SPEECH ACT THEORY AND INTERNET CULTURE:
COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION
IN THE ERA OF WEB 2.0

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I argue for Speech Act Theory's continued relevance today. Particularly in the context of the Web 2.0 movement and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), J. L. Austin's basic notions of performatives, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, and infelicity seem to offer vast insight into what is going on with social interaction on the Internet. In the era of Wikipedia, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter we see the use of language developing and changing to fit the need of users online. In an increasingly social online world, it is no surprise then that the majority of interaction is facilitated via speech acts. Commenting and posting online, for instance, clearly lie in the realm of speech acts, with the act of posting being the locutionary act, and the effect on the world the perlocution, etc. I look at a number of phenomena including: speech in online computer games, 'gestures' in chat groups, emoticons, and Internet abbreviations. How we are using language online offers great insights in how language conveys meaning.
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SPEECH ACT THEORY AND ITS CONTINUED RELEVANCE

Preliminaries

In the mid-twentieth century the philosophy of language was divided between two factions: Ideal Language Philosophy (or analytic philosophy) and Ordinary Language Philosophy (see Jolley 2007 for a discussion). The Ideal Language Philosophers (e.g. Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell) studied what today we would call the formal aspects of language. By abstracting language using formal logic they thought they could understand our natural everyday language. Ordinary Language Philosophers on the other hand (e.g. Paul Grice, Gilbert Ryle, John Searle, P. F. Strawson, and Ludwig Wittgenstein) looked at—just as the name suggests—ordinary language; they scorned abstraction as leaving out some crucial key to how language functions. These schools of thought, it has been argued, are the forbearers of contemporary formal semantics and pragmatics, respectively (Récanati 2004). Of all the Ordinary Language Philosophers, J. L. Austin in particular characterizes this school of thought, or as Hanfling puts it, Austin is “the archetypal ordinary language philosopher” (Hanfling 2000:26).

Austin’s idea

Austin pointed out that there were many types of sentences that were being overlooked in formal studies of language. As he puts it, “We very often also use utterances in ways beyond the scope at least of traditional grammar” (Austin 1962:3). Further, “many traditional philosophical perplexities have arisen through a mistake—the mistake of taking as straightforward statements of fact utterances which are either (in interesting non-grammatical ways) nonsensical or else intended as something quite different” (Austin 1962:3). That is, before Austin, sentences tended to always be
interpreted simply as statements or descriptions, when there is good reason to assume that is not the full extent of how we use language.

In Austin’s book How to Do Things With Words (actually a compilation of lectures turned into a book) he starts out by introducing the idea of a performative. According to Austin, certain utterances “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action” (Austin 1962: 5). Performatives in particular are a unique kind of utterance in that you are explicitly doing what you are saying. Some examples will make this clearer; consider the statements that take place in a wedding ceremony (I do take this man..., etc.), the christening of a ship (I name this ship such and such), statements occurring in a will (I hereby bequeath my dog to my son), or even a bet (I bet you ten dollars that the Jets win the Super Bowl this year). Notice that by saying a performative you are doing that act (betting by saying I bet you..., etc.). These kinds of sentences have to be analyzed differently than the typical statements that philosophers have looked at (it seems ridiculous to say that I hereby bequeath my dog to my son is a false, or true, statement, and it’s definitely missing a crucial element of what is going on). What we notice is that context and other factors are very important in what makes a performative a performative—i.e. saying certain words is never “the sole thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to have been performed” (Austin 1962: 8). The circumstances of the utterance must be appropriate (saying I do in a play is not really getting married), and the intention of the speaker must be considered (he/she cannot be joking for example).

Rather than discussing the truth and falsity of such sentences, Austin found it more useful to discuss how performatives could be used satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily
(how certain things could go wrong in using a performative). He called these things that could go wrong in a performative, infelicities, and then detailed the conditions that create the problems in hope that it would get us closer to learning what performatives really are (or at least why they appear to need to be analyzed differently than regular descriptive statements). The first infelicity condition he gives is: “There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words, by certain persons in certain circumstances” (Austin 1962:14). In order for *I do...* to mean anything there must be a practice established in which it can take place, the practice of wedding ceremonies and marriage in general (similar to that other great father of Ordinary Language Philosophy, Wittgenstein—see Wittgenstein 1958 for discussion of language practices). The other infelicity conditions are roughly: the given situation must contain the right people and circumstances for the act to be successful, the procedure must be done correctly and completely, and generally the people involved must be sincere (have the correct inner thoughts and feelings) and must behave as if they are. At least in some sentences the conditions that lead to successful communication appear to be much more interesting and relevant than truth or falsity (this is a clear step away from the formal logic of Ideal Language Philosophers).

He separates these infelicities further into misfires and abuses; misfires happen when the performative does not go through (the right people did not administer, the procedure was done incorrectly, etc.), abuses happen when the performative did go through but not wholeheartedly (i.e. the individuals were insincere, etc.). In lectures three and four Austin delves deeper into the particulars of infelicity. For example, he discusses abuses, considering three different inner aspects that can be insincere when a
performative is spoken: feelings (saying *congratulations* without feeling pleased),
thoughts (saying *I advise you to...* when you don’t think it’s the best course of action),
and intentions (saying *I bet you twenty dollars if...* if you don’t intend to pay). All sorts of
things can go wrong when uttering a performative in which truth and falsity are
irrelevant. And these infelicities are not limited to performatives. For instance, Austin
addresses Strawson’s discussion of presupposition (that is, *the king of France is wise,* if
there is no king of France) in connection with infelicity (see Strawson 1950). To say *all
John’s children are bald* when John has no children isn’t really a matter of truth or falsity, but rather one of infelicity. Austin quickly realized that all “statements *are* liable
to every kind of infelicity to which performatives are liable” (Austin 1962:135). If
statements and descriptions can likewise be infelicitous then we haven’t come up with a
linguistic definition of performative. What is the distinction between a performative and a
regular statement? The answer is not so clear.

