

VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY

THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF LITHUANIAN STUDIES

Maksim Bogdanov

**CONVERSING IN MASSIVE MULTIPLAYER ONLINE (MMO) GAMES:  
A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CHAT INTERACTIONS IN *WORLD OF  
WARCRAFT* AND *LEAGUE OF LEGENDS***

Master of Arts Thesis

Joint study programme “Sociolinguistics and Multilingualism”, state code in Lithuania 6281NX001

Study area of Linguistics

Kaunas, 2022

## **Abstract**

More and more people are becoming interested in videogames not only in terms of leisure, but also because of their research potential. Videogames are being used as test sites for acquiring social, linguistic, psychological, and other types of data from millions of players every day. The present study aims at comparing the discourses of chat interactions of two largest gaming communities of *World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends*. The study employs mixed-method approach to data collection: observations and questionnaires. Gee's discourse analysis toolkit is used as a research method to process data acquired through observations (screenshots of chat logs) to elicit what social activities are performed with the help of the language used in the MMO discourses of two games. The findings of the present study are in line with the previous research on videogames as "third places", in that the interactions found within the analyzed games reflect specific social activities found outside of game worlds with the producers of the interactions manifesting multiple social identities simultaneously.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. An overview of previous research on online videogames .....	4
2.1 MMOs and Computer-Mediated Communication .....	4
2.2 Interactions in MMOs .....	5
2.3 Linguistic features of MMOs .....	7
3. Research methodology .....	9
3.1 Data collection .....	9
3.1.1. Survey design .....	9
3.1.2 Observations.....	11
3.2 Data processing and analytical approach .....	13
4. Online videogames as places for socialization.....	16
4.1 Social Network Sites elements in MMOs .....	16
4.1.1 Means for social interactions in <i>World of Warcraft</i> .....	17
4.1.2 Means for social interactions in <i>League of Legends</i> .....	21
4.2 Linguistic and discursive features of chat interactions in <i>LoL</i> and <i>WoW</i> .....	25
4.2.1 Structural features and linguistic means of chat interactions.....	25
4.2.2 Micro-level discourse analysis of chat interactions in <i>LoL</i> and <i>WoW</i> .....	33
5. Conclusion .....	49
References .....	52
Appendix 1: <i>League of Legends</i> questionnaire form .....	iv
Appendix 2: <i>World of Warcraft</i> questionnaire form .....	xxiii
Appendix X.....	<b>Ошибка! Закладка не определена.</b>

## List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Overview of empirical data sets analyzed.....	13
Table 2. Cooperative/Competitive division .....	13
Figure 1. Respondents' distribution according to the region of play (in %). ....	16
Figure 2. Number of respondents utilizing designated game features in <i>WoW</i> (in %) ...	18
Figure 3. Number of people actively using designated chat channels in <i>WoW</i> (in %) ...	19
Figure 4. Number of respondents utilizing designated game features in <i>LoL</i> (in %) .....	22
Figure 5. Number of people actively using designated chat channels in <i>LoL</i> (in %) .....	23
Figure 6. Excerpt of inter-player chat interactions in <i>LoL</i> .....	26
Table 3. Frequency of hybrid writing elements in <i>LoL</i> chat communications.....	27
Figure 7. Different instances of inter-player chat interactions in <i>WoW</i> .....	29
Table 4. Frequency of hybrid writing elements in <i>WoW</i> chat communications .....	30
Figure 8. Distribution of utterances according to their type (in %) .....	32
Figure 9. <i>LoL</i> interaction extract.....	34
Figure 10. <i>WoW</i> interaction extract .....	42
Table 5. The three Tone Units of the original utterance and their functions .....	46

## List of Abbreviations

1H	one-handed weapon
2D	two-dimensional
3D	three-dimensional
AAA	triple “A” (classification of videogames)
ADC	Attack Damage Carry
afk	away from keyboard
APC	Ability Power Carry
brb	be right back
CC	Crowd Control
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
CS	Creep Score
DM W	Dire Maul West
DoT	Damage over Time
FPS	First Person Shooter
gd	good duel
gl	good luck
LFG	Looking For Group
LoL	League of Legends
lol	laughing out loud
MMO	Massive Multiplayer Online
MOBA	Multiplayer Online Battle Arena
NPCs	Non-Playable Characters
RPG	Role-Playing Game
RTS	Real-time Strategy
SNS	Social Network Sites
WoW	World of Warcraft
wtf	what the f*ck
wym	what do you mean

## 1. Introduction

Video games have come a long way since the first prototype of *Pong* was booted for the first time ever in 1972. They evolved from 2D (two-dimensional) text-based adventure games without any sound or colorful graphic support to full scale 3D AAA ("triple A") titles with the budgets overweighting those of modern-day blockbusters (for example, the budget of *Grand Theft Auto V* exceeds \$200 million (Villapaz 2013)). The gaming community did not sit idly during this period of progress. While game developers invented new forms and mechanics to play with, implemented the ever-evolving hard- and software technologies into their products, the community adapted to these innovations. People learnt to use buttons to play *Pong*, keyboard to play *Colossal Cave Adventure*, then came the mouse and Microsoft with their *Solitaire* built-in into their Windows 3.0 OS (operating system). Of course, it was not enough for people to simply play videogames alone, sitting in their rooms. They needed to talk about them. While the tabletop games already had their own little local fanbases, their virtual counterparts were only starting to grow the number of followers. The global increase in accessibility of Internet boosted this process. This also brought online video games into existence.

On a more global scale the gaming industry can be recognized as one of the biggest branches of the entertainment sphere. For the 2020 year only it was able to amass \$159.3 billion in value, placing it ahead of Hollywood movie market (Dobrilova 2021, Mamerow 2021). Over three billion people from all over the world play video games nowadays (Williams 2021). The industry grows and so does its consumer base. More and more people are becoming interested in videogames not only in terms of leisure, but also because of their research potential. Videogames are being used as test sites for acquiring social, linguistic, psychological, and other types of data from millions of players every day. In great part it is done by the developer companies to understand what they can improve in their products. On the other hand, individual researchers are interested in taking specific element of a game and studying it in a particular context. Nowadays, videogames are popular not only to play, but to study.

*Meridian 59, The Realm Online, Terra, Ultima Online, Lineage, Dark Ages, EverQuest* - these are the beginning of a whole new genre of games which is now known

as Massive Multiplayer Online (MMO) games. This general genre, in turn, has multiple subgenres which usually derive from their single-player analogues, such as Role-Playing Game (RPG) - MMORPG (*World of Warcraft*, *Final Fantasy XIV*), First Person Shooter (FPS) - MMOFPS (*Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*, *Valorant*), Real-time Strategy (RTS) - MMORTS (*StarCraft I & II*). However, there is one subgenre of MMOs that stands out from the others, namely, MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena), because it does not have a single-player counterpart, i. e. it is designed to be played online with others. If we compare *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) (MMORPG) and, for example, *League of Legends* (*LoL*) (MOBA), as two most popular games of the present time and greybeards of their genres, we will see a lot of differences in gamedesign, mechanics, features, setting, lore, plot, etc. The first one was released on November 23, 2004 and has reported 100 million registered accounts (Sarkar 2014) with 4.74 million active users (Statista 2016)<sup>1</sup>. *WoW* reached its peak in 2010 with 12 million active subscribers (Peckham 2013), and now, supposedly, is in a declining state. The second game was released on October 27, 2009 and according to the recent statistics has reached a total number of growing 115 million active monthly users ('Spezzy' 2021). Both titles became phenomena of the industry and provoked numerous research in different academic fields (Steinkuehler, 2007; Peterson, 2014; Reitman, 2018; Ramler et al., 2021 to name a few) yet, in comparison to *World of Warcraft*, *League of Legends* so far has received less attention from linguists.

Though, the abovementioned MMOs are very different in the ways they give players possibilities to express themselves in their respective virtual worlds, these games have one thing in common, namely, giant player bases full of people who not only interact with the gaming software but also with other players both in- and outside of these cyber environments, locally (character to character), on meta-level (person to person), and combined (person to character). Such interactional multidimensionality of these games provides a fertile ground for sociolinguistic analysis. It is deemed important to study videogames with different theoretical approaches in different time periods to provide

---

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the developer company Activision Blizzard (formerly known as Blizzard Entertainment) stopped updating its public statistics on the actual player count in 2015. The number of active users given here is based on Activision Blizzard internal estimates.

stable points of reference for future research. The questionnaire-related part of the paper deals with the Social Network Sites (SNS) concept (Ellison and Boyd 2007) in an attempt to reveal the most prominent communicative channels two games offer to their users. Moreover, the vast majority of the research in the field of SNS and its relation to videogames is virtually one-sided (Rossi 2009, Chen et al. 2012, Aburahmah et al. 2016): usually it is the social videogames existing within SNS that are researched, and not the elements of SNS that are being implemented within the context of videogames such as MMOs. The present study is going to address this gap with the help of a custom-made questionnaire on the use of social functions in *World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends*.

The overall goal of this study is to shed more light on the complexity of interactional practices that are used within the context of MMOs. More specifically, this study focuses on online interaction patterns in two currently most popular massive multiplayer games, namely, *League of Legends* and *World of Warcraft*. The study aims at examining how the interactional discourses of *World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends* compare with each other in terms of:

RQ1. What social activities are performed and how their performance is linguistically and discursively constructed by players in the MMO discourses of the two games?

RQ2. What means for social interactions do *World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends* offer and how do these means affect the linguistic information exchanged during such interactions?

To situate the aim and the research questions in a broader context, in the following section (Chapter 2) I provide an overview of previous research on online videogames, focusing primarily on linguistic, sociolinguistic, and interactional studies. Chapter 3 details methodological decisions concerning data collection and analysis. In Chapter 4, I first (section 4.1) discuss survey findings concerning Social Network Sites elements in *LoL* and *WoW*, whereas section 4.2 presents an analysis of linguistic and discursive features of chat interactions in both games. In the Conclusion, I provide answers to my



research questions, highlight the most important findings, and discuss recommendations for future research on the topic.

## **2. An overview of previous research on online videogames**

Online videogames have been explored from various disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives, including but not limited to the field of education (Thorne and Black, 2007; Steinkuehler, 2012; Merchant, 2015; Patiniotis, 2018; and others), psychology (Song et al., 2009; Kaufmann, 2021), art (Rough, 2016; Hepdinçler, 2022), sociology (Swoboda, 2015; Sergeyeva et al., 2018) or communication studies (Wiklund, 2005; Thorne et al., 2012). Language, communication, and interaction-oriented studies so far investigated such aspects of videogames as social contextuality, positioning in inter-player communications, literacy development, and L2 acquisition.

The present study aims at analyzing players' interactions within the selected two games, i. e. *World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends*, thus it seems reasonable to acquire a general picture of what MMOs are from a sociolinguistic perspective. One of the methods of how we can approach MMOs was developed by Steinkuehler and Williams (2006a). They proved that MMOs have the potential to serve as a so called "third place" (Oldenburg 1999), where people are open for informal social interactions. Therefore, MMOs can be considered as a kind of 'neutral grounds' for people to communicate with each other, i. e. they are not being looked over and controlled in what language they can use and how they can use it. "Third place" is a rather general term which, from the point of view of this research, includes other notions, namely Computer-Mediated Communication, interactional practices, discourse strategies, and linguistic distinctiveness. All of them in one way or another relate to the aim of the present research and serve as a theoretical foundation for the analytical approach used.

### **2.1 MMOs and Computer-Mediated Communication**

Online videogames can naturally be considered a form of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). In a sense, they can partially replace such services as Facebook

or Twitter, as MMOs provide their users with all the same features, such as personal profile, friend lists, and chats. Different aspects of CMC in MMOs are constantly being investigated, for example interactional patterns it promotes, its cultural influence, or the context it creates for communication.

Colombo (2021), for instance, has recently explored the role of servers in shaping CMC patterns in MMO games. His analysis of *Minecraft* data revealed diverging communication patterns across different servers, suggesting that players' language choices and their linguistic behavior, in addition to other factors, were also shaped by the server on which they were playing. Khairunisa (2020) investigated cultural aspects of online communication in MMOs, showing that the virtual environment of MMOs does not start to exist there to be absorbed by the players inside the game, when the game is first launched, but rather it is formed during their play and affected by each person's motivation to play and their perception of the said environment. Jones (2004) explored to what extent the notions of "text" and "context" can be applied to online (CMC) interactions, concluding that it is counter-productive to view online interactions in standard linguistic boundaries of 'text' and 'context'. Instead, these notions should be upgraded with the elements of "*social actions and social identities*" (Jones 2004: 21).

All of these studies suggest that the research on videogames in the context of CMC should consider not only players' immediate activities but look at them from a broader perspective. As MMOs require multiple people to interact with each other, it is necessary to impose the social layer on whatever is being researched. In this case, the emphasis should be made on people's actions and experiences around their 'main activities' or 'texts'.

## **2.2 Interactions in MMOs**

One way to approach the research on videogames as "third places" is to consider their interactional aspect. Ducheneaut and Moore (2004) examined player-to-player interactions describing several interactive patterns and analyzing how the game's structure influences them and found that players interact with each other in two ways: instrumental and sociable. The first refers to players interdependencies (c.f. one profession supports

the other, thus there is a need to communicate to progress), and the second resembles everyday chats in real life that do not pursue anything else but pure communication and socialization.

Peterson (2012) investigated the linguistic and social interactions of first-time MMO players that utilize a range of strategies associated with the development of sociolinguistic competence: “the extensive and appropriate use of positive politeness in the form of greetings, leave-takings, informal language, small talk, and humor, as a means to build rapport” (2012: 377). It is also pointed out that a certain level of anonymity provided by the chat/text-based nature of conversations and the fact that real people are hidden behind their avatars contributed to a higher degree of risk-taking while decreasing overall anxiety from partaking in player interactions. This remark supports the idea of MMOs being recognized as “third places”.

Several sociolinguistic studies looked at the interaction practices and strategies among the players of *WoW*. Rusaw (2011), for example, focused on traditional discourse practices within the online environment and linguistic medium of the game. The descriptive analysis of sociolinguistic practices of 10 adult *World of Warcraft* players, members of the same guild<sup>2</sup>, demonstrated that “language play”, “collaborative running commentary” and recall of previous comments played an important role in shaping player’s social roles and building social groups within the game and within players’ guild (Rusaw 2011: 85-86). Swoboda (2015) examined interaction strategies used by gamers in *WoW*, focusing primarily on paralinguistic means, such as, emojis or gestures, employed in in-game communication. The study demonstrated that linguistic choices of the players were “influenced by the considerations of the channel, the community, the context and its conventions” (Swoboda 2015: 163).

In conclusion, there are several interactional patterns observed in MMOs players’ social behavior. In great part, this behavior is formed as a response to the challenges imposed on the players by the game’s rules, i. e. specific needs/tasks, fast-paced

---

<sup>2</sup> A guild is an in-game association of player characters. Guilds are formed to make grouping and raiding easier and more rewarding, as well as to form a social atmosphere in which to enjoy the game (Source: <https://wowpedia.fandom.com/wiki/Guild>).

gameplay, gamedesign, etc. All of the elements of the game influence the way the players pose themselves in communication with each other, in the meantime developing the culture of the community they belong to.

### **2.3 Linguistic features of MMOs**

The complex nature and diversity of interactions, as well as a sheer number of people playing a game present a challenge to a systematic linguistic analysis of a specific gaming community. Therefore, most of the studies conducted from a linguistic perspective so far limited themselves to discourse strategies and language use in specific MMOs. Wright et al. (2002), for instance, investigated the role of creative language in an online video game *Counter-Strike*, revealing that the anonymity provided by the game in players' names - every player by default has the nickname "Player" - is frowned upon in the community. If one wants to appear as an experienced player and not a newbie, they must have a unique name, which would symbolize and translate a range of different qualities: "... a player's intent, ... a player's perceived status, interests, age, gender or sexuality" (Wright et al., 2002).

Same as in real life, communication in videogames can be categorized as verbal/textual and nonverbal/graphical. In the first case text and voice chats are used, in the second - emoticons, such as smiley faces, and gestures, that is, in-game animations used to represent specific emotions, such as "cry", "happy", and other. Dresner and Herring (2010) investigated emoticons and their functions in CMC. They identified and showed three ways in which emoticons work in general: "1) as emotion indicators, mapped directly onto facial expression; 2) as indicators of nonemotional meanings, mapped conventionally onto facial expressions, and 3) as illocutionary force indicators that do not map conventionally onto a facial expression" (Dresner and Herring 2010: 251).

