Morpho-semantic processes in the English language used in a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game

A case study of neologisms in Warhammer Online

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Abstract

The language used in Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (or MMORPGs) is a form of computer-mediate communication. It consists of elements from both written and spoken language, but it is a highly abbreviated and innovative form of written language. This study focuses on the English language used in a MMORPG called *Warhammer Online*. The aim of this study is to identify abbreviations, interpret their meanings and to analyze the word formation processes and semantic changes that are involved in new words. The method used in this study is a qualitative case study of the English language in a MMORPG from a synchronic point of view. The secondary sources used in this study include previous works on morphology and semantics. The material used is based on logs acquired from the game *Warhammer Online* as a subscribed player. The results presented in this study show new and unique words created by players in Warhammer Online, along with other semantic changes that have taken place. It is concluded that the English written language has not seen such a major change in its entirety before, within one community.

**Keywords**: abbreviation, acronym, computer-mediated communication, MMORPG, netspeak, semantics, word formation process.
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1. Introduction

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (henceforth MMORPG) are a new phenomenon for the 21st century. It is uncertain when the first true MMORPG was created (as the term Massive is open for discussion) but generally it is thought that they were truly developed during the 1990’s.¹ MMORPGs are games that allow a massive number of players to interact in a virtual world. As all role-playing games, Warhammer Online allows players to assume a fictional character that they control and customize while playing the game. The goal of the game is to level one’s character (by fighting and doing quests) and to continually find better equipment. The world in which the players interact continues to live on even though one player is not present, while others are. Today approximately 16 million people are active subscribers to various MMORPGs², many of whom use English to communicate. Almost all of these games are created and developed in English as the main language, thus the majority of words and names within these games have been created in English.

For practical reasons, MMORPG-players connect to different servers that are located in different countries in order to maximize bandwidth. In English speaking countries, such as the USA where most players are native English speakers, this causes no problems. However, in Europe there are various servers in different countries where players use their respective languages, mainly French, German and Spanish. Players choose what “main” language they want to use and as such they can choose different servers which use different languages (of course no one can forbid a Spanish player to use Spanish on a server where the main language is English). Many European MMORPG players speak English, at least to a certain level of proficiency, and as such communication on English servers takes place in English, even though players come from different countries. Communication among game players usually takes the form of typed messages in various text forms and via different chat-channels, such as closed conversation between two players only, or a chat open for everyone to see in a particular area. Most frequently, these messages appear in a small chat-window on the screen. As new technology develops there are now ways for players to communicate with each other via microphones, thus making audio communication easier when playing. However, this type of communication will not be examined in this study.

As players are occupied by in-game and out-game activities (in-game meaning everything that is related to within the game or as part of the game, out-game is everything else)

¹ See: http://www.ge-eu.com/games.html
² http://www.mmogchart.com/Chart1.html
simultaneously, they are restricted when it comes to chatting by typing on a keyboard. An example of this would be when moving one’s character, either by pressing the key ‘W’ on the keyboard (the universal key in MMORPGs to move forward) or pressing both the left and the right button on the mouse. Either way one hand is occupied moving one’s character, therefore trying to chat simultaneously when moving by only using one hand becomes very difficult. As a result of this restriction, communication had to become more efficient to allow players freer hands. In this type of “efficient written communication” players use different abbreviations such as *acronyms* and *clippings* (these terms will be defined in the theoretical background section 3). To avoid the risk of repeating these examples many times in the study these will be henceforward called *abbreviations* as a general summary for all kinds of shortened words. When it comes to abbreviations, “MMORPG-language” goes beyond Internet chatting and other types of technological language use (e.g. text messaging on cell phones) as the game environment is usually more stressful and player’s hands are more restricted than they usually are when typing on a computer. To date little research has been done on the topic of language usage in MMORPGs and therefore it is an interesting field to study.

### 1.1 Aim & research questions

The aim of this study is to identify neologisms, interpret their meanings and to analyze the word formation processes and semantic changes of new English words that are used in *Warhammer Online*. In order to achieve this aim the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What neologisms are used by players in the world of *Warhammer Online*? What do these mean within the game?
2. What type of word formation processes are involved in creating these types of abbreviations?
3. What are the functions of these abbreviations?
4. Are there any kinds of semantic changes occurring in already existing words? If so, how are they used in *Warhammer Online*?

There are numerous terms that have been imported from previous MMORPGs and other types of online games, such as MUDs (Multi User Dungeons, see section 3), which are now used in *Warhammer Online*. As such, the scope of this study is not to track where the abbreviations
come from but rather to study, from a synchronic point of view, meaning “the study of phenomena […] of events of a particular time, without reference to their historical context”.

2. Material & Method

2.1 Material

The primary data have been collected from logs from *Warhammer Online* that are automatically stored on the players’ computers while playing the game. The total number of words stored in the logs, which are data for this study, are approximately 186,000. The reason why chat logs were chosen as data for this study is simply because *Warhammer Online* is a new game and thus no previous studies about the use of the English language in the game were or are available at the moment. As Ducheneaut (2006:1) writes:

…most of the current online gaming research tends to be based on self-reports obtained from the players using interviews [24], surveys [17], or ethnographic observations [3, 21]. Except for [6], no studies are based on data obtained from the games themselves.

The logs have been recorded since the official opening of the game (between 15 August 2008 and 2 September 2008) and therefore the data cannot be reproduced with the same results as new logs from a newly registered player would be today. This is because the language used by players at the time of the official opening differs very much from how the English language is used today within the game, in that players were more conscious of writing correct English in the beginning. This most likely occurred because players were being precautious in this new environment and therefore kept a more formal language and a more correct way of writing. This may be because the game was new and as such there were no established social groups or any jargon present within the game. These were later created by players automatically through interactions and thus new ways of writing in English became apparent.

The secondary sources for this study mainly include printed literature on word formation processes, abbreviations, computer-mediated communication (CMC i.e. any communication taking place between two networked computers) and are presented in the theoretical background in section 3. In order to find definitions of new words and acronyms regarding netspeak [www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com), [http://foldoc.org/](http://foldoc.org/) and [www.wowwiki.com](http://www.wowwiki.com)

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3 www.thefreedictionary.com/synchronic
have been used since standard English dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not yet contain these.

### 2.2 Method

The collection and analysis of data for this study has been done from a qualitative point of view. In almost all areas where there has been little research done, a qualitative method is preferred and since little research has been done on the topic of language change in MMORPGs this "merits a qualitative approach" (Creswell 2002:22). The strength of using logs as the basis for this study is that the researcher gets a first hand experience of the data collected and thus gets a deeper understanding for it. The findings have then been validated by the researcher, following a qualitative approach.

