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Gendered Talk in World of Warcraft

Engelska

C-uppsats

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Abstract

This essay is predominantly a qualitative piece of research by which I mean it is mainly based on my own observations and analysis of the material. To do this I will cover the theories of communities of practice together with gendered language and apply it to the community and language of the online game World of Warcraft.

Through using collected chat logs, I will analyse conversations held in World of Warcraft with a specific focus on gender and identity, I will then compare these to examples of face-to-face conversations. My analysis will draw on the works of theorists such as Holmes (2006), Sunderland and Litosseliti (2002), Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (1992) amongst others. This study will show that although Netspeak within World of Warcraft is written and not spoken, the strategies for creating gendered identities are not very different from real life discourse. The essay will be a general study of gendered language in a virtual community and will discover that there is an extremely nuanced language within the limited communication medium of chat, and lays the ground for more extensive research on the subject.

Key words: gender, language, communities of practice, netspeak, world of warcraft
Table of contents

1. Introduction and aim ........................................................................................................................................................................3

2. Literature Review ...........................................................................................................................................................................5
   2.1. Discourse analysis
   2.2. Gendered talk
       2.2.1 Leadership and gender in face-to-face interaction
       2.2.2 Humour and gender in face-to-face interaction
   2.3. Netspeak
   2.4. World of Warcraft mechanics
   2.5. Previous research

3. Methods and material .........................................................................................................................................................................13
   3.1. Data collection
   3.2. Delimitations

4. Result and analysis .........................................................................................................................................................................14
   4.1. Leadership and gender
   4.2. Humour and gender
   4.3. Linguistic features and gender
   4.4. Feminine markers and accepted norms

5. Discussion .......................................................................................................................................................................................22

6. Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................................................................24

Works cited

Appendix A

Appendix B
1. Introduction and aim

Through the use of the Internet, it has become possible to communicate with people all around the world, and to keep in contact with friends, family and colleagues. Indeed, the Internet has become the fastest growing forum for socializing and communication (Yates, 2001:93). Through the increased use of computer mediated communication, necessity has created a language coined Netspeak by Crystal (2001). It is in its own way, a new form of communication, including elements of both spoken and written language\(^1\). Netspeak refers to all types of language on the Internet: e-mails, web-published texts, virtual worlds and chat (Crystal, 2001:42). In this essay, however, I will analyse the use of instant messaging, a form of chat that is strongly synchronous and thus requires all participants to be present (Yates, 2001:96)\(^2\). More specifically, I will be looking at the chat within the massive, multi-player online role-playing game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft, that since 2004, has been appreciated by gamers all over the world. MMORPGs are games where a huge number of players can connect through the internet based virtual gaming world, in which they cooperate, socialize and collaborate to achieve common goals.

The aim of this analysis is to explore the interaction used by players of World of Warcraft in order to investigate whether there are:

I. Any differences or similarities in the 'gendered talk' produced in World of Warcraft compared to real life communication.

II. Any differences or similarities in the conversational strategies used by female and male players respectively.

By using the theories of community of practice\(^3\) provided by Holmes (2006), Sunderland and Litosseliti (2002), Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (1992) among others, I will be analysing data drawn directly from the online chat environments of World of Warcraft. There are many popular MMORPGs on the market, such as AION, The Lord of the Rings, Warhammer and Guildwars. The

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1 This will be further discussed under Netspeak.
2 Yates uses the chat program IRC as an example of instant messaging.
3 This term will be explained below.
reason for choosing an MMORPG as my case study example is that the interaction between players of the game builds upon the theory of community of practice which will be presented below. World of Warcraft is the world's most popular MMORPG with approximately 11.5 million subscribers worldwide (Blizzard Entertainment, Press Releases, 2008). This large number of subscribers creates a dynamic social environment made up from a diverse range of cultural and generational backgrounds, as well as players of both sexes and the number of these subscribers has been consistently growing. People of all ages ranging between 8 and 70 can be found, although it appears the majority of players are between 15 and 35 of age. Such gaming communities provide a rich resource for sociolinguistic analysis. Another reason for choosing this area of online chat is my own participation in it; as an active individual within this community I have a unique insight to its nuances.

Considerable research into language within online computer games and MMORPGs has already been done by several academics such as Nardi, A. Bonnie et al. (2007) who explore the issues of learning through language in World of Warcraft and Stienkuehler (2006) who investigates how closely linked language and practices are in MMORPGs. Alix (2007) discusses the maleness exhibited in online game chat and how the creation of a gender identity might be even stronger within gaming communities than in face-to-face interaction.

This analysis will be mostly qualitative, in the sense that I will personally interpret and analyse conversations occurring in the chats of World of Warcraft, with focus on leadership and humour. There will also be some quantitative measurements of linguistic features, more precisely the use of emoticons and mean length of utterance. I will finish by discussing my results, reflecting on my methods and give a conclusion of my research.
2. Literature review

2.1 Discourse analysis

The first versions of modern conversation analysis were introduced by Harvey Sacks and his colleagues in the 1960's through recording and analysing telephone interaction (Woofitt, 2001:50). Sacks and many researchers after him focused mainly on the analysis without looking at the surrounding elements. It has, since then, become clear that analysing interaction and conversation is very difficult without understanding the context and the roles of the speakers. Michael Halliday developed Systemic-Functional Linguistics which includes the role of social elements in language (Fairclough, 2003:5). Social relationships and the subject of conversation are factors that “will have an influence on what is said and how it is said” (Yule, 2006:127). Relationships, actions, persons involved, items and the discourse will form social practices which all influence the conversation (Fairclough, 2003:5). The term discourse can be viewed as a form of representation which is used by different groups of people for example, bankers, carpenters, men, women, hip hoppers, etc. (Fairclough, 2003:26-27). Litosseliti and Sunderland, on the other hand, view discourse as “language characteristics of different social situations, such as classroom discourse” (2002:9) and further explain it as “a form of practice” (2002:9).

