Laws Among the Lawless:

Terms and Etiquette in Video Gaming

**Introduction**

Young people and video games have been irrevocably linked since the later part of the 20th century. Over the years, gaming has developed into a multi-million dollar business with a large portion of our society devoting considerable portions of their time to playing games. With this growing community moving into more advanced technologies, there has been a migration of gamers to the internet. Playing over the internet allows gamers not only to play with one another when they’re immense distances apart, and also allows for instantaneous communication between these partners. These new channels of communication creates the perfect breeding ground for new terms and phrases to be created for the unique situations that are encountered only in video games, such as having a teammate’s impatience costing the rest of his group their lives.

The goal of this paper is to discover terms and phrases used in the gaming community. Finding the meanings of these words and the context in which they would be used will help those who don’t belong to the gaming culture to understand what is being said by this demographic if they were to bring this terminology outside of the games. Culture that is primarily acted out on the internet is extremely fluid, and the actions or preferences of one group easily spreads to another, so fluency in a related field could help frequent internet users to understand new levels of communication on the internet.

**Methodology**

The first steps of forming this study were to form a plan of execution. Deciding where to find informants, what questions would best provoke the responses desired for this research, and finally how to code and draw conclusions from them were the questions that must be solved before research could be carried out.

Informants for this study could be taken from any medium of communication that video gamers frequent, such as gaming forums, discussion boards, advertisements on notice boards in computer labs, or through countless other methods. For the sake of simplicity, choosing players from my own group of acquaintances was the best option. While this would create a biased sample, as will be discussed later, this moderately diverse group of users could be questioned about their communication habits with ease and speed. Using individuals already familiar and friendly with the interviewer eliminated the process of building rapport and the trust of an informant. Also an important contributing factor to this decision was the frequency of users who were in possession of a microphone (or *mic*) that connected to their computers on this friends’ list. Not every gamer has access to this technology, and to have such a dense collection of these people was a valuable resource.

Approaching these informants was achieved through a simple private message sent through the Steam[[1]](#footnote-1) client. The message contained a request to take part in an approximately hour-long interview examining the common communication practices of gamers. The potential informants were made aware of the intentions to record their calls using the program Skype Recorder and the goals of the paper. Once gamers were found and willing to contribute to the study, they were requested to either run or install the computer calling program Skype.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Skype call began with another explanation of the purpose of the study, a request for permission that the call be recorded, and finally the interview would begin. The questions consisted of a half-dozen pre-conceived inquires:

*What types of video games do you prefer?*

*Do you typically play* multiplayer *or* campaign *game types?*

*How would you define* noob*?*

*Can you explain what* trash-talking *is?*

*Can you describe what* trolling *is?*

*What is the difference between these two terms?*

From the answers to these questions, further probing of distinction between terms was employed. Using this ethnographic tool, significantly more terms were found and were able to be examined, far more than were originally included in the study. The recordings from these calls were transcribed and carefully analyzed for any terms or common communication practices. These gems of information were complied and organized carefully in the following sections of this paper.

**Ethical Issues**

The ethical connotations of this paper seem to be few and far between. Besides the standard respect for an informant’s privacy and reporting their responses accurately, there is only one obvious moral quandary to be sorted through; that of anonymity.

The ability to be anonymous in any aspect of life is quickly shrinking, and these small communities where people can sink into relative freedom from the ramifications of their actions and words are scarce. With the rise in popularity of social networking sites and comprehensive membership required to engage in activities on most online forums, a place where the membership requirements are fairly loose and one can literally change their name and entire online image at a moment’s notice is a rare and, for many, appreciated opportunity. The academic exploration of this dwindling group is a frightening prospect for some because it would draw attention to their freedom. There are a growing number of opponents to anonymity on the internet, and the less attention to the negative aspects of these community, the less likely they would be seen as a threat.

**Review of the Literature**

The journals most significant to the formation of this paper were *Not Alone in the Field: Distance Collaboration via the Internet in a Focused Ethnography* by Bonnie K. Lee and David Gregory, and *Understanding Practitioner Ethnography* by Thomas David Baron. These two articles, while not directly related to the research, were enlightening and highly influential to how research was carried out and pulled together.