To try and get closer to answering the question of what a performative is exactly,
Austin decided to further divide the notion into explicit and implicit. Explicit
performatives happen when the action that is being done is actually said in the utterance
(*I bet* is said when betting). Implicit performatives, on the other hand, happen when the
action is not mentioned directly in the performative, but something very concrete is being
performed (*Go!* may be an order, *There is a bull in the field* may be a warning; akin to
Grice’s implicature—see Grice 1989). Performatives, then, do not necessarily have to be
in the *I (do such and such)...* form (i.e. first person singular present indicative active). We
see it’s not the grammar or the vocabulary, but pragmatic factors like context that
determine whether or not a given sentence is a performative. And we see that more and
more things look like performatives (statements said in a given context can act like performatives for instance). Austin spends a long time in the lectures trying to come up with some syntactic explanation of the difference in performatives and constatives (his word for descriptions or statements) and finds that it really isn’t in the way the sentences are formed that determines the act, but the context:

[W]e see that in order to explain what can go wrong with statements we cannot just concentrate on the proposition involved (whatever that is) as has been done traditionally. We must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued—the total speech-act—if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances, and how each can go wrong. Perhaps indeed there is no great distinction between statements and performative utterances. (Austin 1962:52)

What we recognize is that to utter (to say anything) is an act, but the question is: how is this different from a performative act? Or is it? Austin changes the way he approaches the issue. He first notes that “to say anything is... to perform the act of uttering certain noises” (Austin 1962:92) and likewise it is to make certain meaningful words, and to construct certain meaningful statements. Certainly, to say something is to do something, but there seems to be some other act in a performative act than just simply making a statement (uttering words, creating sentences, etc.)—we seem to be doing the act of betting, promising, etc. Austin says, “to say something is in the full normal sense to do something—which includes the utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain ‘meaning’” (Austin 1962:94).

Since Austin hasn’t been able to make a clear distinction of the difference between a performative and a plain statement, he then introduces the idea of a locutionary act. A locutionary act is exactly that act of making a sentence (forming your mouth in
certain ways to make sounds, organizing those sounds into meaningful units, and structuring them into meaningful phrases). Then he contrasts that with the notion of an illocutionary act. He says, “whether we were advising, or merely suggesting, or actually ordering, whether we were strictly promising or only announcing a vague intention” (Austin 1962:99) we are doing something more than making a locution. In making a locution we are also doing something else, and that something else is an illocution. Basically it is the reason for speaking or making the locution, and there seems to be a very large connection between this illocutionary act and the speaker’s intention. Finally he introduces the perlocutionary act, which is the act that happens because of the speaking (by saying such and such, such and such effects happened). For example: saying read this is a locution, the urging or advising to read it is the illocution, and persuading or getting someone to read it is the perlocution. This is where the idea of a speech act comes from, and this is how the field of Speech Act Theory began.

Austin goes into detail differentiating these acts, and it seems we are getting back to his original concern, that “for too long philosophers have neglected this study, treating all problems as problems of ‘locutionary usage’” (Austin 1962:100). Philosophers have been abstracting sentences out of context as if they can exist without being uttered. “[W]e have been realizing more and more clearly that the occasion of an utterance matters seriously, and that the words used are to some extent to be ‘explained’ by the ‘context’ in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in a linguistic interchange” (Austin 1962:100). Meaning then is more than just word meaning (what the Ideal Language Philosophers miss). Someone can ask you what do you mean by that? and you can reply I was explaining or I was just asking, etc. Illocutionary force is somehow also
part of the meaning; "we can use 'meaning' also with reference to illocutionary force" (Austin 1962:100). Part of meaning is "the understanding of meaning and of the force of the locution" (Austin 1962:116, emphasis added).

All utterances are speech acts: "Whenever I 'say' anything... I shall be performing both locutionary and illocutionary acts" (Austin 1962:132). And all utterances have illocution: "to state is every bit as much to perform an illocutionary act as, say, to warn or to pronounce" (Austin 1962:133). And further "we realize that what we have to study is not the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation" (Austin 1962:138). We cannot abstract context out of meaning. Context and intention seem to be critical to meaning in general (and certain statements cannot be understood without these aspects). No utterance exists without a context. Focusing just on truth and falsity or the grammaticality of a sentence is not enough. To say France is hexagonal is a pretty rough statement for sure, but to decide that it is true or false is absurd, it depends on how it's being used, what the context is. For a cartographer making a map of the borders of France it is inappropriate (infelicitous), for a student memorizing the countries of Western Europe it is perfectly ok. "[I]n the case of stating truly or falsely, just as much as in the case of advising well or badly, the intents and purposes of the utterance and its context are important" (Austin 1962:142). Austin goes on to create a taxonomy of speech acts that will include both statements and performatives which is interesting, but not all that important to this discussion (his classifications are verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives), but it's clear that the act of speaking is just as important as the sentence being used, in regards to meaning.
Austin, the “archetypal” Ordinary Language Philosopher, of course fits in with others in the pragmatic line of thinking—I’ve already mentioned Grice (Grice 1957 discusses meaning in particular), Wittgenstein (1958), and Strawson (1950). But that doesn’t mean their theories were necessarily compatible. Strawson in particular criticized Austin’s view claiming that Gricean maxims handled everyday speech acts better than illocutionary force, and that performatives themselves only occurred in very formal conventions (see Strawson 1971, or Sadock 2004 for a discussion). Yet Austin’s idea continued to be influential; Searle (1969) extended Speech Act Theory far more than any other linguist or philosopher. I won’t go into the particulars of his theory, in part because it isn’t pertinent to the purposes of this thesis, but mostly because many did not appreciate the direction Searle took the theory, and there are many criticisms in Speech Act Theory that seem to focus on Searle rather than Austin (e.g. Genova 1973, Shirley 1975, and DuBois 1995 to name a few). In particular Bach and Harnish (1979) decided to take Speech Act Theory in an entirely different direction. And the two different versions and particulars of Speech Act Theory continue to be debated (for instance, Bach and Harnish 1992).

