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Online computer game English
A study on the language found in World of Warcraft

Engelska
C-uppsats

Termin: Vårterminen 2009
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Abstract

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Engelska C, 2009

Antal sidor: 27

Abstract: The aim of this study is to examine the language from a small sample of texts from the chat channels of World of Warcraft and analyze the differences found between World of Warcraft English and Standard English. In addition, the study will compare the language found in World of Warcraft with language found on other parts of the Internet, especially chatgroups. Based on 1045 recorded chat messages, this study examines the use of abbreviations, emoticons, vocabulary, capitalization, spelling, multiple letter use and the use of rare characters. The results of the investigation show that the language of World of Warcraft differs from Standard English on several aspects, primarily in the use of abbreviations. This is supported by secondary sources. The results also show that the use of language is probably not based on the desire to deliver a message quickly, but rather to reach out to people. In addition, the results show that the language found in World of Warcraft is more advanced than a simple effort to try to imitate speech, thereby performing more than written speech.

Nyckelord: computer game, World of Warcraft, Internet language, Netspeak, abbreviation, emoticons

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1. Introduction and aim

Due to my experience of two decades of computer games, I decided to delve into the subject of Computer Game English. I have seen how Netspeak slowly shaped into something that is being used daily in online chat rooms and in mobile phone instant messaging, from being the computer gamers' so called 1337-language. Players of every new multiplayer computer game today almost automatically implant Netspeak in the game and alter its vocabulary, grammar and syntax to suit the game's mechanics and what appears to be the players' needs.

This study was carried out on a computer game, World of Warcraft, which is the game with most active players of its genre at the moment and has a wide variety of ages and nationalities among its players. The genre of MMORPG as it is called, or Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game, is a relatively new genre of entertainment that shows human interaction on a whole new platform of communication and it is entirely new to mankind, which ultimately is a very interesting area of language development from a linguist's perspective and a source of information that is too valuable to ignore.

By studying the fast developing languages online I believe linguists can gather information that has been unavailable before. The only similar language development can be found in pidgins and creoles where language develops from a specific need. In the case of World of Warcraft that need might be, for example, faster and easier communication for non-native English speakers. In addition to being an important source of information for linguists, through the results of studies such as this one we can find indications as to future directions in which the English language is heading.

The aim of this study is to examine the language from a small sample of texts from the chat channels of World of Warcraft and analyze the differences found between World of Warcraft English and Standard English.

2. Background

New means of communication have arrived since the creation of some of the first multiplayer computer games. David Crystal (2006:178-202) mentions MUDs, or Multi-user dungeons, as one of the first virtual worlds, based on the 1970's Dungeons and Dragons™ games, on the Internet that introduced concepts such as the *whisper* command and *emoticons*. Even though MUDs are text-based games and very different from World of Warcraft, clear similarities can be found such as the whisper command and emoticons, which exist in World of Warcraft as well. Even though MUDs have been around since the early beginning of Internet (Zugg Software, 2009), relatively few studies have been conducted on the area. This paper will, however, focus less on MUDs and other virtual worlds beside World of Warcraft and more on other areas of the Internet that are similar to World of Warcraft. Those areas will be introduced later in this paper.

2.1. World of Warcraft

Blizzard Entertainment, one of Americas largest computer game creators launched *World of Warcraft* on February 11, 2005 in Europe (Blizzard Entertainment, Old News 2005, 2005), the fourth game in the Warcraft series that started in 1994 with *Warcraft: Orcs and humans* (Classic-PC-games, Warcraft: Orcs and Humans, 2009) followed by *Warcraft 2: Tides of Darkness* in 1996 (Classic-PC-games, Warcraft 2, 2009) and then *Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos* in 2002 (IGN 2009). In contrast to its predecessors, World of Warcraft is a MMORPG¹ and in an MMORPG thousands of players meet online at the same time in the game world (Blizzard Entertainment, Introduction to World of Warcraft, 2009). In 2004, World of Warcraft received the *Best PC-game of the Year award* from GameSpot in addition to another 29 prestigious awards and with more than 10 million players it is a game that has gone down in history as the MMORPG with most players of all time (Blizzard Entertainment, Awards and honors, 2009);(Yahoo Games! 2008). By launching constant updates and two major expansion packs to the game, Blizzard has managed to remain at the top with a current estimated 11.5 million players all across the world (Softpedia 2009).

¹ Sometimes also MMOG for Massively multiplayer online game (MMOGCHART.com 2009).

Since the launch of World of Warcraft, Blizzard has increased their server language from only being in English to also French, German, Spanish and Russian. The server language doesn't restrict the players to one language, but since all game information is in English on an English server, all players are expected to speak English. In addition, to be able to receive any support from the game support team the players must speak English². However, this study will only cover the European-English servers. Of the approximately 100 English servers, each has been labeled as a *normal* server, *player versus player* server, *role-playing* server or a *role-playing and player versus player* server (Blizzard Entertainment, Realm types, 2009). The role-playing servers have specific rules concerning language and as you play on these servers, you are expected to speak with modern English (in a medieval manner) (Blizzard Entertainment, Roleplaying policy, 2009), therefore most of my study will only involve non-role-playing servers.

2.1.1. Game mechanics

To understand the communication that takes place within World of Warcraft one must first understand the rules and mechanics of the game. Like other games in the MMORPG genre the player's first task is to create a character. Characters can be of different races (human, orc etc.) and dependent on the race, the character will belong to either of the two factions: the Alliance or the Horde, which are unable to communicate with each other by text. The next step is to select a gender and then select a class for the character (warrior, priest etc.). The third step is to edit the character's visual appearance (hair color, facial structure etc.) and then finally to choose a name for the character. Once this is done the player is ready to enter World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, Beginner's Guide 2009) (World of Warcraft).