Lee and Gregory’s writings centered around a long-distance collaboration between partners working on the same report. Both were studying the social environment of a rehabilitation center in Hong Kong, with one of the partners residing on the opposite side of the globe in Canada. The distance between the two was at first a detriment, since the difference in time zones had an adverse effect on direct communication, most situations only allowed for e-mails. Despite this difficulty, the partners found a way to increase their productivity by exploiting their time zone difference. The ethnographer in the field would gather information through images, recordings and field notes, and then send them through e-mail to her partner in Canada before retiring for the night. When the Canadian colleague woke up, he had access to all of the information from Hong Kong, and would get to work organizing and reworking it, even drafting up further questions that the field worker could pose to his informants the following day. This constant collaboration from across the world made the team achieve twice what a normally constructed team would have accomplished in the same time.

Although a partner on the other side of the world wasn’t part of this research, the ability to communicate meaningfully from the opposite side of the globe was inspiring. If such a long distance between partners was easily spanned through the use of the internet, such communication through substantially smaller space and over simpler topics shouldn’t be as impossible as was originally thought. The importance of face-to-face communication in ethnography, while still an important tool in one’s arsenal, is not the only option available to researchers anymore.

Baron’s *Understanding Practitioner Ethnography* was not centered on specific research carried out, but instead defined various different ways to carry out ethnography. The role and history ethnographic interviewing has developed over the years was examined, as well as a general explanation of different forms of ethnography. Of particular interest for this paper was his explanation of practitioner ethnography, which is the practice of studying a society that one belongs to. Typically an ethnographer studies a foreign society, but studying one closer to their own realm of experience could pose a greater understanding of the topic as the ethnographer knows the topics of interest and importance in the culture they are familiar with. The author could develop a deeper understanding for the ways of the society as they will already understand the “language” of the group and can delve directly into the deeper meanings of the rituals and practices. Baron suggests that practitioner ethnography has real value to sociology as it can increase the validity and relevance of a researched topic.

The validity of practitioner ethnography was an important cornerstone in this paper’s construction, as the informants found were found through my own gaming experience. Having played video games for many years has created the interest in the topic that sparked the writing of this paper, so learning that the way in which this paper was going to be researched was indeed valid was an important step.

**Analysis**

Gamers have a dialog all their own that makes no sense to outsiders. This form of speech is thought to originate on message boards and forums that video game and internet aficionados frequent, where popular phrases and memes[[3]](#footnote-3) originate. The term “meme” comes from Richard Dawkins who equated the concept to a virus that replicates and spreads through populations to the evolution of language, which perfectly describes how language comes into being. Just like an organism, language of gamers has developed over time and differs among different populations.

There are three broad categories that most terms unique to the gaming community can be sequestered into. These domains include words that refer to game types and the distinctions between them, how and why people cheat, and finally vocabulary and phrases that refer to other people and actions a person can potentially take part in. Another group of words that were often heard in observation was that of game-specific terminology, words that are particular to a game or game type and are important to the playing of that game. These types of words were omitted from this study not only because their number is astronomical, but also because their understanding is not essential to comprehending the ins and outs of communication among gamers. Within these preferred domains are several sub-categories that build a complex web of expressions and meanings that are unique to the gaming world.

*Game Types*

When gaming in an online, multiplayer format, the most basic knowledge that one develops is that of the different types of games and actions to be executed that are expected in these games. There is a diverse pool of game genres, but the three that are of most relevant to this discussion are the *FPS*, *RTS* and *MMO* game types. *FPS* stands for first-person shooter in which a person controls a character whose main action is shooting at objects or other people to progress through a story. Games categorized as *RTS* (real-time strategy) revolve around players in direct competition against each other or the artificial intelligence (AI) of the game. The goal of these games is to destroy the other players’ *units* (a term used in RTS games that refers to something that can be player-controlled. Can be specified to offence, defense, or foraging for resources to create more units) completely, usually by means of an army or other destructive means. Lastly, there are *MMO*’s. *MMO* stands for mass multiplayer online, which is a completely virtual world where players enter into combat against each other or AI-controlled beasts for items and rewards.

Gamers usually have a preference for which of these game types they enjoy to play the most often, though there is often crossover.

