abschlussstipendium 2014 der Universität Wien
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Conference presentations

- 2010 „L2P n00b – The language of MMORPGs“
Future and Reality of Games (FROG) Conference,
Vienna.
- 2012 „L2P FFS N00B – Höflichkeit und „politeness theory“ in
MMORPGs“
Echtheit, Wahrheit, Ehrlichkeit – Die ethische Frage nach
Authentizität in der computervermittelten Kommunikation,
Hochschule für Philosophie München, Munich.
- 2012 “I’m by default polite – Politeness and positioning in
MMORPGs”
5th Brno conference on linguistic studies in English 2012:
English as the Lingua Franca of the modern world: New
challenges for academia, Department of English Language
and Literature at the Faculty of Education Pedagogická
fakulta Masarykovy univerzity Brno.
- 2012 “L2P FFS n00b!! - Language usage and positioning in
MMORPGs”
5th Austrian students' conference of Linguistics 2012,
University of Vienna.
- 2013 „L2P FFS n00b!! - Language usage and positioning in
MMORPGs“
3. Linguistic conference for doctoral students (STaPs):
Interdisciplinary perspectives on language, discourse and
culture, University Heidelberg.

Publications

- Kramer, Birgit. 2013. „I’m by default polite – Politeness and positioning in
MMORPGs“. In: Discourse and Interaction Vol 6, Issue 1/2013, 41-53.
- Kramer, Birgit. 2013. “GTFO!! - Politeness and stylistic features as means of
positioning in MMORPGs”. Online available:
<http://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:313572>.
- Kramer, Birgit. 2010. „L2P n00b – The language of MMORPGs“. In: Swertz,
Christian; Wagner, Michael (eds.). 2010. Game\Play\Society. Contributions to
computer game studies. Munich: kopaed, S135-146.
- Kramer, Birgit. 2008. „Lol @ n00b – Netspeak and its impact on English outside
the Internet“. unpublished diploma thesis. University of Vienna.

Research interests

- Applied linguistics
- Corpus linguistics
- Sociolinguistics
- Pragmatics (politeness theory)
- Computer game studies (MMORPGs)
- Internet and media studies (CMC)
- History (economy and social history, cultural history)

Skills and qualifications

Languages

German	native language
English	excellent skills
French	basic skills
Latin	basic skills

Data processing

Microsoft Office	advanced skills
Open Office	advanced skills
LibreOffice	advanced skills
Microsoft Windows	user skills
Linux	user skills
Html, xhtml	basic skills
LaTeX	basic skills

Further qualifications

Driver license
trained chef and restaurant manager
trained travel agent
trained hotel manager
8 months practical training in tourism (gastronomy, travel agency and tour operator branch)