Contrary to other single-player³ games, World of Warcraft (like other MMORPGs) is a non-linear game, which means that it doesn't have an end or a specific goal for the player to reach. Instead, World of Warcraft offers 7,650 quests for the player to complete (Softpedia 2009) and 63 different lands to explore⁴. Throughout the entire game it is the multiplayer aspect that drives the game forward. From the very moment a player enters the game with a newly

² Information found on the server status page in World of Warcraft and from information based on in-game communication.

³ As in non-multiplayer game, or non-online game.

⁴ Information found in World of Warcraft.

created character there will most likely be a number of other characters around it, created by other players. Every character will seek out quests to complete and monsters to defeat. With a click of a button the characters can unite and play together, or challenge each other to duels to find out who is the stronger character, or they may want to take part in wide-scale city raiding or treasure hunting.

Single-player RPGs (Role-Playing Games) and adventure games usually let the player do the same thing, but rather than thousands of real people in the same game, most current single-player RPGs use computer codes to implement coherent NPCs (Non-playable Characters) that make the environment come alive. The main difference between single-player games and MMORPG games is the advanced ways of communicating implemented in the MMORPGs. There are countless numbers⁵ of different global chat channels, private chat channels, chat channels for specific groups, instant messaging channels, characters speech channels, emoticon channels and more. The channels that will be studied in this paper will be described in greater detail under 3. *Method*, later in this paper. To understand the complexity of the communication of World of Warcraft, we must understand the different chat situations that take place on other parts of the Internet, on which the communication of World of Warcraft is based.

2. 2. Internet language

Crystal (2006) lists a number of situations where Internet language takes place in different forms.

- *Electronic mails (e-mails)* are widely used between users of the Internet to send messages between private mailboxes. Crystal explains that the language in e-mails is diverse and varied in length and style.
- *Chatgroups* “are continuous discussions on a particular topic, organized in ‘rooms’ at particular Internet sites, in which computer users interested in the topic can participate” (Crystal 2006:11). There are two types of chatrooms. There are *synchronous* chatrooms, which basically means that the conversations in the chatroom are taking place in real time; thus the replies can be both sent and read instantly,

⁵ The number is countless since custom channels can be created by players in addition to the already existing channels of the game.

whereas with *asynchronous* chatrooms, the messages are stored and made available to users on demand.

- *Virtual worlds* are “imaginary environments which people can enter to engage in text-based fantasy social interaction”. In contrast to World of Warcraft, virtual worlds⁶ lack graphical images and are based entirely on text written by users and administrators⁷.
- *World Wide Web (WWW)* is “the full collection of all the computers linked to the Internet which hold documents that are mutually accessible through the use of a standard protocol (the HyperText Transfer Protocol or HTTP), usually abbreviated to Web or W3 and, in site addresses, presented as the acronym *www*.” (Crystal 2006:13)
- *Instant Messaging* refers to the use of electronic conversations between people in real time. In contrast to chatgroups, instant messaging commonly takes place between people who know each other and in chatgroups the participants are usually numerous. In addition, instant messaging usually refers to the use of computer software which is dedicated for instant messaging services such as MSN Messenger, ICQ, AOL, Instant Messenger, and Yahoo!. In contrast to e-mail messaging, instant messaging is synchronous (which the name implies).
- *Bloggng* is one of the newest inventions on the web and came into usage in the early 2000s. *Blog* is a shortened form of *weblog* and, similar to a web page, takes a form where the owner can post messages at intervals. Blogs are typically personal diaries, varied in length from brief notes or sentences to extended essays. (Crystal 2006:1-25).

In World of Warcraft the main chat channels are synchronous. Only one chat channel, the in-game e-mail system, is asynchronous which leaves the rest of the game’s communication functions in real-time. However, the GUI (Graphical User-Interface) allows the user to scroll up and look at the recent history.⁸ Of all the various ways of communicating in World of Warcraft, none fit into any of the situations that Crystal describes, but it is clear that World of Warcraft’s communication carry fragments of some of the situations. Basically, beside the actual game mechanics, World of Warcraft would work perfectly well as a chat program.

⁶ The definition of *virtual worlds* refers only to David Crystal’s definition.

⁷ Administrators are also referred to as wizards, programmers, tinkers, gods, arches and imps.

⁸ This is the case with most chatgroups and instant messengers as well.

More about this under 3.3 *Chat channels*.

2.2.1. Netspeak

Crystal says, “Several writers have called the Internet language ‘written speech’” and adds that people on the Internet “write the way people talk.” (Crystal 2006:27). But he also questions the possibility of actually *writing speech* based on two major points. Firstly, writing on a keyboard you only have the alphabet, the numerals and some additional signs, which “disallows some critical features of conversational speech” (2006:27). Secondly, “as the world is composed of many different types of people who talk in many different ways, what kind of speech is it, exactly, that the new style guides want us to be writing down?” (2006:27).

The Internet language that is being used to imitate spoken language can sometimes be “sloppy, meandering, puerile, ungrammatical, poorly spelled” and “badly structured”, as Philip Elmer-Dewitt wrote in Times Magazine (1994) with the following examples showing typical messages from the Internet, “HEY!!!1!” and “I THINK METALLICA IZ REEL KOOL DOOD!1!!!” (Elmer-Dewitt 1994). Concerning similar abbreviations with deviant spelling such as *d00dz* and *l0zers*, Crystal says “The extent to which deviant spellings and esoteric neologisms can be used to produce a cool jargon has been dubbed *leeguage* by some” (2006:94).

Crystal explains that when the text on the Internet is asynchronous, as with e-mails, it is definitely being written, but when it’s synchronous, as in chatgroups or virtual worlds, people are certainly “speaking” to each other there. “Player X ‘says’ something to Player Y, as in this sequence from one study:

Plate raises his hand and shouts...