As mentioned above there are different servers, using different languages on each particular server. The logs that have been used come from playing on an English server called “Karak-Azgal” (fictitious name). This does not mean that only English players are present on the server, but that there are players from many other European countries using English to communicate. These logs were collected as a player, partly by *lurking* (i.e. observing conversations but not participating in them) and partly by interacting with other players. However, none of my own lines have been included in this study. This might have affected the results as some conversations are taken from interactions where the researcher adapted his language-style to other players’ type of writing; either very correct spelling English or “typical” MMORPG-language (i.e. abbreviated forms and slang words). All words found in the logs by the researcher that were new, abbreviated or in some way not part of formal written English were first collected and roughly categorized according to the semantic or morphological category they belonged to. After the initial structuring, words or sentences that were previously well-known to the researcher and generally common among different Internet users (such as *afk, lol, spam*) have been discarded as these are not in any way “new” and thus do not follow the aim of this study. Finally, approximately 60 sentences and 80 words, that are uncommon outside the context of MMORPGs, have been collected and analyzed for this study.

### 2.3 Setting in Warhammer Online

There are many ways of interacting with other players within Warhammer online, but they are not all written forms. For instance, a player may be part of a *party* of other players, in which they automatically create a chat-channel exclusively for the party-members only. Everything
that a party-member writes on this channel will appear on all the other party-member’s screens as well. At the same time, players may be part of a guild. Guilds are types of organisations created by players that have numerous benefits within the game, but most importantly a player has a chat-channel for the guild as well. One player may be part of a party, which has its own private chat-channel, and the player has (at the same time) a channel open for the guild that the other party-members cannot see (if they do not happen to be part of the same guild). Players can also communicate privately with one another across the virtual world by typing tell [player-name] which directly sends a private message to the other player. There is also a “standard” say command which allows anyone to “hear” what is being said in the same “room”. Room here refers to the immediate area that you can physically see on your computer screen. There are also hundreds of different “emotions” that the characters can express, such as crying, dancing, waving, shrugging etc. These help to emphasize what is being said with the say command, as a form of body language, but these emotions can only be seen “physically” by other players in the same room. To compensate for this or to add character to one’s chat-messages, players sometimes use the same commands (which would make their character emote) in their messages but put them in * asterisks. An example of this could be “That was fun! *smile*”

All these messages that are being sent back and forth are all shown on one messagescreen (except for the say command which also shows a chat bubble above the character which has spoken). Players distinguish the different messages by changing colours on the different channels. For instance all messages that are sent on the guild channel will be in orange and all the party messages will be in blue, to easily see what is being said on each channel. Not only are players often fighting, but at the same time they might be having three or four different conversation as well, or as much “conversation” as is allowed when one is in a fight.
This is the typical camera view from which a player sees the game on his/her computer screen. The picture has been marked out with squares and different numbers to explain what is of interest for this study.

1. This is the character that the player controls. In the top left is a miniature picture of the character with the character’s name “Littleboy” displayed. The iconic representation of the character is usually known as an *avatar* in the context of MMORPGs.²

2. This is another player called “Trask”. As shown in #4 and #5 this Trask can see both the chat-bubble (#4) that appears on Littleboy’s screen and the message shown in the message-screen (#5).

3. This is a NPC (Non Player Character also known as a *mob*) which is a pre-programmed character controlled by the computer, which one can interact with (i.e. clickable) but this character cannot in any way communicate other than delivering one-way messages to players.

4. This is what is displayed when using the command *say* as explained earlier. All other players who can see Littleboy will be able to read this chat-bubble.

5. The message-screen shows dialogues and other interactions that are of importance to the player. This is where all chat channels are displayed such as *party* or *region*.

² See: (http://www.wowwiki.com/Avatar#Other_definitions).
channel. In this picture you can see people talking on the [1:Region] channel, which is open for anyone in the area. This is the single most important communication-tool in the game when writing to one another. However, it is a rather small window compared to the rest of the screen, which indirectly shows that written communication is not the most important way of communicating.

#6. These are the names of those who are part of Littleboys warband (a collection of parties). These are other characters and in this case, they would not be able to see Littleboys message “Fear Me” as they are not in the same “room” as he is. As mentioned above, the warband (parties) has its own private chat-channel that all members can see, but, for instance, the other player, Trask (#2), is not able to see the channel even though he is standing close to Littleboy, as he is not part of the warband.

3. Theoretical Background

As Shortis (2001:5) observed, technological development lead to new possible ways of communicating, not least in written language. Without a doubt MMORPGs are a new breeding ground for a different type of social interaction and for new words to be coined and established. MMORPGs are one of the numerous new technological advancements that have been created in the last couple of decades. With it, players bring already acquired ways of writing (i.e. chat-language) and blend it with new forms that arise from within the game itself. There are numerous reasons why written language during chatting on the Internet, is different from both spoken language and written language in books. The most profound difference is that netspeak is a blend of both casual spoken- and standard written language. As the name suggests netspeak deals with the way people “speak” on the Internet, which includes elements of both written and spoken language.

The secondary sources for this study include literature from books mainly from Crystal (2005) together with Greenbaum (1996), Yule (2004) and Ljung (2003) which were used in order to define linguistic terms such as acronyms or initialism. Furthermore Yule (2004) and Crystal (2006) were used to study the field of netspeak, together with Shortis (2001) (netspeak is also a part of CMC). Furthermore, several articles on language used in online-gaming have been consulted. However, no articles were found that dealt specifically with the topic of morphology, semantic change or neologisms (new word or expression)\(^5\) used in MMORPGs. A MMORPG consists of a virtual world which is part of netspeak, but as we will see in the

upcoming section, certain elements of netspeak presented by Crystal (2006) conflict with the way communication works within MMORPGs.

Crystal (2006:45,47) notes that the distinctions between spoken and written language criteria applied to netspeak in virtual worlds (i.e. online-games). However, Crystal’s assumptions of virtual- worlds were mainly based on studies of MUDs (Multi-User Dungeon which are strictly text-based games that is, they have no actual graphics in them) which did in fact lay the foundation for how words started to be abbreviated in online games, but much like Latin, it is now a dead language. Also the MUDs failed to create any form of direct face-to-face communication. In MMORPGs players are represented by their characters (in other contexts also known as avatars) that are visible for all players. These characters can perform virtual actions such as laughing, nodding or even playing a musical instrument. Emotions are no longer only shown by a written text message (known as emotes) as in the following example *laugh*. Crystal (2006:45, 47) lists spoken and written language criteria that applied to netspeak, but some of these conflicts with the characteristic features of MMORPGs.