A community of practice is “a concept that emphasizes process and interaction” (Holmes, 2006:13). It means that the interaction held in this community is going to be very dependent upon the context of the common practice and work of a particular work group. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet explain a community of practice as a social construction where the discourse, values and other practices “emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour” (1992:220). Woofitt mentions the importance of the tasks or goals that are relevant for the interaction and how these will shape the understanding of the interaction (2001:69).

Within these social practices, or communities of practice, individuals can use different styles in order to create an identity within the group (Fairclough, 2003:159). The term style is explained
by Fairclough (2003:162) as the way language is used in forms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the relationship between language and body language. This is the definition that I have in mind for this paper.

2.2 Gendered Talk

That there is a difference between men and women in conversation has long been recognized by academics and, in the 16th century, Mulcaster pointed out that men seem to use more vulgar language than women (Key, 1996:3). Linguists in France in the 1700's noticed similar differences between the sexes, and Oscar Wilde, in the 19th century, noted that women 'decorate' their language more than men (Key, 1996:3).

In the early 20th century, Jespersen and Sapir made some of the first extensive investigations dealing with male and female language differences, although their point of view was that 'women's talk' was something abnormal and defiant to the 'normal' talk of men (Key, 1996:4).

There has long been a traditional dichotomy in the western world between men and women, where men are perceived and expected to be aggressive, competitive, authoritative, daring, independent and innovative, while women are viewed as sensitive, collaborative, submissive and whiny (Key, 1996:16-17). These are all attributes that have been shaped into our gender roles through culture and some of them can be seen within the aspect of language.

It has been commonplace to assign certain attributes to women, which would make it possible to determine the gender of the speaker through identifying these features in the interaction taking place (Romaine, 1999:154). Lakoff (1975, as cited in Romaine, 1999:154) listed nine attributes that would prove that women are weak, lack confidence and authority. She suggested, for example, that women would ask more tag questions than men (It's very warm today, isn't it?), express more “‘empty' adjectives” such as cute, lovely and that females tend to use more politeness strategies (Please open the window) as well as hedges (I'm not sure but..., kind of, well, I guess, etc.). Lakoff also argued that women are less likely to participate in humorous discourse (Romaine,
Since then, several academics have proved that language and interaction is not as unambiguous as to give women and men specific traits and leave it at that. Swann (2002) mentions that the area of tag questions has been widely explored and that Holmes and Cameron, among others, have found that previous research has built upon inconsistent data and proved that there is no difference between men and women in how often they use tag questions, although Holmes found a difference in how tag questions are used (2002:46). Despite this, Lakoff’s research still highlights the ideals and norms which women and men are expected to perform in their speech (Kendall & Tannen, 2001:550).

The more modern view of discourse as something strongly contextual and fluid within social practices (Swann, 2002:44) has also affected the way researchers view gendered talk. One cannot look at gender “in isolation” (Key, 1996:25) since gendered identity is constantly fluid and changing, depending on the social practices in which the discourse takes place (Litosseliti, Sunderland, 2002:7). Recent research more often views linguistic styles, not as markers for men's and women's biological sex, but rather that the “styles themselves are produced as masculine and feminine, and that individuals make varying accommodations to those styles in the process of producing themselves as gendered subjects” (Cameron, 1996:45-6). The focus has thus switched from the traditional gender binaries, where both genders are assigned attributes, to “gender as a contextualised social practice” (Swann, 2002:47). There are still, however, features that may distinguish masculine and feminine discourse styles. Holmes lists feminine interaction styles as supportive, indirect, collaborative, emotionally oriented and person oriented, and masculine styles as competitive, confrontational, direct, independent and task oriented (2006:6). These strategies can be used by individuals to create a gender identity, and also to strengthen other identities such as their leadership roles and roles in humorous interaction (Holmes, 2006:15).
2.2.1. Leadership and gender in face-to-face interaction

Many people may feel that leadership is a masculine quality, mainly because men have tended to dominate leadership roles. Both female and male leaders may be expected to be authoritative, direct, hard-nosed, competitive and task-oriented which are all traits for a typical masculine discourse (Holmes, 2006:66). Holmes suggests that, by using a masculine discourse, the leader gains respect and makes sure things are done (2006:66).

Feminine leadership style is less direct and includes more hesitation markers and hedges than masculine leadership style (Holmes, 2006:39). Instead of imperative forms (check that out or give it to me), interrogative forms are used (could you check that out? Or, may I have it by tomorrow?). It is more indirect than masculine leadership and is used when “people want to get their equals to comply with them” (Holmes, 2006:40). Goodwin's research (2008) showed that boys' directives in play are in imperative form and that girls' directives are formed as suggestions of upcoming play, thus inviting their friends' points of view more often than boys do (2008:281).

2.2.2. Humour and gender in face-to-face interaction

Holmes argues that humour is, as any other interaction, very dependent on the situation and the participants’ relationships to each other. Her studies reveal that jokes are “10 times as frequent in friendship groups compared to business meetings” (2006:108). Humour plays a substantial part in the process of creating a gender identity, although that does not mean that men always make masculine jokes, or vice versa, since the context of the interaction is very important to which style will be used (Holmes, 2006:110).

According to Holmes, feminine humour is typically supportive and cooperative, meaning that the participants “agree with, support and confirm the content of each other's contributions” (2006:111). The participants collaborate to create a humorous situation and keep on joking and building upon what the previous speaker said (2006:110). Such discourse style is viewed
as feminine because of women's general concern for relationships and the general view that women are more collaborative in their interactions (2006:110).