Fork sighs loudly....

Plate says ‘Nope’

(Crystal 2006: 32)

World of Warcraft has an unnamed channel we may call *emote-channel*, which functions in the exact same way as the virtual world example above. By typing */e* followed by a message,

such as *raises his hand and shouts*, it would automatically be sent into the emote-channel with the following result, starting with the character name:

Simon raises his hand and shouts.

(World of Warcraft)

“These are ‘speech acts’, in a literal sense” (Crystal 2006:32). Crystal points out that the difference between face-to-face and synchronous chat still remains large, partly because, as mentioned above, the keyboard limits the conversation. Another point that Crystal makes is that you get the chance to edit your message before sending it, even if it’s a synchronous online situation. That fact makes the language in a synchronous situation very different from a spoken face-to-face situation, or as Crystal says “the message does not leave our computer until we ‘send’ it” (Crystal 2006:32-3). Therefore, there is no way the recipient can react to the message being typed as he or she would in a face-to-face situation. This paper will not investigate the matter of whether or not Netspeak is an attempt to recreate spoken language deeper than that, but words that are based on pronunciation will be identified and labeled as such later in this paper.

2.2.2. Word formations

Crystal says that in addition to the common terminology associated with computer science, programming, electronics and other subjects relative to Netspeak, such as *cable*, *disk*, *bit* and *binary*, a large number of new words and phrases have emerged (Crystal 2006:86-87). Some of the words are associated with computer software: *file*, *edit*, *home*, *paste*, *format*, *select*, whereas other words are associated with computer hardware: *freeze*, *crash*, *client*. And terms have developed well beyond the technical aspects of the computer world: *netters*, *netties*, *cybersurfers*, *bozos*, *wizards*, are all terms for the population of Internet users themselves. A frequently used method of creating Internet neologisms is by forging *compounds*, i.e., combining two separate words into a new word. Some words are frequently found used in compounds: *mouse* in *mouseclick*, *mousepad*, *mouseover*; *click* in *double-click*, *right-click*; *cyber* in *cyberspace*, *cyberculture*, *cybersex* and so forth. Another way of creating new terms is by joining a part of one word with another which creates *blends* such as *datagram*, *infonyet*, *Infobahn*. An additional way of creating new words is by extending lexical suffixes: adding

–ity to *dubious* forms *dubiosity*; or to *obvious* which forms *obviousity*; adding –itude to *hack* forms *hackitude*; adding –full to *folder* forms *folderfull*; adding –ification to *geek* forms *geekification* and so on. Through word-class conversion new terms are created, usually from noun to verb: *to mouse*, *to clipboard*, *to geek out*, *to 404*⁹ (Crystal 2006:87-9).

According to Crystal, “the various types of abbreviation found in Netspeak have been one of its most remarked features” (2006:89). General terms such as *BBS* (bulletin board system), *BCC* (blind carbon copy), *DNS* (domain name system), *FAQ* (frequently asked questions), *HTML* (hypertext markup language), *ISP* (Internet service provider) are examples of common abbreviations. *AOL*, *IBM*, *IRC* are examples of firms and sites that use abbreviated titles. Letter-plus-number combinations exist as well: *W3C* (World Wide Web Consortium) and *P3P* (Platform for Privacy Preferences). Chatgroups and virtual worlds have abbreviations of their own, some of which might occur in e-mails and in personal web pages as well (Crystal 2006, 89-90). In Crystal’s *A Glossary of Netspeak and Textspeak* he lists 34 pages of abbreviations of this category. *Afk* (away from keyboard), *btw* (by the way), *csthknau* (can’t stop thinking about you)¹⁰ (Crystal 2004) are examples of these kinds of abbreviations which will be further investigated later in this paper, as these types of abbreviations might be the most frequent types of abbreviations in World of Warcraft. An important detail concerning these latter abbreviations is the *lower-case default mentality*, as Crystal calls it, which means that “any use of capitalization is a strongly marked form of communication. Messages wholly in capitals are considered to be ‘shouting’, and usually avoided; words in capitals add extra emphasis” (Crystal 2006:92). In addition to capitals, letter spacing can be used for “loud and clear”: *W H Y*, *N O T* and *w h y n o t* (Crystal 2006:37).

Another area of word modification that Crystal takes up is the spelling of existing words. The plural –s has been replaced by –z in some cases, often frequent in words referring to pirated versions of software, as in *warez*, *tunez*, *gamez*, *pornz*, *filez*. Worth noting concerning spelling is that “in English, US spelling is more common than British, partly for historical reasons (the origins of the Internet), and partly for reasons of economy, most US spellings being a

⁹ “Http error 404” is an error that comes up on Internet Browsers when you are unable to reach a directory (Microsoft, *HTTP Error 404*, 2009).

character shorter than British ones (color vs. colour, fetus vs. foetus, etc.)” (Crystal 2006:93). Non-standard spelling is used frequently in chatgroups, blogs and virtual worlds, which often reflects pronouncing, such as *yep*, *yup*, *yay*, *nope*, *noooo*, rather than simply *yes* or *no*, or *kay* and *sokay*, rather than *It’s OK*. Crystal says, “emotional expressions of horror, shock, and the like make use of varying numbers of vowels and consonants, depending on the ferocity of the emotion: *aaaiiiee*, *yayyyyyy*” (2006:94). Some spellings have become altered and so widely accepted as to be virtually standard, such as *phreak*, *phreaker*, *phreaking* for *freak* (Crystal 2006:94). Similarly, *pwn* is a widely used spelling of the word *own* in the online computer game world, which goes back to an older game in the Warcraft series in which a map designer accidentally misspelled *own* by writing *pwn*, giving the player of the game the message: “*player has been pwned*” (Mo’ Urban Dictionary 2009).