Today there is a lot of discussion of Speech Act Theory in the context of law (recently for instance in the *Journal of Pragmatics* volume forty-one, Charnock 2009, Kryk-Kastovsky 2009, etc.), and in the context of anthropological implications (Ogiermann 2008, Atawneh 2009, and Sugawara 2009, etc.). Even more interestingly, much of Austin’s work has extended into second language acquisition (see Molina Perez and Gaviria 2007, Walters 2007, for examples and discussion). Austin’s basic idea has
become a core element to modern pragmatics, but we'll see at least one area where it hasn't been applied. And we'll see that there is a lot to be said of Austin in the digital age.
WHAT IS ALL THE EXCITEMENT SURROUNDING WEB 2.0?

Preliminaries

In comparison to Speech Act Theory, there is little literature in linguistics dealing with the Internet, particularly with the so-called Web 2.0 movement. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First (and probably most important to linguists) is the huge storage of linguistic data just waiting to be analyzed. The reason that more linguists haven’t tapped into this resource, I suspect, is that it turns out to be quite difficult interpreting which content is public domain, and it’s also hard to gain access to the information in a convenient way (improvements to search engines have been useful, but a lot of the really interesting information is in Facebook, YouTube, MySpace posts, and instant messaging conversations, which by their nature are not easily searchable, or accessible). The second reason it is unfortunate is because of what many have noticed: the way we use language on the Internet is fundamentally different from how we’ve used it before (instant responses and feedback from thousands of people, complete anonymity, a variety of media to encode messages, and a unique culture embodied in all of these new tools).

Web 2.0 is hard to define. The phrase was coined around 2003 and refers to an online movement starting a few years earlier. Instead of forcing users to buy, download, and install software (for spreadsheets, photo editing, word processing, etc.), websites began incorporating a variety of tools directly into their web pages, often for free use. Along with free music and video players, websites began offering free music to listen to, and videos to watch. What developed was a new form of interaction with other people on the Internet. Users could collaborate, share, and record all sorts of media, within the boundaries of their web browsers, and without any real computer expertise. More
importantly these activities (while being around for a few years) became increasing user-friendly and popular, heralding a new form of social interaction. Many people for instance get online entirely for leisure—to talk, check out family photos, watch TV, etc. (Burrows 2007). Online language has gone through its own changes because of this development, becoming the primary tool for interaction in the Web 2.0 era. While Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has been around for a few decades, in the past few years it has changed drastically, simply because of the peculiarity of the new social environment.

There is quite a bit of research dealing with the Internet in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but with the advent of Web 2.0 it has been hard to keep up, and much of this early research is outdated. Probably the only serious linguistic book devoted to CMC, titled appropriately Computer-Mediated Communication, was published in 1996 (Herring 1996), before the beginning of the Web 2.0 movement in the early 2000s (Burrows 2007). What many linguists noticed early on was that language was being used differently on the Internet than it had ever been used before (Collot and Belmore 1996, or more recently Crystal 2004). Among the things they observed was that the use of pronouns was somehow unique—the use of second person pronouns is much more common in Internet writing than other forms of writing, and much more similar to speaking (Yates 1996)—and that sentences tended to be shorter and simpler syntactically than other modes of discourse (Al-Sa’Di and Hamdan 2005). Language on the Internet is significantly different from other written language (letters, notes, etc.), but it is distinct from speech as well (simply because of the modality of discourse). Some of the more notable attributes to CMC that Werry (1996) notes are addressivity (naming your
interlocutor at the beginning of a message to avoid confusion), abbreviation, paralinguistic/prosodic cues (reduplicated letters, ellipsis for pauses, etc.), and particularly interesting for the purposes here, actions/gestures (shaking hands or hugging symbolically by typing *hugs*, *shakes hand*, or using a symbol, etc., Crystal discusses similar usage with messages like <Spoon nods in greeting> (2001:39)). As I said the last is of particular interest for the purposes of this thesis, and it’s easy to see why: the act of shaking hands is done via language (i.e. typing *shakes hand*), and what was once a physical act becomes a speech act with the illocutionary force of agreement or acceptance.

Gestures and other online concoctions have become progressively more common in the Web 2.0 era. And language on the Internet has increasingly taken on a look of its own (see discussion of abbreviation and emoticons below for instance). More and more Web 2.0 sites (like Facebook and YouTube) utilize language in order to facilitate interaction. What has developed is a complex social atmosphere—which is probably what best typifies the Web 2.0 movement (along with greater utility and free content). But we’ll see as the Internet has become more of a social platform, interaction increasingly is facilitated in the form of speech acts.

**What does this have to do with Austin?**

My argument is that our understanding of CMC in light of the so-called Web 2.0 movement is greatly enlightened when understood in the context of Speech Act Theory. The notions of performatives, illocution, and perlocution in particular seem to shed light on what we are doing in YouTube posts, blogs, etc. In the following sections I give specific examples to show this, like the sort of ‘actions/gestures’ above. We’ll see there
are other tools that have developed on the Internet in recent years that behave as obvious speech acts, and seem to fit nicely in Austin's basic theory. Finally I suggest this is strong evidence for the continued relevance of Austin (this is one realm of discourse where Ideal Language Philosophy turns out to be ineffective).
SPECIFICS

Emoticons, instant messaging, and other Internet basics

Crystal (2001) separates the modes of discourse on the Internet into four categories: e-mail (electronic mail), chat groups (discussions where any number of people can participate often in real time), virtual worlds (discussed in the section Online Gaming below), and the World Wide Web (a collection of computers linked together by means of web pages). These divisions aren’t perfect—Crystal, for instance, notes that many of these modes are not mutually exclusive, and in recent years there are many other ways people have found to use the Internet to communicate—nevertheless they offer a good base. Particularly in the era of Web 2.0 we see that these modes of discourses have been vastly expanded (Twitter feeds, Facebook wall posting, and its own internal private messaging system, etc.), but it’s unnecessary for the purposes of this thesis to complicate the categories. I’ll use Crystal’s schema with one exception: instant messaging in its many forms is considered its own mode.