While feminine humour is supportive, male humour is, according to Holmes, competitive and challenging. This style of humour is built upon contradicting each other, and challenging claims put forward by the previous speaker (2006:114) which often leads to a verbal sparring, not meant for arguments, but rather for fun (Coates, 2004:136). Examples of this kind of humour include insults and verbal duels.

According to Palmer, some sociolinguists have put forward the idea that women do not feel as comfortable in their rhetorical skills and, therefore, do not as often participate in this type of humour (1993:71). Palmer also suggests that humour is not as dependent on gender as it is on the circumstances. Women can be vigorously aggressive in their jokes in women-only company, while they seem to be more polite in mixed gender company (1993:71). Yet again, we can draw the conclusion that context is extremely important for analysing gendered talk.

2.3. Netspeak

Ever since the Internet became accessible to ordinary people, different kinds of real time chat have been used for communication, where the participants write short sentences to each other, without having to wait for a long time until a reply arrives. Unlike e-mail, the sentences in *instant messaging chat* are normally short and more similar to spoken language (Baron, 2008:57). Computer-mediated communication, also called Netspeak, has, in its own way, revolutionized social life for many people, since it allows people to connect all over the world (Crystal, 2001:3).

2.3.1. Is Netspeak spoken or written language?

In order to more easily understand the analysis of this paper it is essential to understand the medium in which the logged conversations take place. Most important is to determine whether Netspeak is
to be considered as spoken or written language since the answer affects the analysis itself. Firstly, spoken language is usually characterized as synchronous and dynamic and includes body language, facial expressions and other extralinguistic signs (Crystal, 2001: 25-6). Speech is often informal and simple in its grammatical structure (Baron, 2008:46-7).

Written language, on the other hand, is asynchronous, which means a letter can be written on the 1st December, but read on the 12th December, and so on (Yates, 2001:96). Writings tends to be more formal, better thought through and errors can easily be corrected before they are transmitted (Baron, 2008:48).

According to Crystal, Netspeak is, like spoken language, synchronous, urgent and time bound. Participants can express body language through writing things such as “Paul yawns” or “Sandra giggles quietly to herself” (2001:29). However, face-to-face interaction is much faster than computer mediated communication and it includes back channel response, facial expressions and other body expressions that cannot always be found in Netspeak due to the delay (Crystal, 2001:30). It will always take longer to type a word than to speak it, and there are factors of time delay caused by technical problems (lag), and the participants own will to respond immediately or to wait (Crystal, 2001:31). However, to speed up the chat and reduce the number of keystrokes, Netspeak involves many abbreviations and acronyms. Common abbreviations are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abbreviation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rofl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bbl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ofc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>btw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emoticons are also a phenomenon that has developed together with the Netspeak. They exist to stress the emotions of the writer, and to lessen misinterpretations. Together with a message, they can be used to express an attitude or a feeling connected to the utterance (Crystal, 2001:36). Some of the most commonly used emoticons are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emoticon</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:-) or :)</td>
<td>Happy, friendly, said with a smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-( or :(</td>
<td>Sad, unhappy, disappointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>;-</td>
<td>Wink, flirty, said with irony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-) or :D</td>
<td>Very happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:o</td>
<td>Surprised, astonished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-S or :S</td>
<td>Confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xD</td>
<td>Laughing, joking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-P or :P</td>
<td>Sticking out tongue, joking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^.^ or ^^</td>
<td>Happy, friendly (Japanese style)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The facts that Netspeak is slow, and lacks the emotional facial expressions and body language, lead to the similarities to real life speech being balanced out by the differences. One cannot state that Netspeak is spoken language, but how similar is it to conventional written language? First of all, Netspeak is not as space bound as normal texts are; it is fluent and easily deleted, lost or altered (Crystal, 2001:44). Netspeak is not often corrected from misspellings or other mistakes due to the rapidity of the text, nor does it exist to be merely factual, as many conventional texts. Despite these differences, Crystal comes to the conclusion that Netspeak has far more similarities with written language than with spoken language, although the fact that Netspeak includes items that neither spoken nor written language have, it is to be seen as its own language (2001:47-8). Also, Baron came to the conclusion that instant messaging\(^4\) includes similarities to both spoken and written language, although “not as much speech as we've tended to assume” (2008:70).

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\(^4\) The most synchronous form of Netspeak, and the one that is found in World of Warcraft.
2.4. World of Warcraft mechanics and basics

World of Warcraft is a game where the player creates a character and starts at level 1 to slowly make his or her way up to level 80. When creating a character, the player can choose between nine different races, such as human, night elf, dwarf, orc, troll or undead. After this, the player chooses one of ten different classes, for example rogue, warrior or mage (Blizzard Entertainment, Beginner's Guide, 2009).

When a player has chosen a class and race, he or she will start at level 1 in an area unique to the race of choice (Blizzard Entertainment, Beginner's Guide, 2009). Through completing different quests, the player will be rewarded with experience points which are the base for gaining levels.

After many quests and much exploring, a player will finally reach level 80, which is the maximum level. At this level, there are many dungeons in the world to explore together with four, nine or 24 other players. These dungeons are created to give players a challenge (often in form of a harder enemy called boss) and, when they have managed it, they will be rewarded with items that “drop” from the defeated boss (Blizzard Entertainment, Beginner's Guide, 2009) (World of Warcraft). These items are commonly referred to as loot and are mostly weapons or armour that players can wear on their characters to improve their skills. The more challenging a dungeon is, the better the rewards. In order to be able to defeat the toughest bosses, players will need to communicate and cooperate in teams. Players can come together and create a so called guild where the members have their own private chat. It is often members of the same guild that team up for a dungeon. They often have elaborate rules for their members and they work out systems that are made to distribute the rewards as fairly as possible. Normally, players who belong to a well run guild, find the most success in challenging dungeons (Blizzard Entertainment, Game Guide, 2009).