Kramer (2013), with the help of a self-compiled corpus of communication in *WoW* and *Lord of the Rings Online* consisting of chat-logs, was able to conclude that politeness, within the context of MMORPGs, is used not to "be by default polite, as some participants state, but rather as a strategy of communication to achieve one's goals" (2013: 52). Due to several challenges met during gameplay (for example, fast-paced action which requires

a lot of attention and concentration, such as guild vs. guild battles) players have to adapt their language to the circumstances, thus preferring acronyms, smileys, neologisms and other features over standard lexical and grammatical forms.

Online communication can be synchronous (live chats) as well as asynchronous (emails), and it does not have to always put people into the ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ positions. In the context of videogames, players often have to communicate with pre-written Non-Playable Characters or NPCs for short. These NPCs can be compared to characters in a book. They serve to speak in author’s stead, and as such are often used to tell the player any necessary information they need to know. In a way, NPCs, through their pre-written dialogues, speeches, create a very specific semiotic ecology, which then translates onto the player. Thorne et al. (2012) looked at *WoW* with specific attention to its qualities as a setting for second language (L2) use and development. The lexical and syntactic complexity of *WoW*-related texts is shown to be sophisticated, complex, and with direct and event-driven use-value to players. In essence, these texts are attended to because they are highly relevant to the actions, decisions, and problem-solving at hand.

To summarize, the player-to-player communication in an MMO context is meant to replace real life face-to-face conversations. People tend to use verbal (text in the chat) as well as nonverbal (emoticons and gestures) means of communication to properly translate their ideas to their communicative partners. They also often neglect standard grammar rules and orthography in favor of being quick and precise in the fast-paced context of a game. In some cases, players’ linguistic choices may be affected by the linguistic context a game creates and directly relate to a specific phenomenon existing only within the said game.

As this short overview has shown, language, communication and interaction-oriented research has focused more prominently only on *WoW*, while interaction practices among players of *LoL* so far have been mostly approached from sociological and psychological perspectives (Carvalho et al., 2018; Reitman, 2018; Ramler et al., 2021, etc.). Accounting for the differences between these two online games, such as the contexts for social interactions created by the two games and their designs in particular, this study,

on the one hand, provides a comparative perspective on communicative practices utilized by the members of both communities, and, on the other, contributes to previous research on *LoL*, approaching it via sociolinguistic/discourse analytic lenses.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1 Data collection**

Players' interactional data for this study was elicited via the means of two surveys and observations. The main purpose of the survey was to elicit data on players' preferences in terms of social interaction means (e. g. Social Network Sites elements) offered in *WoW* and *LoL*. More specifically, these data allowed me to address the first part of the RQ2. To elicit actual interactional data and to answer the remaining RQs, I employed virtual world ethnography (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Sundén, 2012; Brown, 2015) and engaged in game observations.

##### **3.1.1. Survey design**

The questionnaires for *World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends* were designed following Schlee's (2014) recommendations for sociolinguistic surveys. The questionnaires were made as much identical as it was possible. However, due to different nature of the games some variability was included. For example, the *WoW* questionnaire has questions about the 'mailing' system implemented in *WoW*, which does not exist in *LoL*. In the same way the questions about the server the respondents play on differ according to how this system is realized within each of the games.

In total, the questionnaires consisted of 37 (*Wow*) and 40 (*LoL*) items and covered eight themes, primarily based on the components essential for SNS (Ellison and Boyd, 2013):

1. Background information (5 and 4 items accordingly) in terms of the regions the respondents play from and servers they play on, and players' relation to bigger social in-game groups.

2. The frequency and specificities of client chat (only *LoL*, 7 items) usage, eliciting the most actively used chat channels and participants of a typical communicative act.
3. In-game chat (7 and 9 items). Same as 2.
4. Mail (only *WoW*, 4 items) system use and its purpose in terms of player-to-player communication in *WoW*.
5. Frequency of Profile (7 and 6 items) feature use; opinions on the influence player profile has over the perception of said player; and attitudes towards the purpose of having a profile page/tab in a game.
6. Friend list (6 items) feature utilization and opinions on its relation to personal bonding.
7. Other means of communication (5 items) used by the communities and their opinions on text- and voice-based communication.
8. Biographic data (2 items). The final section of each questionnaire was made optional and consists of questions regarding the participant's gender and age.

The wording for the questions was chosen to be rather simple to appeal to the communities with the assumption that no one has a linguistic background. Both questionnaires were piloted with five respondents a week before publication and revised considering respondents' feedback, namely some questions were reworded to be more precise and in line with British English standards. Questionnaire templates are provided in Appendix 1 (for *LoL*) and Appendix 2 (for *WoW*).

The questionnaires for *WoW* and *LoL* were created using Google Forms platform. This platform was chosen primarily for two reasons 1) it provides free access and 2) offers comprehensive User Interface (UI). It was discovered later that Google Forms also has convenient automatic data processing tools, i. e. it makes it possible to look at individual respondent's answers one at a time, see detailed information on a specific question, and it automatically visualizes the results for each question using appropriate types of diagrams, charts, graphs, etc. In addition, Google Forms also has an option to export all the results to a spreadsheet, which allows for more detailed analysis.

The games' subreddits on reddit.com were chosen as the main platform for the distribution of the questionnaires due to their popularity among the communities: r/wow

(at the time of writing this paper) holds 2.165.851 members with 2.000 online on average, while r/leagueoflegends counts 5.616.957 members with 10.000 people online on average. The questionnaires were open online for 2 months (from 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2021, until 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2022) and updated or reposted according to the rules of the communities, which often stated once every 3-4 weeks.

### **3.1.2 Observations**

Observations were employed in order to collect data on player's actual communicative practices in the analyzed games (*World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends*). For that purpose, I decided to engage myself with the communities by taking part in the collective activity of playing the games and taking the role of an observer (i. e. I did not initiate communicative acts between the players). To collect the data, I used a free open-source program 'Greenshot', which enables to make screenshots with an option of choosing a specific region of a screen (in this case - the chat window). However, the decision to collect the data from within the games was soon proved to be not as fruitful as it was expected to be.

As I have found out, the chance of seeing people chatting in one match in *LoL*, which can take up from 25 to 40 or even more minutes to end, grows proportionally to the time it takes to complete the said match. However, it does not guarantee that people will actually chat. The 'problem' here is that the game utilizes the system of 'signals', where by a couple of simple movements one can signal an important piece of information without wasting time to move their hands over their keyboard. In case of *LoL*, being away from the mouse means to put oneself in a disadvantage if they suddenly need to react quickly, for example for an enemy ambush. Such signals include "Enemy has vision here", "Back down" (or "Retreat"), "I am coming here", "Need help", etc. Of course, this system does not eliminate chatting entirely, instead it provides an alternative, which gives just enough possibilities to communicate without using words. In a sense it can be seen as an example of nonverbal communication.

To increase my chances of collecting any data I decided to remove myself from the game's environment. I moved over to YouTube. The possibility to fast-forward,



pause, rewind, and the ability to watch in double speed allowed me to navigate through the content present there comfortably and sort it quickly. I have found a couple of *LoL* dedicated channels and watched through their daily uploads for the rest of the time dedicated to data gathering in the game, which is one month for each game. The channels chosen were picked as the first results from YouTube search for ‘League of Legends’. In total, I observed 6 channels and 27 daily uploads made in the time between 29<sup>th</sup> of November and 19<sup>th</sup> of December, 2021. During the observation period I was taking screenshots of the chat windows whenever players tried to start or engage in a conversation with others, totaling 234 screenshots with 708 lines of player-written texts ranging from a couple to a dozen words per line (see Table 1).

In comparison to *League of Legends*, *World of Warcraft* proved to be yet another challenge for data collection. In terms of game design, *WoW* has a giant open world, which means players can actually go from one end of it to another freely. This world (Azeroth) is divided into different sections/locales/areas, and each area has its own chat channel visible and used by only those players who currently are in the same area. Despite this, the game offers a ‘global’ chat channel for people all over Azeroth to communicate. However, it is not all. Each in-game activity that requires different multiple people to co-interact offers a new separate chat channel, e. g. ‘raid’ or ‘dungeon’. In the same manner the ‘private’ channel is inaccessible to any but one player for obvious reasons. The game also allows players to create their own ‘custom’ channels in case the offered ones do not provide them with needed functionality. In total, there are 9 standard chat channels to look for (excluding ‘custom’ ones). My survey results revealed that the majority of the *WoW* players interact most actively in the so called “group/party”, “guild”, and “raid” channels. Therefore, I decided to focus specifically on these channels to collect interactional data from *WoW*. The data for *WoW* was collected on Twitch (rather than YouTube). This decision was motivated by the fact that it is much simpler to find full stream recordings on Twitch, due to its specialization, while YouTube promotes abridged or montaged or edited content. To collect the data, I followed similar procedure as with *LoL*: I identified the most popular channels at the time and observed interactions in the game-recordings published on those channels from 3<sup>rd</sup> until 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 2022. In total, I observed 3 channels and 3 game recordings (totaling to 22 hours of play) and made 259

screenshots with 967 lines of player-written texts ranging from a couple to a dozen words per line (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of empirical data sets analyzed

	<i>LoL</i>	<i>WoW</i>	Total N
Screenshots	234	259	493
Interactions <sup>3</sup>	738	1051	1789
Lines of text	708	967	1675
Words (tokens)	3192	3823	7015

### 3.2 Data processing and analytical approach

Survey data was processed in MS Excel and analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis. Observational data consisted of screenshots containing player chat interactions. I first organized the screenshots of interactions into different categories according to the source material.

The analysis of interactional data proceeded in two steps. Chat utterances were first analyzed using analytical categories presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Cooperative/Competitive division

<b>Addressee/stance</b>	<b>Friends</b>	<b>Enemies</b>
<b>Positive</b>	Cooperative	Cooperative-competitive
<b>Negative</b>	Competitive-cooperative	Competitive

The main aim of this analytical step was to determine the functional load of an utterance. Taking into account the very nature of analyzed games that build upon a high

---

<sup>3</sup> Any kind of inter-player activity that includes textual exchange of information, e. g. chat messages.

degree of competition vis-à-vis cooperation between the players, I analyzed all utterances accounting for two factors: the addressee of the message (friends vs enemies) and the stance of the author regarding the situation or event that motivated them to write the message in the first place, i. e. the context (positive vs negative). As a result, all analyzed utterances were classified under any of the four variants of cooperative/competitive utterance types:

1) Cooperative type. This type includes players developing game strategies to outplay the enemy team, giving in-game related advice, contributing to the general knowledge of the enemy's positions, praising each other's skills, etc. In other words, anything that helps/praises/benefits the team.

2) Competitive type. This type includes profanities addressed to the enemy team members usually on the basis of their low skill level (for example, on a particular champion), or generally bad play and bad decisions during the game, etc. It does not exclude simple expressions of anger directed at objectively good players from the enemy team.

3) Competitive-cooperative type. An example for this is when one's team member starts to talk negatively about their teammates, for example about their bad play, having too many deaths, not helping the team in critical moments, etc. This can be followed with that player going *afk* (away from keyboard) till the end of the match or event, which puts the team in relative disadvantage (9 vs. 10 players in *LoL*). In this type, a player(-s) places their own skills/knowledge of the game over someone else's from their team, as if they compete not with the enemy team but with their own. In *LoL* the messages of this type may be posted not in the "team" channel (where only the members of one's team can see them) but in "/all" channel (where the enemy team can see them). This can have a strategic meaning as to create a demoralizing effect, however, it may not work as expected.

4) Cooperative-competitive type. An example for this type would be when one's team members talk with the enemy team members with positive intentions in mind, e. g. praising enemy player's skills at playing a certain champion or class, giving advice on how to play in certain situations, generally being polite with the enemy team, etc. Essentially, it is the Cooperative type but addressed to one's foes.

It is important to note that people may not always express their stance when talking to others. They can remain completely neutral. Such expressions are usually just ‘expressions’ (a simple single utterance or sentence that does not lead to a discussion and which can be characterized as “thinking out loud”). They may not be even related to the game or immediate situation during a match. They are not numerous, though they do exist (2% in *LoL* and 5% in *WoW*). The present paper does not consider them being a part of a discourse as they neither lead to any communication nor are a part of any communicative act. On the other hand, they can be regarded to as the so-called “ice-breakers”, but which failed in breaking the ice.

These ‘neutral’ expressions can be regarded to as addressed to one’s team or an enemy’s team by the chat channel they were posted in, but they lack a clear stance indication in relation to the game. In addition, they usually are not followed by any discussion or even a single reply from a team member. Context may also be important when deciding if a message falls under ‘neutral’ label. For example, a message can be indirectly addressed to a concrete player in one’s team and the aim of the message is to perform a specific action which can benefit the whole team. Therefore, it does not create a discussion, but by the way it is contextualized we can define it as being an utterance of the first type - Cooperative.

To analyze interactional discourse, I adopted Gee's (2014) discourse analytic approach, which foregrounds the political and societal implications of ways of speaking. Gee (2014) distinguishes seven ‘areas of reality’ that are formed by language, namely, (2014: 32): 1) significance, 2) activities, 3) identities, 4) relationships, 5) politics, 6) connections, and 7) sign systems and knowledge. According to Gee (2014), “... people enact identities and activities not just through language, but also by using language together with other "stuff" that isn't language”. In this thesis, following Gee (2014), I differentiate between discourse and Discourse. I use the former to refer to “language in use” and the latter to refer to “kinds of people” or language in context. I employ Gee’s ‘areas of reality’ as heuristic tools to investigate interactions in *WoW* and *LoL*. In addition, the notion of *discourse* covers all those aspects of communication which involve not only a *message* or *text* but also the *addresser* and *addressee*, and their immediate *context* of situation, which Leech & Short (1981) note as its ‘interpersonal’ or ‘transactional’ nature.

Example utterances from *LoL* and *WoW* were analyzed according to Gee’s discourse/Discourse analysis toolkit (2014). The analysis was comprised of using Gee’s tools which represent 27 leading questions directed at revealing specific aspects of communication present in a discourse/Discourse. The order of tools used differs for each example, which is justified by Gee’s recommendation “to choose an order that works for the data and the researcher” (2014: 187). During the analysis I tried to answer all of the questions proposed, however I mostly focused on the Fill In Tool, the Frame Problem Tool, the Doing and Not Just Saying Tool, the Why This Way and Not That Way Tool, and some other tools.

#### 4. Online videogames as places for socialization

##### 4.1 Social Network Sites elements in MMOs

The main aim of the survey was to elicit particular player habits revolving around six instruments of socialization: client chat (only *League of Legends*), in-game chat, mail (only *World of Warcraft*), profile, friend list, and other means of communication. In total the questionnaires for *WoW* and *LoL* were completed by 68 and 115 respondents accordingly. The regional distribution of respondents is presented in Figure 1. An overwhelming majority (97.1 percent for *WoW* and 91.3 percent for *LoL*) of the respondents indicated that their region of play and actual living place match.

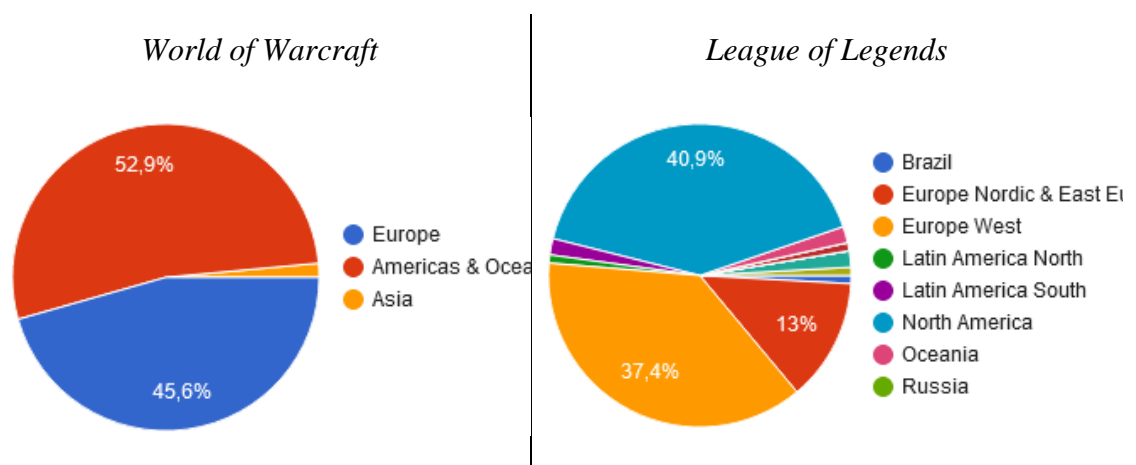


Figure 1. Respondents’ distribution according to the region of play (in %)

The main regions where the respondents play from, which may differ from the region they currently live in, are North America and Europe. Only a handful (2.9% for *WoW* and 8.7% for *LoL*) of each community's respondents indicated that they chose to play in a region different to the one they live in. The preference to play in the region respondents actually do not live in was commonly explained by the presence of friends (60% and 100% of the respondents, in *LoL* and *WoW* accordingly, who indicated they play in a different region chose the option "I have friends there"). This simple fact could mean that the already established social bonds between players are valued more than one's comfort during play. Playing in a different region means adapting to a new time zone to play with friends, having to bear with the increased latency, which can have a drastic impact on one's performance in the game, and introducing oneself to a new community.