Email and instant messaging seem to be the most basic modes of discourse on the Internet. Instant messaging is similar to a conversation; small chunks of information (from a letter to a word to a couple of sentences) are sent in real time between, or among, participants. Email, unlike instant messages, is generally longer and more carefully constructed, and for the most part does not require an instant response. But the idea is the same behind both: a message is typed, then sent instantly to the other party or parties in the conversation. They are both different from speech (though instant messaging is synchronous, the other party generally cannot see what you are typing until you hit ‘enter’ on the keyboard or click ‘send’ on the screen) and other forms of written language
(they are, after all, instant across vast distances). In particular, instant messaging because of its short statement-like messages fits nicely into a Speech Act Theory of meaning—the primary use of instant messaging is to have a conversation, not to state or describe. But in both cases we see blatant speech act-like characteristics (typing a short statement and hitting ‘send’ is a clear act of locution).

Chat groups and the World Wide Web likewise display these obvious speech act-like characteristics. Chat groups are basically large-scale instant messaging platforms, where people (often strangers) participate in a conversation. It’s easy to see why speech acts stand out in this mode of discourse as well: you type a message, click send, and participate in a conversation. The World Wide Web is a much broader mode than what we’ve mentioned so far, but it too has these characteristics. Whether it’s posting a message on a blog, making a comment on a *New York Times* article, or publishing a classified advertisement on Craigslist (a popular advertizing webpage), there are clear acts of locution, and illocution, and perlocution. The post is the locution, the reason for posting the illocution, and the effect the perlocution (selling an item, say). But the World Wide Web in particular has evolved in the past few years because of Web 2.0, so I’ll go into more detail about this mode in the sections that follow. In any case these four basic modes (again, the fifth will be discussed below in the section Online Gaming) on a rudimentary level seem to be illuminated within a Speech Act Theory analysis.

One of the most obvious examples of illocutionary force in these four modes of discourse is the heavy use of emoticons. Emoticons are images made out of symbols and letters often put at the end of a sentence to express an emotion (or even disambiguate the sentence). An example is *I never want to go out with you again ;)* where the winking
smiley face at the end is a cue for sarcasm. Faces are the most basic emoticons (in Appendix A I reproduce charts from Wikipedia that show the most basic face emoticons), but on the Internet it’s easy to come across anything from roses to guns to animals (really whatever a relatively clever user can type out). Crystal (2001) discusses emoticons in detail and has his own chart of faces. He notes that emoticons in particular are pragmatic in nature—that they “act as a warning to the recipient(s) that the sender is worried about the effect a sentence might have” (Crystal 2001:38). And it’s not too much of stretch to replace ‘effect’ with ‘perlocutionary effect’ in Crystal’s statement. One study has even shown that users of emoticons appear more outgoing (Fullwood and Martino 2007). In fact emoticons appear to be in the business of illocution, whether it’s an expression of disgust or agreement or even disappointment, an emoticon is used primarily to add an additional meaning to the semantic meaning of a statement (and often they are used by themselves without any statement to link to). They appear to indicate the intended illocution of the sentence when the sentence fails to give sufficient cues (or is ambiguous, etc.). Of course emoticons are used extensively throughout the Internet, and are used in all forms of discourse (even a professor of mine uses emoticons occasionally in our email correspondence). Understandably, as the Internet becomes more of a social environment, the use of these symbols has become more prevalent.

You don’t need to look long to find more elaborate use of symbols and letters to create pictures. This practice of complex images made of text-based symbols is often called ASCII art—in Appendix B I give an example of a common ASCII art that you might find posted to a YouTube video, or in a chat thread (ASCII art). I’ll limit my discussion of ASCII art because some would argue the pictures are not linguistic, but it’s
worth pointing out that posting one of these pictures (say a fist with the middle finger raised) does seem to convey some meaning, and it seems much easier to analyze the meaning as a speech act than in a formal semantic derivation (much like the same gesture would be in the non-virtual world). It’s clear that the type of meaning a user is able to express in ASCII art can be symbolic or semiotic.

Another Internet basic that you find in these modes of discourse are abbreviations such as a/s/l (i.e. ‘age/sex/location’) or lol (‘laugh out loud’). Many of these abbreviations (like emoticons) can be used independently of any other words to form their own speech act. Typing a/s/l into an instant message for example will immediately be understood as an inquiry into the interlocutor’s age, sex, and current location, and will almost always be returned with a perlocutionary response (e.g. f/25/NY). These have become lexicalized speech acts on the Internet. And, as Austin would put it, they are not true or false, but fall victim to the same sorts of infelicities that we have discussed before (i.e. saying a/s/l in an all female chat room, or without specifying who it is directed to, etc.). In Appendix C I make a short list of abbreviations that can be used as clear speech acts (text or SMS messaging on a mobile phone displays similar features discussed here—see Crystal 2008 for a discussion; Crystal also includes lists of abbreviations in multiple languages, many common to the Internet as well).

There are still other elements that the everyday Internet user deals with on a daily basis that seem to be best understood in the context of speech acts. Particularly the messages that the Internet community has labeled ‘trolling’ (sending messages intended to irritate others but doing so with feigned innocence), ‘spamming’ (sending unwanted messages, sometimes advertisements or links, generally excessively long, and often
posted over and over again in a given feed), and ‘flaming’ (sending aggressive messages attacking a specific recipient and/or his views, beliefs, etc.) can easily be understood in the context of Speech Act Theory (for a discussion of each, see Crystal 2001 chapter two). Each of these acts has an intended perlocution (in the case of trolling it is to aggravate, for instance—but it’s also important that the intended perlocution is not recognized by the recipients). The fact that these sorts of messages are used in ways other than to state or describe (and the fact that we have names for these acts) suggests that much of the social interaction on the Internet is facilitated via speech acts.