Communication in World of Warcraft is done through a massive number of channels, such as global trade channels where players can trade in-game goods, and guild channels which are
Kristensen

accessible only for members of a specific guild. There are also *party channels* for 5 players in a team, and *raid channels* for 10 up to 40 players in a team.

Due to the number of special names of dungeons, weapons, armour, classes and roles et cetera, new acronyms and abbreviations have occurred. It is not uncommon for a player to write something completely incomprehensible to an “outsider”, for example: *Lfg 5 man ToC hc* which would mean *Looking for a group for the 5 man version of the dungeon called Trial of Champions, in the slightly harder mode called heroic*. World of Warcraft certainly has its own special jargon used by almost all players.

3. Methods and material

To be able to study this, I have collected chat episodes during different situations. I have logged team chat in World of Warcraft at two different times and situations. One of them was collected while 10 players formed a group to enter a dungeon together and this lasted for one hour. The second log was collected under similar circumstances, but this time with 25 players. These logs are mostly 'professional' in the sense that most participants are focused on what needs to be done and how it should be done. This does not, however, mean that there is no casual talk or jokes. I have also gathered random chat taking place in the *guild channel* outside dungeon gaming which is mostly casual and less 'professional'. The reason for choosing team based chats in front of the global chat is that I found them more relevant in my study of the community as a social practice and the interactions going on within this community. While the global *trade channels* are more focused on trading, *raid channels* and *guild channels* are more focused on the team and the goal which forms the team.

3.1. Delimitations

One problem with analysing chat where the users have aliases is that it is sometimes difficult to
know whether the member is male or female. The fact that the sex is many times questionable is somewhat interesting because, whether or not a player chooses to disclose their sex, I think they still seem to create a gender identity through their speech in different positions. Gender behaviours are not, as mentioned above, always connected to the real sex of the speaker, but people seem to form a view of what sex a person is, depending on the style that is used by that player.

Finally, it is important to remember that this study is restricted to gendered talk within World of Warcraft and the members of the guild used in this study. To obtain a fuller picture of Netspeak in general, and across more online multi-player games, a more extensive study, with more time and resources, would have to be done.

4. Result and analysis
This section will cover the analysis of the social differences between genders in World of Warcraft such as in leadership and humour, in order to be able to determine how the gender norms have affected the society in the game, as well as to investigate how similar or different it is from real life interaction. There will also be analyses of the language use between the sexes, and the use of non-linguistic features such as emoticons. All abbreviations and other jargon words used are explained at appendix A.

4.1. Leadership and gender in World of Warcraft
I will next consider whether the players of World of Warcraft require the same masculine discourse style in leadership as leaders in real life interaction.

The following example shows a typical direct and task-oriented discourse, performed by a British man who operates as a female character called Katalia. The context of this example is a group of 10 players in a dungeon who are preparing to engage in a boss fight. Katalia is the group leader and has thus been given the task to go through the tactics that are needed to defeat the boss.
Katalia is giving direct orders in imperative form (*all back up, nuke down in this order*), characteristic for a masculine leadership style (Holmes, 2006:37). In this discourse, no one is questioning him, and his orders are followed because the players in this group know that Katalia is an experienced player and that his orders are correct. He is focused on the target, confident and knows what is needed to defeat the boss ahead. The other participants in this group are also already acquainted with these tactics and recognize them as successful. Many jargon words are used due to the context of the text.

This style can be compared to a workplace discourse where a manager gives orders to his or her colleagues in a meeting. It is rather similar to Holmes' examples of authoritative and direct leadership at a workplace, two of them are as follows:

```
1. Gin: the very last 25 cases that you take off that line I want them put
2. aside the very last 25 cases put them on a pallet
3. get them stretch wrapped
4. they're going to be a momentum for everybody
5. so make sure you er remember that...
6. VII. so just remember the very last 25 cases put them on a pallet
7. VIII. get them stretch wrapped
8. IX. put them aside for X...
9. X. send them through with no glue [laughs]"

(Holmes, 2006:38)
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```
1. Kate: okay here's the list
2. ring all the people on it and tell them the meeting is ten tomorrow"

(Holmes, 2006:39)
```

What differentiates the face-to-face examples with the Netspeak example is that there is no
repetition in Netspeak, such as *get them stretch wrapped, get them stretch wrapped*. This is most likely due to the fact that it is written and, therefore, not considered necessary for there to be any repetition. There are also no hesitation markers, such as *er*, in the Netspeak example, and that is yet again probably due to it being written and not spoken. The shorter example shows no hesitations or repetitions, probably due to the length of the directive. Other than that, the directives are made in more or less the same way in both Netspeak within World of Warcraft and face-to-face communication.

A feminine leadership style was hard to find in the chat logs I have collected. The only example I could find is brief. The context is when players within a guild are trying to gather 25 people for dungeon gaming. The group leader is a 30 year old man from Britain, playing a female character called Tianlong.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 1.2</th>
<th>Jargon explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| [Tianlong]: reet  
[Tianlong]: dps is going to be tight  
[Blodbright]: Folights⁵ just got online  
[Tianlong]: manami⁶: mind dpsing?  
[Cramleaden]: TS should be full now  
[Manami]: Ye. I'll dps. | Reet = modification of 'right', based on pronunciation  
Dps = Damage per Second, do damage  
TS = TeamSpeak |

The italicized word *mind* is what makes this an example of feminine leadership style. Through using an interrogative strategy, Tianlong softens his request. To compare this to face-to-face feminine leadership we can take a look at one of Holmes' examples, where the senior manager Sonia interacts with an administrative assistant in a similar way:

1. **Son**: you'll be out here by yourself  
2. and I wondered if you wouldn't mind spending some of that time  
3. in contacting while no one else is around  
4. contacting the people for their interviews

⁵ Name of character.  
⁶ Name of character.
Holmes mentions that if a leader feels secure, that his or her colleagues will follow the request; even if it is in interrogative style, the leader may use it instead of explicit directives (2006:41), like in both examples above. Example 1.2 was found within raid chat during a guild formed dungeon raid, which indicates that the familiarity within the guild led to Tianlong choosing a more interrogative style than Katalia did in his leading of a group where the participants did not belong to the same guild.