2.3. Pidgins and creoles

When people from different nationalities with different languages meet with communication difficulties a *pidgin* might develop (Aitchison 2003:113-30). Aitchison says “a pidgin is a restricted language system which arises in order to fulfill essential communication needs among people with no common language. It is no one’s first language, and is used at first in a limited set of circumstances. Such a system typically develops on trade routes and in coastal areas” (2009:128-129). Lonely planet’s *Pidgin languages of Oceania* offers a slightly more simplified or basic explanation; “pidgins are generally characterised by their use as a secondary language and by their regular and simplified grammars” (Lonely planet 2008:9). Even though MMORPGs are not prime examples of where pidgins may develop, similarities such as the different nationalities and the different languages meeting can be seen both in pidgins and MMORPGs.

In some cases, pidgins may die out, while at other times their importance increases and they grow in significance until the pidgin becomes people’s first language. The language has then become a *creole*. This development is obviously unlikely for a computer game, but the language change patterns of pidgins and creoles may also be found in the, also fast changing, language found in World of Warcraft. Concerning pidgins and creoles Aitchison says that “they are valuable for the insights they provide into language change” (2003:130), and I believe the same holds for the language World of Warcraft.

3. Method

In order to study World of Warcraft English I had to gather large amounts of texts from various parts of the game. As mentioned in the background, chat situations in World of Warcraft are similar to other existing chat situations on the web. However, this paper will only focus on chatgroups which are found in World of Warcraft's various chat channels. The public channels that this paper will investigate are *Trade channel* and *General channel* and the more private channels that this paper will cover are *Party channel*, *Raid channel* and *Guild channel*. When deciding which field to study I came to the conclusion that World of Warcraft's equivalent to chatgroups and instant messengers would yield most text relevant to my study. However, since the only instant messenger¹¹ in the game takes place between two people in World of Warcraft I would have to take part myself and thereby possibly alter the objectivity of the study. I chose therefore not to include this. I chose the different chat channels so that I would cover as broad a use of the language in World of Warcraft as possible.

3.1. Server and character

Since I chose to study *global channels* (see "Chat channels" below) my choice of character will remain irrelevant for the aim of my study. However, I chose to create two characters, one for each faction, *horde* and *alliance* and study public channels on both.¹² As mentioned in section 2.1. World of Warcraft, there are a number of different server types on which players, due to role-playing rules, strive for a more Standard English usage, rather than the specialized language that is the focus of this study. Therefore, a *normal server* was chosen where there are no such role-playing rules. However, Guild channel and Raid channel were logged from a role-playing server due to technical difficulties on other servers. The participants on those channels did not show any sign of role-playing behavior, so the server type is unlikely to have modified the texts used as material in this study.

When analyzing the text I had gathered I sometimes came across players spamming¹³ messages over and over. I removed all those duplicates and counted the initial message once

¹¹ Referred to as *whispers* in the game.

¹² Because rumor has it that younger players more often choose to play alliance than horde, though, finding proof of this seems impossible due to obvious technical obstacles; players do not need to specify their age.

¹³ To spam means to send the same information more than once.

only. In addition, there are commercial businesses which sometimes come online on World of Warcraft to, illegally, post messages about their services and products. I discarded those kinds of messages entirely, as they have no relevance for my study. I also came across a few messages written in another language than English and discarded them as well.

3.2. Chat channels

The public channels I chose to study were *Trade channel* and *General channel*; both are public and allow everyone with their characters located in the same region of the game access. In addition, these channels are *global* which means that messages can reach the audience regardless of where a character is located in the region.¹⁴ Trade channel is self-explanatory; it is the channel you use to sell in-game goods. The General channel is a channel in which you can ask for assistance or chat about anything on your mind. However, there is no one to stop anyone from sharing, for example, one's opinion about the current weather in one's home country in the trade channel.

Party channel and *Raid channel* are slightly different as they are intended for only two to five players in the case of Party channel and more than five to forty players in the case of Raid channel. In Party channel this often makes the topics of discussions more personal, but also much more quickly paced than all other channels. Both channels, but Raid channel in particular, are often used to give instructions before combat in the game and also *during* the actual combat, while the players are somewhat busy steering and controlling their characters. This lack of time to write might be a reason to use abbreviations to a greater extent than in other channels. As with General channel and Trade channel, Party channel and Raid channel are also global channels so text written in these channels will reach the other players in the channel no matter how far the characters are from each other, even if they are in different regions. Party chat and Raid channel can be used for anything and the discussions can often become much more personal than General channel and Trade channel.

Guild channel is another channel that I chose to study, because in this channel the language might be more relaxed than elsewhere and therefore of value to my study. Guild channel is, like the other channels mentioned above, also a global channel, entirely independent of the

¹⁴ The Trade Channel is linked through all the game's cities, combining several regions.

characters' location. Only the players with characters belonging to the same guild may write in this channel so theoretically one is only writing to friends. The topic of discussion may vary greatly here. During the time I collected my material, the number of people online the guild channel was approximately 20.

List of chat channels:

<u>Channel name:</u>	<u>Preferences:</u>
Trade channel and General channel	public, global, sell goods and ask for assistance
Party channel and Raid channel	global, 2-40 players, quick pace
Guild channel	global, approximately 20 players, varied topics of discussions

4. Results

I analyzed 1045 unique messages of text written by different players on World of Warcraft. 351 messages were gathered from the Guild channel, 437 messages were gathered from Party channel and Raid channel and 257 messages were gathered from General channel and Trade channel. The main areas that I studied were *abbreviations, emoticons, words based on pronunciation, multiple letter usage and other type of word formation*. In the discussion section of the paper I will also highlight some slightly smaller areas that become relevant to the discussion.