Whether it’s sending an emoticon or abbreviation, clicking ‘post’ on chat channel or ‘send’ in an email, we see that we appear to be in the realm of speech acts. These basic domains of communication on the Internet demonstrate the fundamentals of Speech Act Theory, but the realm of social networking and other Web 2.0 inventions offer even more robust examples of speech acts and illocutionary force.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.

The new social environment that has appeared in the last few years has dramatically changed the way that we think about language and language use. Crystal (2001) likens it to the introduction of the printing press and the television. And some (Baron 2008) have wondered how the new use of language will affect our culture and the way we think. As the Internet has changed, so too has the culture surrounding it. The World Wide Web has particularly gone through vast changes in the past few years with the Web 2.0 movement. Of special note are social networking websites like Facebook and MySpace; these have taken over the chat and social interaction on the Internet (with the exception of blogging and YouTube, see below). Social networking websites are a
collection of web pages representing users that are linked together by their authors in order to build social networks. Friends, coworkers, and former classmates, for example, are added online to one’s list of friends in order to keep in contact with them. One’s page lists personal interests, hobbies, current work or school schedule, etc. (Burrows 2007), and by navigating through other’s pages you can learn about them, talk about common interests, get back in touch, and so forth.

But social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace have become much more sophisticated with new programs and tools that users can use to keep in touch (whether it’s playing scrabble with a few old high school classmates, or ‘tagging’ yourself in pictures that other people have posted so that Facebook notifies the rest of the friends on your list of the picture). And Facebook in particular is expanding the ways users are able to interact online. As the New York Times puts it, “Facebook is rapidly becoming the Web’s dominant social ecosystem and an essential personal and business networking tool in much of the wired world” (Stone 2009). Facebook has a number of tools that allow one to talk with other users. It has its own internal instant messaging system and email message system, but also allows users to comment on each other’s pages (i.e. post on their ‘wall’) so that others can see the conversation and engage as well. One of the few peer reviewed articles dealing with Facebook discusses how individuals view others based on what they post on their Facebook pages, or ‘profiles’ (Walther et al. 2009). The article shows that individuals will view other individuals differently based on the type of information they post describing themselves (are they more introverted, etc.). In particular, the study looked at those things users cannot manipulate (attractiveness in profile pictures, what other people post on your wall, etc.), versus those they could (your
own descriptions of hobbies, etc.). They concluded that postings from other people have a
greater impact on how individuals are viewed. But what is clear is that postings do have a
clear impact on how people are viewed—whenever anything is posted (by yourself or
from another person about you) there is a clear perlocutionary effect. Because the social
networking sites have this sort of social impact on how a person is perceived, it is
undeniable that the linguistic exchange online has a greater dimension to it than simple
locution.

Not surprisingly, with these new tools and their greater social dimension, we find
pragmatic force playing a heavier role. As the Internet has become more of a social
platform, users participate more regularly in speech acts with clear illocutionary force.
Appendix D provides an example of a ‘Wall-to-Wall’ posting on Facebook. The
messages are arranged in a reverse chronological order (except for the messages that are
posted by other users as comments on the two individuals’ conversation). In the ‘Wall-to-
Wall’ sample there are many examples of speech acts (like the birthday greetings at the
beginning), and even an example of emoticon use (the use of the winking smiley face at
the end is an indication that Sara just found out something and knows that Jake will know
what she is hinting at). Birthday greetings are a common occurrence on Facebook
because all the users are notified of each others’ birthday by the website. And clearly
these greetings (e.g. HAPPY BIRTHDAY!) fit into the category of performatives (wishing
someone a happy birthday on the wrong day is a clear infelicity for instance). Trying to
interpret these greetings in some analytical/truth-conditional way isn’t very useful. In the
example there are requests (e.g. shoot me a text or a email), commands (Get on Gchat
fool), and even what might be referred to as an interjection (*HAHAHA This has been a hijacking, your welcome all!*), but in all cases, speech acts.

Recently another Web 2.0 creation has become popular that typifies this type of speech act-like behavior on the Internet: Twitter. Twitter incorporates the same sort of posting feed that you see on websites like Facebook—users post short status messages which appear on anyone’s wall that subscribes to that individual’s postings. Twitter is different from other social networking sites in that this is all it is; individuals sign up to receive messages from their friends, news sources, and even celebrities, and Twitter is basically the live feed of those messages. Each message serves as a speech act (i.e. to inform people of what you are doing, request something of your friends, or even invite coworkers to lunch). Messages are limited to 140 characters, and can be sent from basically anywhere—mobile phones, etc.—creating a culture of people that are virtually always online (Boutin 2009). Websites like Facebook and Twitter typify ways language is being used on the Internet, and fit nicely into a Speech Act Theory of meaning.

Many websites on the Internet allow one to interact with others in numerous ways. For one thing users can comment on virtually everything (status updates, videos, other comments, etc.). YouTube (the online video watching website) is probably the best example of this type of practice. Like Facebook and Twitter, YouTube also has live feeds of user-generated conversation. Individuals post videos and others watch them, then comment underneath. These comments of course behave as speech acts as well. Many postings are simply the abbreviations/emoticons/etc. that have been discussed in this thesis, without any other words or phrases (e.g. *lol, rotfl*, or something similar). It is much more difficult interpreting this type of post from a purely truth-conditional theory...
of language (typing "lol" is expressing one’s enjoyment of the video, and is engaging with
other people online, not describing or stating anything in particular). Because such a post
has no real truth-value (like simply posting an emoticon), the meaning in such an act
must be understood performatively. Comments on videos, along with Twitter posts
(‘tweets’ as they are called online) and Facebook messages, all seem to demonstrate this
type of behavior. The messages are short and to the point, and because of that
illocutionary force tends to stand out in each message, often it is the only meaning in the
utterance. If the only meaning is illocutionary, then Austin’s distinction is not only
useful, but also necessary to interpret such utterances. Writing far before the Internet was
even imagined, he unknowingly provided the tools for interpreting such behavior. Yet his
ideas, particularly in the era of Web 2.0, because of the type of social interaction, are
required for interpretation when we use language in this way.