The first important difference in social aspect of two communities is that more than a half (54.4%) of the respondents from *WoW* indicated they tend to play in large groups (guilds) or "communities within community" while only 21.7% of *LoL* respondents prefer and are engaged in local groups they play with (set teams of five). In case of *LoL*, the majority of players prefer playing solo.

#### **4.1.1 Means for social interactions in *World of Warcraft***

*WoW* provides their users with four main in-game ways for players to socially interact with each other, namely chat, mail, profile pages, and friend lists. Figure 2 shows that all of these features are being used by the majority of players, and only a small number of people indicated they have never examined them. However, we should consider the frequency of use for the said features: in-game chat is regularly ('frequently' and 'very frequently' answers) used by 58.6% of the respondents, mail – by 45.6%, profile - by 43.4%, friend list - by 57.4%.

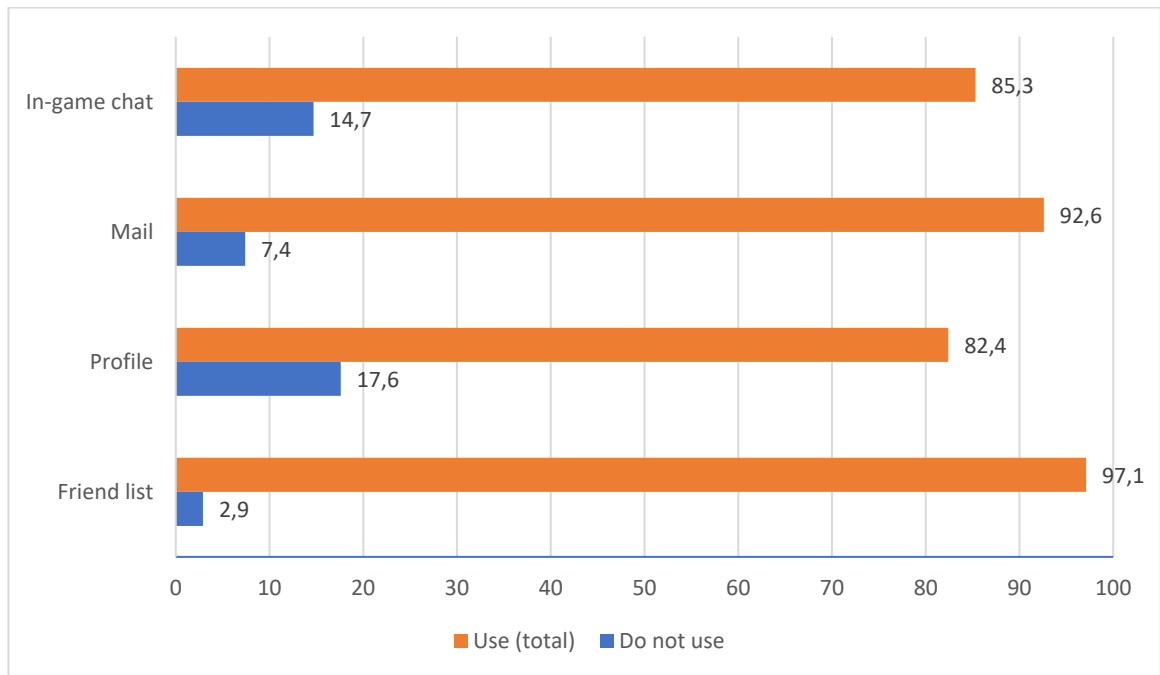


Figure 2. Number of respondents utilizing designated game features in *WoW* (in %)

The chat in *WoW* is separated into different channels (see Section 3.1). One of the reasons for this is the division of the in-game world, Azeroth, into different sections/locales/areas, where each area has its own chat channel visible and used by only those players who currently are in the same area. In addition, there is a ‘global’ chat channel for people all over Azeroth to communicate. Moreover, each in-game activity that requires different people to co-interact offers a new separate chat channel, for instance ‘raid’ or ‘dungeon’. In the same manner the ‘private’ channel is inaccessible to any but one player. The game also allows to create ‘custom’ channels in case the offered ones do not provide needed functionality. In total, there are 9 standard chat channels (excluding ‘custom’ ones) in *WoW*. Survey results revealed that the majority of the *WoW* players interact most actively in the so called “group/party”, “guild”, and “raid” channels (cf. Figure 3). Overall, the popularity of channels is as follows (in the declining order): group/party, guild, raid, private, local, global, lfg, trade, custom, and local defense. As we can see, there are basically two types of channels present:

1. the ones that serve for more or less intimate communication where both or all parties are known to each other (group/party, guild, raid, private), which coincidentally are the most popular among the players;
2. and the ones that are specialized on inter-player communication where one of the agents of communication can be regarded to as a 'stranger' (the least popular).

Some may argue that the 'raid' chat channel should be categorized as the second type. However, there is a justification for such distribution. The 'raid' channel relates to the in-game activities bearing the same name. If one wishes to participate in any of them, it is necessary to find a group who would play with you. In that regard the 'Looking for Group' or 'LFG' chat channel may be the solution.

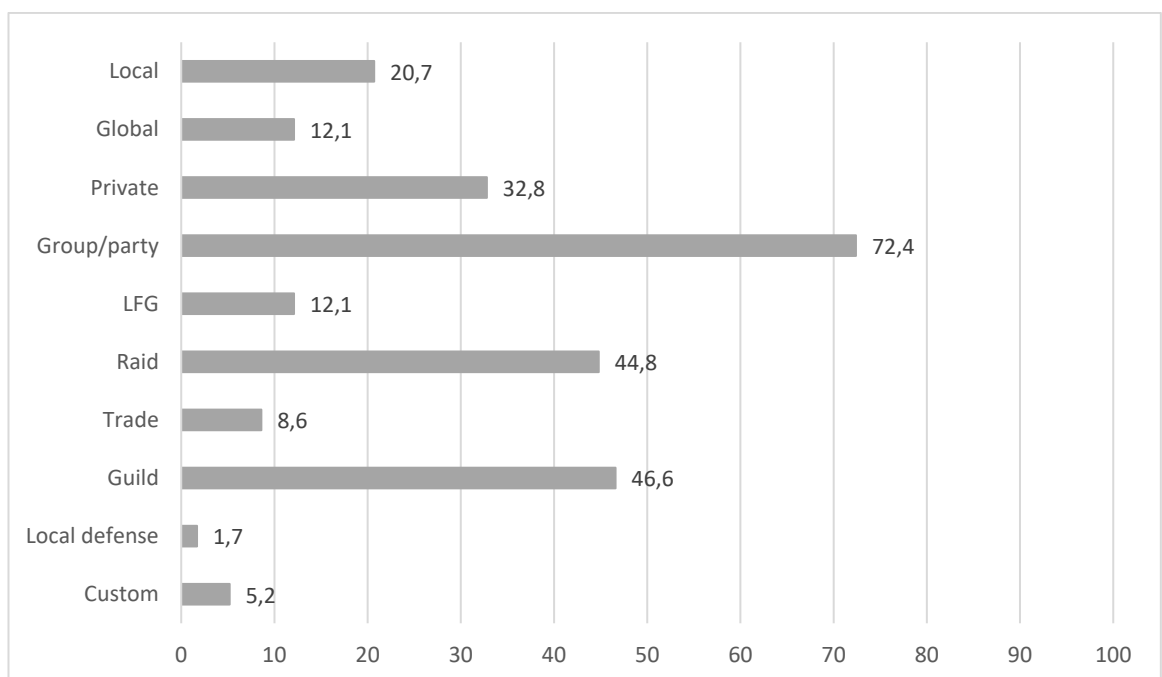


Figure 3. Number of people actively using designated chat channels in *WoW* (in %)

As survey results suggest (cf. Figure 3) not a lot of people use 'LFG' channel, though many still use the 'Group/party' one. A possible explanation for this phenomenon lies in the 'Guild' chat channel. Guilds in *WoW* are formed to make grouping and raiding easier and more rewarding, as well as to form a social atmosphere in which to enjoy the



game. Therefore, it is logical to assume that players first talk to their guildmates to look for possible partners for a dungeon or raid and then switch to the ‘Group/party’ channel to keep the main ‘Guild’ channel clear of their immediate affairs. Thus, avoiding using the ‘LFG’ channel at all. That means the participants of a typical raid party or group are often known to each other even before the said party is formed.

The mailing service in *WoW* can be compared to emailing in real life. There are two main ways to use it: one can either send a textual information, a message, that will not be deleted over time in the chat, or some in-game objects (or both at the same time). It is noteworthy that this sort of a ‘time-gated’ communication, when one can send a message and wait for the response for more than a couple of seconds, is used only by 11.1% of the respondents. The rest (88.9%) use mailing only as a ‘delivery’ service for in-game items.

Profile in *WoW* is used to indicate one’s character statistics, parameters, equipment, achievements, and other kinds of numerical data, which is mainly used to compare players between each other. On average (‘frequently’ and ‘very frequently’ answers) players tend to use profile pages to track their own progress (50%) rather than to look at someone else’s characters (36.7%). As to why people use this feature, some respondents indicated in a free-form answer that they are used to look at their friends’ profiles to decide on a gift their friends do not own yet. Some pointed out the imperfections of the system and promoted the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> party websites that specialize on systematizing this type of data (raider.io, check-pvp.fr, warcraftlogs.com).

Friend lists are essential for building long term relationships. The ways they are implemented in any system are virtually the same: one can add or remove people to/from the list, is able to directly communicate with anyone on the said list and see their status (online/offline or in some cases where they are). *World of Warcraft* is not an exception to the rule. People who met in *WoW* tend to move their relationship outside of the game online as indicated by 81.8% of the respondents, and in person (60.6%). However, only 62.2% of the respondents on average continue to interact with their friends outside of *WoW*.

One last important thing about *WoW* is what people use additionally to communicate with each other and consequently what the game lacks in terms of communicative features. As indicated by the majority (89.7%) of the respondents they do use other ways to talk with other players: some indicated they use social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), some use messengers (WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.), and literally all of them make use of dedicated software (Discord, TeamSpeak, Skype, etc.). The two main reasons for this are that these services provide their users with better chatting options and the possibility to verbally communicate with others. On average (49.2%), people preferred voice-based communication during play over the text-based one (22.9%). However, these numbers should not be regarded as indisputable. In both cases, 32.8% of the players had difficulty in deciding what they prefer more. It was noted by one of the users on reddit.com that this choice is mostly situational and depends on a number of factors, such as gameplay (slow-/fast-paced), their mood, who are the communicative partners, etc.

As it can be seen *World of Warcraft* gives their players considerable level of freedom as to how they can socialize in the game. However, not all the systems are perfect, and some players opt for 3<sup>rd</sup> party options. The majority of players are used to fast-paced communication of online chats and prefer to ‘limit’ this communication to already established social relations (large guilds and smaller groups). Finally, one of the limitations of the game that forces its players to use other means for communication between each other is the absence of voice-based communicative options.

#### **4.1.2 Means for social interactions in *League of Legends***

*LoL*, in the same manner as *WoW*, has four unique ways for its players to socialize. These are game client chat, in-game chat, personal profiles, and friend lists. Figure 4 indicates that the majority of respondents make use of the aforementioned features and only some of players have never touched them. In terms of the frequency of use, game client chat is regularly (‘frequently’ and ‘very frequently’ answers) used by 22.9% of the respondents, in-game chat - by 53.9%, profile - by 34.4%, and friend list - by 53.1%.

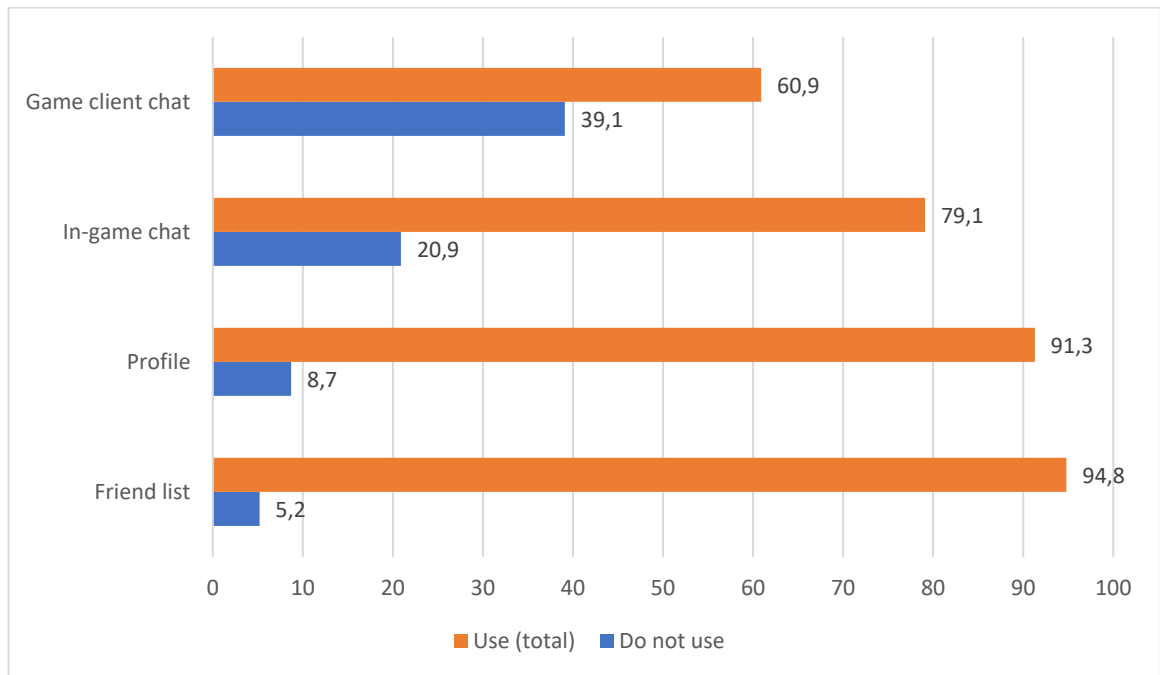


Figure 4. Number of respondents utilizing designated game features in *LoL* (in %)

*League of Legends* as a game can be considered to consist of two elements: game client and the game itself. In the client, one can search for matches, browse the game's shop, chat with other players, follow game's news, and examine (any-)one's profile. The 'game' part is dedicated solely to playing matches as a member of one of the two teams formed beforehand in the client. The chat present in the client and the chat used in-game are two separate features with different aims and functionality.

Game client chat offers functionality similar to the in-game chat in *WoW*. It is used to talk with everyone currently online ('public'), with certain individuals ('private'), with members of one's team ('group'), and with members of one's club (cf. Figure 5). Also, the client chat offers a function to create one's own channel if the standard ones are deemed insufficient. As indicated by the frequency of use, the client chat is the least used option for social interaction in the game. One of the reasons for that is the competitive nature, and the very design of the game. They promote individuality, which translates into players' social behavior within the game. In support of this idea, 78.3% of the respondents indicated they do not belong to any group within the game and, thus, prefer playing alone.

