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Sven Stephan–Lars Bülow: On the Pragmatics of ‘In-Game’ Chat Communication
Alkalmazott Nyelvtudomány, XVII. évfolyam, 2017/2. szám
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.18460/ANY.2017.2.002>

On the Pragmatics of ‘In-Game’ Chat Communication

Der Beitrag widmet sich der Chat-Sprache im sogenannten Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game *World of Warcraft*. Wir zeigen mithilfe korpuspragmatischer Analyseverfahren, dass die WoW-internen Chat-Räume Interaktionsräume darstellen, in denen Spieler spezifische sprachliche Form-Funktions-Dispositionen aushandeln. Unser Korpus umfasst ca. 147,5 Tausend Token aus fünf Chat-Räumen. Die Form-Funktions-Analysen verdeutlichen, dass sich die Sprachverwendung in den spielinternen Chat-Räumen deutlich voneinander unterscheidet. Die verwendeten Konstruktionen sind in der Interaktion ausgehandelte Lösungen für pragmatische Aufgaben, die sich durch die Funktionen und Kontexte der verschiedenen Chat-Räume ergeben. Wir arbeiten anhand Keyword- und Kollokationsanalysen heraus, dass sich die verschiedenen Chat-Räume in klare Sprachhandlungsräume gliedern lassen. Des Weiteren können wir in den untersuchten Chat-Räumen eine starke Tendenz zum ökonomischen Schreibverhalten feststellen. Außerdem arbeiten wir anhand von qualitativ-quantitativen Beleganalysen heraus, dass die Pronominalverwendung auf Prozesse der Etablierung und Stabilisierung sozialer Gruppen hindeuten.

1 Introduction

Today, a significant part of everyday communication is computer-mediated. Social networks such as Facebook or Twitter and their tools for entering chats and writing commentaries are an integral part of the communication routines of many people. Even in online computer games, these tools are used intensively to communicate with other players. The particular technological framework conditions of computer-mediated communication (CMC) undoubtedly influence linguistic behaviour (Beißwenger, 2016; Barton/Lee, 2013; Androutsopoulos, 2010, 2007), as keyboard-to-screen communication (KSC) (Jucker/Dürscheid, 2012) differs in many respects from other forms of written communication.

CMC is of increasing interest to applied linguistic research. A shift in applied linguistics towards online communication took place around the turn of the 21st century (Herring, 1996; Crystal, 2001). A key focus of CMC research is on chat language. Chat communication is a superb example of quasi-synchronous written computer-mediated interaction (see Dürscheid, 2016), and it has been relatively well studied from an interactional perspective (among others, Herring 1999; Storrer, 2013, 2001; Beißwenger, 2016, 2007). Furthermore, previous studies have found that chat language tends to be heterogeneous (Androutsopoulos, 2007). Online chatting is considered an abstract form of

communication rather than a homogeneous text type that can be defined by a consistent form and/or function. Dürscheid (2016: 380) has highlighted different types of chat, such as class-chats and advice-chats, in which people tend to write differently.

This paper considers the pragmatics of chat language in the massive multiplayer online roleplay game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft (WoW) (Blizzard Entertainment/Activision Blizzard, 2004). WoW is a highly popular MMORPG, and it had 8.5 million subscribers worldwide from 2005 to 2015. Thus, the high number of players guarantees to provide a representative sample of social and linguistic interaction online. Chatting is a necessary and significant component of playing WoW. Such communication in the context of MMORPGs in general and in WoW in particular has to date not been investigated in great detail. This paper aims to fill this research gap by focusing on the linguistic differences in WoW's internal chat-rooms.

Communication in WoW can take place in one of various chat-rooms, each of which are typified by specific parameters. We will investigate whether these parameters can – and should – be operationalized as influencing variables on WoW's chat language. We must take into account the fact that language can have various effects in WoW's chat-rooms. On the one hand, linguistic structures in chat-rooms might mirror individual socio-pragmatic parameters. On the other hand, language is the medium through which these chat spaces are constructed. We assume here that chat space can be defined by linguistic practices.

The main question of this article is whether we can find differences in the pragmatics of language usage in selected WoW chat-rooms. For this reason, we are less interested in carrying out a purely qualitative analysis of chat interactions. Rather, we are concerned with capturing the form-function correlations typical to each analysed chat-room. Therefore, we use a large corpus of chat utterances gathered from game. Form-function correlations, or dispositions, are methodological solutions to pragmatic tasks in that they organize items into a sequential order. These dispositions can be identified by repetitions in the data (Beißwenger, 2016: 305). To discover and analyse the specific form-function-relationships of each chat-room we use the corpus pragmatic approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative data analyses. This procedure was first applied to WoW data by Bülow/Stephan (2017). Some of the results we show in this article are based on this prior study.