4.1. Abbreviations

Throughout the 1045 messages 527 abbreviations were found, meaning that if the abbreviations were spread out evenly, 50% of the messages contained abbreviations. 126 of these abbreviations were unique and only 2 of them would be found in Standard English; *etc* and *min* (short for *minute*) (MacMillan English Dictionary 2007). Many of the abbreviations found are used primarily in the game such as *voa10*, short for *Vault of Archavon – 10 man* (a raid-dungeon in the game) (Wikia, Vault of Archavon, 2009) and *hc* or *H*, short for *heroic* (a certain difficulty within the game). However, most of the abbreviations could theoretically be used in most everyday situations, since they are not only connected to the game. Examples are *rdy* which stands for *ready* and *pls* or *plz* which stands for *please*.

A few of the abbreviations are seen in Table 1 accompanied by a simple explanation of that abbreviation. Some abbreviations will be explained in greater detail in section 5. *Discussion*, later in the paper. Due to the vast number of abbreviations, however, some have been omitted from this list. A full list of all abbreviations, without explanations, can be found in the Appendix. All the abbreviations are listed in the form I came across first. If the abbreviation is labeled *NO* under *Case sensitive*, other ways of capitalizing the abbreviation were found, (ex. *lol*, being labeled *NO* under case sensitivity means that it might also have been spelled *Lol*, *LOL* or *LoL*. If labeled *YES*, there was only one type of capitalization found). All explanations for abbreviations are based on my own experience but many of them are supported by either Crystal's *A Glossary of Netspeak and Textspeak* or *Urbandictionary.com*.

Table 1: List of abbreviations with explanations

<u>Abbreviation:</u>	<u>Number of times:</u>	<u>Case sensitive:</u>	<u>Explanation:</u>
/w	2	YES	whisper
afk	1	YES	away from keyboard
any1	1	YES	anyone
AOE	2	YES	area of effect
Atm	2	YES	at the moment
ATP	2	NO	attack power
brb ¹⁵	4	YES	be right back
BS	10	NO	blacksmith
btw	9	YES	by the way
Crit	1	YES	critical strike
dbm	1	YES	deadly boss mod
dmg	1	YES	damage
dps ¹⁶	25	NO	damage per second
ffs	1	YES	for fuck's sake
FTW	1	YES	for the win
G	14	NO	gold
GJ	2	NO	good job
grz	1	YES	congratulations/congrats
gtfo	1	YES	get the fuck out
imba	1	YES	imbalanced
imho	2	YES	in my honest opinion
inc	6	YES	incoming
k	9	NO	thousand
k	5	YES	okay
lfg	2	NO	looking for group
lol ¹⁷	27	NO	laughing out loud
m8	1	YES	mate
omg	2	NO	oh my god

¹⁵ Also used as a noun.

¹⁶ Used both as a noun and a verb.

¹⁷ Since the capitalization version only appeared once, it felt more emotionally charged than the normal *lol*.

omw	1	YES	on my way
plz	7	YES	please
ppl	8	YES	people
PWN	1	YES	own
ROFL	1	YES	rolling on floor laughing
some1	1	YES	someone
sry	2	YES	sorry
tnx	1	YES	thanks
VoA10	1	YES	Vault of Archavon10-man
w/c	1	YES	welcome

4.2. Emoticons

The 116 emoticons¹⁸ found, 25 of them being unique, are listed in Table 2. As with Table 1, if the emoticon is labeled *NO* under *Case sensitive*, other ways of capitalizing the emoticon were found. Explanation 1, before the slash has been taken from Crystal (2004). Explanation 2, after the slash is gathered from Computer Knowledge's *Full emoticon list*. Even though the two sources provide more than 2000 emoticons together, some of the emoticons I came across remain unexplained, as Table 2 shows. The list is sorted based on ASCII.¹⁹

Table 2: List of emoticons with explanations

<u>Emoticon:</u>	<u>Number of times:</u>	<u>Case sensitive:</u>	<u>Explanations 1 / Explanation 2:</u>
.-.	1	-	none / sleepy
:-(2	-	unhappy, sad dissatisfied, frowning / drama, sad, unhappy
:(3	-	unhappy, sad dissatisfied, frowning / sad, frowning
:~)	1	-	happy, joking, smiling, satisfied / happy, smiling, ha ha
:~) ²⁰	32	-	happy, joking, smiling, satisfied / I meant it kindly, happy
:D	14	YES	none (alternative :-D laughing) / laughing
:O	7	NO	amazed surprised, shocked / yelling
:P	21	NO	disgusted (sticking out tongue) / sticking out tongue
:s	2	YES	none / (alternative :-S What you say make no sense)
:S	2	YES	none / (alternative :-s used after bizarre comment)
;-)	1	YES	winking / winking, irony
;)	2	-	winking / winking
;D	1	YES	none / none
;o	2	YES	none (alternative ;o) joking) / none
^.^	1	YES	none / (alternative ^_^ smiling)
^^	9	-	none / happiness
=(2	YES	none / none (alternative version of :()
=)	1	YES	none / none (alternative version of :))
=o	1	YES	none / none (alternative =O) Stimpny)

¹⁸ In some cases referred to as smilies.

¹⁹ Short for American Standard Code for Information Interchange. An “alphabet” for all characters on a standard American keyboard.

²⁰ One case was found with a space in between “ :) ”.

>:D	1	YES	none (alternative >:-) devilish) / none (alternative >:) devil)
>_>'	1	-	none / none
o.<	1	YES	none / none
O.o	1	YES	none / really stupid face
o/	1	YES	none / raise hand
xD	6	YES	none / none

4.3. Words based on pronunciation

As mentioned earlier in section 2.2.4 *Non-standard spelling*, in chatgroups, blogs and virtual worlds some words are created which reflect pronunciation, such as *yep*, *yup*, *yay*, *nope*, *noooo* (Crystal 2004). The 57 non-Standard English words, based on pronunciation, 37 of them unique, that I found are listed in Table 3. As in Tables 1 and 2, if the word is labeled *NO* under *Case sensitive*, other ways of capitalizing the words were found. Since some of the words only made sense in the context of where they were written, I have added brief explanations to some of them.