In the following section (Crystal 2006) criteria for netspeak are presented and later the characteristics of MMORPGs are presented (with invented examples). Crystal lists numerous criteria for spoken language applied to Netspeak and virtual worlds. He writes (2006:28-29, 45) that face-to-face, such as facial expressions and gestures or deictic expressions (such as time and space related), are not possible in virtual worlds. However, even though it is somewhat restricted, MMORPGs allow for certain emotions to take place. Shrugging, crying, or pointing is possible in a MMORPG even if it is not a perfect resemblance of the “real” world. Crystal (2006:29, 45) also writes that immediately revisable utterances (such as starting again or adding qualifications) while another person is listening are not possible in virtual worlds. It is different in virtual worlds, but immediate changes are possible by using corrections marked by asterisks. For instance uttering a word wrongly can be resembled to misspelling. In a conversation one might say “I mean...” and in chat one might use asterisk corrections (explained in section 4.3). Crystal (2006:29, 45) says that prosodically rich nuances of intonation, contrast of loudness, tempo, rhythm, pause cannot be written down with much efficiency in virtual worlds: Although written language might be restricted, consider how the following examples “sound” when read:

*Sound Symbolism:* Nooooo waaaay! Vs No way

*Loudness:* NO WAY!!!!! Vs No way
There are also written language criteria applied to virtual worlds in netspeak. Crystal (2006:28-29, 47) writes that lack of visual contact means that participants cannot rely on context to make their meaning clear. Virtual worlds are decontextualized with some adaptation. But since an action in the game is physically visible for players, there is no doubt that MMORPGs are contextualized. For example a character might make a silly dance that could result in laughter from other players, which makes contextualized meaning reliable. (Crystal 2006:29, 47) Argues that elaborately constructed sentences such as multiple instances of subordination in the same sentence or elaborately balanced syntactic patterns are not present in virtual worlds. Even though it is very rare that players write elaborate sentences while chatting with one another, there are many pre-programmed characters (non-player characters or NPC) and virtual books (which players can pick up and read) that have very elaborate dialogues and stories, often stretching across many pages.

The properties of netspeaking in virtual environments (according to Crystal) do not take MMORPG into consideration. On many points Crystal refers to “traditional” types of written netspeak used in e-mails, chatting and web pages. For instance “Lack of visual contact means that participants cannot rely on context to make their meaning clear” (Crystal 2006:28). This might be true for both written books and even online-chatting, where the writer and the reader cannot see each other. However, in a MMORPG players are highly visible to one another, which allow context-bound references to be used. As this study shows, many traditional assumptions about written language are questioned, as grammatical “rules” are being violated by players every day in order to be efficient.

3.1 Morphology

In this section morphological processes that bring about new words or neologisms are discussed. There are two major branches in morphology, word-formation and inflection Greenbaum (1996:470). Word-formation is the process of creating new words. Inflection deals with the grammatical form of words such as writers where –s is a suffix indicating a
plural form of the singular word *writer*. This study will only focus on word-formation processes.

**Acronyms**

This type of word formation process involves taking the initial letter of a set of words to form one single word, most often spelled with capital letters. A few examples of these are NATO, NASA and AIDS, which in spoken language are pronounced as one word, but in writing they still keep their capital spelling. Acronyms are a popular linguistic invention in all areas of technology, as they help to contract long, complicated words or names into one single, short form. Some of these acronyms have entered the English language and have become “standard” words without capital spelling, such as *laser* which actually means ‘light amplification by simulated emission of radiation’ but has now become so common that we have dropped the capital spelling (Yule 2004:68).

**Initialism**

These are words which are very similar to acronyms in that they are also created by taking the initial letters of a set of words and compounding them to one form. The major distinction between these is that while acronyms are uttered as one word (as mentioned above) initialism are items which are uttered as individual letters. Examples of these are CD, USA or VCR. Not all initialized words are formed by exclusively using the initial letters. Even though this is the most common form there are exceptions such as PhD, where ‘Ph’ are the initial letters of the word *Philosophy* (Crystal 2005:129).

**Clipping**

This is a process in which words that have been abbreviated from their original form [*gasoline*] to create a shorter form [*gas*]. This is commonly used in casual speech; in fact it is so common that many words that have been clipped have now become the standard: *gym, fax, ad, plane, phone, sitcom* etc. Even names can go through a clipping process where *Michael* becomes *Mike* or *Susane* becomes *Sue* (Yule 2004:66).

**Back-formation**

Back-formation, at first glance, resembles clipping in that the words are made shorter by usually dropping a suffix. However, while in clipping the word still belongs to the same word-class and carries the same meaning, in back-formation the word changes both meaning and
word-class. An example would be (to) *obsess* [verb] which has been back-formed from the noun *obsession*. As this example shows, the noun suffix *ion* has been dropped while the stem *obsess* has been kept in order to create another word-class, resulting in a different meaning from *obsession* (Ljung 2003:161).

**Conversion**
Conversion resembles back-formation in that a word changes word-class. However, there is a distinct difference. Whereas back-formation changes the form of a word, conversion does not. An example of conversion could be *bottle* [noun] (the action to put something into a bottle, for example wine) would be (to) *bottle* [verb] (Ljung 2003:111). As one can see there is no alteration of the form in *bottle*. However, this should not be confused with semantic change (see section 3.2), where the meaning of a word changes. Conversion is the creation of a new word which has derived from another word-class and carries no previous meaning other than the word it has been derived from.

**Derivation**
The process of adding affixes to already existing words in order to create a new word is known as *derivation*. In many cases, adding a *prefix* or a *suffix* to a word changes its word-class. In the example of *write* [verb] the suffix *–er* was added in order to create the word *writer* [noun] (Ljung 2003:81). Since *writer* has derived from the word *write* this process is known as derivation. There are other examples where derivation does not change the word-class of the original word. One does not need to go further than to the word *rewrite* which also carries the stem *write* (Ljung 2003:50). However, even though *rewrite* and *write* are both verbs they carry different meanings.

**Compound**
Words that have been compounded to form a single new word are known as *compounds*. These are usually created by taking two words of which the second word is known as the *head*, which determines the words word-class and general category. The first word is known as the *modifier* and explains what type of *head* it is (Ljung 2003:121). Examples of compounds are *laptop, screenplay, keystroke, television*. 
Coinage
This is the least common word formation process as it requires an invention of a totally new term. This usually describes something that has never existed before which could be a new invention, a product, an action or just a new expression for something that already exists. After their coinage these terms easily enter our everyday language, as there is a need for their existence. Some examples of these are nylon, reboot, zipper and teflon (Yule 2004:64).