### 4.2. Humour and gender in World of Warcraft

Humour seems to be a common socializing strategy used by players in order to generate team-building and to handle difficult situations, just the same way as people use it in real life interaction. The context of the example below is general and social chat within the guild where 4 men exchange a humorous sequence in what could be considered as a feminine humour style.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 1.3.</th>
<th>Jargon explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Elinas]: yeah your dps is abit love Eckim sry</td>
<td><strong>dps</strong> = Damage per second, how much damage a player can cause to an enemy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Elinas]: low ops</td>
<td><strong>Omg</strong> = Oh my god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Eckim]: XD</td>
<td><strong>nn</strong> = Night night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Eckim]: nn all</td>
<td><strong>XD</strong> = a smiley which means 'laughing with eyes shut'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Elinas]: we always knew you were, ehem, u know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Keldan]: ask him, he will marry u</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Dominatorius]: /blushes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Elinas]: but but.. im already married Elin will kill me now!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We find Elinas (Swedish man, 34) joking about his mistype _love_ instead of _low_. Both Keldan (South African man, age unknown) and Dominatorius (Dutch man, age unknown) join in the amusement and contribute with more humour to the one that Elinas introduced. The whole joke is based upon

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7 When 10 or 25 players come together for dungeon gaming.
Elinas' first humorous statement *omg I love Eckim* and the rest of the joke is consistent and built upon this. The participants have thus together elaborated a joke that all agree and support each other's proposition. This kind of humour is considered to be feminine because it is supportive and collaborative. In this case it is done by men, and this kind of joke has proven to be hard to find in the chats I have logged in World of Warcraft.

The context of this example of masculine humour is as follows: Dahero (man, unknown location) challenges Keldan (man, South Africa) in who has learned the most within the profession Jewelcrafting (see description in table), and Manami (American female, age 16) starts off a masculine, competitive humour sequence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 1.4.</th>
<th>Jargon explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Keldan]: [Jewelcrafting]</td>
<td><strong>Jewelcrafting</strong> = one out of ten possible professions that characters can learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Dahero]: [Jewelcrafting] just for some healthy competition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Keldan]: oh we have to world cup thingy where they choose which teams face which tomorrow</td>
<td>Learning one always grants some kind of advantage, for example the ability to improve one's gear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: Dahero wins, because they have my fave gem.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Keldan]: gonna be fun I guess</td>
<td><strong>Gem</strong> = what a jeweler cuts and later put on gear to improve them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: And my most used.</td>
<td><strong>Runed</strong> = a type of gem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: Next to runed ofc.</td>
<td><strong>Ofc</strong> = Of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Dahero]: See Kel, I always win:)</td>
<td><strong>Btw</strong> = by the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Keldan]: only in yr dreams m8, only in yr dreams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: This is reality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: You lost.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Dahero]: and Megan tells me to say Hi btw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Keldan]: THIS IS SPARTA!!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dahero challenges Keldan and states his superiority with *See Kel, I always win:*). The mocking line *only in yr dreams m8, only in yr dreams* is met with Manami joining the ongoing joke through saying *this is reality* and thus challenging Keldan's claim that Dahero is only a winner in his dreams. Dahero makes the final move and mocks Keldan through suggesting that the actress, Megan Fox (whom Keldan is known to admire), is with him. At this point Keldan, declares war with a playful reference to the historical war film *300*.

This could be considered a typical masculine humorous interaction style where there is an
obvious contest going on between the two men. This type of humour, where there is a competition about who is the best and who can come up with the most witty line against the other, is common between the two of them. It shows the same patterns as similar situations in face-to-face interaction such as:

1. **Cal:** I definitely sent you the right one
2. **Bar:** [laughs]
3. **Eri:** yep Callum did fail his office management [laugh] word processing lesson
4. **Cal:** I find it really hard being perfect at everything

(from Holmes, 2006:115)

In this example, Callum is insulted by Eric and responds by challenging Eric with line 4. This is the same pattern that happens in example 1.4 when Keldan responds with *only in yr dreams m8* to Dahero's mocking insult. Another example of masculine humour in real life is:

“Ray: crate!
Sam: case!
Ray: what?
Sam: they come in cases Ray, not crates
Ray: oh same thing if you must be picky over every one thing
Sam: just shut your fucking head Ray!
Ray: don't tell me to fuck off fuck (..)
Sam: I'll come over and shut yo-
Jim: yeah I'll have a crate of apples thanks [laughingly using a think sounding voice]
Ray: no fuck off Jim
Jim: a dozen...
Dan: shitpicker! [amused]”


In this case, the competition going on is concerning whether apples come in cases or crates. Just as Keldan was in the above example, Ray is the subject of the joke and they are both challenged in their claims and later react with aggressive “war declaration” (*THIS IS SPARTA!!* and repetitive usage of *fuck off*) although Keldan is not as assertive as Ray. Despite the harsh words, the conversation is light hearted (shown by the laughter) and not an argument (Coates, 2004:136).