The Web 2.0 movement has offered simple and powerful tools to interact online,
and as technology has advanced, language has become the tool for users to facilitate this
interaction. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc. are just a few of the Web 2.0 sites that
facilitate this type of environment. Consider online sports commentary that is now
available: real-time updates and play-by-play analysis behave as obvious speech acts as
well (see Perez-Sabater et al. 2008). As the Internet becomes a more powerful and broad
vehicle for social interaction, language will continue to change in order to aid and
accommodate its development.

**Blogs, Wikipedia, etc.**

Interaction on the Internet tends to be in the form of a direct act, whether it’s
clicking ‘Add as Friend’ on Facebook, or typing "lol" on a YouTube video to express
enjoyment of it. By their nature many of these acts are linguistic, and many of them are clear speech acts. Clicking on a website in order to perform an act is common place now. The website Digg is a good example. Users add news stories to the site and individuals who feel a given article is newsworthy click ‘digg it’. The more ‘diggs’ a story gets the higher up it goes on the feed so that it is easily accessible by other people (Burrows 2007). But in general, many of the acts on the Internet are linguistic. For instance, Wikipedia, the online user generated encyclopedia, is run entirely through users posting comments and editing articles. The premise is that anyone can go on and correct/create an article on Wikipedia, and the community aims to prevent misinformation from appearing on the website as a common goal.

Wikipedia has developed its rules and regulations in order to resolve disputes and get many individuals to cooperate in the project. Each article has a talk/discussion page that allows users to communicate and resolve disputes. Users have developed tools and philosophies that have become a part of the Wikipedia guidelines in order to help people work together, resolve disputes, etc. ‘Assume Good Faith’ is one such policy—basically Wikipedia advises collaborators to give each other the benefit of the doubt and assume that without sufficient evidence any act by another user is done in order to benefit Wikipedia (again similar to Grice—see Grice 1989). Likewise there are customs that Wikipedia recommends users do in order to support a collaborative community (saying good work, etc. to other contributors). Or even the concept of ‘Wikilove’—the term that users have coined to express the idea that everyone should be working toward a common goal on Wikipedia—fits into this category (Ayers et al. 2008). These sorts of complex social practices only arise in a highly developed discourse setting (Kollock and Smith
(1996) discuss this issue of cooperation, identifying rules, boundaries, etc. that have
developed to manage online collaborations. It’s not surprising then that we see the same
sorts of speech acts in Wikipedia that we see elsewhere on the Internet. Appendix F
provides an example of a talk/discussion page on Wikipedia, where each post can be
categorized according to speech act: a request (Could someone tell me what β SOUNDS
LIKE!!!!!!!!!!!!!), a command (I would like to call for a correction...), etc. These social
mediums give rise to speech acts in order to facilitate cooperation and communication
between parties. Wikis, like Wikipedia, have even been shown to be constructive for
scholastic group projects (Farabaugh 2007). This kind of cooperation online is
accomplished entirely through speech acts, and is greatly illuminated by Austin’s theory.

Blogs (short for ‘web logs’), likewise have developed a similar environment for
social cooperation and communication to shape an increasingly online political and social
world. Blogs are online diaries or journals and are often used as a citizen based news
source/news commentary (Burrows 2007). Many books and articles have come out
discussing how citizen generated media is changing the political and social landscape
(Hewitt 2005, Kline and Burstein 2005, etc.). Bloggers post (daily, weekly, etc.)
comments or articles, which are read by followers and passed around. The fact that blogs
are shaping our culture provides good evidence of perlocutionary effects (because they
are having an influence on the outside world). Individuals themselves can have direct
perlocutionary effects as well. There are many well documented cases where legal
consequences have come about because of individual posts on blogs. In 2006, for
instance, Ellen Simonetti lost her job as a flight attendant for Delta Airlines for material
posted on her blog. Even more extreme, Kareem Amer from Egypt was sentenced to four years in prison for insulting the president of Egypt and Islam on his blog (Burrows 2007).

It's common knowledge that language can shape the world, but many have argued blogging has shifted in the impact a single individual can have. Saying something online really is doing something (insulting the president, inciting a riot, etc.). Cheshire and Antin (2008) come to a similar conclusion—positive feedback (on blogs, YouTube, etc.) have social and psychological effects, and actually impact the contributions in the information pool. Dippold (2009) confirms this as well, peer feedback on educational blogs have a profound effect on the performance of students. This is clear perlocutionary impact based on the illocutionary force of the feedback (was it positive, motivating, etc.).

**Online gaming**

Interestingly, there is one area in particular that remains almost completely unexamined in the linguistic literature: online games (Crystal 2001 has a brief discussion, but not at all extensive, and very dated). And perhaps the use of language on the Internet to do an action (with all of the Austinian implications) is best typified by the so-called ‘Massively Multiplayer Online’ games (or as they are called online: MMOs). These fall into the last mode of discourse on the Internet in our schema: virtual worlds. Second Life is a good example of a basic massively multiplayer online game. Their website describes the game as a “virtual world with a Resident population of millions of real people from around the world. Each person is represented by an avatar that represents their chosen digital persona. They are gamers, housewives, artists, musicians, programmers, lawyers, firemen, political activists, college students, business owners, active duty military, architects, and medical doctors, to name just a few” (FAQ). The point of the game is to
talk, interact, and otherwise mingle with other players who are living out regular lives in the virtual world, doing professions that they otherwise wouldn’t have the opportunity to do. The interaction among players is largely carried out via text based instant messaging. And we’ll see it’s clear what the players are saying is just one key element to what they are doing by talking/typing in the game.