Multiple Processes
Sometimes there is more than one process in action when creating a new word. For example, the word yuppie was derived from the acronym YUP which means Young Urban Professional by simply adding the -pie suffix (Yule 2004:70).

Emoticons
Another way to express emotions in chat is to use smileys (also known as emoticons) when writing messages. Smileys are ways of using different letters to resemble facial expressions and are almost always written sideways, from left to right. These help to deliver sublime messages that tone of voice, or body language usually does in face-to-face interactions. There are various styles in writing smileys and players use them widely. The basic formula for smileys contains a set of eyes and a mouth (nose is optional). The following examples have been compiled from The Canonical Smiley (and 1-line symbol) List. Eyes can be represented by the following signs [ : = ; 8 X ] in combination with the mouth, which gives the actual expression. Here are a few [ :) :-) =) 8) X-) ] There are also smileys that are typically called Japanese and are created by making another type of face: [ ^_^ ]. The arrows represent the happy-eyes and the line in this case represents the mouth. There are hundreds of these different emoticons but although different from “western” smileys, they also follow a universal formula of having a set of eyes and a mouth.

In Warhammer online there is a censor function that automatically censors any swearwords. These instead appear as different signs such as !@#$@! which are also frequently used in comic books. This is mainly done because Warhammer Online does not want any explicit language to affect younger children who are playing the game.
3.2 Semantic Relations and Semantic Changes

Semantics deals with the meaning of words and semantic change is the study of how the meanings of words change.\(^6\) (Cruse 2004:212-213) presents a possible scenario of how a word might change its meaning through five different steps. The word here is symbolised by \(W\) and the sense (or meaning) is represented by \(S^1\) (for the original meaning) and \(S^2\) (second meaning).

1. Word \(W\) has established a literal sense, \(S^1\)
2. Some creative person uses \(W\) in a new figurative sense, \(S^2\) (according to the rules of synchronic extension).
3. \(S^2\) ‘catches on’, and becomes established (i.e. laid down as an entry in the mental lexicons of members of the speech community), so that \(W\) becomes polysemous between \(S^1\) and \(S^2\). \(S^1\) is still perceived as literal, and \(S^2\) as figurative.
4. \(S^1\) begins to become obsolescent. \(S^2\) begins to be perceived as literal, and \(S^1\) as figurative. \(S^1\) is lost, at which point the meaning of \(W\) has changed from \(S^1\) to \(S^2\).

This study presents words that have reached step 3 (as exemplified above) within the MMORPG community and in the context of MMORPGs in general, maybe even step 4. There are numerous angles from which semantics and semantic changes can be studied. An example of semantic relations is homonym and an example of semantic change is broadening of meaning.

**Broadening of meaning**

A broadening of meaning of a lexical term, means that a word expands its meaning, also known as generalization (Greenbaum 1996:417). For example a chick used to describe a baby bird but through broadening it now also refers to a young woman in casual speech\(^7\).

**Narrowing of meaning**

This change of meaning is, as suggested by the name, the opposite of broadening of meaning. A word that is subjected to a narrowing of meaning becomes more specialized than before. An example of this is meat which used to mean any sort of food, it was later narrowed to mean only “edible flesh” (Ljung 2003:156).

\(^{6}\) [http://databas.bib.vxu.se:2114/eb/article-9110293]

\(^{7}\) [http://www.thefreedictionary.com/chick]
Homophones
Words that are spelled differently but are pronounced the same are known as homophones. An example of this could be one and won, or cell and sell (Greenbaum 1996:428).

Homonyms
Homonyms are two lexical items or words which are identical in both written form and in speech but have different meaning, for example bat as in a flying animal and bat as in a cricket bat (Katamba 2005:295).

4. Results & Analysis
In the beginning after the official opening of Warhammer online, players used very standard correct English without many abbreviations or acronyms. Players even bothered to add apostrophes to words. After approximately one week, players seemed to become surer of themselves and each other and this allowed the language to become informal. This is important since MMORPG-language is characterized partly by its informality. After approximately two weeks the typical MMORPG-language (with a great deal of abbreviations and acronyms) became the standard way of writing.

As mentioned above the server from which the logs were acquired, held players from many different European countries and one of the most astounding things is that it is quite common that non-English players use the abbreviated forms of English words. This is a sign that non-English players possess a quite high proficiency of English within this community and it might also show that abbreviations can be created by simply having a “feel” for the language. Alternatively, players also possess a logical way of abbreviating words/sentences in English. It is impossible to know whether or not some of the terms in section 4.3 and 4.4 have been coined or created by players who are not native English speakers, but this does not in any way make them any less legitimate. As the following examples from the chat-logs show, there are numerous results that need studying and categorizing. Also note that [sic] will not be added for misspellings made by players, as this would make the examples full of them and not make the text very reader-friendly.
4.1 Word-formation processes

Acronyms

As demonstrated in this section, players use a lot of acronyms but they are never (or very rarely) spelled with capital letters, which is the standard way of writing acronyms. This is mostly due to the fact that players want to be efficient and save time. Writing in capital letters means unnecessary time wasted pressing extra keys. Knowing what different acronyms mean and how to use them serves as a certain social identification to show that a person is part of the social group (also known as a shibboleth) (Shortis 2001:35). A player who is not familiar with abbreviated words and certain netiquette rules within a MMORPG is commonly known as a newbie, a word which has a slightly negative denotation, describing a player who is new to the game and does not know his/her way around. As the following example (1) shows, the sentence resembles something out of a comic book and is quite different from formal ways of writing in English. Acronyms are rare in Warhammer Online since words that have been abbreviated by players rarely contain any vowels and thus are categorized as initialisms. However, example (1) shows an acronym, spelled in a somewhat odd way.

(1) [Reivax]: loool i hate that !@#@!!

Laughing Out Loud, loool in (1) does not mean ‘Laughing out out out Loud’, rather it is a stylistic way of emphasising the acronym to make it more dramatic and any number of ‘l’ or ‘o’ are permitted as for example llloooooooollilll. Ironically, in many cases the player is not laughing out loud at all, they may just find the situation slightly amusing. There are numerous ways of abbreviating words and players use them frequently to save keystrokes. Another way of contracting several words into one word is through initialism.