Well what I usually play are, um, I like FPS-style games, which are first person shooters, games like Call of Duty, Left 4 Dead, Battlefield: Bad Company 2 which is really similar to Call of Duty. What I’ve really been playing a lot of lately is actually StarCraft 2 which is an RTS, a real-time strategy game. Made by Blizzard, same people who made World of Warcraft... an MMO, mass-multiplayer online game.

Within these games are yet more different variants of how to play. A *campaign* is a single player game through the story of the game, though sometimes others can join the player to aide them through. When competing against each other, there are players controlling both allies and enemies (though often some enemies are controlled by a computer), and this is known as *multiplayer versus*. The most common ways players are drawn together in FPS and RTS games are through *matchmaking* systems that tie players who are looking to play together into a game, usually matching them in skill level, experience or other important factors. These games are referred to as *randoms*. MMO players usually play with people in their regular group of players (also known as their *guild* or *clan*), or whoever happens to be looking for a game. These multiplayer versus games are divided into *free-for-alls*, where there are no teams and everyone is against everyone else, and *team games*, where one team sets out to destroy another team. In team games, configurations generally range from *1v1*, meaning one player against another single player, to *2v2, 3v3, 4v4* and beyond. These team sizes don’t always have to match up, but customarily they will be at least close to each other in size or cumulative skill level. The combination of different types of games, such as this gamer explains:

Well, usually it, usually those are like that, but StarCraft also has different team games. They have 1v1, 2v2, 3v3 and 4v4, and you can do both arranged and random teams, so like for instance, I was doing random 2’s earlier where I was going into a game with another random person against two other people who were either random or had chosen to be together in a team.

*Breaking the Rules*

After understanding the basic components of a game, one must understand how these concepts can be altered in the unfair favor of a player through unsavory means. *Hacking* and *Cheating* are similar concepts, with *cheating* being a general domain, and *hacking* being a sub-set of it. Cheating is generally identified as altering the game in any way to weigh the conclusion unfairly in one’s favor. This can include actions that are within the game, but not necessarily meant to be used in a specific way such as shoving a chair from another room against a wall and then jumping on that chair to jump to a previously unreachable area, allowing the players to bypass a large segment of the intended gaming area.

Another form of cheating that isn’t against any written rules is that of the *pub stomp*. Pub stomping is when the dynamic of randomly chosen teams facing against another randomly chosen team is broken. A gamer with the alias of SlapChop explained the reasons a team would choose to engage in pub stomping;

Well, a pub stomp is where a group of friends, usually when you’re playing with your friends and you’ve got a vibe going on, all “woo, we’re winning” and you’ve gotten used to winning, and you know each other’s positives and negatives and are friends. Well a pubstomp is when good friends or good people go into public games, so pre-made teams against random people kinda like destroy, score-wise destroy the other team.

This gives unfair edge to the pre-organized team as they already know each other’s strengths, habits and communication skills, whereas the randomly selected team has no organization and must start from scratch. In pub stomping, as with most forms of indirect cheating, there are no punishments, it is simply frowned upon.

*Hacking*, on the other hand, is “using some sort of program to cheat, to modify the terms of the game in your favor. It’s hugely frowned upon by the whole gaming community, people hate cheaters,” according to an informant. This can range from running programs that automatically point one’s weapon to enemy targets (*aim hacking*), give oneself added health points, extra money points or an unlimited ammunition on an FPS. The ramifications of hacking are much more severe than the general forms of cheating; many games will completely ban a player who is caught hacking, and players will add them to their *block list*, which means that they will never come into contact with that player again.

Certain situations allow for hacking and cheating, despite the overall negative connotation.

I’d come into games and there’d be a skilled player and I’ll add him as a friend, and then we’d go into a local game, we’d host a game locally (to host a game with another person on a private server where cheating and hacking is allowed) and turn on the cheats so we can spawn hunters, that way we can go back and forth and practice against each other and get better, or teach each other how to play better. There’s a guy I played with a lot on Left 4 Dead who’s really good at dead-stomping hunters so that when they pounced on him, he would just melee attack them and stop them from pouncing on you, and he was so good at it that he’s been banned from several servers because people think he’s aim hacking

As OM3GA explained, there are times in which cheating and hacking are not only allowed, but they’re encouraged to increase skill, or to change the objective of the game. When all the people playing a game are aware that cheats are going to be used, as on a custom server[[4]](#footnote-4), using cheats is accepted. For instance, *trainers* allow players to play under specific circumstances until they have mastered the skills necessary to win in this situation when they encounter it in an actual game. It appears that if everyone in a game is offered the same ability to cheat, then it isn’t considered unethical anymore. According to an informant, “If it’s changing the terms of the game only for yourself, then that’s selfish and it’s not ok and it’s frowned upon because it’s making the game unfair for others.”

