I’M BY DEFAULT POLITE – POLITENESS AND POSITIONING IN MMORPGS

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Abstract

MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games) like World of Warcraft®, require gamers to communicate in English regardless of their language competence in it. Therefore, English becomes the lingua franca of many gamers. Furthermore, gamers have to communicate efficiently with one another in high stress situations causing another linguistic challenge. These conditions do not lead to the assumption that politeness is of any relevance in MMORPGs but rather that these games are hostile and impolite environments. A survey investigating the language usage of gamers, including a questionnaire and a self-compiled corpus, sheds light on the language usage and politeness of gamers. This survey asks how and why gamers coming from different language backgrounds using ELF in MMORPGs utilize politeness to position themselves.

Keywords
politeness, politeness theory, gaming, ELF, MMORPG

1 Introduction

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

Such a sentence is a usual way of communicating for a gamer especially of MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games) like World of Warcraft®, Star Wars the Old Republic® or Lord of the Rings Online®. It only becomes apparent when talking to a non-gamer how special the language of gamers has become. The given example is just a remark to another gamer, who caused the death of all party members (wipe), asking if he or she could please (pls) do it better next time. The negative emotions of this request are mitigated by the use of positive smileys like the smiley sticking out the tongue and the Asian inspired Anime-smiley or Kaomoji (^^). While the used language might appear awkward for non-gamers, there is another aspect which is often disregarded when speaking of MMORPG gamers. A large proportion of gamers communicate in English while gaming, yet most of them are not native speakers of English. MMORPGs require gamers to communicate in English regardless of their language competence in it, since gaming servers are not offered in every language. Therefore, English becomes the Lingua Franca of many gamers.