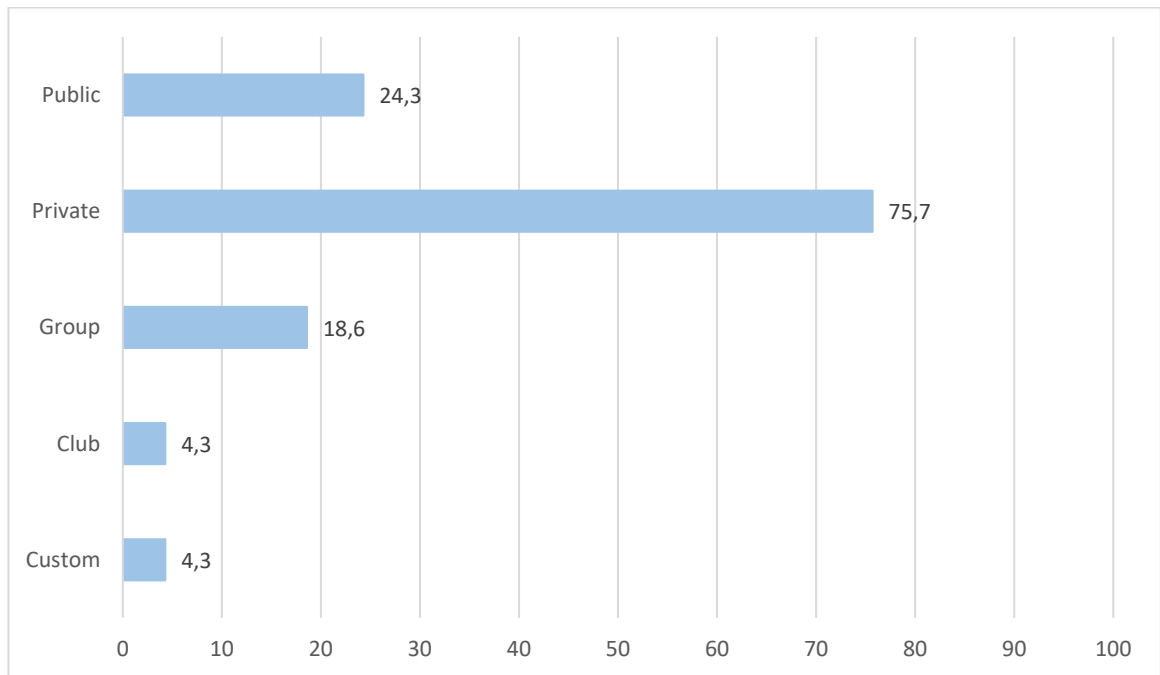


Figure 5. Number of people actively using designated chat channels in *LoL* (in %)

In-game chat is dedicated solely to the communication between 10 players placed in two teams of five. Both teams have their own separate team-only channels and a shared /all channel. More than a half (53.9%) of the respondents prefer to talk with their own team and only a quarter (26.4%) would engage in conversations with the enemy team. Often such interactions would include obscene language (74.8%) targeted at the members of the enemy team (41.8%) as well as one’s own team (80.3%).

The profile feature in *LoL* is basically the same as in *WoW*, with the only difference being different sets of information present to the viewers. On average (‘frequently’ and ‘very frequently’ answers) players tend to use profile pages to track their own progress (47%) rather than to look at someone else’s profiles (21.8%). There are varying reasons as to why people use profiles in *LoL*, some of them include showing off, strategical scouting of the enemy team members, and “expression of personality/preferred aesthetics”. Some mentioned the disadvantages this system has in comparison to the 3<sup>rd</sup> party websites that specialize on systematizing this type of data, as illustrated in (1):

(1) *There are all sorts of third-party tools, most notably op.gg, that offer more information than the game profile. Clearly the game profile could take cues from third-party tools to make the information it display[s] be more useful.*

- R1, *LoL* survey

Friend lists in *LoL* offer the same functionality as any other friend lists. In terms of the length the relationships formed in *LoL* have, people who met in the game tend to move their relationship outside of the game online as indicated by 79.8% of the respondents, and in person (60.6%). However, only 51.4% of the respondents on average continue to interact with their friends outside of *LoL*.

The fast-paced nature of the game sometimes requires its player for ‘immediate’ communication which is clearly not achievable through text-based interaction. That is why the developers implemented the system of ‘signals’ (see Section 3.1), where by a couple of simple movements a player can signal an important piece of information without wasting time to move their hands over their keyboard. However, in some cases even that would be insufficient. Therefore, people turn to other ways to communicate with other. 89.6% of the respondents indicated they do use other ways to communicate with other players: some indicated they use social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), some use messengers (WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.), and almost everyone (99%) uses dedicated software (Discord, TeamSpeak, Skype, etc.). On average (73.8%), people preferred voice-based communication during play over the text-based one (14.6%).

To sum up, *League of Legends* does enough for its players to feel comfortable during play. They do not have to feel anxious for talking with strangers because they can use ‘silent’ signals. The game, in essence, does not force its users to interact with each other more than is needed to achieve a common goal. On the other hand, people who come into *LoL* with an already established social group will not be able to find proper means to communicate with each other and will have to go for 3<sup>rd</sup> party services.

In conclusion, both games offer almost identical possibilities for social interactions and lack in the same aspects. The only major difference between the reviewed features lies in their quality, which in turn is directly related to the games themselves. *World of Warcraft* is a grand-scale open world MMORPG which gives a lot of ways for

the players to interact with each other, thus it has to provide an equal number of ways for the players to communicate with each other (chat channels). *League of Legends* is a fast-paced MOBA which concentrates on one activity exclusively, thus it does not need to offer a lot, though it tries to appeal to a greater audience by some of its Quality of Life implementations (the 'signal' system). The communities of both *WoW* (49.2%) and *LoL* (73.8%) with different intensity vote for the necessity of the voice-based communication in both games. The difference in these numbers can again be explained by the nature of both titles, with *League of Legends* being a highly competitive game and *World of Warcraft*, on the other hand - a cooperative game with some elements of competitive play.

## **4.2 Linguistic and discursive features of chat interactions in *LoL* and *WoW***

The main aim of this section is to discuss in more detail how players linguistically and discursively construct their social interactions in the virtual worlds of *LoL* and *WoW*. First, I discuss chat interactions in terms of their structural, linguistic, and functional features. To illustrate social activities performed in MMO discourses, in the sub-section 4.2.3 I present a micro-level analysis of two selected interaction excerpts following Gee's discourse analysis toolkit.

### **4.2.1 Structural features and linguistic means of chat interactions**

*Structural features (LoL)*. Both analyzed games employ game chat function. Nevertheless, despite some structural similarities in terms of how messages are conveyed and their linguistic content, the games differ in visual representation of these messages and possibilities for communication between multiple players. To illustrate this, I first discuss structural and linguistic features of interactions in *LoL*, and then highlight the most prominent features of interactions in *WoW*.

Figure 6 provides an excerpt of chat discussion between five players from one team and occasional interjections from an enemy team member in *LoL*. It can be noticed that the message log in *LoL* is structured very clearly: first comes the time stamp indicating when the message appeared during the match, then comes the (nick-)name of

the player, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> place in round brackets is the name of the character or champion they are playing as, and finally the text of the message itself. In some messages one can see “[All]” before the name of the player. It is an indication that the messages were sent to the /all chat channel and are visible to both teams.



Figure 6. Excerpt of inter-player chat interactions in *LoL*

*Hybrid writing in LoL.* As can be seen from Figure 6, some messages may appear to be divided randomly in different parts (lines 1-2, 6-7, 8-9, 23-24, 26, 28, 30), some lack in grammar, and some contain words or expressions used in game-specific meanings, such as “jungle(-er)” or “gank(-ing)”. Turkle (1995) noted, that the specialized linguistic practices used by gamers in MMOs appear to non-gamers as the “discourse of Dante scholars, ‘a closed world of references, cross-references, and code’” (1995: 67). Steinkuehler has labelled such linguistic practices as “hybrid writing” (2006b: 42). This type of writing consists of (a) abbreviations, e.g., *Wtf* for ‘what the f\*ck’ (line 27), *lol* for ‘laughing out loud’ (line 29), *afk* for ‘away from keyboard’ (line 21), or *wym* for ‘what do you mean’ (line 14), (b) truncations, e.g., *lvl* for ‘level’ (line 19, 22) or *mins* for ‘minutes’ (line 20), (c) typographical errors, e.g., *tops* for ‘top’s’ (line 13) or *theres* for ‘there’s’ (line 4), (d) syntactic erosions, e.g., the omitted referential *he* from ‘[he] wont jungle’ (line 28), ‘[he] wont communicate’ (line 30), and (e) specialized vocabulary, e.g., *jungler* (line 4) - a specific role to play in a team which concentrates on jungle - parts of the game map structured as mini labyrinths between three main lanes: top, mid, and bot.

Table 3. Frequency of hybrid writing elements in *LoL* chat communications

Hybrid writing element	Total N occurrences	Relative Frequency
a) abbreviations	110	3 %
b) truncations	38	1 %
c) typographical errors	246	7 %
d) syntactic erosions	172	5 %
e) specialized vocabulary	532	16 %
<b>Total N of words</b>	<b>3192</b>	

Table 3 summarizes the distribution and frequency of different features related to hybrid writing in the entire *LoL* chat interaction corpus. Table 3 shows that the specialized vocabulary prevails in the whole *LoL* dataset (every sixth word or 16% of every word analyzed). The typographical errors type includes incorrect spelling, and such a high number of these instances (7% of total or roughly every 13<sup>th</sup> word) can be explained by a rapid nature of the game process. Every player in *LoL* needs to be concentrated on the



match they are part of, and even a single moment of distraction can be destructive to the overall score. That is why the players do not have time to check what they wrote or retype their message anew. The syntactic erosions type mostly includes absence of direct references, e. g. to particular players, (subjects) and verbs (predicates). It is mostly caused by the fact, that communication usually happens between separate players and not the whole team. At the beginning they refer to each other directly, however after the initial addressing, probably to save time typing a message, they omit the subject as the addressee being the only communicative partner at the moment understands the reference. In the case of the whole team communicating, or simply with more than 2 communicative partners, the related subjects persist. The omission of predicates is often justified by the context or structure of a message. For example, in the message “Jinx to the top” it is implied that the player playing as Jinx should [go] to the top (lane). Abbreviations and truncations are the least used elements of hybrid writing in *LoL*. They mostly deal with gaming lexis in general, e. g. *afk* ‘away from keyboard’ or *brb* ‘be right back’, or lexis developed in modern online communications, e. g. *wym* ‘what do you mean’ or *wtf* ‘what the f\*ck’. In some cases, both abbreviations and truncations are used in regard to the specialized vocabulary, i. e. *LoL*’s terminology. For example, one will often find such words as *ADC*, *APC*, *CS*, *CC*, or *DoT*, etc. These are all abbreviation examples that refer to specific in-game mechanics (e. g. ‘Creep Score’ or ‘Crowd Control’, etc.). Truncations usually refer to the lexis specific to the game, i. e. names of items, champions, objectives, etc.

*Structural features (WoW)*. Figure 7 below illustrates the structure of chat interactions in *WoW*. The first major difference between the two games is their chat windows. Where *LoL* offers a strict division on team and /all channels only, *WoW* provides its players with option to easily switch between the multitude of chat channels (10 at any given time) on the fly by clicking at the respective tab at the top of the chat window. Thus, even though *WoW* players are not limited in the number of people they can simultaneously interact with they are restricted in the number of abstract ‘rooms’ they can simultaneously be part of. This fact allows *WoW* players for more freedom to communicate with strangers playing the game along with them in comparison to *LoL* players who are limited to 10 (mostly random) people in a single match. In addition, the

color coding of messages is more developed in *WoW*: in *LoL* only the names of the senders are color coded to indicate members of different teams (blue - friend, red - enemy); in *WoW* whole messages are colored according to the chat channel they are sent in. Whole message coloring helps when a player chooses to see messages coming from different channels simultaneously as seen in some examples on Figure 7.



Figure 7. Different instances of inter-player chat interactions in *WoW*

The structure of a message in a way resembles that of *LoL* messages. If it is not a message sent privately, first comes the channel name in square brackets, followed by the name of the character, i. e. the player, then in some cases comes the action performed, for instance “says” or “whispers”, and finally the text of the message. If the message is sent to a specific player and is not meant for the eyes of the others, in the chat log it begins with a “To”.

*Hybrid writing in WoW.* As can be seen in Figure 7, features of “hybrid writing” (Steinkuehler 2006b: 42) are also present in chat interactions of *WoW*. There are instances of (a) abbreviations, e.g., *gd* for ‘good duel’ (line 10, 11) or *gl* for ‘good luck’ (line 19), (b) truncations, e.g., *critt* for ‘critical’ (line 6) or *ppls* for ‘people’ (line 3), (c) typographical errors, e.g., *critt* for ‘crit’ (line 6) or *thr ,ob* for ‘the mob’ (line 25), (d) syntactic erosions, e.g., the omitted predicate *go* in ‘don’t [go] 10 mid at start’ (line 17), and (e) specialized vocabulary, e.g., *antonio perelli* (line 20) refers to a particular NPC vendor whose merchandise differs according to his current location.

Table 4. Frequency of hybrid writing elements in *WoW* chat communications

Hybrid writing element	Total N occurrences	Relative Frequency
a) abbreviations	257	6 %
b) truncations	110	2 %
c) typographical errors	177	4 %
d) syntactic erosions	187	4 %
e) specialized vocabulary	591	15 %
<b>Total N of words</b>	<b>3823</b>	

Table 4 summarizes the distribution and frequency of different features related to hybrid writing in the entire *WoW* chat interaction corpus. Table 4 reveals that the specialized vocabulary element of hybrid writing prevails in the whole *WoW* dataset (roughly every sixth word or 15% of every word analyzed), same as in *LoL*. Abbreviations as the second most used element of hybrid writing are popular among the players of *WoW*

for their conciseness. *WoW* is a much bigger game than *LoL* both in size and mechanics it has. Many places, items, or NPCs/creatures, etc. in Azeroth have names consisting of two and more words according to the game's fantasy setting. It is much less time consuming to type "DM W" than "Dire Maul West" or "1H" for "One-handed weapon" for example, even if it means losing some cohesiveness for unexperienced players such as myself.

The syntactic erosions element mostly includes absence of direct references, e. g. to particular players, (subjects) and verbs (predicates). In team-based in-game activities, e. g. raids, it is common to address one's whole team when issuing orders, and as raids require a lot of concentration from the players, it may be disadvantageous to spend time writing messages in the chat. In that case, team leaders rely on the context to be understood. For example, a message consisting only of the name of a specific objective on the game map implies that the team should concentrate its attention on that specific objective at that specific period of time. The necessity to perform the task can be exaggerated even more if the message was written in uppercase. The omission of predicates is less common and generally follows the same principle as in *LoL*.

The typographical errors element includes incorrect spelling, and its frequency (4% of total or roughly every 22<sup>nd</sup> word) can be explained by different contexts the game offers for communication. In case of people participating in raid activities the chance of finding a typographical error in someone's message is much higher than in a message of someone who simply logged in to chat with their guildmates for example. Truncations is the least used element of hybrid writing in *WoW*. They mostly refer to the lexis used by the game, i. e. names of items, classes, objectives, etc.

In conclusion, both *LoL* and *WoW* chat interactions are full of examples of hybrid writing. In both games specialized vocabulary dominates the linguistic content of the messages posted in chats, which may be explained by the ideational content of the said messages that in most cases directly refers to in-game systems, features, events, objects, etc. Roughly every third or fourth message in a chat in both games will include an element of hybrid writing. The players who wrote these messages clearly did not abide the standard grammar rules of the language they used, i. e. English, though somehow the acts of communications found can be considered complete. Both the senders and the receivers

of the messages fully understand each other in the context of each game, which is proved by the fact that the ‘answer’ messages do not pause related conversations with requests to ‘senders’ to explain themselves. However, if we had to put a *LoL* player together with a *WoW* player in one chat in the context of *LoL* or *WoW*, they most certainly will have troubles in understanding each other due to the high degree of specialized vocabulary used in common chat interactions in each game.

*Utterance types and their distribution.* Figure 8 below shows the distribution of found utterances from both *LoL* and *WoW* by their types: cooperative, competitive, cooperative-competitive, competitive-cooperative, and neutral (see Section 3.2). Out of 738 utterances in *LoL* the utterances of cooperative type combined (cooperative and cooperative-competitive) take up to 74% of the utterances total with 24% being of the competitive type combined (competitive and competitive-cooperative). In *WoW* 92% from the total of 1051 utterances are of cooperative type combined and 3% were found to be competitive in nature.