This article first defines chat-rooms as social spaces (section 2.1) and clarifies the Communities of Practice (CofP) concept, the latter of which is well established in the area of interactional linguistics. The CofP concept is then applied to language interaction in MMORPG chat-rooms (section 2.2). The influencing factors of chat language in WoW are discussed in section 3. Section 4's methodology presents and explains the authorial understanding of corpus

pragmatics, as well as this research's analysis tools and corpus compilation. In section 5, the study's results are presented, first by illustrating the relationship between dominant speech acts and the keywords of each chat channel (5.1), then by comparing the dominant form-function correlations in different chat-rooms (5.2), and finally by addressing identity formation through processes of external and self-reference in chat-rooms (5.3). Finally, the results are summarized and discussed (section 6).

2 Theory

So far, we have used the compound word 'chat-room' relatively naively. The word 'room' might be particularly misleading: When used in a literal sense, the concept of room is relatively narrow in that it denotes an absolute and tangible size. A room is "a part of a building that has its own walls [...] and is usually used for a particular purpose" (*Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, 2017), as in 'living room', 'dining room' or 'bedroom'. In contrast, the term chat-room uses the word room in a metaphorical sense, which is more commonly expressed by 'space' (as in 'social space').

2.1 Chat-room as social space

It is not unusual to consider online communication platforms as social spaces. One of the premises of Internet research in the human and social sciences regards new media and their communication tools not only as technologies, but also (even, primarily), as social spaces that are constructed by written communication. A chat-room is therefore a social space that has been created by human interaction and language use. The relationship between human interaction, language, and social space is best captured by Certeau (1988), who comprehends space as a dynamic network of relations. Space is "actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it", and it is "the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities (Certeau, 1988: 117). In a nutshell, "*space is a practiced place*" (Certeau, 1988: 117). Interestingly, Certeau (1988: 119f.) also refers to the work of Labov and Lotman. Lotman's theory makes clear that semantic spaces cannot occur without the formation of defined boundaries (Lotman, 2005). For Labov, however, it is evident that social space is constructed by the practice of drawing semantic and pragmatic boundaries. We believe social space and language use to be interrelated.

In merging these two aspects, we define chat-rooms as social spaces that are shaped by linguistic practices. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the chat-room as a social space has an influence on language usage, in particular, on the pragmatics of language usage.

2.2 Communities of Practice

The concept of linguistic practices is deeply interwoven with the research program of third wave sociolinguistics (Eckert, 2012). “Whereas the first two waves viewed meaning of variation as incidental fallout from social space, the third wave views it as an essential feature of language. Variation constitutes a social semiotic system capable of expressing the full range of a community’s social concerns.” (Eckert, 2012: 94) Instead of using technological determinism, which tries to construe a causation between (media)-technology and linguistic innovation (Hutchby, 2001: 14), our approach is in line with the research program of third wave sociolinguistics.

Language is commonly understood as a semiotic resource “by which speakers construct, maintain, or contest the boundaries of social categories and their membership in or exclusion from those categories” (Meyerhoff/Strycharz, 2013: 428). The representatives of third wave sociolinguistics criticize notions of homogenous speech communities (Eckert, 2001; Bucholtz, 1999), believing that the focus should instead be on Communities of Practice (CofP). The CofP concept was developed as an ethnographic research program, specifically to observe and analyse spoken language (Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert/McConnell-Ginet, 1992). However, it can also be applied to written chat communication. CofPs are smaller social groups whose members have the same interests and engage in personal exchanges, thereby developing a shared communicative repertoire and strategies of appropriate language usage (Meyerhoff/Strycharz, 2013: 429–432; Wenger, 1998; Eckert/McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464). The CofP concept also elucidates that people can identify themselves with different groups simultaneously, groups that do not have geographic or historical connections but that rather have overlapping and shared interests. The language of a CofP is characterized by a specific linguistic repertoire and conventional implications¹ which can be easily understood by group members but not by outsiders.

All of these characteristics are true for the WoW player community. WoW players enter into a mutual engagement via chat. What this means is that they need to be in the same digital space in order to engage in shared practices. In this sense, they share a jointly negotiated enterprise. The WoW community works together in the chat-rooms to solve game challenges. They must therefore develop shared communicative strategies in order to solve recurring communicative tasks. “These resources (linguistic or otherwise) are the cumulative result of internal negotiations.” (Meyerhoff/Strycharz, 2013: 430) These linguistic resources are not necessarily created in the CofP but are certainly adapted and further developed there for the respective needs (Wenger, 1998: 126).

2.3 Immersion

This article does not identify the different CofPs in WoW with their avatars but instead with their players, who identify necessarily with their onscreen self. However deeply or superficially they are engaged with the game world, it is the WoW players rather than their avatars that communicate in the game's chat-rooms.