Table 3: List of words based on pronunciation

<u>Words based on pronunciation:</u>	<u>Number of times:</u>	<u>Case sensitive:</u>	<u>Explanation:</u>
Ah	2	YES	affirmative / "I understand"
Ahhhh	1	YES	-
ahw	1	YES	pitying or whining
cos	3	YES	from "because"
coz	1	YES	from "because"
cuz	1	YES	from "because"
cya	1	YES	from "see you"
dammit	1	YES	from "damn it"
dang	1	YES	from the sound a bell makes
Ewww	1	YES	disgusted
friking	1	YES	from "freaking"
gonna	1	YES	from "going to"
haha	8	YES	-
hahah	3	YES	-
hahaha	1	YES	-
hehe	3	YES	-
Heja	1	YES	-
heya	4	YES	-
hiya	1	YES	-
hmm	1	YES	curious or thinking
huh	1	YES	questioning / "I didn't know that"
Kay	1	YES	from "okay"
kinda	1	YES	from "kind of"
mhm	1	YES	affirmative
nono	1	YES	-
Nop	1	YES	from "no"
nope	2	YES	from "no"

Table 5: List of other types of word formation

<u>Word:</u>	<u>Number of times:</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
*	1	* followed by a number to state quantity
+	1	used instead of “and”.
adds	4	additional enemies that are approaching
aggro	1	from the British slang meaning violent**
AH	1	verb form of abbr. AH (auction house). Ex. “I will AH it”
alting	1	verb of the abbr. alt (alternative character)
blacksmith	1	blacksmith with the suffix -er
boost	2	verb, to help another lower level character
Drop	2	noun, something that has been dropped.
epic	1	concrete noun, “give me the epic, please”
guildies	1	guildmembers
ish	1	suffix used as a word of its own.
loling	2	verb of the abbr. lol (laughing out loud)
mobs	2	mobile (non-playing) objects / monsters*
n00b	1	from the word newbie
nubs	1	a variation of the word noobs (from “newbies”)
nublets	1	nubs, but with the -lets suffix (as in “piglets”)
Nuke	1	to do magic damage from a distance*
ooming	1	verb from the abbr. “oom” (out of mana) ²¹
pre-tbc	1	a specific period of time. lit. “before the Burning Crusade”
pull	1	lure an enemy closer*
wipe	2	the entire party of characters dies*
x	22	x followed by a number to state quantity
youtubing	1	making the noun youtube to a verb

* (Mo’ Urban Dictionary 2009).

** (MacMillan English Dictionary 2007).

5. Discussion

5.1. Abbreviations

The results of the study indicate that the use of abbreviations is extremely frequent on World of Warcraft. However, by analyzing the text I collected it becomes clear that some people use more abbreviations than others, but more importantly, depending on the situation, the number of abbreviations varies greatly. By assuming that the abbreviations are spread evenly among the messages the results indicate that 30% of messages in the Guild channel (with a more personal conversation atmosphere) had one abbreviation, 22% of the messages in the Raid channel (with an instructional and often quick paced atmosphere) had one abbreviation and

²¹ A more detailed explanation follows in section 5.2 *Word formation*.

General and Trade channel (with the purpose of reaching out to people and delivering a message) reached 125%, which theoretically means that every sentence contained more than one abbreviation. This indicates that the reason for the use of abbreviations in World of Warcraft is not necessarily to speed up the conversations or add a personal touch to the language, but to reach out to people and get attention. Both Trade channel and General channel provided almost exclusively messages of an attention seeking nature, most often by asking to buy or to sell game goods or asking for characters to join them on raiding parties or similar game activities. A good example of one of those kind of sentences is: *LFM 3DPS AN HC /W me*, which means *looking for three more damage dealers to Azjol-Nerub in heroic-mode. Whisper me*. The players of World of Warcraft are connected to quite a number of chat channels at the same time and are busy playing the actual game. Therefore it is easy to understand that the full sentence above might not deliver the wanted message in time for people in the game to catch it, while the abbreviated message would.

The lower-case default mentality that Crystal speaks about, lower-case words being standard and capitalized words being considered shouting, doesn't seem to be entirely the case according to my results. While the abbreviation *lol* indeed feels less powerful than *LOL*, the technical abbreviations such as AOE (area of effect), BG (battle ground), ATP (attack power), DM (Dire Maul) and JC (Jewel crafter) seem to function just as well capitalized as in lower-case. In the Raid chat and Guild chat the lower-case default mentality seems more accepted as standard compared to Trade channel and General channel. This might be because the types of abbreviations are more technical in the latter channels and thereby accepted capitalized without being misinterpreted as shouting, as Crystal explains can be the case otherwise (see above, section 2.2.2).

The results of my studies of abbreviations show that, what Crystal referred to as *leeguage* (see 2.2.1 *Netspeak*), that is, words with deviant spelling, such as *d00dz*, turned out to be nonexistent except for three cases, *m8*, *any1* and *some1*. *m8*, for example, is a deviant spelling of the word *mate*, but Crystal says that leeguage is about creating *cool jargons*. Whether or not *m8* originally was created as a cool jargon is probably impossible to find out, but seeing how *LFM 3 DPS AN HC /W me* is preferred before *looking for three more damage dealers to Azjol-Nerub in heroic-mode. Whisper me*, it is also easy to see that *m8* might be preferred before *mate*, without being a cool jargon. The word *n00b* in Table 5 means an “inexperienced

and/or ignorant or unskilled person. Especially used in computer games,” (Mo’ Urban Dictionary 2009). This is obviously not an abbreviation, but a clear case of leanguage, since the zeros have no direction function, such as decreasing the numbers of letters (and in this case numerals) used.