For example, two of the more popular massively multiplayer online games are World of Warcraft (WoW, as it’s called online) and Final Fantasy XI Online (FFXI). These two games are Role Playing Games (RPGs, or MMORPGs to be exact), and it’s quickly apparent that CMC is crucial in order to advance in the game. In order to complete certain tasks and successfully coordinate attacks for instance, you have to work with other players and communicate in real-time using the text-based chat system that’s built into the game. Players have developed their own lingo and conventions in order to facilitate this need (and do it as efficiently as possible). Like Second Life you have a character/avatar that you use to interact with others in the game, but unlike Second Life there are tasks and adventures that the player must complete in order to progress in the game and advance his character. Characters are ranked based on the tasks they complete, the items they obtain in the game, and a number of other factors in a complex system (World of Warcraft Guide).

Appendix G includes a glossary of terms that have arisen from the game (by no means exhaustive—I chose terms that particularly emphasize the border between speech and action). Many of these terms have been created simply out of utility in the game (it’s much quicker to say *pulling mandragora* to alert the members that you are bringing a particular creature into battle, than actually saying *I’m brining a madragora to fight, be*
ready!). Likewise many of the terms by themselves can act as speech acts in the game (all you need to say is pull, and the player who is in charge of bringing the monster to battle is alerted—via command that you are ready). Most of these terms can be used in descriptions (e.g. I was pulling this mob yesterday, and you're not going to believe...), but the majority of the time they are used in real time as commands, requests, warnings, etc. (in the appendix common illocutionary functions are given for many of the terms). Interestingly, many of the players do not even know what some of the acronyms and terms stand for (mob for instance, or proc). They have been lexicalized within the game (like many of the abbreviations discussed above), which further suggests they have arisen out of utility in the game.

These terms are used primarily as speech acts, and with each one there is an act of locution (pressing enter/sending the text), act of illocution (the command, request, etc.), and perlocutionary effect (getting someone to bring a creature to your group, etc.). It is evident these really are being used as speech acts because the same sorts of misfires appear to happen in the game world (e.g. if the context were wrong: saying pull in an area without monsters, or when you aren’t in a group; or the intention: the wrong character says pull, etc.). Every statement (like in the real world) it seems, serves as a speech act. And because of the nature of these games, the statements appear to be clear speech acts—sending the message is a clear locutionary act, and almost all of the statements are used to facilitate game-play (ilocution).

In Appendix H a list (again not exhaustive—there are hundreds) of slash-commands is given (the list is only made up of those from World of Warcraft, though Final Fantasy XI has its fair share as well). These are even better examples of speech acts
in the game in that by using a slash-command (typing in a forward-slash and a word or compound word) your character will then actually act based on what you commanded them to do and it informs the people around you that you are doing so (e.g. /dance will make your character do a little jig and the other players around you will be informed of it in the chat field with different colored text—i.e. *Drowan bursts into dance*). Here then, are even more explicit versions of using language/text to perform an action. By typing the slash-command you are forcing your character to do the action that you are saying. The action and the language (at least in this virtual world) are bound to each other; the rules of the system make it so you cannot separate them—they simply are the same thing, and in order to do the action, you must make the utterance.

Many of these commands actually have the character act out the action that you are saying (e.g. typing /chicken displays a message that your character flaps its arms and struts around and clucks like a chicken as your character in fact does those things on the screen). Others simply inform everyone around you that you are doing the action (/apologize displays a message that you apologize). Slash-commands of these types are called ‘emotes’ (these though are not interpretable to everyone in the game: opponents in *World of Warcraft* appear as different ‘races’ and their text gets morphed into a kind of gibberish between races, and though some clever people have been able to decipher a few phrases and words, messages generally cannot be understood in the text field of an opposing player, it often says something to the effect that the other player is making some strange gestures whenever an emote is used—only players of the same race can view them). Others program your character to do an action in the game (/follow forces your character to start following another character that you specify), and have to be used in the
game to complete a task (voting for instance, or in order to complete a quest). Appendix H gives a small sample of preprogrammed commands one can use (and sometimes has to use) in the game, but note by using a generic one you can make up any ‘emote’ you want and it will inform everyone around you that you are doing whatever you say you are doing. Austin provides a good way of looking at this use of language (truth-conditional analysis is obviously not very useful). By using/saying these commands your character is actually doing the command (at the same time everyone in the area is notified in the chat-field that you are). Clearly we use language for a lot more than just describing or stating.

MMOs are not the only games that display these types of utilities. There are many games (like online chess, scrabble, etc.) that have their own terminology and linguistic tools that are interesting in their own ways. It’s not too much of a stretch though to suggest that how language is used in these games is very similar to what has been discussed, or to suggest that speech acts are likely fundamental tools to facilitate game-play (simply because of the way real-time game-play and simultaneous chat seem to interact). We are doing something interesting and new when we chat online via games. Here I looked primarily at text-based games, but many other games allow real-time audio/voicing, which I’m sure has its own distinct linguistic phenomena which would be worth looking into (from speech acts to syntax, etc.). What I’ve shown is that the way language operates in these games actually (by its very nature) creates an action in the game. Some uses of language (e.g. slash-commands) lie completely outside of stating and describing.
WHY AUSTIN STILL MATTERS

J. L. Austin is still relevant today because Speech Act Theory offers a simple way to analyze a complex aspect of language: that there are different levels of meaning in every utterance we make. When we look to the type of utterances we see on the Internet (especially in social contexts like comments on blogs, or YouTube videos) it is difficult, if not impossible, to interpret meaning in a purely truth-conditional way. Statements like lol or I never want to go out with you again ;) have a clear illocutionary force behind them that is crucial to their interpretation. Many of the linguistic examples online appear to be purely illocutionary (the meaning of lol, for instance). Austin’s felicity conditions likewise are useful in understanding the meaning behind the particular uses of these utterances (when is it appropriate to use lol, etc.). And in general, we find all sorts of acts online (such as ‘emotes’ on World of Warcraft) that we would have a much more difficult time accounting for without Austin’s basic insight: that whenever we are saying anything we are doing something as well.