The real draw of the online game is its immersive qualities. Immersion is “a psychological state of the user, similar to concepts such as flow [...], presence [...] and cognitive absorption” (Valtin et al., 2014: 51). Since this article primarily considers the socio-pragmatic structures of linguistic usage and not the game-studies aspect, we can restrict ourselves to a specifically social type of immersion; the “shift of attention to the other players as social actors and the relationship between them, and the construction of a situation model of the social space that is constituted through the communication and social interaction between the players” (Thon, 2008: 39). Linguistic practices within the game can thus considerably contribute to social immersion in that they are crucial in shaping both social interaction and social space. It is important to note that the degree of immersion depends on the authenticity of communication (Valtin et al., 2014: 52). However, by assuming that chat-rooms in MMORPGs are highly social spaces, any abstractions derived from the corpus can at least in part be transferred to other social spaces.

3 Factors of influence in WoW's internal chat communication

In addition to the above-mentioned interactional aspects it is necessary to distinguish three classes of factors that affect chat language structure, namely medial factors, situational-contextual factors, and intralinguistic factors. Since we are working with the data on a language level, the intralinguistic factors are included in all our processes. The linguistic form in relation to its function is our dependent variable.

For the purpose of clarity, we will first briefly explain what is meant by construction, a term which will be important when answering this article's central question. First and foremost, within the context of construction grammar, constructions are form-meaning-pairs (Goldberg, 1995). Constructions are therefore relevant for linguistic practices, as their patterns can be prototypical for certain forms of communication, situations, or medialities, the latter of which we will detail here.

3.1 Medial Factors

Mediality is a prominent parameter in German discourse on chat communication (Beißwenger, 2016: 279; Storrer, 2013; Jucker/Dürscheid, 2012; Androutsopoulos, 2007) in two respects. One view focuses on the medium itself as a channel for communication. The other view is strongly influenced by the

works of Koch/Oesterreicher (2011; 1985), who define mediality as the dichotomous opposition between graphic (written language) and phonic (spoken language) codes. These two codes can be projected onto a continuum of communicative immediacy on the one hand and distance on the other. Spoken language is associated with immediacy, while communicative distance is associated with written language.

As Jucker/Dürscheid (2012: 44) point out, “these are only prototypical expectations, communicative immediacy can also be found in the graphic code and communicative distance in the phonic one”. Factors that influence written language are the temporal and spatial distances of its production and reception (Koch/Oesterreicher, 1985: 20). The less temporal disruption there is between two speakers, the more their written communication can be interpreted as conceptually spoken (Dürscheid, 2004: 155). Conceptual spoken language can be defined by categories known in pragmatics such as privacy, familiarity, communications direction, cooperation, and spontaneity.² Androutsopoulos (2007: 80) restricts his notion of immediacy to its active construction in online communication.

Mediality could also refer to the possibilities and restrictions of the medium through which communication is transported. In keyboard-to-screen communication (KSC), these restrictions can for example be a lack of phonological information and a slight delay in-between the production of language input.³ WoW extends these restrictions further by the fact that in-game activity proceeds quasi-simultaneously to its written communication in the chat-rooms. Collocutors must therefore split their attention not only between the keyboard, the already sent onscreen messages, and the onscreen input window, but also between the actions with which the game world presents players onscreen. Due to this subdivision of players’ attentions, we can expect them to use language more economically in the chat-rooms than they may do in other forms of KSC. We expect that these medial and situational-contextual factors play a role in online chat language, particularly in WoW.

3.2 Situational-contextual factors

We opted to research WoW because it has a predefined set of chat-rooms which can be described in terms of access authority and scope. These are the key situational-contextual factors on which we focus.

Access authority refers to chat-rooms that require a specific social interaction or invitation to join before communication is possible. We distinguish between personal and public chat-rooms; these are not absolute aspects but rather two extremes at opposite ends of a continuum.⁴

Local and global chat-rooms can also be differentiated in terms of their scope. Some chat-rooms such as the Say-Chat are only readable by players who are

within a certain range of the communicating avatar, while others like the Guild-Chat can be read wherever players' avatars are in the game world.

Table 1. Scope and Access Authority of WoW's Chats

Chat-Room	Scope	Access authority
Trade	Server-wide (only capitals of the different fractions)	Very public (automatic accendence)
General	Server-wide	Very public (automatic accendence)
Guild	Server-wide	Very personal (only if the avatar is invited to a permanent social group)
Group	Semi server-wide (restricted by the group's activity)	Slightly personal (two to five avatars joining together for an activity 30 minutes on average)
Raid	Semi server-wide (restricted by the groups activity)	Slightly personal (six to 40 avatars joining together for an acitivity of two hours average)

There are a number of hidden variables for chat-room characteristics, and it is not possible to collect data for some of these variables, such as age, gender, education level and other socio-economic aspects. Easily quantifiable variables such as time are included in the database, but we suggest that due to the corpus' already considerable size, their influence on the language structure is marginal.