*Lag* is an important factor in the online gaming experience, though it is often heard in frustrated screams from a player who feels he has been on the bad end of its wrath. Even bringing up lagging with an informant produced an anguished “God, I hate lagging!”, and in the other interviews, breaching the subject brought out groans of frustration. *Lag* is a hiccup in the fluid movement of motion and time in a game, creating an almost strobe light look to the game. This can be the result of a hardware malfunction (damage to the physical computer), an internet connection issue, or intentional manipulation of the internet connection by the *host* of the game. At the beginning of each game that is hosted over the internet, there is a 55-second window where players are all able to connect to the game. If in this time they aren’t able to connect, they are ejected from the game. During the actual game, people can still *lag out* of the game, which is where for any of these reasons the player cannot stay attached to the server. Often, if someone is having trouble connecting to the game, “there’ll be jokes about what they’re downloading in the background and that they should stop downloading said material.”

*Lag switching* is a form of cheating that manipulates the connection of all players to a server. The person who is *hosting* the game (around whom the connection of the other players congregate around) can manipulate the connection the other players have to the game by disconnecting them for a few precious seconds to have the time to make a movement or even kill. As one can see from the distinction between cheating and hacking, this would be a form of cheating since it does not include changing the code of the game.

*Communication Styles*

Players in the game have an incredibly diverse pool of words in which they can draw from to refer to specific characteristics other gamers may have. Each term has a specific meaning or connotation, despite standard variation from person to person, but the basic principles are universal. Most of the terms found in this study were negative and referred to traits that are insulting to be tied to. To fully understand the negative connotation of these terms, the words that describe a player who is enjoyable to play with should be considered.

A good player is, most importantly, someone who understands the importance of good communication. Good communication can often be the difference between a win or a loss, regardless of skill or any other factor and along with a compatibility of personality, is paramount. After communication, the ability to be a team player and follow directions well is important, then things such as skill and ability to take constructive criticism. Good players are often recognized not through many specific terms or language (other than *beast* and similar terms that insinuate that the player is incredibly good), but through receiving *friend requests* from the other players. When accepted, a friend request turns into an entry on a *friends list*, which is a collection of preferred players that a gamer can access easily whenever they’re playing.

Now that the qualifications for a good player have been laid out, the negative terms should be examined. *Trolling*, *trash talking*, *raging* and *griefing* are key to a pessimistic view of gamers. *Trolling* is the act of intentionally causing fights, drama or spreading lies in order to watch people’s reactions and get a rise out of them. *Trolls*, the people who frequently troll, find this activity enjoyable. One informant revealed that in real life, they are held accountable for what they say and do, so the anonymity of the internet allows them the freedom to tell lies and invest time in perpetuating these false stories while not being directly liable for the chaos it can produce. Some trolls are respectable people *IRL* (literally “in real life”, referring to their life and persona outside of the gaming world), and the veil of anonymity changes many players into more lively, brash caricatures of their real life selves.

You can’t really troll too much in real life without (people) thinking oddly of you, or bad towards you. Obviously when you’re online and gaming you’re never going to meet these people and never come into contact with them, so it’s not a big deal. You’ll never meet again, so fuck it, why not troll?

When players suspect that someone in the game is a troll, they typically say things such as “*Don’t feed the troll*” or “*Obvious troll is obvious*” to discredit the player who is trying to cause commotion.

The typical reason that a person would choose to troll is that they enjoy the reactions of the other players. Trolls inspire very diverse reactions, from anger and frustration to amusement. Some people find the antics of a troll entertaining, as an informant described:

Trolling is… making shit up, like \*laughs\* one of my buddies Cam came into a game and said “Did you know Kevin Costner died by hot air balloon?” And it was just the funniest shit and he made a fake website with fake links and trolled people so hard, made them believe he was telling the truth, making them believe the lie,

The site looked legitimate and many people believed the ruse, much to the amusement to those who were in on the joke.