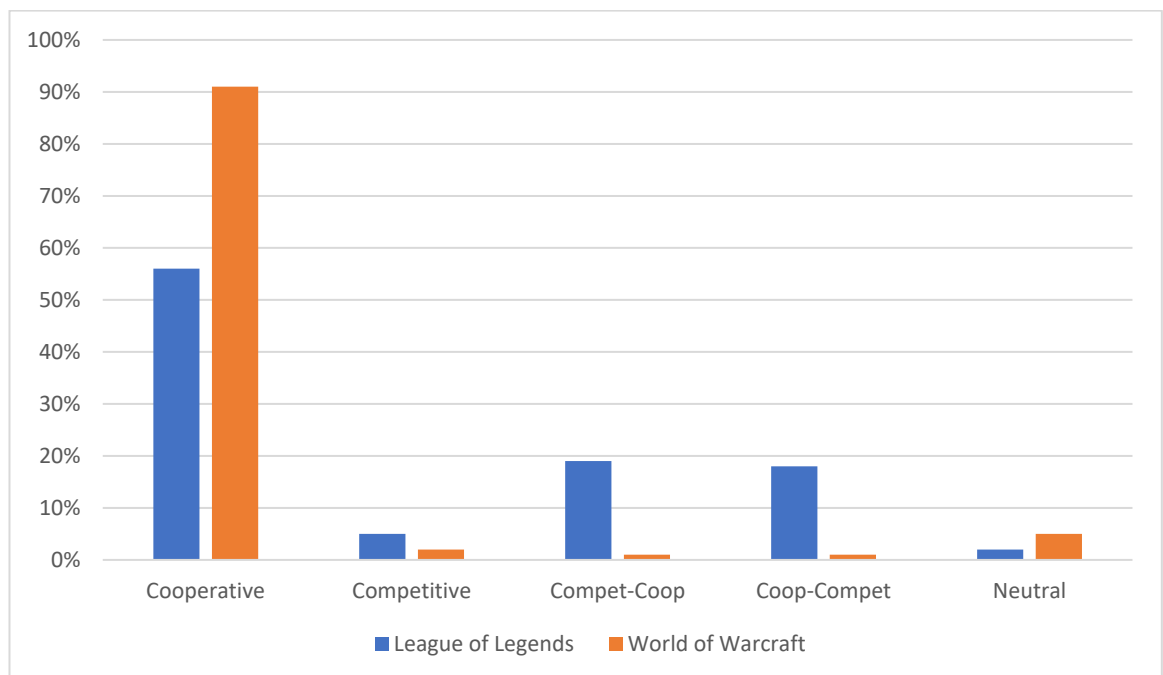


Figure 8. Distribution of utterances according to their type (in %)

In conclusion, the Cooperative type of utterances was found to be dominant both in *LoL* (55%) and *WoW* (90%). This result mostly aligns with what the genre of MMO implies, i. e. cooperation between strangers online. Though, as it was mentioned earlier, *League of Legends* was designed to be competitive, that is why the utterances of Competitive types are more widespread than those in *World of Warcraft*, which surpasses *LoL* in Cooperative type utterances in relation to the Competitive ones (see Figure 8).

#### **4.2.2 Micro-level discourse analysis of chat interactions in *LoL* and *WoW***

The present section is dedicated to discourse/big-D discourse analyses of example interactions from *LoL* and *WoW*. In order to illustrate what social activities are performed and how it is done in the discourses of both games I will rely on a micro-level analysis of two selected interaction excerpts from both games. The selection of these two excerpts was determined by richness of the information conceived in their respective communicative acts and their typicality in the contexts of each game. The results of the analysis are then used to compare both discourses additionally answering RQ1.

##### *The downfall of Mordekaiser*

The interaction I analyze here occurred on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021 in the chat of one of the observed matches in *LoL*. This particular match was not a *ranked* one, i. e. it did not affect players' statistics in the end and in general is accounted to as a safe way to play the game for fun without stressing over the “competitive” part of it too much. For general context of this interaction: Mordekaiser was signaling Lee Sin to help him score an easy kill (i. e. point for the team), however Lee Sin did not come, thus the chance was lost. The following analysis is structured around Gee's tools as indicated in the italics.



1) [02:51] Chînā (Lee Sin) signals to be careful  
2) [02:59] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): i pinged you 6 times to gank  
3) [03:01] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): but alright  
4) [03:13] Chînā (Lee Sin): but ok  
5) [03:15] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): theres the difference between a  
6) [03:17] Chînā (Lee Sin): u can back  
7) [03:19] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): darius was lvl 2  
8) [03:21] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): and had no problem ganking  
9) [03:29] Chînā (Lee Sin): learn to back  
10) [03:33] Chînā (Lee Sin): and muting u  
11) [03:38] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): back? he had 12hp'  
12) [03:42] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): oh if lee is muting me ima leave top  
13) then  
14) [03:46] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): no communication im gona need a  
15) teammate  
16) [03:52] Mouthystudent64 (Samira) is on the way  
17) [04:02] [All] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): tops urs  
18) [04:08] [All] jungle/August (Taim Kechi): wym  
19) [04:11] [All] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): lee sins already gotten  
20) emotional knowing hes the worst jungler here  
21) [04:17] [All] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): he was standin in the tri  
22) brush watched darius walk up  
23) [04:21] [All] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): then turned to do red buff  
24) [04:25] [All] jungle/August (Taim Kechi): o  
25) [04:37] [All] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): said "lvl 2 im muting you".  
26) [04:51] [All] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): so he can take the loss no  
27) way ima deal with this type of unskilled player for 30 mins  
28) [04:55] [All] Chînā (Lee Sin): report morde afk  
29) [05:02] [All] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): imagine losing to darius as lee  
30) sin at lvl 2 it blows my mind  
31) [05:11] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): Morde  
32) [05:15] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): Please  
33) [05:59] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): Morde, seriously  
34) [06:05] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): lee sin wont play  
35) [06:05] The enemy team has slain the Ocean Drake!  
36) [06:06] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): Wtf  
37) [06:06] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): wont jungle  
38) [06:07] Chînā (Lee Sin): just report him lol  
39) [06:10] Zweg Fan69 (Malphite) purchased Dark Seal  
40) [06:10] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): wont communicate  
41) [06:10] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): wont communicate  
42) [06:13] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): go top  
43) [06:13] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): just give him his loss he wants  
44) [06:15] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): and go next  
45) [06:17] Mouthystudent64 (Samira) signals that enemies are missing  
46) [06:18] Mouthystudent64 (Samira) signals that enemies are missing  
47) [06:32] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): why would i go top when our  
48) [06:34] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): Darius has a 150G bounty  
49) [06:44] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): he wants to lose thats why he  
50) [06:46] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): top has no prio  
51) [06:49] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): so its free  
52) [07:07] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): you are acting like a kid  
53) [07:16] Chînā (Lee Sin): he is a kid  
54) [07:17] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): welp  
55) [07:23] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): naw im more acting like someone  
56) [07:33] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): im not gonna stress out and carry  
57) [07:39] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): who doesnt have the brain  
58) [07:43] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): Huh?  
59) [07:44] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): follow pings or play his role  
60) [07:52] Zweg Fan69 (Malphite): morde i will give u gift card if u play  
61) [08:06] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): i make like 8000 every two weeks  
62) [08:08] Chînā (Lee Sin) is asking for assistance  
63) [08:09] Mouthystudent64 (Samira): How old are you?  
64) [08:12] Zweg Fan69 (Malphite) is on a killing spree!  
65) [08:25] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): old enough to know better than  
66) [09:48] LeifrQcOu (Mordekaiser): just take a breath guys, you lost  
67) [09:49] Zweg Fan69 (Malphite) is on the way

Figure 9. LoL interaction extract<sup>4</sup>

*Significance building.* Every person manifests their social identity or, from the linguistic point of view, their social discourse through what they say and how they say it. In some cases, this identity is used to show the owner of it in a position of power or

<sup>4</sup> To make the referencing and addressing easier during the analysis I refer to the players who wrote specific messages/lines as the champions they were playing as, e. g. if I refer to Mordekaiser, I refer to the player nicknamed LeifrQcOu, in the same manner Lee Sin is the player Chînā.

authority. In the analyzed extract, lines 63-66 suggest that Mordekaiser presents himself as an experienced player, who accuses a team member of being too “emotional” over their skill at the game. The wording of lines 63-64 suggests it is an answer to a previously asked question, it specifically begins with “old enough”. However, what follows does not relate to the age of the player per se, instead Mordekaiser uses a specific quality, “to know better than stress out over a bad player”, to characterize his experience in multiplayer games. The same quality is used here to differentiate Mordekaiser from the rest of the team or at least those who were talking with him at the moment in the chat implying they were the ones who were stressing out. Moreover, the “bad player like this lee sin” shows us Mordekaiser has a clear idea of how the champion Lee Sin should be played and that the current Lee Sin did not meet his expectations, what actually was the reason for the whole story. Simply by this single message we see that Mordekaiser puts himself not only above one player (Lee Sin) but his whole team or, again, those who were talking with him in the chat at the moment.

*Doing and not just saying.* The lines 65-66 attempt to downplay what was said previously. Mordekaiser tries to calm down his communicative partners, suggesting there was a heated discussion on the topic, and addresses them with a friendlier informal “guys”, as well as making this sentence the theme of his whole second message by writing it first, i. e. emphasizing it. Then follows his reasoning for what Lee Sin’s actions led to. Mordekaiser states they have already lost that game on 9:48 timestamp (for reference, this match ended after 46 mins). However, Mordekaiser does not refer to anything directly. For now, we can only guess what is meant by “emotional” in line 66, whether it was an in-game action which put the team in a clear disadvantageous position or maybe it had something to do with what Lee Sin said in the chat. The important point is that in this competitive game a player was accused of showing his emotions. That, in fact, tells us more about how we should perceive Mordekaiser’s identity and his figured world of *LoL*. Additionally, the way he uses deictics, such as “jungler” (line 66), in his message actually tells us precisely what Lee Sin did or rather did not succeed in doing from Mordekaiser’s point of view. In the lines 65-66 Mordekaiser refers to Lee Sin as “jungler”, not the player but his role, supposedly to not repeat himself. However, in the



same message he places the role in one row with another player - Darius (a top laner, the direct opponent of Mordekaiser).

*Fill in.* In *League of Legends* there is a clear distinction between more than 140 champions available to play based on their supposed role, which in turn is based on a character's stats and skills. In total, there are five roles to fill: top laner / bruiser, jungler / assassin, mid laner / mage, bot laner / marksman, and support / healer or tank. They are named after the region of the map they occupy at the start of the game (except the support who helps the current bot laner). The map is symmetrical, but the jungles are mirrored, so both teams have the same regions to play in. The role of a jungler is to hide in his team's jungle or infiltrate the enemy team's one and occasionally ambush one of the main three lanes. In the jungle there are neutral monsters and monster camps to gain experience and currency from. Despite the jungler role being almost self-sustainable, the main purpose of it is in unexpected ambushes or ganks it can create.

*Activities building.* In the lines 65-66, Mordekaiser refers to another player in a derogative manner by using the role ("jungler") instead of calling the player directly ("lee sin") to show, first, his disrespect towards that player and, second, Lee Sin's inability to fulfill the role of a jungler. The comparison to Darius indicates that the problem Mordekaiser is concerned about is in an unsuccessful gank from Lee Sin. By doing or rather saying what was said Mordekaiser tries to reason with other teammates while competing with one of them. These actions in turn constitute more global social activities of "socializing (with one's team)" and "playing a game of *League of Legends*".

*Frame problem.* For an outsider to the context of the game everything above may seem enough to justify Mordekaiser's frustration over Lee Sin's inability to play his role properly, as well as perceiving Mordekaiser as a mature and experienced player of not only *LoL* but other, supposedly competitive, multiplayer games. However, to properly analyze what was said we need to look at it from the insider's point of view. We need to understand social values of this community.

*Fill in.* In general, players of *LoL* follow a set of unspoken rules when interacting with other players who were put in one team, which can be regarded to simply as etiquette. By default, players are polite to each other because there are no reasons for hate when the

match starts. Everyone wants to win and understands that to succeed they need to cooperate with each other, to play as a team. Bad-talk in this case is a side-effect. However, this is not an absolute rule. There might be people playing for a whole day and having a bad streak of loses, people having a bad day in general, or people in bad mood who transfer their anger into the game using a “shield” of anonymity it provides. As a researcher and observer, I have to speak from my own experience with the game (more than four years).

First of all, I want to raise the importance of timestamps in the chat and time in general for a *League of Legends* match. From the gameplay point of view time dictates when the first wave of creeps/mobs start to spawn, when the jungle monsters start to appear, when super mobs (dragon and baron, they are very important for a team’s success) start to pop up. It has a strategic importance. From the gamedesign point of view, time dictates the bare minimum of how long a match can be by controlling the availability of the option to surrender, i. e. end a match prematurely by letting one’s team members to vote. Surrenders cannot be called before the 15 minute mark. However, the surrender vote is considered an "early surrender" and must be unanimous if the vote is called prior to the 20 minute mark. If a player is AFK, that player's team can surrender at 10 minutes with a unanimous vote, or at 15 minutes with the normal vote rules. In the case of Mordekaiser, judging by his second message (lines 64-65) in particular, the match was supposed to end before the timer would hit the 20 minute mark. However, as I mentioned earlier, the match ended only a bit after 46 minutes and the team won.

Secondly, it is important to mention that the community of *League of Legends* is considered one of the most toxic communities in the online gaming segment of the Internet. Simple google search “is lol toxic” fetches more than 25 million results on people debating how and why the community is as it is. In the defense of the game, and from my own experience, I would say it greatly depends on the circumstances related to each player individually. The points I made earlier about bad-talk are true, but one may get lucky and play a match where everyone just booted *LoL* for the first time that day, nothing bad happened to them, and they are more or less happy. However, even these prerequisites do not guarantee a stable/polite outcome if something during the match did go wrong.

*Doing and not just saying.* Sometimes language can be used to impose one's point of view onto others and with the additional context from the above two paragraphs in mind, we can look at Mordekaiser from a different perspective. "just take a breath guys" in line 65 can now be seen as a mockery. Instead of a more neutral/defensive "take a breath (guys)", he lowers the register of the message into casual speech and, kind of, "reverses" its "polarity" by including adverb 'just' at the beginning of the sentence. Additionally, the fact that the message "you lost the game" was sent in the chat at 9:48 timestamp, almost at the literal beginning of the match, is a clear sign of player's toxicity. By saying what he said, Mordekaiser conditions his team to lose. He states it as a fact, as something that has already happened, and not as something that will only happen in the future. An interesting detail here is that he uses second person pronoun "you" instead of a more expected first person plural "we" to refer to the team. Mordekaiser not just distances himself from the team trying to redeem himself as if saying "it's not my fault", he does not associate himself with the team in the first place. He clearly did not play in a team at that moment. He played alone and for himself.

I began this analysis by trying to identify who was the author of the messages. Mordekaiser turned out to be an experienced in online multiplayer games toxic player, probably a male (83.3% of the questionnaire respondents identified themselves as males). However, there is more than that. As Gee (2014: 106) suggests, there are quite often more than one identity present at any time. It applies to Mordekaiser as well. To learn more about who he is we need to look back at what has led to what he said.

*Situated meaning.* Let us start by clarifying "emotional" in Mordekaiser's second message (lines 65-66). Previously we reviewed it in isolation from the context of what preceded it. Now is the time to look at how it all started. The lines 1-15 show what provoked Mordekaiser to write in the chat from his first message. "pinged" here refers to the signal system discussed in the Section 3.1.2. It is one of the "non-verbal" ways for the players to communicate with each other during a match. Mordekaiser called for help several times pinging "Attack Darius" when Lee Sin was nearby. Mordekaiser expected to receive help because in his view or figured world junglers are regarded to as supports, who should come to aid whenever they are called. However, Lee Sin prioritized defensive play and did not risk ganking or ambushing an enemy player this early into the game.

This conflict of views then developed into indirect accusations from Mordekaiser's side, namely starting with the line 4 we can see his clearly negative opinion over Lee Sin's unwillingness to help. First, Mordekaiser compares Lee Sin to an abstract 'perfect' jungler "with map awareness", then to an enemy team member Darius. Instead of taking part in a one-sided argument, Lee Sin decided to mute Mordekaiser. The 'mute' option lets players to limit whose messages they want to receive in the chat. This seemed to be 'the last straw' for Mordekaiser and it was when he 'abandoned' the team by leaving his role as a top laner, which put the team in a serious disadvantage. This fact supports my previous statement that Mordekaiser did not associate himself with the team in the first place. He disregards social values adopted within the community.

*Figured worlds.* The simple decision to not take part in the argument was called "emotional" by Mordekaiser. He transfers his beliefs of what a match of *LoL* should be on others and expects them to behave accordingly. As a top laner he has his own values in the context of the game, but they were not shared by others. In the set of 'team' and 'individual player' values Mordekaiser put himself over his team, which in the context of the game provoked negative reaction from the team towards him.

*Politics building.* On the one hand, it is generally perceived as appropriate for someone to silently leave a conversation with others whom they do not want to argue with. On the other hand, the one who started the argument will either feel victorious that they 'won' the argument or offended that they are not being heard any longer. The latter is the case with Mordekaiser. The failure to fulfill his "positive face needs" (Gee 2014: 119) of being involved leads to Mordekaiser continuing his argument for the duration of the match. Even his first two messages in the chat (lines 1-2) already established how he wanted to be perceived: he wanted others to do what he told them to do, he expected some sort of subordination from his teammates.