4 Method

To identify chat-room-specific form-function correlations, we need a mixed approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Therefore, the investigation carried out here is based on a corpus pragmatic approach.

4.1 Corpus pragmatics

Corpus pragmatics is a relatively new approach within the field of pragmatics, which is currently enjoying great popularity (among others, see Müller, 2015; Rühlemann/Aijmer, 2014; Jucker/Taavitsainen, 2014; Felder et al., 2012). It is a combination of pragmatics and corpus linguistics (Rühlemann/Aijmer, 2014: 9), both of which are normally concerned with naturally-occurring linguistic data. While corpus linguistic studies tend to be large-scale quantitative analyses of written text, pragmatic studies are relatively small-scale qualitative analyses that focus on spoken data. This is why Rühlemann/Aijmer (2014: 12) state that "corpus pragmatic research is more than just pragmatic research and it is more than just corpus-linguistic analysis in that it integrates the horizontal (qualitative) methodology typical of pragmatics with the vertical (quantitative) methodology predominant in corpus linguistics". Archer et al. (2008: 620)

emphasize that “[c]orpus pragmatics is so named because, like corpus linguistics in general, it involves analysing actual patterns of language use, using a collection of natural texts. Increasingly, these texts tend to be in an electronic form, which means that researchers are able to make use of computers when analysing their data”.

Felder et al. (2012) define the goals of corpus pragmatics as identifying dominant form-function relationships on the level of language structure, and as identifying meaning, speech acts, and argumentation patterns with the help of corpus analysis tools. The corpus analysis tools used for the purpose of this research are suitable for capturing directions both from form to function and from function to form (Rühlemann/Aijmer, 2014: 9–10).

The quantitative and qualitative analyses were carried out using Anthony’s concordance software AntConc, which is available as freeware online. The corpus linguistic methods used for this article have been validated and illustrated by the existing literature on the subject (cf. Müller, 2015). We use the following tools: frequency analysis (word list), keyword analysis, concordance analysis, collocation analysis, and exemplary analysis. Our approach can be described as both corpus-based and corpus-driven.

4.2 Corpus and data collection

The data were collected on the German speaking PVE server Arygos in the period between 25.07.2016 and 24.10.2016. Data were automatically generated by player avatars via the game’s internal chat logging tool (chatlog) on a daily basis. Since this chatlog records all text in the game, i.e. both player-generated and computer-generated data, the original data set was initially adjusted to investigate only player-generated communication. After these adjustments were made, a corpus comprising more than 147,500 tokens was generated, consisting of five sub corpora: General-, Group-, Guild-, Raid-, and Trade-Chat.

When focusing on the collected data’s inter-chat-specific aspects of one sub corpus, we use the others as reference corpora.

5 Results

There are various ways to analyse linguistic data by means of pragmatics. Therefore, in this section we present only the most interesting findings from the data. We start on a macro level by looking at the predominant ‘speech acts’ in WoW’s chat communication. Although speech acts are usually hard to grasp quantitatively, we show that our data connects the chat-room’s dominant keywords to its speech acts (5.1). After we have explained this, we spotlight the data and give an example of a typical construction formed by frequently used N-grams on the structural side. We show that different variations of one basic construction can be adjusted to aid different situational necessities (5.2). In addition to situational factors, we show how contextual premises are used by the

player community to handle a specific task, namely welcoming each other. In a last step, we demonstrate that the WoW player community does not exist as a single entity but rather as a combination of different groups. These CofP will be pointed out when we analyse the patterns of pronoun use by player groups who make self and external references (5.3). Our results show that the factors of scope and access authority are relevant to communication in WoW as well as being a part of one specific CofP.

5.1 Keywords and speech acts

On first looking at the data, we were surprised by the highest rated keywords for each chat. Firstly, the five words with the highest Keyness⁵ factors differ for all of the examined chat-rooms. Secondly, these keywords can be connected to speech acts, which also differ from chat-room to chat-room. This supports our hypothesis that scope and access authority are situational-contextual factors that influence language usage.

To further illustrate this, we can compare the keywords of two chat-rooms that have completely different parameters (cf. table 1). The keywords for the Group-Chat make clear that the speech acts of salutation and saying goodbye are predominant. Furthermore, we can see a trend towards greater economization in language use, as reflected in the second keyword *bb* ($N = 36$; $K = 81694$). The meaning of this digraph can be described as ‘see you soon’ or ‘bye bye’.