### 4.3. Linguistic features and gender

Since women are rather under-represented in World of Warcraft, it is difficult to get hold of a
Kristensen

flowing communication where both women and men are present in approximately even numbers. I have only managed to record one such occurrence where 4 women and 6 men entered a dungeon together. The whole encounter took approximately 1 hour and, during that time, 286 utterances in Netspeak were made. Out of these, 109 were made by women and 177 by men. This suggests that men seem to speak more than women, with men taking up 61.9% of the conversation compared to 38.1% of women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utterances:</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emoticons:</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of emoticons:</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average words per utterance made by women was 2.6 while it was 4.1 for men. This indicates that men do not only talk more often, they also say more every time they say something. We must keep in mind, though, that these numbers only apply to the log collected during one hour and while the group leader was a male and, therefore, was the one who spoke most of the time. This situation can be compared to a workplace meeting where the chairperson is a man. If the chairperson (or in WoW, the group leader) had been female, we would probably have obtained different results. Baron actually found in her studies that women tend to speak more lengthy utterances in instant messaging than men (2008:64). This shows that context is always important for the whole picture.

When counting all collected material, where both women and men were present, women used an emoticon in 21.8% of all their utterances, while men only used them for 16.3% of their communication.

4.4. Gender markers and accepted norms

The more extensive use of emoticons among women is an interesting observation that made me wonder about word choice between men and women. As mentioned earlier, women tend to choose
Kristensen

words that are related to relationships and emotions while men use words that are task-oriented, and confrontational (Holmes, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 1.7.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Keldan]: with u manami, it will be tough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: ;(</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: You are saying I suck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: D;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this example Manami reacts to Keldan's joke with a suggestion that her feelings have been hurt and that he claims that she is not a good player (You are saying that I suck). Sad faced emoticons have been added, although they are winking as if to imply that she has not been hurt for real; she is only pretending and is thus collaborating with Keldan's challenging joke.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 1.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: Stupid fat lady. ;/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Manami]: With her stupid blubber mana(^8) sheild.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In example 1.8, Manami is talking about a specific boss in a dungeon which requires the group to destroy a magic shield. This can sometimes prove difficult and, to express this, Manami adopts a feminine speech style. She uses soft adjectives as assertions stupid, blubber instead of taboo ones. This way, she strengthens her feminine identity within the community.

In a male dominated community of practice, where a masculine, task-oriented and competitive discourse is the accepted norm, an extremely stereotypical woman may be perceived as annoying and disturbing. In World of Warcraft, the accepted norm is to appear strong, secure and distant from emotions. When someone defies this norm, she is noticed and recognized as a female, and often a female who is willing to receive attention in the form of sexist jokes, sexual innuendo and invitations. Some may perceive her behaviour to threaten the peace and calm of the male dominated community. Furthermore, this kind of women is often perceived as immature, as are the men who participate and collaborate with her in this discourse. Evidence of this thinking can be found in a closed chat involving only a few members of the guild:

\(^8\) Used to power magic spells.
The context of this conversation is the discussion about how Manami’s personality is similar to another member of the guild called, Avs. Manami and Avs are both young women who act in ways that may be viewed as extreme and stereotypical of women, and Nynaeve and Dominatorius are here expressing a dislike for them, as they are as mentioned above, perceived as disruptive to the peace of the virtual environment.

5. Discussion

Going through approximately 7 hours of logged chat conversations, it has proven to be hard to find many conversations that are held in a feminine discourse style. To find feminine leadership style was extremely difficult, especially since most “leaders” in guilds are male, and also because the women that take on the leadership roles often creates a masculine leadership identity. If a woman were not to do this, I suspect she would not receive as much respect and this would threaten the success of her mission. If I had the possibility to record what was being said in the program TeamSpeak, perhaps I would have found more examples of the use of interrogations, collaboration and hedging but, in the written Netspeak, it was very rare. According to Holmes, women in leadership roles often conform “to the expectation that leaders should use predominantly masculine and authoritarian styles of behaviour” (2006:67). This indicates that the leadership styles in the community of World of Warcraft do not differ too much from face-to-face interaction, since it seems as though most leaders, female or male, use a masculine leadership style within this gaming community. The differences between real life leadership discourse and the Netspeak in World of Warcraft. 

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Example 1.9.

[Nynaeve]: not looking forward to when Avs is back.... 2 of them
[Novila]: haha
[Nilam]: lol
[Dominatorius]: i has to go
[Dominatorius]: pick
[Nynaeve]: Can I pick both pls? ;-D
[Dominatorius]: yes
[Dominatorius]: I didnt say u could pick one...
Kristensen

Warcraft ones, seem to be that there are more repetitions and hesitations in real life. Due to Netspeak being a typed language, the words linger a little longer, and are, therefore, not needed to be repeated as often as the fluid spoken language.

One of the reasons as to why masculine humour dominates can be that World of Warcraft has a majority of male players, even though there are many female players too. The whole community seems to be predominantly male dominated, where the leaders are mainly men and where men set the norms. Even if feminine humour exists, it is very subtle, and it probably occurs more often in closed chats, than in the open ones. Both Palmer and Holmes suggest that feminine humour style is more common within a circle of friends and in smaller groups (1993, 2006). Since masculine humour is thus considered to be used more openly, jokes in World of Warcraft correspond rather well with face-to-face humour.

The fact that women tend to use more emoticons than men is probably an effect of women's focus on emotions and relationships. The use of emoticons has thus transferred the facial expressions and concerns about maintaining relationships into the language of Netspeak, which makes it similar to female interaction style in real life communication. Due to the fact that it is not possible to determine a players sex through looking at their character (men can play female characters and vice versa), it seems to me that gamers exaggerate their linguistic gender markers (frequent use of emoticons and affectively-oriented words versus macho language and strong affirmations) in order to signal to everyone that it is a woman or a man sitting by the keyboard. This is something that could be further explored in future studies.