The desire to keep things short, as we have seen being the case with abbreviations, was found in more situations. The use of *x* (and in one case the use of ***) as an indicator of quantity such as in *wts [Eternal Fire]x50* and *WTS 1x [Frozen Orb]*, and the use of *+* instead of *and* are clear signs of the desire to keep things short. But it is not to create *written speech* as several writers have said concerning Netspeak (see 2.2.1 *Netspeak*).

5.2. Word formation

In several of the examples in Table 5 there are cases where *keeping things short* seems to have nothing to do with it. Some terms, such as *adds*, *nuke*, *pull* and *wipe* seems quite normal in the sense that they are words created from the game’s need and thereby also irrelevant to study in greater detail. However, it is very interesting to see how some words take on peculiar word forms such as *alting*, which comes from *alt*, which is short for *alternative character* (Mo’ Urban Dictionary 2009). The form *alt* then becomes a verb when the suffix *-ing* is added, and the word means to *logout from one character and login to an alternative character*. Similarly, the abbreviation *oom*, short for *out of mana*,²² becomes a verb when the suffix *-ing* is added and the meaning of the word becomes the act of *going out of mana*. *Youtubing* is another word with the same transformation, meaning to go *onto Youtube*.²³ *Drop* also changes word form, but from verb to noun as the example from the text shows: *i doubt he will anymore as i think tol²⁴ has his drop*. The character in the example is not talking about a drop, as in a *water drop*, but *an in-game item that has been dropped by a boss*. *Epic* also changes word class, but from adjective to noun which the following example from the text shows (in plural form): *basically free epics*. An epic item is *an item of great quality* in the game, simply referred to as an *epic*.

²² Mana is the magical power of the game, used to cast spells.

²³ A specific web page (www.youtube.com).

²⁴ *tol* is a character’s or player’s nickname.

Another interesting word formation is the use of the suffixes *-er* in *blacksmithier*, *-ies* in *guildies* and *-lets* in *nublets*. This type of word formation, using suffixes, is seen elsewhere on the Internet as well, Crystal explains. By adding *-ity* to *obvious* it forms *obviousity*, for example (see above, section 2.2.2). The suffix *-lets*, as in *piglets*, might very well make the term *nublets* even more demeaning compared to the term *nub* (with a slightly deviant spelling *noob*), which comes from *newbie* ‘beginner’. However, any proof of it being more demeaning seems impossible to find, but it seems probable, given the circumstances where it was found in the text; *that part wasnt on strategies coz even nublets knew to kill them xD*.

I would speculate that the *ish* term is relatively new in the way it was used in the text I gathered, because I have not come across any similar usage in my secondary sources. Normally, *ish* can be used as a suffix casually as in *blueish*, but in my case the suffix behaved slightly differently. First one message was written, followed by a second:

Simon: *30 mins*
Simon: *ish*

So, rather than modifying a noun, *ish*, in this case modifies the previous message. Whether this way of expressing oneself is common, my study does not show, but it shows that the technology²⁵ gives birth to new ways of using the language.

5.3. Emoticons and discussion of other areas

The sources I used for emoticons had more than 2000 emoticons altogether. The fact that I still failed to find and identify some of them shows that there are very many. However, perhaps emoticons should be considered more like sentences, built up by words, or in the case of emoticons, by characters. There is a limited number of characters, just as there is a limited number of words, but an unlimited number of sentences and unlimited number of emoticons. The only limit would be the imagination. However, the results of my studies show clearly that positive emoticons (68)²⁶ are more frequently used than negative emoticons (7),²⁷ leaving the

²⁵ In this case, the stacking of messages on top of another.

²⁶ Positive smilies being (skipping commas for better reading) :-) :) :D ;-) ;) ;D ^_^ ^^ => xD

²⁷ Negative smilies being (skipping commas for better reading) :-(:(=(

rest of the emoticons uncategorized. The use of emoticons was much more frequent in the Guild chat, the more personal channel, with a total of 75 out of the total 116.

In addition to emoticons, the use of characters was displayed in an interesting way which has not yet been addressed. The character * was used to correct a typo²⁸ in the following way:

Simon: *helo Johan!*
Simon: **hello*

According to *urbandictionary.com*, this use of the asterisk comes from instant messengers,²⁹ where it is also used to censor out parts of words or entire words, or to define something, such as an action (Mo' Urban Dictionary 2009). The latter was found in my results as well in the two following ways:

Simon: **lights cigar**
Simon: **blush**

Interestingly, this shows that these kinds of written actions are accepted both in the first- and third person without a personal pronoun (*Simon lights* or *he/she lights* and *I blush*). Similarly, “ was used in the same way:

Simon: “*nods*”

Another interesting use of characters was how the – was used to emphasize something as in the following way:

Simon: *You -still- sound like Ella Nhaz*

As is seen primarily in table 1 and 2, capitalization found in my study is a difficult matter. Concerning emoticons there seem to be no certain rule for writing either :o or :O. The meaning of the emoticon might not be exactly the same, but as said above, it is only the

²⁸ Or misspelling.

²⁹ MSN messenger, Skype etc. are chat programs that are also defined as instant messengers.

imagination that limits the variation of emoticons. Concerning abbreviations, however, capitalization seems less simple. 21 abbreviations that allowed capitalization were *technical terms*, such as ah (Auction House), atp (ATtack Power), lfg (Looking For Group), ret (RETriBution) and wts (Want To Sell) while only 4 abbreviations were *less technical terms*, gj (Good Job), k (okay), lol (Laughing Out Loud) and wb (Welcome back). In addition to these results, my experience supports the theory of *lol* and *LOL* being unequally powerful, while *lfg* and *LFG* mean exactly the same thing.