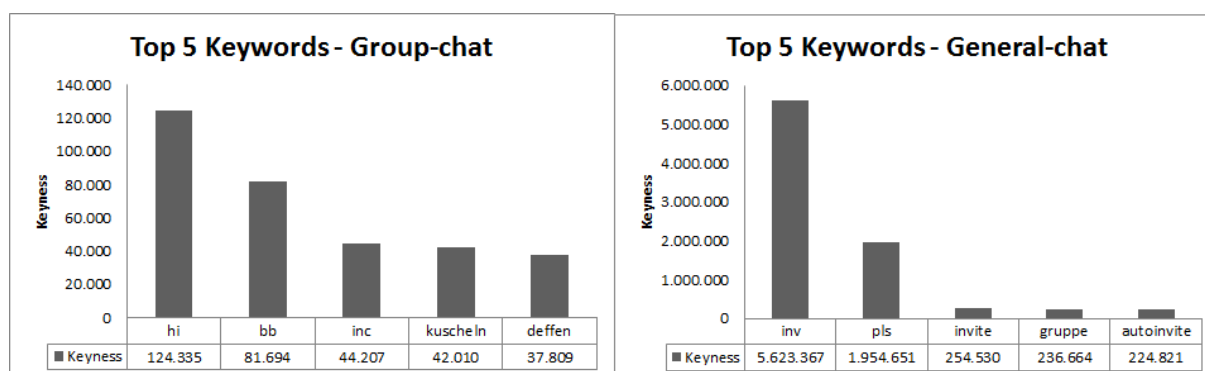


Figure 1. Keywords in General and Group-Chat

The other three keywords represent the speech acts of warning and of calls to action. Warnings are signalled by *inc* (= incoming; $N = 17$; $K = 44207$), and calls to action by both *kuscheln* (= the avatars should stand as close as possible to fulfil certain game mechanics; $N = 10$; $K = 42010$) and *deffen* (= defending strategically relevant positions; $N = 9$; $K = 37809$). At first glance, they are exclusively autosemantic, which is a good indication of economical language use.

What is particularly striking are the keywords in the General-Chat. Here, the top keyword *inv* (= invite) appears with a frequency of 1445 tokens ($K =$

5632367), which is about three times more than any other keyword. This observation is interesting because the corpus of the General-Chat is the second smallest WoW sub-corpus, producing only about 13% of the total data. Taken all sub-corpora together *inv* appears with a frequency of 1451 tokens. The remaining six occurrences of *inv* appear in the Guild-Chat (n=2), Raid-Chat (n=1), and Trade-Chat (n=3).

The keyword analysis shows that the two chats differ significantly in terms of their speech acts; this is also indicated by the quantitative values. While the Group-Chat has a total of 160 salutation formulae, there are only 17 in the General-Chat. The practice of salutation therefore seems to be much more realized in the Group-Chat than it is in the General-Chat. The difference can be explained by the different communicative requirements of each chat. The Group-Chat is only created when several players get together to tackle a common task, while the General-Chat is a chat-room that players automatically enter. Therefore, the need for a welcome is much more apparent in the Group-Chat.

5.2 Collocations and constructions

In order to shed light on the linguistic practices connected to the above-mentioned speech acts, we must search for form-meaning co-occurrences, as to a certain degree they define such practices of communication. By defining the linguistic practices that are used in a given community, we can gain a better understanding of the underlying CofP as defined by their shared communicative repertoire and strategies of appropriate language use. To identify the apparent form-function-relationships, we look at the collocations of the top three keywords of the General-Chat. Interestingly, *pls* (= please) is frequently connected to *inv* and *invite*, which enforces the significance form-function correspondence of these expressions as constructions. *pls* is 565 times collocate to *inv*, of which it appears 556 times on the right sight (*inv* appears 1445 times in the General-Chat and *pls* 589 times). *pls* is only 24 time not a collocate to *inv*. Variants of *pls* – both *plz* (53 times out of 56 times in the sub-corpus) and *please* (3 times out of 5 times in the sub-corpus) – are also noticeable collocations to *inv* (see Figure 2).

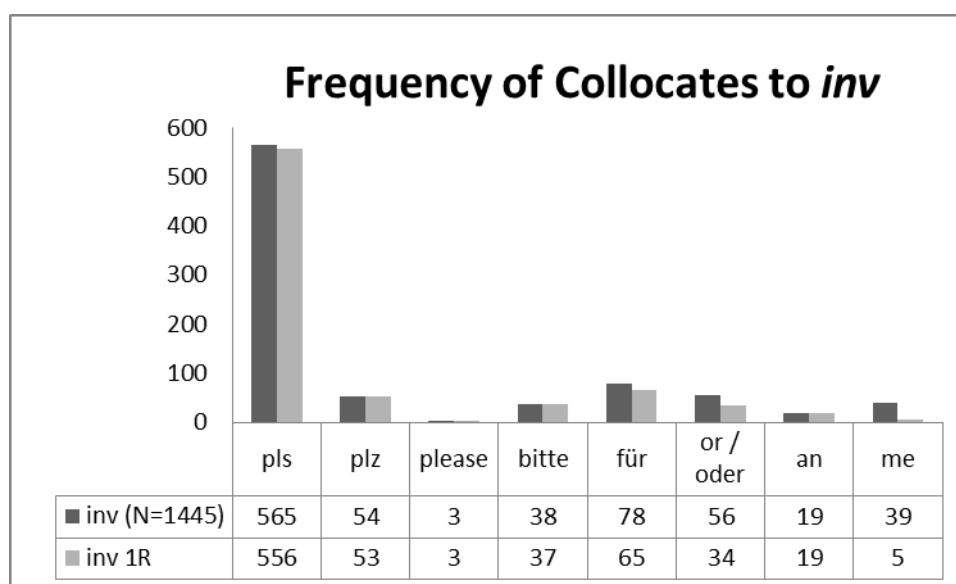


Figure 1.