*Big "D" discourse.* The last important milestone in Mordekaiser's story is right before what we saw in the lines 63-64. Mordekaiser revealed one of his social identities, who he is outside of the game in the lines 60-61. He was provoked by a message from Malphite (line 59) who tried to motivate him to continue playing and fulfilling his role as a top laner by offering a gift. Mordekaiser responded in a rather offensive way instead of

a neutral “(no) I don’t need it (thank you)”. He began by stating his salary and mentioning his occupation as a welder, which suggests he is much older than an ordinary *LoL* player (from the questionnaire results the majority of the respondents fall in 17-24 years old range). The inclusion of “really” and “ur” moves the register of the message into casual/informal speech, however, “ur” is common in online text communication, while “really” is used to emphasize Mordekaiser’s opinion, thus operating as a clear stance marker. In the current structure of the utterance “really” also emphasizes the following negation “dont” with an alternative being “i dont really need ur money”. In its current position “really” can be interpreted as “sure” or “certainly” and serves to “brush-off” the received offer. The following question by Samira (line 62) leads us the point where we began on the line 63.

In a sense, Mordekaiser’s “emotional” on the line 66 serves as an intertextual element as it directly refers to what was said/done before by another person. In the meantime, it serves as a justification for the relationships he created with his team members. Probably, he uses the fact that he is older than an average player to put himself into a position of authority. That is why his views of community values differ from those of his teammates.

It is also important to note the difference in message structures of Mordekaiser and the rest of the players. Even though everything put in the chat is in a way abrupt and the sentences are unnecessary separated in different places, there is a common factor at play here. If one had to look at these chat logs and then switch to, for example, a transcription of a prerecorded speech used in some research (for instance, Gee 2014: 15, 21-22), they would see some similarities between the two. Players in *LoL* do use complex, developed sentences, of course giving preference to short ones to be quick in typing them out, but they divide these sentences in a way as if they were verbally saying them out loud. Every change to a new line/new message is a little intonational stop that divides idea (tone) units (Gee, 2014: 22). For example, the lines 7-8, 9-10, 24-25, 30-31, 33/35/37, 40-41, 46-47, 53-56/58 could have been written in just one line each. The message on the line 35 clearly refers to the first one on the line 33 as it is the continuation of the same idea but without the familiar comma sign, and if we add the missing subject from the line 33 “who” and predicate “doesnt” to lines 35 and 37, it becomes a complete

sentence. Commas are generally rare in online chat interactions, and here the absence of it or rather the implied use of one gives Mordekaiser time to take another “breath in” to continue his message on the line 33.

What makes Mordekaiser stand out from the rest of the team is that more often than not he uses structurally full sentences, with the logical beginning and end, subject and predicate, situated within one message at a time. It may be an indication of a generational gap in how players process their ideas for others to consume. Younger players tend to split up their written sentences into manageable idea units simulating oral communication, while older ones, who are used to emailing or professional communication resort to full sentences as a work of habit. Of course, this is a preliminary hypothesis, and further research should be done with a properly defined sample to make any concrete conclusions regarding this aspect of chat interactions in MMOs.

### *My guild is my castle*

It was mentioned previously that *World of Warcraft* is different to *League of Legends* in how the chat system is implemented. There are nine distinct chat channels (excluding ‘Custom’) and every one of them is used for specific purposes or rather contexts. Thus, ‘local’ is the main choice for strangers in one area to talk with each other; ‘guild’ for example is used specifically for communication between members of the same guild; and ‘raid’ is the medium for communication between members of one group who agreed to participate in the activity. Every chat channel in *WoW* serves to fulfill a specific social activity related to the channel itself, and as suggested by previous examples the activity can usually be derived from the name of the channel. To look at every single channel and see what is talked about in them is an enormous task and would require much more space paper-wise. Therefore, for this study, I decided to focus only on the most popular channels as defined by the questionnaire results (‘raid’, ‘guild’ and ‘group/party’). In the following paragraphs I will analyze an example of communication between guildmates in *WoW*.



Figure 10. *WoW* interaction extract

Figure 10 above is an excerpt of a guildmates' talk in *WoW*. The 'guild' channel allows for multiple people (everyone in the guild who are currently online) to chat simultaneously. As it can be seen, there are at least eight people chatting at the time the screenshots were taken. Their names are in square brackets after the name of the channel. Of particular interest to us is the message in lines 20-21 made by the player named Jakohc.

At first glance, the message consists of three sentences with some traces of punctuation. However, there are at least two problems in understanding the meaning of

it. First is the use of a highly specific terminology originated from the game and gaming in general. Second is a vague reference to what was said previously in the beginning of the message. To clarify the prior:

- “toon” is another way to call an in-game character, it’s synonymic to ‘avatar’;
- “brb” is literally ‘be right back’;
- “/w” is a special chat command that lets people use the ‘private’ channel, i. e. send messages directly to each other;
- “inv” stands for ‘invite’.

To address the latter, we will have to consider the context which provoked this conversation. A couple of minutes before the lines 20-21 there was another message posted in the chat by Jakohc. On the lines 2-4 one can find an example of the most complete and developed sentences used in the chat of *WoW*. Supposedly, this message was posted by Jakohc as can be seen by the nickname of its author. However, it is not precisely true.

*Contextuality of the utterance.* The message (lines 2-4) states the fact of death of the in-game character “Jakohc the Warlock” at character “level 10” by ‘the hands’ of some “Princess”, and then follow his “last words”. The possessive determiner “our” the message begins with redirects us to the guild itself. It was and is a common tradition in larger communities to refer to its members as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’. Next, we see the character’s class - the Warlock. A class dictates what set of abilities or skills a character has, and generally is the determiner of a playstyle. “level” refers to character progression. There are 80 levels in total a character can achieve in *WoW*. Knowing that, we can assume Jakohc the Warlock died at the beginning of his journey to the ‘end’ of the game. Then comes a specific location, “Elwynn Forest”. In Azeroth (gameworld of *WoW*) Elwynn Forest is the starting location for every human race character. It may indirectly tell us the race of Jakohc, but he died at level 10 not 1 or 2. The fact that the forest is the starting location for humans does not mean that only humans are allowed there. Characters of other races from the Alliance (humans, night elves, dwarves, gnomes, draenei, and worgen) can also come here to do some quests for example. Now, “Princess” is somewhat misleading for anyone not familiar with the game and the location specifically. According



to the related quest description it is a “a prize-winning pig”. In *WoW* all quest related objects, either unanimous items or ‘living’ beings, have distinct names for ease of recognition. That is the case with Princess. Finally, the second sentence of the message (lines 3-4) directly quotes Jakohc’s own last sent message in the chat before this one.

In terms of orthography, Jakohc’s message on the lines 2-4 is as perfect as it can be. Here the player properly used letter cases, commas, full stops, and quotation marks. If we compare it to any other message from this chat or any other, it will certainly stand out. The reason for this is it was not written by a human. The message was ‘written’ and ‘posted’ in the chat by a script or bot (programmable sequence of performed actions). In fact, parts of the message were prewritten for the script to fill-in omitted parts. Originally, the message most probably was “Our brave \_\_\_, \_\_\_, has died at level \_\_\_ in \_\_\_ to \_\_\_. \_\_\_ last words were “\_\_\_””. Every missing piece in this template is filled by the information gathered directly from the game: ‘brother/sister’ is taken from the chosen gender at character creation screen, as well as name and class; level is accessed from the character statistics screen in-game; location can be seen on the map; the killer Non-Playable Character (NPC) is the last NPC Jakohc was targeting before death; ‘his/her’ depends on whether ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ was chosen as the first option; and the “last words” are stored in the memory of the script which affects the whole guild chat but works with each player individually.

There is a reason for Jakohc to use a script to notify his guildmates of his death. First, he is not the only one to use it. Second, the guild Jakohc is part of is not an ordinary gaming guild. This is a speedrunners’ guild. Speedrunning is a practice that has existed in the world of gaming for a long time. However, only recently it became popular. The main concept of speedrunning is to complete a game as fast as humanly possible. Sometimes, when a game cannot be completed, for example a MMORPG (there is no ‘end game’ screen or credits), speedrunners try to achieve specific in-game tasks that are considered by the community of the game as being an ‘endgame’. In case of *WoW*, it is to achieve character level 80, the maximum level. Everyone in Jakohc’s guild, including him, does exactly that. They compete with each other in the race to level 80 and use scripts in the chat to show others in the guild how far they were able to progress before ultimately resetting their progress by dying in-game.

After the scripted message on the lines 2-4 Jakohc received some advice on how he could have succeeded in killing Princess and staying alive (line 13). There were five players who took part in the conversation simulating a real-life discussion on what has just happened. Not all of the messages directly refer to Jakohc. For example, Catbear negatively reacts to Zuckerr's suggestion to Jakohc using fences around the area where Princess is to his advantage (line 17). Ny, in turn, negatively reacts to Catbear's reaction (line 19). For the purpose of understanding the initial message by Jakohc, which here is on the lines 20-21, we should also consider the message by Zuckerr on the line 18. "super risky" and "too" indicate that Zuckerr will try to kill Princess in the same way Jakohc tried to do it, i. e. without using the proposed 'fence' method. This message prompted Jakohc to write the last part of his message (lines 20-21) where he tells Zuckerr he will write to him directly to invite him in a group to fight Princess together. However, it is not just Jakohc stating a fact, that he will write to Zuckerr. He asks for Zuckerr's help.

I previously mentioned the use of emoticons in videogames (see Section 2.3) referring to the work of Dresner and Herring (2010). Jakohc's message (lines 20-21) is an example how emoticons can affect the meaning of an utterance. Two kinds of smiley faces are used here: :P and =). Both of them are used to map facial expressions to their preceding utterances. Thus, the negatively offensive rejection of "Nah fuck that" acquires a teasing, 'smiley', lighter meaning that can be translated as "Nah, I'll do it my way". With the help of the second 'face' Jakohc basically asks Zuckerr the question "Will you help me?" without asking the question. In some contexts, it may be viewed as a rude way to ask for help. Essentially, Jakohc makes Zuckerr help him. However, here everyone is engaged in the process and at the same degree is interested in making progress, thus perfectly understanding that cooperation is the key to achieving the common goal. Moreover, Jakohc made use of Zuckerr's message on the line 18, which tells us Zuckerr was yet to face Princess and he was going to do it the same way Jakohc did. Fortunately for Jakohc, Zuckerr agreed to help as seen on the lines 23 and 24.

*Syntactic analysis.* Now that we completely understand what Jakohc's message (lines 20-21) is about, we can review it from the point of view of Syntax. In ordinary written text, punctuation and capitalization separate the utterances into different tone/idea units (e. g. sentences) (Gee 214: 74), and each of them may serve a distinct function. In

MMO communication such rules are usually not followed. However, we can use Jakohc’s segmentation by full stops to divide his utterance into three separate tone units.

Tone unit 1 is *interpersonal* and serves to indicate Jakohc’s opinion on the suggested method of killing Princess proposed by Zuckerr and opposed by Catbear (lines 13 and 17). The method itself is based on abusing limitations of this NPC’s Artificial Intelligence (AI) and requires much more time and patience than just fighting the pig face-to-face but provides a greater degree of safety from being killed by the said NPC. By saying what Jakohc said the way he said it, he thanks others for valuable advice but rejects it in favor of his own strategy. The ending emoticon “:P” serves as a sign of teasing and shows how the preceding sentence should be read. The choice to use the rather informal “fuck” shows the kind of relationships the agent (Jakohc) has with the other participants of this conversation, which can be described as playful, non-normative, (closely) related, due to the fact they all are part of one guild, a group of people with similar interests.

Table 5. The three Tone Units of the original utterance and their functions

	Tone Unit 1	Tone Unit 2	Tone Unit 3
Original utterance (parsed):	[Nah fuck that.. :P]	[ill remake a toon and brb..]	[Zuckerr ill /w u for inv =)]
Gloss:	Thank you, but I would better do it my way	I will create a new character and come back	Zuckerr, could you help me with the Princess afterwards?
Function:	Interpersonal	Ideational	Interpersonal

Tone unit 2 is *ideational*, presupposing a particular configuration of process, participants, and circumstance (Martin, Matthiessen, & Painter, 1997). The material action of creating a new character, thus starting a new attempt at speedrunning *WoW*, performed by Jakohc himself and returning back to the game world is used here to inform not only others in the guild who were online at the moment, but Zuckerr specifically because of the next tone unit. The reason for this action lies in the context of what preceded this message, which is the death of the previous character to Princess (the pig), i. e. a failed attempt. The choice of lexical means to express the idea of starting over in

this tone unit presents Jakohc as a rather experienced player who is familiar with the in-game terminology developed by the community/insiders (“toon”) and the gaming environment in general (“brb”), which is not easily understandable by outsiders.

Tone unit 3 is *interpersonal* and directly addressed to another player. The theme of the sentence indicates the addressee. This addressing, being placed in the first position in the sentence, shows a certain degree of respect coming from Jakohc towards Zuckerr. In a way, by doing this Jakohc creates what Gee (2014: 118) calls “social goods” of, in our case, respect and distributes it to another player. Another option for how this sentence would have been constructed suggests placing the addressee at the end of it, which would devalue the importance of Zucker’s involvement and change the whole meaning of the sentence as if it was Zuckerr who was asking to be invited to participate in the activity. The purpose of the emoticon “=)” here is to ask a question without explicitly doing it, which Jakohc succeeded in communicating to Zuckerr as evidenced by Zuckerr’s next messages (lines 23-24).

*Social activities review.* There are two main activities present in this MMORPG: playing the game and socializing. The utterance produced by Jakohc can be considered to represent a certain activity within the game - speedrunning. Tone unit 2 relates to describing one of the many actions which constitute this activity. However, as there could be multiple discourses present in one act of communication, there could be multiple activities performed through these acts. At the moment of posting his message in the chat, Jakohc was playing a videogame, participating in a discussion, speedrunning, fulfilling his “face needs” (Gee, 2014: 119), cooperating with other players, and socializing in his guild’s chat. Some items in the given list are actions and some are activities. As Gee notes (2014: 97), it is hard to draw the line between the two. In my opinion, there are two main activities present in this MMORPG, while everything else should be considered as actions that constitute these activities.

*Big D-discourse analysis.* From the above we can finally move to the last point of Gee’s toolkit, which is the social identity of the issuer. Through his utterance Jakohc was able to accomplish several community-valued goals at once: (a) developing one’s avatar in terms of experience and wealth, and (b) creating social relationships (even though they are often finite in nature). Earlier it was mentioned that the guild Jakohc is part of is all

about speedrunning the game or, in the case of *WoW*, achieving the maximum character level as fast as possible. This, as well the fact that Jakohc uses a highly specific terminology to refer to in-game objects, shows his experience as a player, which puts him closer to being a “veteran” player rather than a “newbie”. In addition, Tone unit 3 serves as a bridge for co-interaction with another member of the community by suggesting them to participate in a shared activity.

It is worth pointing out that while speedrunning is certainly a way to play the game, it is not a default one. *WoW*, as any other game, gives their players specific routes for character progression they can use. Usually, it is justified by the in-game context. Thus, humans start in one area and visit one set of regions of the in-game map, but night elves, for example, start in different area with different regions around it. However, the game gives its players some freedom in how they can progress. That means humans can come to the areas where night elves start and vice versa. Such a decision to leave one’s starting area in favor of another one may not be logical story-wise but may be fruitful progression-wise. This is what speedrunners do. They reject the story content of the game, because they simply do not need to go over it again and again, in favor of gaining character levels as quickly as possible. There are many player-created routes other speedrunners use and develop. In relation to Jakohc’s guild, everyone in it follows the same route that happens to go through humans’ starting area and the quest with Princess specifically. The fact that Jakohc knows about and uses this route shows that he is not only a “veteran” in *WoW* in general, but he is not an amateur in speedrunning the game as well. He not only participates in a social activity but co-interacts with other participants (Tone units 1 and 3), who share his views about the game. At this point, Jakohc, as a speedrunner, performs a role different to the one assigned to him by the game (Warlock), or rather he uses this in-game role to fulfill his social role as a speedrunner.

The above analyzes showed that players in both *LoL* and *WoW* perform different actions through their written speech, that can resemble oral speech through its division into separate tone units. The actions found in part constitute more global social activities that are shared between the games, which are 1) playing a game and 2) socializing in a game’s chat. In addition, players in both games were found to manifest several social identities while interacting with others, depending on the context of communication.