Initialisms

Initialisms are words that have been contracted to one form by taking the initial letter from a series of words. Each letter in the initialised word is also read individually and not as whole words as acronyms are. The following example is an initialised word taken from Warhammer Online:

(2) [Tamas]: too many sw....

SW means Shadow Warrior and is a new initialism exclusive for Warhammer Online in its meaning. As players start to learn the names of different things within the game they start to abbreviate them automatically to save keystrokes. This does not mean that every player in the game understands what the acronym sw in (2) means because it appeared only 12 days after
the game officially opened. Once players have learned the formula for contracting words there is basically no limit to what type of words that can be contracted. Table 1 show a list of acronyms and initialisms that are used in Warhammer Online, most of which are also used in many other MMORPGs as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gg</td>
<td>Good Game</td>
<td>gj</td>
<td>Good Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>np</td>
<td>No problem</td>
<td>ty</td>
<td>Thank You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>omw</td>
<td>On My Way</td>
<td>pq</td>
<td>Public Quest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ty</td>
<td>Thank You</td>
<td>ffs</td>
<td>For Fuck’s Sake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rofl</td>
<td>Rolling On the Floor Laughing</td>
<td>bb</td>
<td>Bye Bye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gl</td>
<td>Good Luck</td>
<td>wtb</td>
<td>Want To Buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ctd</td>
<td>Crash To Desktop</td>
<td>lvl</td>
<td>Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dps</td>
<td>Damage Per second</td>
<td>ofc</td>
<td>Of Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gtg</td>
<td>Got To Go</td>
<td>nvm</td>
<td>Never Mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ftw</td>
<td>For The Win</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 1 these word formation processes help players write faster. However, as the environments created in MMORPGs are new and especially to the English language, new words have to be invented to describe a new thing or event within the MMORPG-world. The invention of entirely new words or phrases is known as coinages.

**Coinages**

In this section new words and expressions are presented with an explanation after each word. Coinages arise from a need for new words either describing new things or actions. In some cases they are created though wordplay by some creative person as the following example shows.

(3) [Fenaya]: yup also called **legolas-syndrome**

Legolas is a character from J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings” who mainly used his bow as a weapon. In (3) *Legolas* refers to an over-representation of Shadow Warriors in a group, which would be vulnerable to melee-attacks (close distance attacks). Other coinages are created in more “traditional” ways by using common prefixes in the English language as shown in (4).

(4) [Maranor]: **relog**
Relog in (4) means to ‘login again’. *Re-* is a commonly known prefix in English and *log* has derived from the word *login* and does not have anything to do with wood or chat-logs. Other ways of coining words can be through acronyms as shown in the following example:

(5) [Cyndane]: *watch what happens on forums when they nerf it*

*Nerf* in (5) is an acronym for “Non-Expanding Recreational Foam”[^8] and is a material used when creating toy-weapons. In MMORPGs it is used to describe a weakening of a single character-class within the game (i.e. applying to all characters of that class, such as shadow warrior or magician) since they are over powered in comparison to other character-classes in the game. With MMORPGs come new types of personalities which in turn need new words to describe them.

(6) [Mebridia]: *yea thats good i never understood twinks :S*

*Twink* in (6) is a word that usually carries a negative connotation. It describes a player who has acquired unusually powerful equipment for that character’s level, thus making it somewhat “unfair” for other players, as it creates a big power gap between the *twink* and other players[^9]. Other words have been coined through sheer exclamations as shown in the following example.

(7) [Zaardo]: *ooh ding rank 12*

*Ding* is an onomatopoeic word, which means the resemblance of sounds such as *boom* or *bang* (Yule 2004:2-3). *Ding* in (7) can also be used as an exclamation and can therefore stand alone in a sentence, as in just *Ding!* It signals to other players that the player has reached a new level with his/her character. The reason why the word *ding* is used is generally thought to be because the MMORPG *EverQuest* makes this sound when a player achieves a new level.[^10]

(8) [Kelborn]: *why do i get this feeling that im the lowest and noobest [adjective] in the guild?*

The term *noob* [noun] is also known as *n00b*, *newb*, or *nub*. *Noob* should not be confused with *newbie* which is a person who is new to the game and is thus apologized for making innocent mistakes. A *noob* however, is a person who is an experienced player but is generally considered ignorant and stupid because of their misbehaving.[^11]

[^8]: See: [http://www.wowwiki.com/Nerf](http://www.wowwiki.com/Nerf)
[^9]: See: [http://www.wowwiki.com/Twink](http://www.wowwiki.com/Twink)
Abbreviations

In MMORPGs there are literally thousands of abbreviations and many of them are spontaneously created even though they may not be widely recognized. Abbreviations in MMORPGs are mostly understood from the context and there are more or less no words that can not be abbreviated in one way or another. As mentioned above (Crystal 2005:120) defines one aspect of abbreviations to “convey a social identity”, as in knowing the meaning behind abbreviated words and using them conveys that a person is one of the group. One might argue that many abbreviated forms in MMORPGs are specialized words which people outside of these games would not understand unless put into context. However in MMORPGs they are not mainly used to create a sort of identity but they are used to save keystrokes. As the following examples demonstrate, there are different styles of abbreviating words but not every player uses the same form.

(9) [Emiljo]: cya all, tfh [tfh is a typo/unknown acronym]
(10) [Tjullah]: c ya :)
(11) [Kelborn]: guys and girls ty [thank you] for the invite im going off cause im too tired ill cu all tomorrow have a nice day or nigth and gl [good luck] in the game xD

Here we see three different ways of writing “see you”, this does not mean that the three players belong to three different “social groups” or have three different “social identities”, such as in (9) would belong to the “cya group” or that (11) is in the “cu group”. People have different ways of talking (e.g. dialects, expressions, pronunciation etc.) and players in MMORPGs have different ways of writing. Another way of contracting words can be done by resembling speech, as shown in the following example.

(12) [Eladamri]: wont let em use him

em for ‘them’ in this case is not used by all players but is a personal choice of the player too convey his own style of writing. What does however include or exclude players from the social group of MMORPGs is their etiquette while playing (see (8)). Sometimes players can be very short on time and therefore manage to abbreviate whole sentences as demonstrated in (13).