The most important language construction within this chat is: *inv pls/ plz/ please* + ‘context’, where context is information which chat-room participants must derive from the situational context of the onscreen action in the game world. Specifically, this will inform chat-room users as to which activity the participant (here, the speaker) would like to be invited. This context is not verbalized in the construction of *inv pls / plz / please*. While *plz* and *please* are written variants of *pls*, combinations with the German *bitte* are often used in a slightly different construction types. Unlike in *pls / please / plz* where the context is not verbalized, the construction *inv bitte* always has a verbalized specification of the context as in *inv bitte nur Gruppe* (= inv please only group).

Another strong collocate to *inv* is the preposition *für* (meaning ‘for’), which appears 65 times in 78 cases as the right collocate (*für* appears 248 times in the General-Chat). The collocation *inv für* is related to two form function types. First, *inv für* represents cases that have a specific demand, as in *inv für Gruppe* (= invite for group). Second, *inv für* is found in explanatory phrases like *Whisper mit “inv” für invite* (= whisper with “inv” for invite).

The form-function-differentiations between the speech acts of making demands and elucidating are clearly shown by the collocate *me*, which occurs in just 5 of 39 cases as a right-hand collocate to *inv* (*me* appears 88 times in the General-Chat). If *me* is a collocate on the right side of a two-word phrase, it is always a demand for an invitation, as in *inv me* + ‘context’. If *me* is on the left side of a two-word phrase, the construction is an explanation, which is often also indicated by the fact that *inv* is enclosed within quotation marks, as in *w me “inv”* or *“+” for autoinvite*. Furthermore, the use of highly lexical reduced constructions that are only understandable to regular chat-room participants is

evident. This strengthens the assumption that WoW player groups show evidence of CofP.

5.3 Identification through personal pronouns

We have shown above that the participants in WoW chat-rooms are not only engaged in the mutual activity of playing the game but also use a shared repertoire of constructions. Furthermore, we can assume that all players have at least one shared interest: in playing the game.

These factors suggest that all of WoW's players on the server represent just one CofP. However, CofP are also defined as small social groups; the specific WoW server observed has around 16,000 players. Since all these players have access to at least the chat-rooms with little to no access authority, the CofP cannot be attributed to the individual chat-rooms. Instead, we must assume that there are various small social groups with slight differences between them, and that these social groups constitute a bigger unit which uses a jointly negotiated repertoire. To identify these basic CofP, we must look at how these groups further distinguish themselves. We use the pragmatic aspect of Person deixis as indicator for this. In particular we use personal pronouns to identify CofPs because they allow us to derive information of how members construct and maintain the social identity of their group as well as how they exclude others through constructing an opposition of speaker and addressee.

Personal pronouns have two distinct aspects. First, they either refer to the self (I, we) or the other (you, he, she, it, they). Second, they refer to either an individual (the singular) or to a group (the plural).

Person	Singular	Plural
<i>I / we</i>	Self; Individual	Self; Group
<i>you / you</i>	External; Individual	External; Group
<i>He, she, it / they</i>	External; Individual	External; Group

Figure 2.

When looking at personal pronouns in the WoW dataset, the relative low frequency of both the third person singular and the plural is apparent. Although it varies from chat-room to chat-room, only 12% to 33% of all pronouns in a chat-room are either in the third person singular or in the plural.

Since we are interested in social groups, the plural pronouns are of more interest to us than the singular. After sorting the pronouns relative to the amount of all pronouns used in the respective sub corpora from high to low frequency, we find the following:

High Frequency			Low Frequency		
1. Ps.Pl.	Group 17.73 % (n=36)	Trade 13.70% (n=143)	General 12.20% (n=41)	Raid 7.14% (n=9)	Guild 3.88% (n=36)
2.&3.Ps.Pl.	Group 22.17 % (n=45)	General 15.77% (n=53)	Trade 11.01% (n=115)	Raid 7.94% (n=10)	Guild 6.67% (n=62)

Figure 3.

Interestingly, both rows show the Guild- and the Raid-Chats as having low relative frequencies of pronoun use. It is useful to bear in mind that guilds and raids are social groups that frequently play together (see table 1) and that hence offer more stable communities than groups that do not come together as often. Guild and raid groups therefore do not need to distinguish themselves within the group on a linguistic level. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for individuals to enforce their position in these communities, as use of the first person singular is over 20 percent higher than in all other channels combined (see figure 5).