Not only do people have strong reactions to trolls, but sometimes those strong reactions work in the favor of the troll. If a person on one side of the game is trolling another side and that person gets overly emotional, they may lose their edge and forget to do an important action in the game, or make a vital mistake. This advantage can prove incredibly powerful for players who are easily shaken, and while not all players let trolls get to them, enough do to make it a unique, albeit annoying, tool against an opposing team.

Similar to trolling is *trash talking*. *Trash talking*, also known as *talking shit* is calling another player out on either an action that was not successful (missing a target), or to comment on the opponent’s substandard skill and their own team’s superiority.

Usually they’d say things like “Fuck you, you suck,” “Goddamn it, you just missed that charge,” “How could you miss?” They’ll just make your mistakes obvious, that’s what happens when someone trolls in a game, “I’m too good, you’re too bad”, “Oh wow, I’m too good, just leave, get out of here.” I do come across it, usually when I make a mistake.

The main difference between these two terms is that trash talk is based in fact, however exaggerated, whereas trolling is a complete fabrication. Trash talking varies in strength of abuse from harmless banter is closer to teasing all the way to bullying and verbal abuse, sometimes escalating to threats. This type of speech is nearly always negative, though it can have a positive effect if a player being harassed notices the same insults being targeted to him and can choose to change his behavior or skills to avoid this in the future.

Similarly to trolling, trash talking receives various and diverse reactions from other players. Some enjoy the banter while others cannot stand the unmannerly conduct. Also like trolling, the potential power of trash talking depends on the victim, with the easily shaken or overly emotional being the easiest target. However, several informants told of instances where trash talking has the opposite of the intended effect; teams who are being harassed by the other team sometimes band together against this abuse and working even harder to pull out a victory.

*Describing Others & Events of the Game*

Gamers have some unique words they use to describe other players or comment on the events of a game, and most of these terms are included in trash talking. Firstly, the insults hurled at players are generally those that comment on the victim’s lack of skill, often equating them to a player who has just started to play the game. These terms, *noob, scrub,* literally means a new player and is considered by lots of players to be the height of insult. However, since this term has been around for quite a long time in the gaming world, it is going out of popularity and is seen by some as a bit antiquated and not in the common vernacular anymore. Other insults are the same as talking trash in any situation, such as *you suck, you blow, you’re shit*, but they refer directly to the player’s skill level. *Bitch*, on the other hand, is used less to insult a player’s skill than it is to comment on their apparent submissiveness to the other team’s dominance. As is often the case with this word, it implies that the target of the term is far from a masculine *power house* (a good player).

Even superior skill can be translated into an insult, as is often the case when players feel a specific person or team is doing overly well and have succeeded in squelching all of the opponent’s attacks. *Calling hax* or *calling cheats* is done when a player is suspected of using the previously described cheats or hacks, however baseless an accusation may be. Calling hax is often met with laughter or flattery by the target, as it is a roundabout way of complimenting their skill. However, when the losing team uses this as a crutch or excuse as to why they are losing, it’s often seen as whining or *bitching* (complaining and not taking responsibility for one’s actions).

There’s a guy I played with a lot on Left 4 Dead who’s really good at dead-stomping hunters so that when they pounced on him, he would just melee attack them and stop them from pouncing on you, and he was so good at it that he’s been banned from several servers because people think he’s aim hacking

When players are seen as annoying or obnoxious, or if they’re trolling and trash talking, other gamers will often tell them to *STFU*, which is a common phrase on the internet meaning literally “shut the fuck up”. This is often paired with other insults, such as “STFU noob” or “STFU bitches”. While rarely effective, it seems to be more to inform the obnoxious player that people are sick of his communications.

The most radical of terms in online gaming are probably the racial slurs. Many players use racial slurs as an insult whether or not the targeted gamer is of that racial/religious/gender group. While many players are quick to assure anyone asking about their overt racism that they are in fact not racist, the truth of bigotry being expressed on the internet is unavoidable. A particular informant who self-identified as a troll and trash talker stated that although he does use slurs as a majority of his insults and that there are no terms he knows of that are too horrible for him to use, he doesn’t feel that he is a racist. “I’m not like, a racist person, I just say it… I dunno, I just say it. I’m not racist, and I don’t mean it to be racist, I just say it as a comment.”