(13) [Sluggermonkie]: afk sec pee

This example perfectly demonstrates how the following sentence might be abbreviated by using acronyms, abbreviations and omitting certain words “Away From the Keyboard for a
second, I need to pee”. MMORPG-players are so efficient that they even abbreviate MMORPG:

(14) [Marerindhir]: its kinda the point of an MMO :)

It should also be noted that a lot of words that are abbreviated are relevant terms used frequently in fantasy, role-playing worlds, such as the one in Warhammer Online. Resurrection, quests and levels are rarely used in standard spoken English if not in particular situations. As Table 2 shows there are many “specialized” words that are abbreviated and experienced players do not need to see these in context to understand their meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ppl</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>champs</td>
<td>Champions</td>
<td>def</td>
<td>Defend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sec</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>int</td>
<td>Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inv/invitez</td>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>delf</td>
<td>Dark Elf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>merchs</td>
<td>Merchants</td>
<td>lvl</td>
<td>Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lo</td>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>dmg</td>
<td>Damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inf</td>
<td>Influence/Information</td>
<td>thx/thanx</td>
<td>Thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cos</td>
<td>Because</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rez</td>
<td>Resurrection [noun]</td>
<td>cya/cu</td>
<td>See you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ressing</td>
<td>Resurrecting [verb]</td>
<td>gz</td>
<td>Congratulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grats</td>
<td>Congratulations</td>
<td>mins</td>
<td>Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subz</td>
<td>Wazzup/what’s up</td>
<td>tlk</td>
<td>Talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nthing</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>bt</td>
<td>But</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probs</td>
<td>Probably</td>
<td>Qs</td>
<td>Quests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>str</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>sc</td>
<td>Scenario</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As one can see in Table 2, these abbreviations have been categorized as contracted forms of (mainly) single words. Other abbreviated ways of expressing words or feelings over the Internet with written language is through the use of emoticons.

**Emoticons**

Another way of abbreviating emotions such as *smile* is through the use of smileys. As mentioned above there are numerous examples of types of smileys used by players in MMORPGs. The following Table 3 is a compilation of smileys used by players in Warhammer Online.
### Table 3 Smiley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smiley</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:D :&gt; :) :] 8) =]</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:P :/</td>
<td>Sticking out tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:/ :</td>
<td>Disappointed or unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=o :O =O 8o</td>
<td>Surprised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:s</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xD</td>
<td>Blushing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=x</td>
<td>Regretting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8(</td>
<td>Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;<em>&gt;</em></td>
<td>Disbelief (Japanese style)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-=\</td>
<td>(Japanese style of hitting one’s own head)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-=-</td>
<td>(Japanese style disappointment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other lists of smileys such as the “Canonical Smiley (and 1-line symbol) List”\(^\text{12}\) will show that different eyes and mouths mean different things but in most cases this is just a stylistic variation of the same meaning. Often, some players use one type of smiley to describe an emoticon that another player uses to describe something else. As with much MMORPG-language, smileys are also context based. A happy face for instance can be either one of the following: =) :8) :-) =o) =0) =] =o] =0] 0] :o] etc. Using a o O 0 or as a mouth will signal a type of surprised expression, a gasping mouth or a disappointment as in “ohh…” but when used as eyes they can signal confusion when using the more Japanese style for example o_O. A tilted mouth will show a type of disappointment as in /= or :/ and mouths ending “downward” are sad mouths =(. There is however a possibility to mistake an abbreviated word for a smiley or the other way around as shown in (41). A common way of abbreviating words and names within MMORPGs is through the process if clipping.

### Clippings

This is commonly used in MMORPGs when players have named their characters with long (from a MMORPG point of view), complicated or fictional names such as the following example:

(15) [Kire] tells you: i would like to kill N..sth, just drop the line
(16) [Laederlaban]: doubt that ent
(17) [Maranor]: Cyn need to talk to you!

---

\(^{12}\) See: http://www.astro.umd.edu/~marshall/smileys.html
In (15) Narith Flamescar, (16) Entarion or (17) Cyndane which easily becomes ent or Cyn in these examples could also be abbreviated to just N or C if it is obviously referring to a specific player. This is also one of the rare areas where players actually sometimes keep the capital letter of an abbreviation, to signal clearly that this is referring to a player’s name, to avoid any confusion. This is not a new phenomenon in written or spoken language. Letters can be signed with initials or in speech nicknames are sometimes used among friends and since MMORPG-language is a blend of both spoken and written language, Cyn and C are both accepted. As MMORPG-language is mainly saving keystrokes players have also turned to the usage of sound symbolism.

**Sound Symbolism**

“Sound symbolism is the direct linkage between sound and meaning” Hinton (1994:1). Word *homophones* are a part of sound symbolism. They can be words that sound identical even though they are different in written form, such as [*bear*] or [*bare*] (Yule 2004:120-121). Using the definition above, the following examples have been categorized as *sound symbols*. Other abbreviated forms give rise to fictional and eccentric ways of spelling as the following sentence show: *U nEd 2 w8 b4 U sk8 m8* [You need to wait before you skate mate] which creates a kind of rebus-like contraction and can save about half the key strokes needed to type out a full sentence. The following examples illustrate that these sound symbolisms are mostly used as a way to save keystrokes on single words and rarely in the typographically playful way of writing sentences as exemplified above.

(18) **me2** Me too
(19) **supo m8ies** What’s up mate’ies
(20) **K m8 np** OK mate no problem
(21) **can u inv poyzer 2 guild please** Can you invite Poyzer [player] to the guild please
(22) **Welcome!**

Example (22) obviously spells Welcome but with the exception that the W has been created by using slashes and backslashes. This serves no other purpose than to create a sort of typographical playfulness with the word and only appears one time in the logs. Another usage of sound in written language or at least an attempt to bring spoken language into written is through the usage of *sound effects.*
Formulaic sound effects

Crystal (2006:170) noted that people in online-chat groups use a lot of contracted forms such as gonna, em, wanna which are also known as sound effects. These can be transcriptions of emotional noises such as um, erm, or comic-book style interjections such as ugh or yikes. This section will cover different aspects that are typical for MMORPG players’ ways of writing. There are certain characteristics of MMORPG language that are very close to other aspects of netspeak, such as online chatting. These forms of netspeak have been implemented in virtual worlds such as Warhammer Online. The most obvious characteristic of language in MMORPGs is that its written form is very close to casual speech. As we will see, some forms of MMORPG language do not serve the purpose of typing more efficiently but they add a more “spoken” feel to the written language and are in fact a type of “phonetic way of writing”. The spelling of some words are very unconventional but resemble the way they are pronounced in speech when read. These types of formulaic sound effects are generally more accepted than slang in casual speech but are not considered formal written English. Table 4 shows some of the many forms of formulaic sound effects used in Warhammer online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contracted forms</th>
<th>Comic-book style interjections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>imma ['I am']</td>
<td>hugh!!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dunno ['Don’t know']</td>
<td>yeah!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanna</td>
<td>yupp/yup/yah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gonna</td>
<td>whoops!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tis ['it is']</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>til [until]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional noises</th>
<th>Phonetic way of writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>huh?</td>
<td>aye [yes]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uh</td>
<td>mai [my]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>erm…?</td>
<td>Hellu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oh</td>
<td>me ['my'] (as in ‘tis I and me mates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aww</td>
<td>w00t [what]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhaa</td>
<td>cuwl [cool]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uoh</td>
<td>lul [lol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In speech people can use emotional noises which signals a change of thought which may be followed by a correction as in ehh, I mean… this type of correction is known as a self-repair (see section 4.3).
**Under-lexicalisation**