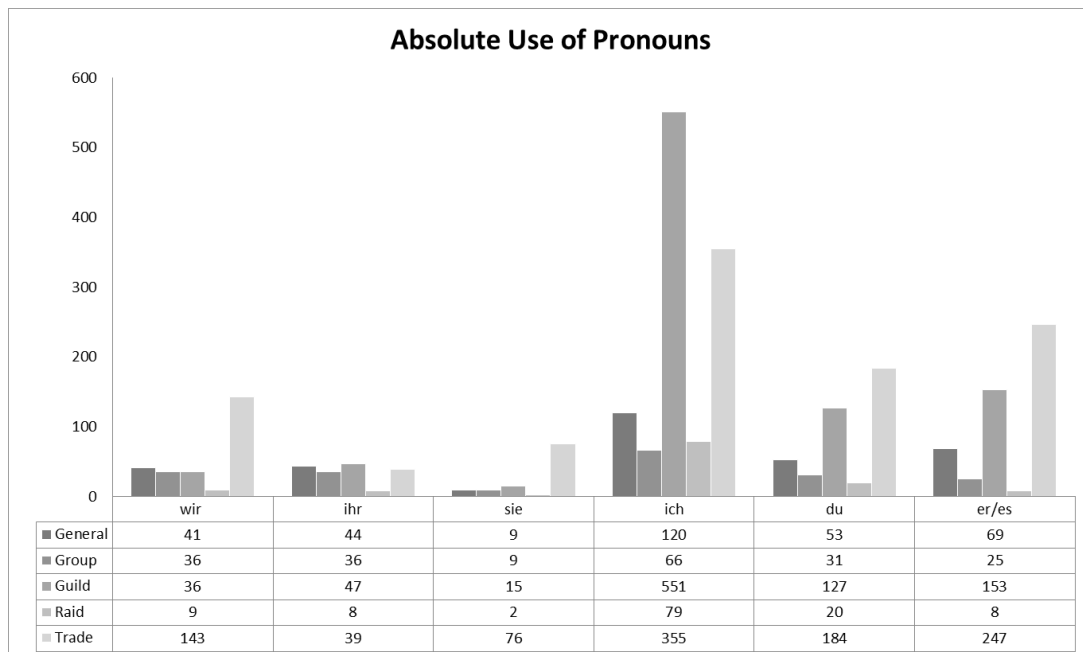


Figure 4.

The first person plural in the other three chat-rooms (Group-, Trade-, and General-Chat) is used in two distinct ways:

1) The pronoun can be used to refer to a group of players playing at the time of the message, as it is used in such phrases as *müssen wir echt alle mobs machen o.O* (= do we really have to kill all enemies [astonished smiley]). This is the dominant use of pronouns in the Group-Chat, which has the highest relative frequency of 1.ps.pl. compared to the other chat-rooms. We refer to this variant

as context-bound. As it is necessary to know the exact context of the phrase in order to fully understand it, the use of *wir* can be identified as a conversational implicature, with the addressee having to derive who is involved, and to whom it refers.

2) The first person plural is the dominant form of promoting the social group in the Trade- and General-Chat, both of which are defined as public chats. This is most easily seen when analysing the one-right-collocates to *wir* in the Trade-Chat. The top five most frequent collocates can be considered as effectively being recruitment tools.