He further explained that although he uses these words as an insult, he would never say them to anyone outside of the anonymity of the internet and does not mean them as a comment of a particular group or people. He instead says that this is just a shocking and subversive statement that can often get him attention and a reaction (the food of the trolls), but that he means it in a sarcastic or comedic way. The truth of these statements is impossible to prove, but it is a point that was made often and clearly among gamers. It is interesting to point out that when questioned about the racist nature of his comments, he was actually surprised to notice how often he said these words.

*Griefing* often follows instances of trash talking or trolling and refers to the actions of a player who is emotionally affected by the mockery used. The actions of griefing players range from retaliating with trash-talk, using small glitches in a game that aren’t necessarily against the rules but are frowned upon to their favor as a sort of pay back. Conversely, if these players have animosity towards their own team, they may purposefully hurt their team to decrease their chances of winning. For instance, if a team is being unkind to a player in the FPS Left 4 Dead 2, that player could shoot his teammates with a powerful gun to decrease their health, then jump off a high building to kill his character. “They’re upset about the way the game is going, they’re about to rage quit and they’re going to screw everyone on their way out.”

Leaving a game in this way is known as *rage quitting*. Mostly this term means leaving a game before its conclusion as a result of unfavorable odds or circumstances with an emotional outburst often characterizing it. Not every instance of leaving a game before the conclusion is rage quitting, that emotional outburst is necessary. People who leave the game without an outburst are sometimes referred to as rage quitting, but without the outburst it is impossible to be sure of their intentions. This action is frowned upon and it is embarrassing to be labeled a rage quitter. In most circumstances, rage quitting hurts a team because they are now down a player, but if this player relinquishes their resources or points to other members of their team before leaving, the more skilled use of these items can sometimes help a team.

According to those who gave their opinion for this study, the order in which these actions generally occur is as follows; a player will *trash talk* or *troll* other players, putting them into an aggravated state, which leads that player to *grief* through either retorting viciously to the taunting or harming the team. After this stage, the player will typically *rage quit*, leaving the game and players to continue without him.

*Manners*

All of this negativity does have another side. Despite the anonymity and relative lawlessness of the internet community, there are is an accepted set of manners that most players adhere to. Understanding the concept of *gg-ing* at the end of a game, for instance, is an important step in being a considerate player. To *gg* is to literally tell the other players “good game”, to say that they played a good, clean game that ended fairly. “It’s just good manners, like that’s what you say to be like ‘Thanks for playing a clean game’”. Even this simple term has an intricate set of rules for when, by whom and where it is to be used. For instance, to not say “gg” (or *gr*, which is “good round”) at the end of a game is seen as an insult to some players. To some players, leaving without gg-ing is on par with rage quitting in its rudeness. GG can be said before the end of the game when the outcome looks like it is inevitable, yet if said by the winning team before the losing team has stated defeat is considered uncouth by some. To have such complex rules for two simple letters may seem odd, but this form of etiquette is generally followed.

Constructive criticism is also a frequent occurrence in games with courteous players, and is the direct opposite of trash talking, though there is no gamer-specific term for it. There is an adoptionsystem that some players take part in, in which a less-skilled player will be coached to a higher rank by a much better player. Often an unfortunate player can post videos of his plays on forums where skilled players frequent, which encourages gamers to take a look at his strategy and critique his style. Rarer than this, a player may request help on a forum and a very good player will adopt him, which entails the two playing many games together to improve the skill of the novice. This requires a lot of time and patience on both the part of the teacher and learner, as well as a pronounced skill difference, but it is the most effective way to learn many skills in a relatively quick amount of time.

One of my informants was adopted by another player, and he explained the experience to me during an interview.

I complained in the forums, I said “I’m bad, I’m coming out here as bad, someone please come teach me.” And some guy on the forum actually adopted me and we played team games a lot. We’d play and he’d say “Do this” and I’d start to learn strategies, and now I’m able to come up with my own stuff and execute my own strategies and win a lot. What it requires is a kind of someone to put themselves out there, be like “Hey, I’m really bad, I’d really like some help.” Usually that’s how it happens. I know a lot of people who have commented on the forums and said “Hey, I’m really bad I’d like some help” and they’ll post a replay of themselves playing, and people will download it and watch it and comment on things that they did wrong and things they did right, and then post on the forums about it. But usually the best way for them to help is that adoption thing. The lower level players really have to be willing to get good, and the higher level player who practices with them usually has to be really patient, because it depends on the game, but usually with StarCraft, you don’t usually normally meet a lot of people in the ladder who are a lot higher skill level than you, the multiplayer match making keeps it around your level, so the forums are the only way for people to find each other for help.