Players very often omit letters or signs that they feel serve no purpose other than taking up their time while writing a message. Therefore words do not include the apostrophe where there should be one. Players also ignore the need to write with capital letters when they should be capital, since this just requires extra keystrokes. Thus any letters at the beginning of sentences or acronyms do not have to be in capitals. This is not a form of misspelling but rather another way for contracting word forms. The following example demonstrates how some of the above mentioned contractions can be used in a sentence.

(23) [Senni]: hope it *doesn’t* start until this one is finished since *im* winning :P

The meaning behind the two contracted forms in (23) is obvious to any reader and as such it has become standard to drop apostrophes in MMORPGs. Some other examples of this would be:

(24) [Kelborn]: but no *im* making pots
(25) [Shera]: when the spot is red it means they *cant* perish or else it fails
(26) [Maranor]: Like *thats* hard.
(27) [Cyndane]: *isnt* there one on the market square?
(28) [Marerindhir]: *i m* at Mirelen *atm* [at the moment]

**Derivations**

(29) [Kelborn]: maranor is little but *ownage* [adjective]

*Ownage* derives from the word *own* but not in the sense of possessing an item. To *own* someone is a rather colloquial expression and means to dominate another person or NPC and carries a negative connotation. In (29) however, the word carries a positive connotation and is a compliment to the player [Maranor], who despite his small stature is good at *owning*. Derivations can take place among different word-classes and not necessarily from verb to adjective. Example (30) demonstrates an adjective that has derived from a noun:

(30) [Maranor]: My laptop is so *laggy* too so:P

*Laggy* in (30) has derived from the word *lag*, in this sense it is a type of delayed experience. However, while *lag* is a noun *laggy* has been created by adding the suffix –*gy* and thus created an adjective. The meaning of *laggy* as used in (30) is a computer that that has a graphical delay. Another type of derivation that is common within MMROPGs are initialisms followed by the suffix –*ing*. 

23
Derivation by suffixation

(31) [Emiljo]: well.. then how about another PQ? (Public Quest [noun])

(32) [Cyndane]: im PQ'ing (I’m doing Public Quest(ing) [verb])

(33) [Maranor]: im rvring (Realm versus Realm(ing)[verb]

As we can see in examples (32) and (33) an acronym standing for two or more nouns can turn into a verb by simple adding the suffix ‘ing or :ing to it. In the case of Public Quest it comes naturally since quest can easily be turned into questing. The same goes for xp (experience or experience point) which can be derived into xp’ing, xping or xp:ing. This is a form of multiple word formation processes. This formation is so common and easily applicable that they are here called “acrofixes” (a compound of acronym and suffix). There are limitations to what types of acronyms that can be processed in this way. There is no exact way of forming these types of acrofixes (thus making none of them truly wrong) but there is however a general guideline for creating them. Basically any acronym which solely stands for a noun can be used, and putting ‘ing’ after them creates an acrofix. Other players however understand them all. For instance afk:ing (away from keyboard:ing) would “sound” strange or awkward since it is already an action and is never used.

In other MMORPGs RvR (Realm versus Realm) is known as PvP (Player versus Player)\(^{13}\) and stands for the concept of one player fighting against another player. This acronym is also affected by the acrofix phenomenon as in PvP’ing or PvPing. Player versus player’ing makes an awkward form, since the acronym is read in a different way when fully spelled out. PvP is not read “player versus player” by the person reading the acronym, it is read “Pe Ve Pe” which might be the reason why putting an ing at the end “sounds” more natural. An invented example of this outside of MMORPGs could be:

(34) I’m BBC’ing

This could mean that a person is watching the TV channel BBC. Or the following example would also be acceptable:

(35) I’m TV’ing.

Another way of saying I’m watching television. The formation processes in these examples are applicable in the same sense as mentioned in (32) and (33), but they sound strange and awkward outside the context of MMORPGs. Also note that these are only applicable to initialized acronyms.

\(^{13}\) See: (http://www.wowwiki.com/Player_vs._Player)
Compounds

Compounds are, as mentioned above, the unity of two separate words into one. The second word, or the head, determines what type of word-class the new word will belong to. In the following example both the head and the modifier are verbs and as such the word’s word-class does not change in any way:

(36) [Cyndane] says: stop kill stealing

Kill stealing is the disgraceful act of rushing towards an enemy NPC, that another player was heading towards, in order to kill it and “steal” credit. This is particularly bad if the NPC is “rare” or difficult to find.\footnote{See: http://www.wowwiki.com/Kill_steal} It could as well have been called “stealing a kill”, but as this act is rather common in MMORPGs it has been compounded into one word (even though there is a space in the word in this particular case).

Conversions

The word-formation process of taking a word from one word-class [noun] and changing it to another word-class [verb] without altering its form is known as conversion.

(37) [Kingslayer]: ill tank [verb]

As (37) shows tank describes the action of being a tank (a metaphor for an armoured tank). Players have converted the noun tank directly into a verb. Tank in (37) has been converted from a word which has experienced a broadening of meaning and will be explained in greater detail in the upcoming example (38).

4.2 Semantic relations and Semantic change

This section will discuss some of the semantic changes which have taken place within the MMORPG community. Semantics is as mentioned above, the study of word meaning. As the following examples show in this section, there has been a change of meaning of certain words. However, their meanings are context bound and as such they are not applicable outside the context of computer-games.
**Broadening of word meaning**

As mentioned in 3.2 the meaning of words may change due to some person’s creative way of using language. The following example is no exception to this, and it is very likely that the word was originally used as a metaphor as demonstrated bellow.