World of Warcraft seems to be a male dominated community, where the norms are set after the masculine discourse. Unless they state otherwise, most players are assumed to be male and, if a player identifies as female, through the use of affectively-oriented words, emoticons and through speaking on TeamSpeak, she is often expected to conform to the stereotypical gender identity. Most players have a discourse that is rather neutral, even if I think it is always slightly gendered. If a
Kristensen

woman, who has been identified as one, starts to use male expressions, such as more taboo assertions and imperatives, it would be interesting to see the reaction. However, if a female who has not been identified attempts to use a male interaction style, she would most likely be perceived as a man. The same thing would probably happen if it were the other way around.

If I were to improve and develop this research, I would make use of more detailed and efficient data collection methods. The method used here was, on reflection, limited and time consuming. A more efficient approach would provide more significant data and strengthen my argument. Nevertheless, I think the material currently being used has provided me with enough data to at least begin analysing gender issues relating to online chat and social interaction within World of Warcraft and has provided me with a valuable starting point for further research.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to find out if the interaction in World of Warcraft is any different in its gendered discourse norms than in face-to-face interaction. My analysis has shown that World of Warcraft is similar in the sense that it is male dominated and follows male discourse norms, where females are the ones that differ from the set norm. Most leadership interactions are made in a masculine discourse style and same goes with humour situations. The language is heavily masculine and consists of a high amount of masculine style jokes. The study suggests that women use more emoticons than men, and does thus correspond to previous research, which argues that women express their emotions more openly than men. Stereotypical feminine discourse is often considered as defiant and disturbing, and one could draw the conclusion that discourse norms World of Warcraft are not only the similar as in real life, they are stronger.

To develop this study further, a more extensive amount of material could be collected in order to make the study more reliable and reality mirroring. The study shown in this essay is restricted by time and does only dust the surface of possibilities of gendered talk studies in World of
Kristensen

Warcraft. One could for example not only use the chat, but also the TeamSpeak and the common forum boards on the internet. It would be interesting to see if there are any differences between the genders in the different communication mediums. To take gender studies in World of Warcraft further, one could look more deeply into how individuals use language in order to strengthen their gender identity behind the keyboard. Another possibility would be to create a survey and in that way investigate the participants own experiences and views of gender. Other studies that can be done are to explore how the language in everyday life becomes affected by the game, or vice versa.
References


Johnstone, Barbara, 1993. Community and contest: Midwestern men and women creating their
Kristensen


[online] n.d. Available at:


[Accessed at 16 February 2010]


**Appendix A**

Explanations of jargon words and abbreviations used in the presented chat logs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adds</td>
<td>Additional monsters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Btw</td>
<td>By the way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Crowd Control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dps</td>
<td>Damage per Second.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Faction Champions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gem</td>
<td>A gemstone which a jewelcrafter can cut into a jewel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>Heroism, a skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewelrycrafting</td>
<td>One out of ten possible professions a player can chose for his/her character. Each player can learn two out of the ten, and learning professions grants advantages in the game, such as improved gear or the ability to create helpful items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kk</td>
<td>Okey Okey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nn</td>
<td>Night night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuke</td>
<td>An abbreviation of Nuclear Weapon, that has gained its own meaning of “destroy immediately/as fast as possible”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mana</td>
<td>Magic supply which helps players cast magic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M8</td>
<td>Mate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofc</td>
<td>Of course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omg</td>
<td>Oh my God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull</td>
<td>The start of the encounter, when the monsters are 'pulled' towards the players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>TeamSpeak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr</td>
<td>Your, you're</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sry</td>
<td>Sorry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Extract of collected chat

5 December

[Manami]: Yes he did.
[Keldan]: oh yeah, I thought u meant something else
[Manami]: As you can see.
[Manami]: ;o
[Dahero]: lol
[Dahero]: did u sort Megan out yet
[Dahero]: :P
[Keldan]: nah, I believe shes a lost cause
[Dahero]: we live in hope dont we?
[Keldan]: we havent had megan jokes in a while
[Manami]: I'm starting to consider using [Legwraps of the Awakening] instead for my healing set aswell, more SP alittle less regen, but not so much.
[Manami]: Hard discision because I go oom so fast ;[
[Keldan]: never had a resto druid
[Manami]: 516... haste... pfffttttt
[Manami]: nevermind don't need to stack another haste atm. -..
[Keldan]: oh btw, if u need JC
[Manami]: Not til I switch gloves.
[Keldan]: [Jewelcrafting]
[Keldan]: havnt got everything tho
[Manami]: Get purified dreadstone, and i'll love you forever.
[Dahero]: I got that one
[Dahero]: love me instead
[Manami]: Dahero wins my love. <2
[Keldan]: yeah love dahero
[Dahero]: lol
[Manami]: I need to pvp for more gems.
[Manami]: I have orange and red.
[Manami]: But no more purple.
[Manami]: D;
[Manami]: I need to level my enchanting.
[Vantilatare]: keldan can u link jc plz
[Manami]: But been procrastinating it.
[Keldan]: [Jewelcrafting]
[Dahero]: [Jewelcrafting] just for some healthy competition
[Keldan]: oh we have to world cup thingy where they choose which teams face which tomorrow
[Manami]: Dahero wins, because they have my fave gem.
[Keldan]: gonna be fun I guess
[Manami]: And my most used.
[Manami]: Next to runed ofc.
[Dahero]: See Kel, I always win:)
[Keldan]: only in yr dreams m8, only in yr dreams
[Manami]: This is reality.
[Manami]: You lost.
[Dahero]: and Megan tells me to say Hi btw
[Keldan]: THIS IS SPARTA!!
[Legolassie]: nn all
[Dahero]: nn lego
[Keldan]: nn
[Dominatorius]: nn all
[Dahero]: nn Dom
[Keldan]: I never lose, I only regroup and come back swinging
[Dahero]: so you're a swinger?
[Manami]: I need to learn to spam swiftmend more.
[Keldan]: better ask yr gf m8?
[Dahero]: can't she's at your dad's atm
[Keldan]: lol, even he is in on the action
[Dahero]: all are m8 all are
[Shadowshot]: kel link your JC again plz
[Dahero]: Mana btw..If u need to cut the gem it has to be now ...about to log
[Keldan]: [Jewelcrafting]
[Dahero]: *me to
[Shadowshot]: ty
[Keldan]: nps
[Manami]: I don't need any now.
[Manami]: but thank you sweetie.
[Keldan]: see dahero, yr love didnt last, tsk tsk