## 5. Conclusion

Both *LoL* and *WoW* are examples of the MMO genre of videogames. They provide their players with a number of functions allowing for social interactions. Based on the statistical analysis of the observed chat logs and their illocutionary forces it was found that, despite the fact that the game designs of both titles differ (competitive and cooperative), the inter-player communications are shown to perform very similar actions of cooperation. Besides that, some degree of variability being cooperation with one's competitors in *LoL* (see Section 4.2.2) was also noticed. The only major difference between the two is the almost complete absence of competition-oriented messages in *WoW*. This fact can be explained by the lack of in-game ways to communicate with one's enemies in team-based in-game events such as arena fights. In general, players in both games prefer cooperation with the aim of achieving a shared goal.

The majority of observed inter-player communications follow the same pattern of being abrupt and divided by their idea units, i. e. there are usually not many complete developed sentences written in the chat. The preference is given to shorter sentences with a high chance of abbreviations being used due to the immediate needs of each player defined by the in-game context. If the in-game situation allows for leaving control over one's character to 'properly' talk with others, players will most likely choose to follow standard grammar conventions. For example, Mordekaiser (see Section 4.2.2) preferred complete sentences because he was not paying attention to the match and was ready to surrender. In fact, he was trying to manipulate others into surrendering early. As another factor for his choice, it may be explained by his age difference in comparison to an ordinary *LoL* player and his experience in 'professional' communication, thus it may be his work of habit. In case of Jakohc (see Section 4.2.2), his character had already died when he composed his message, therefore there was no need for him to pay any attention to what was happening in the game. In addition, he did not take part in any collective activity, and no one relied on him, which separates Jakohc from Mordekaiser.

Players of both games use "hybrid writing" (see Section 4.2.1) to communicate with each other. This type of writing consists of (a) abbreviations, (b) truncations, (d) syntactic erosions, and (e) specialized vocabulary, all of which are present in the collected

data. Some of the elements appeared to be more widespread than others, specifically specialized vocabulary, which may be explained by the ideational content of posted messages that in most cases directly refers to in-game systems, features, events, objects, etc. Though, this observation is in line with Steinkuehler's (2006b) findings, more research is needed to make any concrete statements regarding this topic.

In relation to RQ1, the discourses present in both games share the same activities performed during inter-player communications, namely playing the game itself and socializing within the said game. Different actions constitute these activities and change from game to game. The main 'places' for socialization within the two games are considered to be their chat windows and specific in-game groups or communities within communities members of which share similar social values (guilds in *WoW*).

There are certain differences between *LoL* and *WoW*. The former provides its players with enough functionality to allow 'non-verbal' communication through signaling. It takes less time to convey game-specific information to other members of one's team by pressing one button and dragging one's mouse than typing words in the chat. However, the drawback of this system is a negative impact on the socialization aspect of the game, as well as a degree of ambiguity this system creates. The topics for such a 'communication' are limited to game-specific situations/events/actions and using signals for anything else might fail to deliver that information. *WoW*, on the other hand, gives its players a higher degree of freedom in how they can organize their communication in in-game chat channels offering nine of them instead of two in *LoL*. Such a massive increase in available sources of messages may become destructive to overall player experience with the game. *WoW* solves this problem by color-coding whole messages according to the channel they were sent in. In *LoL*, for example, only the name of the sender is colored.

Even though *World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends* are games of different but related genres with different design choices in their structures, they share a lot of things in terms of inter-player interaction (RQ2). Both games provide their users with specific ways to interact with other users, namely chat windows, friend lists, and profile pages. In addition to that, *WoW* offers a mailing service that supports in-game item exchange

between players as well as leaving time unrestricted messages, that do not get deleted after some time in contrast to the chat window.

In terms of social interaction means (RQ2), survey results have shown that most players rely on chats for in-game interaction. Nevertheless, due to certain limitations, some survey respondents advocated for the use of third-party services to fulfill the need in verbal communication proper. In addition, some players give their preference to third-party websites in regard to getting access to systematized data on some of the in-game information.

This study explored social aspect of MMOs through micro-level discourse analysis of example chat logs following Gee's discourse analysis toolkit and custom-made questionnaires. Nevertheless, it is necessary to perform more specialized research into in-game communications to make any specific statements. The limitations of this study include absence of the sample analysis and relatively small number of collected data in comparison to the scale of both games' communities. Also, the paper dealt with two titles simultaneously. However, such a comparative analysis allowed to view both games' communities and what they had in common.

For any future research on the topic of inter-player communication it is advised to pay attention to not only what was said and how it was said but to the identity of the one who said what was said as well. The findings of the present study are in line with the previous research on videogames as "third places" (Steinkuehler and Williams 2006a), in that the interactions found within the analyzed games reflect specific social activities found outside of game worlds with the producers of the interactions manifesting multiple social identities simultaneously. In terms of Computer-Mediated Communications research, this paper may be of value as a reference point in a comparative diachronic analysis of chat interactions in the reviewed games with the aim to detect any developing trends in the ever-changing nature of online interactions. In addition, future research may also investigate what role does a player's age have in shaping communication patterns within a game and to what extent MMO games can be considered as part of a global MMO Discourse.



## References

- 'Spezzy', (2021), "How many people play League of Legends? – UPDATED 2021." *Leaguefeed*. Accessed June 9, 2021. <https://leaguefeed.net/did-you-know-total-league-of-legends-player-count-updated/>.
- Aburahmah, L. H., AlRawi, H., Izz, Y., Syed, L. (2016), "Online Social Gaming and Social Networking Sites." *Procedia Computer Science*. 82: 72-79.
- Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C., Taylor, TL. (2012), *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 264.
- Brown, A. (2015), "Awkward. The importance of reflexivity in using ethnographic methods." In *Game Research Methods. An Overview*, Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 77-92.
- Carvalho, L. P., Cappelli, C. (2018), "Sexism and League of Legends: NFR aesthetic analyses." *Conference Paper -- Escola Regional de Sistemas de Informação do Rio de Janeiro*.
- Chen, K., Shen, K., Ma, M. (2012), "The functional and usable appeal of Facebook SNS games." *Internet Research*. 22, no. 4: 467-481.
- Colombo, S. (2021), "Computer-Mediated Communication as Situated Phenomenon in Massive Multiplayer Online Servers: A Minecraft-based investigation." MA thesis, Umeå University.
- Dobrilova, T. (2021), "How Much Is the Gaming Industry Worth in 2021? [+25 Powerful Stats]." *Tech Jury*. Accessed June 9, 2021. <https://techjury.net/blog/gaming-industry-worth/#gref/>.
- Dresner, E., Herring, S. C. (2010), "Functions of the Non-Verbal in CMC: Emoticons and Illocutionary Force." *Communication Theory*. 20, no. 3: 249-268.
- Ducheneaut, N., Moore, R. J. (2004), "The social side of gaming: a study of interaction patterns in a massively multiplayer online game", *Conference Paper -- 2004 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*.

- Ellison, N. B., Boyd, D. M. (2007), "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." *Journal of Computer-Mediated-Communication*. 13, no. 1: 210-230.
- Ellison, N. B., Boyd, D. M. (2013), "Sociality through Social Network Sites." In *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*, edited by Dutton, W. H., 151-72. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gee, J. P. (2014), *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, 4th ed, London: Routledge.
- Hepdinçler, T. (2022), "The Games on Exhibition: Videogames as Contemporary Art." In *Games and Narrative: Theory and Practice*, edited by Barbaros Bostan, 135-142. Cham: Springer.
- Jones, R. (2004), "The problem of context in computer mediated communication." In *Discourse and technology: Multimodal discourse analysis*, edited by P. LeVine and R. Scollon. 20-33. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Kaufmann, D. (2021), "Personality Type and Motivation to Play MMO Games." *Journal of Scholarly Engagement*. 4, no. 1: 96-118.
- Khairunisa, A. A. (2020), "Computer-Mediated Communication: Online Gaming Communication Culture, Proceedings of the 2nd Jogjakarta Communication Conference (JCC 2020)." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. 459: 172-176.
- Kramer, B. (2013), "I'm by default polite – Politeness and Positioning in MMORPGs." *Discourse and Interaction*. Jan 6<sup>th</sup>: 41-53.
- Leech, G. N., Short, M. H. (1981), *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. London: Longman, 393.
- Mamerow, M. (2021), "Gaming Industry vs. Other Entertainment Industries (2021)." *Raise Your Skillz*. Accessed June 9, 2021. <https://raiseyourskillz.com/gaming-industry-vs-other-entertainment-industries-2021/>.
- Martin, J. R., Matthiessen, C. M. I. M., & Painter, C. (1997), *Working with functional grammar*. London: Arnold.

- Merchant, G. (2015), "Virtual worlds and online videogames for children and young people: Promises and challenges." In *Handbook of Research on the Societal Impact of Digital Media*, 291-316. IGI Global.
- Oldenburg, R. (1999), *The Great Good Place: Cafe's, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through The Day*. New York: Marlowe & Company.
- Patiniotis, K. (2018), "Enhancing Collaborative STEM Learning through Multiplayer Online Videogames." *Conference Paper -- Foundations of Digital Games 2018*. Ionian University Department of Informatics.
- Peckham, M. (2013), "The Inexorable Decline of World of Warcraft." *TIME*. Accessed June 9, 2021. <https://techland.time.com/2013/05/09/the-inexorable-decline-of-world-of-warcraft/>.
- Peterson, M. (2014), "Learner interaction in a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG): A sociocultural discourse analysis." *ReCALL*. 24: 361-380.
- Ramler, I., Lee, C., Strong, S. (2021), "Investigating Match Performance Differences between Genders of League of Legends Champions." *Conference Paper -- FDG'21: The 16th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games 2021*.
- Reitman, J. G. (2018), "Distributed Cognition and Temporal Knowledge in League of Legends." *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations*. 10, no. 1: 23-41.
- Rossi, L. (2009) "Playing Your Network: Gaming in Social Network Sites, SSRN Electronic Journal." *Conference Paper -- Digra Conference Proceedings*.
- Rough, B. (2016), "Are Videogames Art?" PhD diss., University of Maryland. <https://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/18776>.
- Rusaw, E. (2011), "Language and social interaction in the virtual space of World of Warcraft." *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences: Illinois Working Papers*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 66-88.

- Sarkar, S. (2014), "Blizzard reaches 100M lifetime World of Warcraft accounts, *Polygon*, 28 January." Accessed 9 June 2021. <https://www.polygon.com/2014/1/28/5354856/world-of-warcraft-100m-accounts-lifetime/>.
- Schleef, E. (2014), "Written surveys and questionnaires in sociolinguistics." In *Research Methods in Sociolinguistics*, edited by Janet Holmes and Kirk Hazen, 42-57. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Sergeyeva, O., Tsareva, A., Zinoveva, N., Konovova, O. (2018), "Social Skills Amongst MMORPG-Gamers: Empirical Study." *SHS Web of Conferences*. 50: 1-5.
- Song, S., Kim, M., Song, D. H. (2009), "The Cognitive Processing Mechanism for the Players' Rule in MMO Game." *Conference Paper -- 2008 IEEE/WIC/ACM International Conference on Web Intelligence and Intelligent Agent Technology*.
- Statista, (2016), "World of Warcraft estimated subscribers from 2015 to 2030." Accessed June 9, 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/276601/number-of-world-of-warcraft-subscribers-by-quarter/>.
- Steinkuehler, C. (2006b), "Massively Multiplayer Online Video Gaming as Participation in a Discourse." *Mind, Culture, and Activity*. 13, no. 1: 38-52.
- Steinkuehler, C. (2007), "Massively Multiplayer Online Gaming as a Constellation of Literacy Practices." *E-Learning*. 4, no. 3: 297-318.
- Steinkuehler, C. (2012), "The mismeasure of boys: Reading and online videogames." In *Gamebased Learning. Clash of realities 2012*, edited by Winfred Kaminski und Martin Lorber, 33-50. München: Kessler Druck + Medien, Bobingen.
- Steinkuehler, C., Williams, D. (2006a), "Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as "Third Places"." *Journal of Computer-Mediated-Communication*. 11: 885-909.
- Sundén, J. (2012), "Desires at play: On closeness and epistemological uncertainty." *Games and Culture*. 7, no. 2: 164-184.
- Swoboda, B. (2015), "GTFO!! - Positioning as interaction strategy in MMORPG communication." *Comunicação e Sociedade*. 27: 151-166.

- Thorne, S. L., Black, R. W. (2007), "Language and Literacy development in Computer-Mediated Contexts and communities." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. 27: 133-160.
- Thorne, S. L., Fischer, I., Lu. X. (2012), "The Semiotic Ecology and Linguistic Complexity of an Online Game World." *ReCALL*. 24, no. 3: 279-301.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Touchstone.
- Villapaz, L. (2013), "'GTA 5' Costs \$265 Million To Develop And Market, Making It The Most Expensive Video Game Ever Produced: Report." *International Business Times*, IBT Media. Accessed June 9, 2021. <https://www.ibtimes.com/gta-5-costs-265-million-develop-market-making-it-most-expensive-video-game-ever-produced-report/>.
- Williams, C. (2021), "Gaming: Study reveals how much of the global population now plays video games." *Give Me Sport*. Accessed June 9, 2021. <https://www.givemesport.com/1653435-gaming-study-reveals-how-much-of-the-global-population-now-plays-video-games/>.
- Wright, T., Boria, E., Breidenbach, P. (2002), "Creative Player Actions in FPS Online Video Games. Playing Counter-Strike." *The International Journal Of Computer Game Research*, 2, no. 2: 1-12.

## Appendix 1: *League of Legends* questionnaire form

# Interactions in League of Legends

Dear participant,

The following survey is conducted as part of an MA thesis project that aims at eliciting Discourses of MMOs on the example of League of Legends.

The research is conducted by Maksim Bogdanov, MA student of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), Lithuania, and Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (JGU), Germany, under the supervision of Dr. Aurelija Tamošiūnaitė.

The purpose of this survey is to gather data on how the players of League of Legends use particular elements (such as, game client chat, in-game chat, and others) and functions of the game.

Please, take your time and fill in the questionnaire fully and honestly. The survey takes approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Your participation is highly appreciated and very important for the success of the project.

Your responses will be treated with absolute confidentiality and will not be passed on to third parties. You will remain fully anonymous and information identifying you will not be disclosed under any circumstances. The data obtained via the survey will be used for research purposes only and will be processed according to ethical standards.

Thank you for your time and help!

Maksim Bogdanov.

Contact details:

Maksim Bogdanov (email: [maksim.bogdanov@vdu.lt](mailto:maksim.bogdanov@vdu.lt))

Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

---

\*Required

Background Information

1. What region do you play from? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Brazil
- Europe Nordic & East Europe
- Europe West
- Latin America North
- Latin America South
- North America
- Oceania
- Russia
- Turkey
- Japan
- Republic of Korea
- Southeast Asia (servers run by Garena)
- China (servers run by Tencent)

2. Do you play in the same region you live in? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 5
- No Skip to question 4



3. Do you play in a set team of 5 people? \*

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Skip to question 5

Playing on a different server

4. Why did you choose to play on a different server? (More than one answer is possible) \*



Tick all that apply.

Better internet connection (lower ping)

Less toxic community

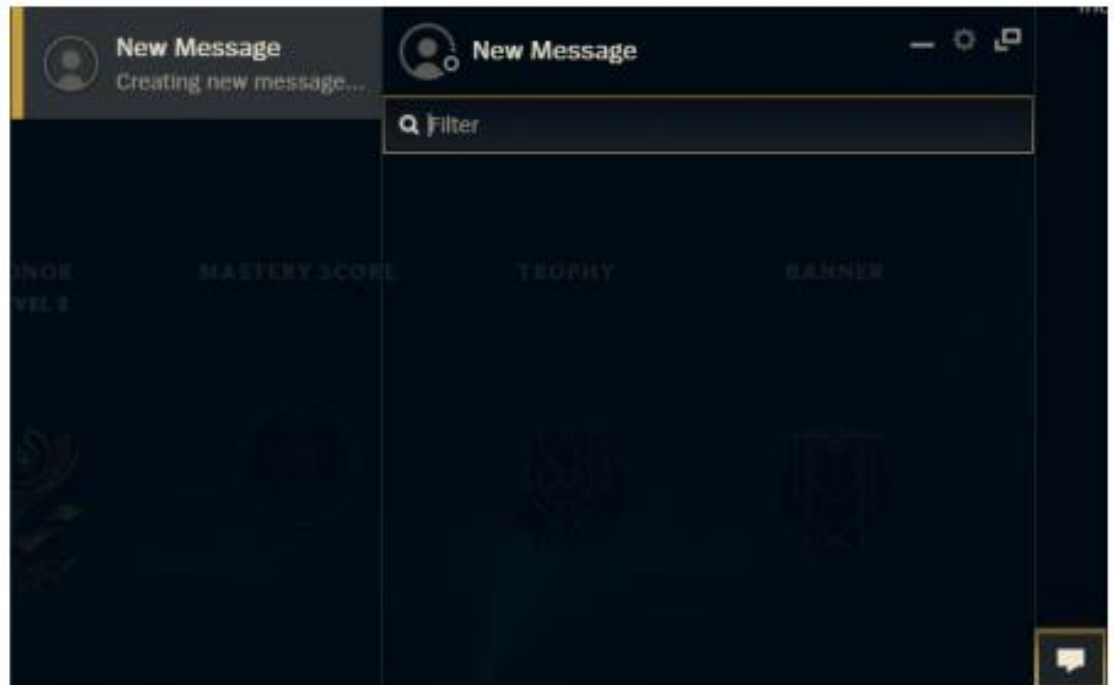
I have friends there (they have worse internet connection/cannot migrate/I moved but still want to play with them/etc.)