**Weakness of Research**

Like any research, this project is not without faults. The most obvious downfall of this venture is the bias in the selection of informants. Random selection of informants within a group that isn’t simply one person’s friend’s list would be ideal, though the benefits of selecting individuals to study in this way had many benefits. While no claims were made about this analysis’ ability to be extrapolated to every group of gamers, but it is true for this community, whose limits are unknown. While these terms and word choices have been observed on countless occasions from hundreds of individuals, there is no way to pretend to know how far reaching these terms are without doing much more research.

Another potential weakness of this data would be that it is complied through practitioner ethnography. While some would count this as a strength, it does increase the likelihood that the researcher could draw conclusions from their outside experiences instead of the research alone, and could let their previously developed conceptions (misguided or correct) cloud their analysis. The familiarity with the subject as well as the informants can be detrimental, as the informants, knowing that the interviewer has a very solid knowledge of the concepts they’re asking about, can leave out important points assuming they go without saying. These risks, however important, are offset, in the researcher’s opinion, by the benefits of practitioner ethnography.

Finally, the medium of conducting interviews could be a detriment to this research. While interviewing the subjects from the comfort of home at off-hours that were convenient to both parties is alluring, voice conversations have the downside of being void of any facial cues, hand or body signals, or elaboration by means other than spoken words. While this wouldn’t seem a large impairment to research focusing on the use of language that is expressed and experienced in the same conditions, it could potentially influence the depth of information received from the informant.

**Directions for Future Research**

As stated above, this project was limited in scope, merely seeking to define the most popular terms and phrases used by a specific group of people in a specific circumstance in a specific time. Future research could elaborate on this data by looking at another demographic of gamers, such as those of a specific geographical location, language, typical games played, age group or even gamers that describe their communication style in certain ways. The potential group parameters know no bounds other than the researchers’ imagination. After this preliminary research on how certain groups use gaming terminology is completed, these groups can be compared and contrasted with one another to form a complex map of where and when terms are used and by whom.

In the opposite direction of this widening of the research, more specificity could be given to topics. One could easily find enough information on the occurrences of trolling alone to write an entire report on, similarly could one find copious amounts of information on the dominance patterns or construction of hierarchies among gamers through usage of language. Language is the only way gamers who play together have to communicate, so it is an immensely powerful tool with many intricacies and topics ripe for research.

**Conclusion**

Although we share the same native language, the people we come into contact with may be-lingual in several different cultural languages. The gamers speak one of these cultural languages, and now with an understanding of the basic tenants of their communication understood, perhaps the reader can find a common ground to relate to this group with.

The way in which gamers employ their specified language range from how to categorize games and distinguish the differences between them, how to recognize the practices of manipulating the rules, how to identify other players and the ways in which they communicate, and finally how to insult other players in a manner appropriate to the situation. The ways to cheat and hack are various, but the witch-hunt mentality around identifying them causes people to call hax on people who have very strong skills or inordinate luck.

Although it seems that gamers are a very negative and on occasion cruel group, the ways in which they communicate has different connotations than how other groups do. Though formal rules are few and far between, the select few that are in place, such as gg-ing and not rage quitting, serve important functions to keep members respecting each other in small ways. Gamers need cooperation from each other in small ways to keep the gaming community together, and these small concessions of politeness are just another way language is evolving.

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Player “SlapChop”

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1. “A digital distribution, digital rights management, multiplayer and communications platform... used to distribute games and related media online.” [Steam: Wikipedia] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A computer-to-computer messaging system that supports calls similarly to a phone conversation. The ability to mix audio, video and text communication all for free makes it a popular resource among internet users. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Pronounced “meem”, a cultural item that is transmitted by repetition in a manner analogous to the transmission of genes [Dictionary.com: Meme]. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. a server that allows for whatever variable one wants, such as different weapons, different rules [↑](#footnote-ref-4)