Crystal says that multiple consonants and vowels can be a sign of emotional expressions of horror or shock. The results of my study also show that the use of multiple consonants and vowels is a sign of emotional expression, however, neither horror nor shock, except possibly the example of *Ewwwww* (see table 4). The player shouting *GOOOOOAAALLLL*, was watching an ice-hockey game. The same person also said, *goal :(*, followed by *FUCK!!!! Goal :(*, proving that there were a lot of emotions involved.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that there are significant differences between the English of World of Warcraft and Standard English. It shows that the languages differ, not only in one area, but many, including the use of abbreviations, emoticons, vocabulary, capitalization, spelling, multiple letter use and the use of rare characters. By comparing my results with previous study on other fields on the Internet (such as MUDs and Chatgroups), I found that they supported some theories while questioning others, such as Crystal's statement that multiple letter use is a statement of horror or shock. I was surprised to see that the need to be able to type a message faster is not the main reason for abbreviations, according to my results. The results of my study also show that World of Warcraft English is not a simple effort to try and imitate speech. The use of * for correcting typos, the usage of *ish* to modify a previous message, deviant spelling, overuse of suffixes and more show that World of Warcraft English is much more advanced than that, which supports Crystal's similar statement with new evidence. However, my study is ultimately too small for the results to be generalized. Also sources of online computer game language turned out to be very hard to come by. Even so, I believe that my paper and results can be a starting point for people who want to delve deeper into the area.

When I was analyzing the results of my study I noticed that the use of punctuation (including use of exclamation marks, commas, semicolons etc), quotation marks and nicknaming are areas which I believe are also suitable to be studied with a method similar to mine. As this area of language is changing very fast (as it is dependent on the software)³⁰ and relatively new it would be interesting, and probably possible, to trace the development backwards in time to see how World of Warcraft English has evolved from game to game and/or possibly from other areas as well, such as chatgroups.

After having finished the study, I realize now that some things could have been done differently. By comparing texts from a game with a text gathered from an online chatgroup, I would have been able to distinguish the parts of the language that are only useful in the actual game and which words could be used elsewhere as well. However, my intention was to examine the language found in World of Warcraft and pick out the parts of it that differ from Standard English and analyze those parts. I hope to be able to delve deeper into the subject soon again, since it turned out to be an extremely fascinating area of language to study with plenty more secrets, I am sure, waiting to be revealed.

³⁰ In this case World of Warcraft.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Full Table 1:

<u>Abbreviation:</u>	<u>Number of times:</u>	<u>Case sensitive:</u>	<u>Abbreviation:</u>	<u>Number of Times:</u>	<u>Case sensitive</u>
/w	2	YES	hc	18	NO
afk	1	YES	hc's (plural)	1	YES
Ah	4	NO	hol	2	YES
AN	6	NO	HOS	4	YES
any1	1	YES	hp	4	NO
AOE	2	YES	IF	1	YES
aq	1	YES	imba	1	YES
Atm	2	YES	imho	2	YES
ATP	2	NO	inc	6	YES
BG	1	YES	Inv	2	YES
bk	1	YES	iuno	1	YES
brb ³¹	4	YES	JC	8	YES
BS	10	NO	JCs(plural)	1	YES
btw	9	YES	JCW	1	YES
bwl	1	YES	k	5	YES
CoT	1	YES	k	9	NO
Crit	1	YES	kk	1	YES
dbm	1	YES	LF	82	NO
DK	1	YES	LF2M	1	YES
DM	1	YES	lfg	2	NO
dmg	1	YES	LFM	20	NO
dpend	1	YES	LFM1	2	YES
dps ³²	25	NO	lfw	5	NO
dps's (plural)	2	NO	locks	1	YES
enh	1	YES	lol ³³	27	NO
EoE	1	YES	lolol	1	YES
etc	1	YES	Lvl	8	NO
ffs	1	YES	m8	1	YES
FTW	1	YES	mats	7	YES
G	14	NO	MC	1	YES
gb	1	YES	min	2	NO
GC	1	YES	mins	1	YES
GJ	2	NO	mo	1	YES
Grats	4	YES	naxx	3	NO
gratz.	4	YES	NORM	1	YES
Grp	1	YES	omg	2	NO
grz	1	YES	omw	1	YES
gtfo	1	YES	OS	2	YES
gz	4	YES	Pala	1	YES
H.	4	YES			

³¹ Also used as a noun.

³² Used both as a noun and a verb.

³³ Since the capitalization version only appeared once, it felt more emotionally charged than the normal *lol*.

peeps	21	YES	T7	1	YES
pls	4	YES	tacts	1	YES
plz	7	YES	Tbc	2	NO
PoH	1	YES	tnx	1	YES
ppl	8	YES	ty	2	YES
pref	1	YES	u	1	YES
Prot	1	YES	UK	1	YES
PWN	1	YES	uld	1	YES
rdy	1	YES	UP	10	YES
Rep	1	YES	vc	3	NO
resto	1	YES	VH	6	YES
resto	1	YES	voa	3	YES
Ret	3	NO	VoA10	1	YES
RFK	1	YES	w/c	1	YES
RL	1	YES	Wb	6	NO
ROFL	1	YES	WC	1	YES
s	3	YES	WG	3	YES
secs	1	YES	Wisp	1	YES
sham	1	YES	wna	2	YES
Shatt	1	YES	WTB	5	YES
some1	1	YES	WTE	1	YES
sry	2	YES	wtf	1	YES
stats	1	YES	WTS	46	NO
SW	1	YES			