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

Game Client Chat



5. Do you use the game client chat (in the main menu) to talk to other people? \*

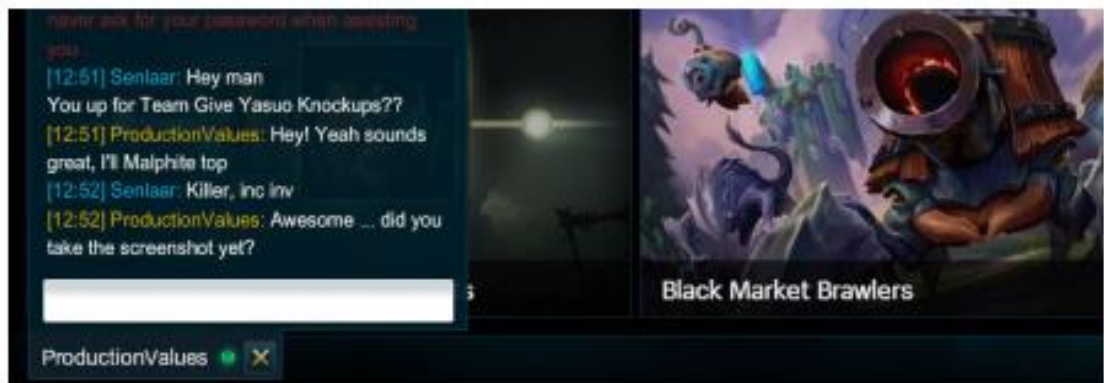


Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No Skip to question 12

Skip to question 12

Game Client Chat



6. How often would you say you use it? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Almost never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Every time I play

7. What chat channels do you use or have ever used in the past? (More than one answer is possible) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Public
- Private
- Group
- Club
- Custom

8. What chat channels are you most active in? (More than one answer is possible) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Public
- Private
- Group
- Club
- Custom

9. With whom do you interact in chat (choose all that apply)? \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Strangers
- Acquaintances (i.e. friends of friends, members of your set team, etc.)
- Friends

10. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely are you to JOIN an ongoing conversation in the chat? \*

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely

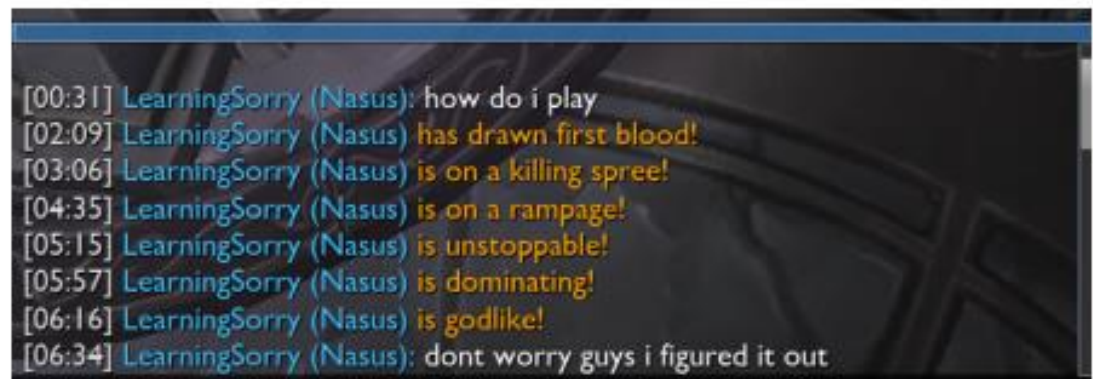
11. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely are you to START a new conversation in the chat? \*

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely

### In-Game Chat

12. Do you use the in-game chat (during matches) to communicate with your team? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Yes  
 No Skip to question 21

Skip to question 21

### In-Game Chat



13. How often would you say you use it? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Almost never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Every time I play

14. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely is it that you will talk with YOUR team?

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely

15. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely is it that you will talk with the ENEMY team?

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely

16. How often do you encounter people swearing in the in-game chat during matches? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

17. How often does YOUR team swear? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

18. How often does the ENEMY team swear? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

19. How likely is it that swearing will be addressed to the members of the SAME team? (Example: "Our Lee Sin is a !@#\$" in the team or /all channel)

Mark only one oval.

1      2      3      4      5

---

Very unlikely                  Extremely likely

20. How likely is it that swearing will be addressed to the members of the ENEMY team? (Example: "Your Rengar is a %^&\*") in the /all channel)

Mark only one oval.

1      2      3      4      5

---

Very unlikely                  Extremely likely

## Profile



21. How often do you tend to look at YOUR OWN player profile? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very frequently

22. How often do you tend to look at SOMEONE ELSE'S player profile? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very frequently

23. How important is profile customization to you? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely important

24. If you were tasked to find someone for your PARTY (top/mid/bot/jungle), how likely is it that their profile would affect your decision? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely



25. If you were tasked to find someone for your SET TEAM, how likely is it that their profile would affect your decision? \*

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely

To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements

26. Player profiles are used to... \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Slightly agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
...show off	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...help players track their progress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...help people playing in groups find/recruit other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...incentivize players to actually play the game and invest in their overall progression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



27. If you have any other ideas on what player profile can be used for, you can express them here. (Optional)

---

---

---

---

---

### Friend List

28. How often do you use the in-game friend list? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Very Frequently
- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Very Rarely
- Never [Skip to question 34](#)

[Skip to question 34](#)

### Friend List



29. Approximately, how many people have you added to your friend list in the past month?

*Mark only one oval.*

- None
- ~1-2
- ~5
- ~10
- ~20
- ~50 or more

30. Do you keep in touch (in-game) with everyone in your friend list? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- Only with some people
- No

31. Have you ever contacted people from your friend list ONLINE (outside of the game)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

32. Have you ever contacted people from your friend list IN PERSON outside of the game? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

33. How likely would you play other MMOs or co-op games with the people you became friends with in League of Legends? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely

#### Other Means of Communication

34. Do you use other ways (software) to talk/chat with other players online while playing LoL? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No      *Skip to question 39*

*Skip to question 39*

Other Means of Communication



35. What other ways have you used? (Choose all that apply) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Social Networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- Messengers (Whatsapp, Telegram, etc.)
- Dedicated Software (Discord, TeamSpeak, Skype, etc.)

36. Why did you choose to use them? (Choose all that apply) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Better options for chatting
- Possibility to actually talk to my friends
- My friends use it and so do I

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

37. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely it is that you would prefer to use TEXT chat over VOICE chat? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not likely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely

38. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely it is that you would prefer to use VOICE chat over TEXT chat? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not likely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely

Optional  
Information

Thank you for your time and patience. We are almost finished. This section is optional and you can skip it at the bottom of the page.

39. To which gender identity do you most identify?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Male
- Female
- Transgender male
- Transgender female
- Gender variant/Non-conforming
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

40. What is your age?

*Mark only one oval.*

Under 16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47



- 48
- 49
- 50
- Above 50

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire!

If you have any questions about the survey or the research in general feel free to contact me (i.e. Maksim Bogdanov) by email [maksim.bogdanov@vdu.lt](mailto:maksim.bogdanov@vdu.lt)

If you are interested in the survey results, please contact me personally.

All the information you provided when answering the survey will remain fully anonymous and will not be disclosed under any circumstances.

Once you are finished, please, press the "Send" button below.





## Appendix 2: *World of Warcraft* questionnaire form

# Interactions in World of Warcraft

Dear participant,

The following survey is conducted as part of an MA thesis project that aims at eliciting Discourses of MMOs on the example of World of Warcraft.

The research is conducted by Maksim Bogdanov, MA student of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), Lithuania, and Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (JGU), Germany, under the supervision of Dr. Aurelija Tamošiūnaitė.

The purpose of this survey is to gather data on how the players of World of Warcraft use particular elements (such as, game client chat, in-game chat, and others) and functions of the game.

Please, take your time and fill in the questionnaire fully and honestly. The survey takes approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Your participation is highly appreciated and very important for the success of the project.

Your responses will be treated with absolute confidentiality and will not be passed on to third parties. You will remain fully anonymous and information identifying you will not be disclosed under any circumstances. The data obtained via the survey will be used for research purposes only and will be processed according to ethical standards.

Thank you for your time and help!

Maksim Bogdanov.

Contact details:

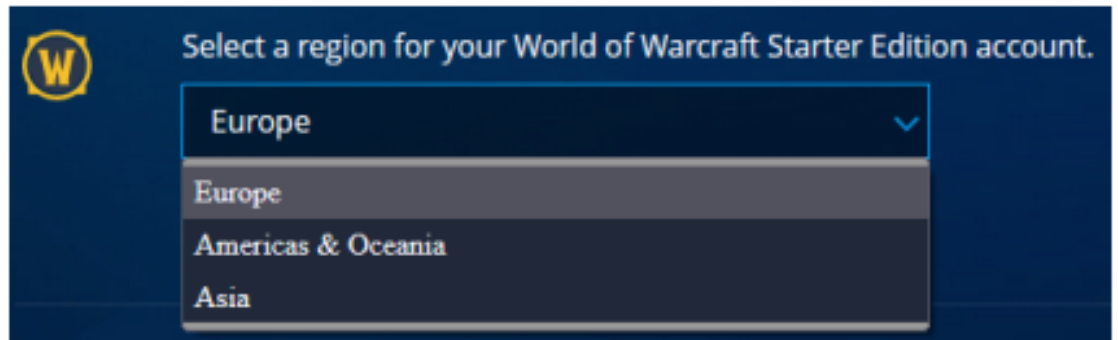
Maksim Bogdanov (email: [maksim.bogdanov@vdu.lt](mailto:maksim.bogdanov@vdu.lt))  
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

---

\*Required

Background Information

1. Which region do you play from? \*



Select a region for your World of Warcraft Starter Edition account.

Europe

Europe

Americas & Oceania

Asia

*Mark only one oval.*

- Europe
- Americas & Oceania
- Asia

2. Do you play in the same region you live in? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes    *Skip to question 6*
- No    *Skip to question 5*

3. What type of a realm/server do you play on? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Normal
- PvP
- RP

4. Are you currently a member of a guild? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

[Skip to question 6](#)

Playing in a different region



5. Why did you choose to play in a different region? (More than one answer is possible) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Better internet connection (lower ping)
- Less toxic community
- I have friends there (they have worse internet connection/cannot migrate/I moved but still want to play with them/etc.)

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

Chat

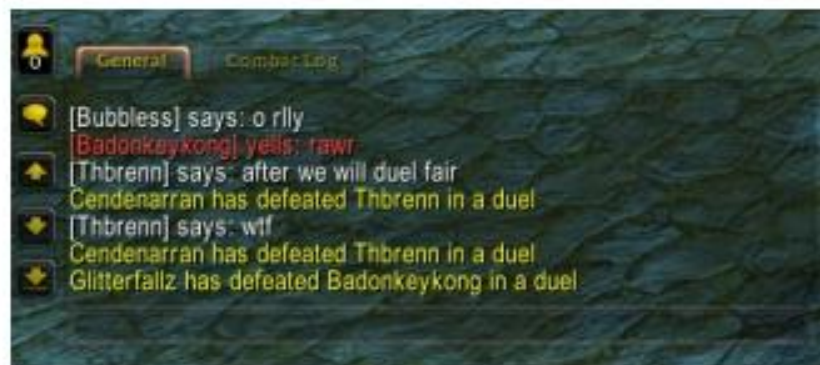
6. Do you use the in-game chat to talk with other people? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No Skip to question 13

Chat



7. How often would you say you use it? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Almost never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Every time I play

8. What chat channels have you ever used? (More than one answer is possible) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Local
- Global
- Private
- Group/party
- LFG
- Raid
- Trade
- Guild
- Local defense
- Custom

9. What chat channels are you most active in? (More than one answer is possible) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Local
- Global
- Private
- Group/party
- LFG
- Raid
- Trade
- Guild
- Local defense
- Custom



10. Whom do you interact with in chat (choose all that apply)? \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Strangers
- Acquaintances (i.e. friends of friends, members of your guild, etc.)
- Friends

11. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely are you to JOIN an ongoing conversation in the chat? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely

12. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely are you to START a new conversation in the chat? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely

Mail

13. How often do you use the in-game mail service? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Very Frequently
- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Very rarely
- Never *Skip to question 17*

#### Mail

14. What do you use the in-game mail service for? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Send textual mail to other PCs (Player Characters)
- Send items
- Both



15. How likely it is that you will use MAIL service to communicate with other people in-game? \*

Mark only one oval.

1      2      3      4      5

---

Very unlikely                  Very likely

16. How likely it is that you will use CHAT to communicate with other people in-game? \*

Mark only one oval.

1      2      3      4      5

---

Very unlikely                  Very likely

## Profile



17. How often do you tend to look at YOUR OWN character profile? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very frequently

18. How often do you tend to look at SOMEONE ELSE'S character profile? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very frequently

19. How important is profile customization (i.e. stats, transmog, achievements, etc.) to you? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely important

20. If you had to recruit someone for a DUNGEON, how likely is it that their profile would affect your decision? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely



23. Character profiles are used to... \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Slightly agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
...show off	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...help players track their progress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...help people playing in groups find/recruit other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...incentivize players to actually play the game and invest in their overall progression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. If you have any other ideas on what player profile can be used for, you can express them here. (Optional)

---

---

---

---

---

Friend List

25. How often do you use the in-game friend list? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Very Frequently
- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Very Rarely
- Never    *Skip to question 31*

*Skip to question 31*

Friend List



26. Approximately, how many people have you added to your friend list in the past month?

*Mark only one oval.*

- None
- ~1-2
- ~5
- ~10
- ~20
- ~50 or more

27. Do you keep in touch (in-game) with everyone in your friend list? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- Only with some people
- No

28. Have you ever contacted people from your friend list ONLINE (outside of the game)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No

29. Have you ever contacted people from your friend list IN PERSON outside of the game? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No

30. How likely would you play other MMOs or co-op games with the people you became friends with in World of Warcraft? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely

Other Means of Communication



31. Do you use other ways (software) to talk/chat with other players online while playing WoW? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No    *Skip to question 36*

*Skip to question 36*

Other Means of Communication





32. What other ways have you used? (Choose all that apply) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Social Networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- Messengers (Whatsapp, Telegram, etc.)
- Dedicated Software (Discord, TeamSpeak, Skype, etc.)

33. Why did you choose to use them? (Choose all that apply) \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Better options for chatting
- Possibility to actually talk to my friends
- My friends use it and so do I

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

34. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely it is that you would prefer to use TEXT chat over VOICE chat? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not likely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely

35. On the scale from 1 to 5, how likely it is that you would prefer to use VOICE chat over TEXT chat? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not likely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely

**Optional  
Information**

Thank you for your time and patience. We are almost finished. This section is optional and you can skip it at the bottom of the page.

36. To which gender identity do you most identify?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Male
- Female
- Transgender male
- Transgender female
- Gender variant/Non-conforming
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

37. What is your age?

*Mark only one oval.*

Under 16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

- 48
- 49
- 50
- Above 50

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire!

If you have any questions about the survey or the research in general feel free to contact me (i.e. Maksim Bogdanov) by email [maksim.bogdanov@wdu.lt](mailto:maksim.bogdanov@wdu.lt)

If you are interested in the survey results, please contact me personally.

All the information you provided when answering the survey will remain fully anonymous and will not be disclosed under any circumstances.

Once you are finished, please, press the "Send" button below.