6 December
[Solia]: oops
[Eckim]: lol
[Elinas]: yeah your dps is abit love Eckim sry
[Elinas]: low ops
[Eckim]: XD
[Eckim]: nn all
[Elinas]: omg I love Eckim....
[Keldan]: we always knew you were, ehem, u know
[Dominatorius]: ask him, he will marry u
[Elinas]: /blushes
[Elinas]: but but.. im already married Elin will kill me now!
[Magie]: pff..
[Dominatorius]: theres a first time for everything
[Keldan]: nah, shes ok, only if u cheat with white women I believe
[Elinas]: hahaha
[Elinas]: should rename to Tiger
[Dahero]: heh
[Solia]: --.
[Argeas]: PLING!! PLING!! You got mail!
[Solia]: hehe
[Dominatorius]: free mail?
[Solia]: ahh
[Solia]: :
[Solia]: can't stand on this mail box
[Keldan]: all send argeas love letters
[Manami]: Everyone send Kel death threats.
[Argeas]: better than bills...lately...
[Shadowshot]: tht would be rather humorous
[Keldan]: shes been sending me quite a few, I guess its a love hate relationship

7 December
[Argeas]: where we headed?
[Argeas]: totc?
[Magie]: hehe
[Elinas]: hardmode :D
[Keldan]: dont think we know
[Vantilataire]: cleared
[Keldan]: extra hardmode then I guess
[Tianlong]: normal is, yes
[Elinas]: small afk
[Keldan]: hey tharila
Kristensen

[Dahero]: Normal mode is too easy and he mode is waaaaay to hard:(
[Tianlong]: lets see
[Tianlong]: 7 healers
[Magie]: Bleff : That was very low btw.. on TS
[Tianlong]: last 2 spots for dps :P
[Keldan]: KB I guess?
[Manami]: Heh, let's hope we can make it easy then. xP
[Keldan]: hey KB
[Allanidalen]: im back
[Killerbabe]: hey:)
[Keldan]: with u manami, it will be tough
[Manami]: :( 
[Manami]: You are saying I suck.
[Manami]: D;
[Keldan]: no never
[Tianlong]: rob mon
[Tianlong]: folhealer :)
[Tianlong]: you too manami
[Manami]: I never thought I left.
[Tianlong]: it happens sometimes :)

[Manami]: Kel's trying to get in my pants.
[Manami]: Smack him.
[Keldan]: yr pants, u 16

[Cramleaden]: can't hear anything on TS
[Vantilataire]: :S 
[Manami]: Same, can't hear anything.
[Manami]: :S
[Keldan]: I can hear that
[Cramleaden]: just ghosts
[Keldan]: totc HC 25 man
[Solia]: nuuu
[Magie]: Sounds like your miles away from mic..
[Keldan]: yeah
[Dahero]: aye
[Keldan]: but u can still hear him
[Magie]: nah...
[Manami]: I hear a little
[Magie]: hear something..
[Manami]: “mini mouse voice.”
[Magie]: mm
[Vantilataire]: who is talking on TS btw
[Keldan]: he asked where we heading
[Keldan]: father christmax
[Dahero]: Will be briefly afk before we start it off...brb 45mins top :P

[Hiyori]: is there a jc in the raid? :)
[Keldan]: stupid warrior, honestly
[Manami]: Oh crap reminds me. Forgot my flasks in bank from farming leather the past few days. Brb.
[Cramleaden]: can anybody make me some agi flasks?
[Cramleaden]: I only have 10 left
[Keldan]: hiyori, myself and dahero
[Keldan]: hopefully one of us will have the gem recipe u need

[Magie]: How can endless rage only last 1 hour?
[Keldan]: not so endless
[Soulforger]: yea ehe
[Manami]: because Bliz likes eating things.
[Soulforger]: true
[Keldan]: small children, mmmmmmm, tastes like chicken
[Soulforger]: they do. Always thought the taste was familiarity
[Manami]: Lol.
[Novila]: nilam are u in foltank?
[Nightenigma]: looks like the first england w cup game will be easy lol Manami
[Manami]: Not attrack Kel.
[Manami]: attractive*
[Keldan]: huh?
[Manami]: Wow, can't type.
[Manami]: Lol.
[Keldan]: eating children?
[Keldan]: eating*
[Manami]: Nope, not attractive.
[Keldan]: ah ok, good to konw
[Keldan]: know*
[Keldan]: ill try cats and kittens then
[Keldan]: change of diet is always a good thing
[Manami]: No matter how magazine on my nuts, no matter how many mc's I eat up, it's never enough.
[Nightenigma]: lol
[Soulforger]: wts “Book of Spelling” 2g
[Manami]: WTS Kel's soul 22 copper