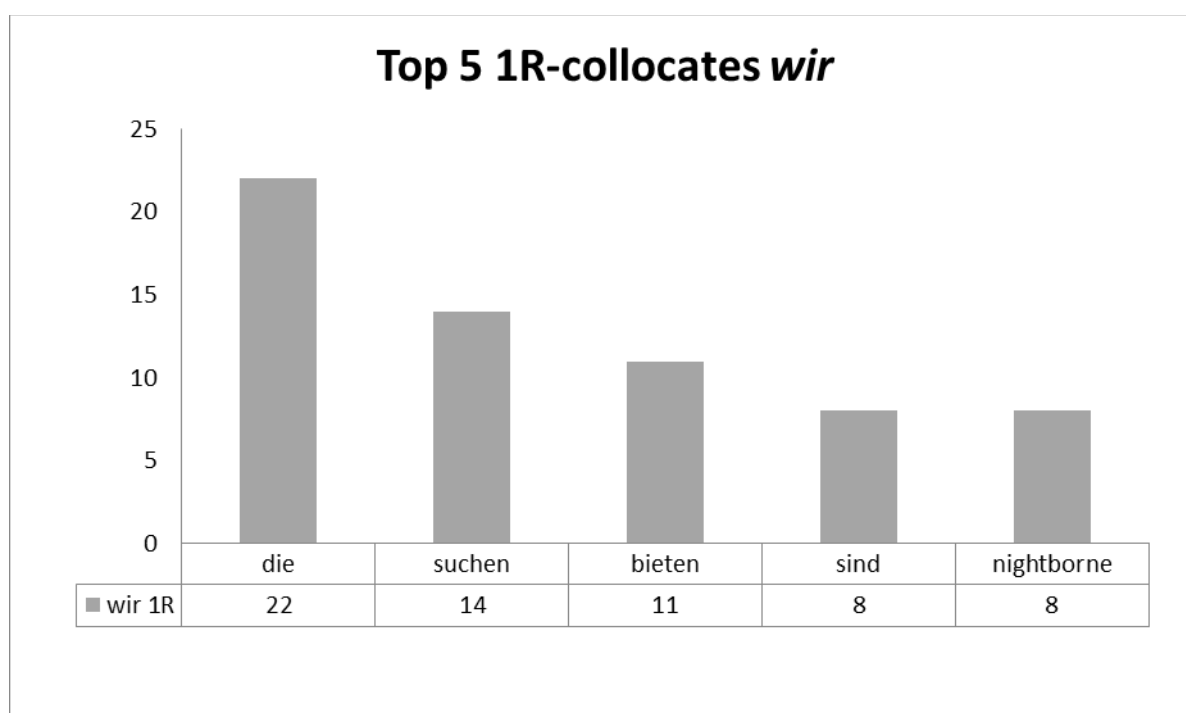


Figure 5.

Even if the article *die* does not belong to this recruitment toolset, it is re-semanticized because it is solemnly used in specific constructions within this toolset. All of the 22 instances for *die* use the construction *wir*, *die* + ‘specification’, such as, the ‘name of the guild or group’ + *suchen* (= look for) or + *bieten* (= offer). There is a conventional phrase that all the groups use to recruit new members. The combination *wir suchen* (= we are looking for) would need cotextual specification in standard language use. In WoW chat-rooms, such a verbalized specification is not given. Rather, the interested player has to deduce what traits and skills or avatar classes may be useful to the group from the game’s situational context.

As the construction *wir suchen* is used very frequently, it is not only defined as a conversational but also as a conventional implicature. For example, in *Wir die wiedervereinte Gilde sucht noch zum Aufbau des 20m Raids, RDDS jeglicher*

Specs (= we the reunited guild is still searching for their 20-person raid group, range damage dealers of any class') is not understandable to a participant without prior knowledge of the game's chat-room vocabulary. Furthermore, even if all words are independently decodable, the main clause does not specify what exactly the guild is looking for in players. WoW novices must therefore understand this information within its situational context, as only General-Chat veterans will be familiar with this language construction that is specific to the WoW environment.

6 Conclusion

As we have seen, there is a perceptible difference in chat-room's language structure and use based on the factors scope and access authority. Not only have we shown that keywords differ from chat to chat, but also that they actually represent the dominant speech acts. The communication in WoW chat-rooms is thus very action oriented and is characterized by its economical use of phrases, since none of the most significant lexemes for each chat is functional only in terms of standard language. When relating to a specific activity, the majority of players use such chat-room related lexemes or phrases as *inv* or *inv + pls* in a conventional manner.

These types of constructions are frequently used to further economize language. Due to the synchronicity of players moving through the game world and writing in the chat-rooms, certain constructions become re-semanticized, where phrases must be understood within their context rather than as a sum of individual words. This process seems to be jointly negotiated within the WoW community, as a broad majority of players use them. We define these as conventional implicatures. In addition to their efficiency in communication, they also help to construct and maintain the social community fostered by (veteran) WoW players in that they exclude novices unable to decode the message. Nevertheless, we have also found evidence of more seasoned players explaining the function and use of the implicature *inv + plz* to others, so the community is not a completely closed system.

Lastly, we showed that although all players mutually engage in the chat-rooms, share interests and the basic repertoire, a single WoW's server population nevertheless cannot be described as one CofP. Instead, the server comprises many smaller social constructs that define themselves as communities by referring to themselves as collective while distancing themselves from other social constructs. The most frequent occurrence of this phenomenon was in guilds trying to recruit new members.

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¹ “In uttering a Sentence *S*, a speaker implies that *p* is the case, if by having been uttered, *S* suggests as its conclusion *p*, without *p* having been literally said. If the conclusion rests exclusively on the conventional meaning of the words and grammatical constructions that occur in *S*, then the conclusion is called a ‘conventional implicature’.” (Bussmann 1996: 221)

² See Storrer (2001, 2000) for a detailed discussion of these categories.

³ For a broader explanation of keyboard-to-screen possibilities and restriction, see Jucker/Dürscheid (2012).

⁴ Another concept of the dichotomy between private and public is used by Landert/Jucker (2011).

⁵ Keyness is a value gained from a log likelihood calculation. For detailed information, see Anthony (2017) or UCREL (2017).