(38) [*Inquisitorius*]: *we need a tank [noun]*

*Inquisitorius* in (38) is not referring to an armoured vehicle but rather to a player who can act as a *tank*. The meaning of the word *tank* is a player who attacks enemies making them aggressive and attacking the player. Thus the *tank* takes all the damage, allowing other players to attack the enemy (which is now focused on the tank) without suffering damage. The reason why this type of player is called a tank is because the player typically wears a lot of armour (such as metal breastplates, helmets and gauntlets) and can withstand a lot of damage. *Tank* in MMORPGs almost exclusively carries the meaning in (38). It can therefore be discussed whether or not (in the context of MMORPGs) the meaning of the word *tank* has experienced a “local” *narrowing of meaning*. The following two examples have experienced a broadening of meaning, but their meaning is understood by which context they are put it. The following example has been taken right before a battle.

(39) [*Cyndane*]: *linguis, pull*

“Pull” in this sense means to make an enemy aggressive and starting a combat, acting as the *tank*. It does not mean to physically walk up to an enemy and pull him but rather to walk close enough to the enemy to make him aggressive and attack. In doing this, players can avoid confronting a whole group of enemies and instead only *pull* a single enemy from a group. The meaning behind *pull* is always used to start a combat and can not be used in the same sense when, for example, pulling a rope. The following example is also context bound and is taken from after a battle when one player is about to leave the group.

(40) [*Kire*]: *thanks for party :)*

A temporary *group* of players in a MMORPG is known as a *party* and does not have anything to do with music and dancing. A party is a group that shares experience points together and can communicate with each other on the [party] chat (see 2.1). *Party* in MMORPGs is different from just a gathering of people. There may be lots of players at one spot at a particular time, but this does not make them into a party. It is only after one player start inviting other players to join his/her party that they go from a random group to a *party*.
**Homonyms**

In certain cases of creating emoticons there are situations where they might be mistaken for an acronym. One should remember that in MMORPG-language acronyms are rarely ever written with capital letters and as the following example shows, this separates an emoticon from an acronym.

(41) *[Marerindhir]: + you lvl XP from doing pretty much anything in this game*

In this case *XP* is a smiley with crossed eyes sticking out its tongue but it could also have been the abbreviation *xp* for *experience*. This is a rather new form of homonymy, which are words with identical form, such as *bank* [river-bank] and [bank] (Yule 2004:121). Other types of homonyms are easier to distinguish from each other even though they are identical in form.

(42) *K m8 np OK mate no problem*
(43) *the 2 give you 5K 5 kilo*

In (42) and (43) *K* has two different meanings even though they have the same form. In example (42) *K* is a contracted form for *OK*, in (43) *K* is an abbreviation for *kilo* which in term is used to symbolize 1000. This usually used when counting the number of *experience points* or *xp* (points needed to reach a new level with a character).

**Self-repairs**

If making an error in speech a person can correct oneself instantly. This is known as a self-repair.\(^{15}\) However, there is no name for this type of self-correcting process is called language when using an asterisk to signal this. Since players signal his/her correction with an asterisk (*) they are here labelled *asterisk corrections*. The asterisk can be put in front of the corrected word or after the corrected word. The asterisk correction serves many purposes; it signals that the player is aware of the misspelling; it can avoid misinterpretation of a sentence or a word that is misspelled as another word (usually happens with articles); the player also avoids a need to apologize for the misspelling. The asterisk correction is put in directly after the player misspells something, so for instance noticing an error half a minute later and correcting oneself would be awkward, the same as with speech. The following examples demonstrate how an asterisk may be used to correct oneself.

(44) *[Eldrin]: HERE [Eldrin]: here*  (45) *[Tjullah]: as a expected [Tjullah]: i*

As demonstrated in examples (44) to (47), players indicate their misspelling by writing the misspelled word correctly and adding an asterisk afterwards. This can be done out of courtesy (as part of netiquette) or to clarify the previously written sentence. Other types of “misspellings” in Warhammer Online may generally be regarded as an incorrect way of writing; however these “misspellings” are a way for players to save keystrokes.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was fulfilled in the sense the all the research questions have been addressed in section 4 by using examples from chat-logs and analyzing them with the help of linguistic definitions. All neologisms used by players in Warhammer Online that have been presented in this study have been explained, and as demonstrated, players use all methods of word-formation known to linguists to create new words. The function of these neologisms is, for the most part, to shorten words in order to save keystrokes. Other examples also show that players have implemented elements of spoken language in their writing, which do not serve the purpose of saving keystrokes. Finally, as demonstrated in section 4.4, semantic changes of the English language have also occurred within Warhammer Online.

The strength with logging and using the results in a study from a synchronic point of view is that the researcher gets a first hand experience of the data collected and thus has a deeper understanding for it. This is because the researcher uses data collected from his/her own experience, which allows for contextualized interpretations to be made. This is much more difficult to do by using other means such as corpora for instance, where the data have not been collected first hand by the researcher but originates from someone else. The downside of using logs in the way that it was done in this study is that it is impossible for one person to record every single item of interest, and thus some data might have slipped by the researcher’s eye. As this study shows there are vast numbers of ways in which players have adapted and changed the English language within MMORPGs. This was mainly done by abbreviations, word formation processes or just word play. Taking into consideration that MMORPGs have only been around for about 20 years, and not every lexical item of interest was included from the logs, my conclusion is that almost every written word in the English vocabulary can be changed in one way or another, keeping in mind that it does not have to be native English speakers who make the changes. MMORPGs such as Warhammer Online can,
in theory, also allow a player to communicate without writing anything at all. This can be done by using a form of “virtual body-language” such as pointing at objects, nodding, shrugging or simply by leading other players to different places. One thing that is easy to forget is that even though people do not speak with each other, they are still communicating, and the same applies to MMORPGs.

The results of this study have turned out much as I had expected. It was no secret that the language used in MMORPGs was highly abbreviated and semantically changed. However, it is amazing to see that within one social group, language has been allowed to change as dramatically as it has within MMORPGs. Usually these small changes go unnoticed, because they occur gradually and are imbedded in otherwise correct sentences, but when picked apart and studied closely the results are extraordinary. MMOPRG-language is a collection of all forms of speech, written language and netspeak and I would argue that the English written language has never before seen such a major change in its entirety, within one community.

This study may be of use as an introduction to how the English language is used in a MMORPG (and other online-games as well) from a linguistic point of view. There are however many linguistic aspects that have not been covered in this study and would need further research. Examples of these could be the nature of syntaxes or carry out discourse analyses within MMORPGs. However, language is an ever-evolving phenomenon and will always be in constant change. MMORPGs are the places to study if one wants to see rapid change of a language, and as new games evolve and new technology is introduced, one can only guess what changes will take place in the future in the English language.
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