Austin has impacted many areas of scientific inquiry from second language acquisition, to the philosophy of law. But his theory remains crucial to our understanding of the philosophy of language itself. Our understanding of how, on an everyday basis, we interpret sentences and communicate with each other is enriched by Austin’s simple, but powerful ideas. To ignore illocution is to ignore a fundamental aspect of communication. Though language has shifted dramatically with the rise of the Internet, the basic precepts remain the same: what we do on the Internet is akin to what we do in everyday speech; saying something is really doing something. But on the Internet we see very obvious
examples of locution, illocution, etc., simply because of the tools that users have developed to interact online.

Austin is still important today because factors such as intention and context are crucial to meaning, and cannot be extracted from the utterances we make. Austin, like the rest of the Ordinary Language Philosophers, understood this. But Austin in particular noticed that speech is being used in order to facilitate conversation and communication—and that is why it is so applicable to what we see on the Internet.
APPENDIX A

Wikipedia tables recording “Eastern Style” and “Western Style” emoticons, respectively (List of Emoticons):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d^_^b d-_b</td>
<td>listening to music, thumbs up</td>
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<tr>
<td>(^<em>^) (^-^) (^</em>^) (^_^)</td>
<td>smiley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(__) (__)</td>
<td>wink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(&gt;_&lt;) (&gt;.&lt;)</td>
<td>in pain, frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.-.)</td>
<td>upset, sighing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(^o^)</td>
<td>singing, laughing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(^3^)</td>
<td>kiss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(^<em>^) ^</em>^&quot;</td>
<td>nervous, sweat-drop, embarrassed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(:.:) (T_T) (ToT)</td>
<td>crying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.<em>.) (.</em>.)</td>
<td>disappointed, bitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-.-)zzZ -_-zzZ</td>
<td>sleeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(X_X)</td>
<td>dead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
:) :) smiley or happy face
:D XD laughing, big grin
:( :c frown
D: D= horror, disgust
; ) *) wink
:P :p :p :b tongue sticking out, blowing a raspberry
:O surprise, shock
:/ /\ skeptical, annoyed, uneasy
:X :# sealed lips, embarrassed
0:) innocent
:'( crying
APPENDIX B

An example of some ASCII art pulled from Wikipedia (ASCII art):

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+---------------------------+  
```
APPENDIX C

Sample of Internet abbreviations pulled from Crystal (2001:85-6) that can be used alone as speech acts in instant messages, chats, postings, etc.:

- afk  away from keyboard
- a/s/l  age/sex/location
- bbl  be back later
- brb  be right back
- cu  see you
- cya  see you
- eod  end of discussion
- hhok  haha only kidding
- jk  just kidding
- lol  laugh out loud
- rotfl  rolling on the floor laughing
- thx  thanks
- ttfn  ta-ta for now
- ttyl  talk to you later
APPENDIX D

Example of a Facebook ‘Wall-to-Wall’ posting. All parties have agreed to let me use this unsolicited posting (see Appendix E for signed statement).

Sara Neerings Jake Fawson! HAPPY BIRTHDAY! hope you have a great day! ❤️
May 13 at 12:56pm • Comment • Like

Peter Gebhard at 1:20pm May 13
Jake!!! I'm so lazy to navigate to your profile, so I'm gonna hijack this post that showed up on my feed and say Happy Birthday! Enjoy the hats, lol.

Stein Ingebretsen at 1:21pm May 13
That's way lazy.

Peter Gebhard at 1:22pm May 13
What the Stein! Get on Gchat fool

Sara Neerings at 1:22pm May 13
ridiculously lazy.

Peter Gebhard at 1:23pm May 13
HAHAHA This has been a hijacking, your welcome all!

Write a comment...

Jake Fawson Haha yes someday hopefully soon
March 12 at 2:14pm • Comment • Like

Sara Neerings Jake! How was racket ball today? I'm still sad that I didn't get to play. Someday soon we will do something! We have to!
March 11 at 10:14pm • Comment • Like

Jake Fawson yo yo what up? So I'm pretty sure it's going to happen this weekend. Let me know if there is anything you've always wanted to do on a date and we'll do it ...(money permitting) Haha ya I'm way excited ta ta
January 13 at 8:56pm • Comment • Like

Sara Neerings I'm excited for this group date we're putting together! It's going to be a lot of fun! Yeah, I am excited for the new semester. Especially now that I'm in my major and like what I'm learning. How did your first day go?
January 12 at 1:42pm • Comment • Like

Jake Fawson YES we do!!! shoot me a text or an email. So you excited for college to start back up?
January 10 at 3:52pm • Comment • Like

Sara Neerings Jake! Me and you! We have some important business to discuss! ;)
January 10 at 3:03pm • Comment • Like
APPENDIX E

Copy of signed permission statement.

By signing this form I agree to let Stephen John Sovinsky use a Facebook “Wall-to-Wall” posting that I participated in. I have seen said posting, acknowledge that it was unsolicited, and give Stephen the right to reproduce and use it for discussion in his Honors Thesis.

[Signatures]
Sam Wynn
Sarah Neelings 6/15/09

[Signatures]
Jacob Fawson
6/15/09

[Signatures]
Petra Giddens
Peter Giddens
6/15/09

[Signatures]
Stein Ingebreten
June 15, 2009
APPENDIX F

An example of postings in a talk/discussion page of Wikipedia on Phonology

(Talk:Phonology):

β

Could someone tell me what β SOUNDS LIKE!!!!!!!

Um, do you mean the German letter β or the IPA symbol β? The German letter sounds like the /s/ sound of grass or sand. The IPA symbol is a voiced bilabial fricative which doesn't exist in English. You can make it, though, by making a /v/ sound as in very, and then slowly moving your lower lip from your teeth to your upper lip. When your two lips are very close together and the air is flowing out between them, you're making the β sound. Artgr(t • c) 23:43, 24 May 2006 (UTC)

Wrong link under J. Kaye in the body of the article "Phonology"

I would like to call for a correction to be made to the link under Jonathan Kaye in the above mentioned article. The link points now to the homonymous Jonathan Kaye, American Golf Tournament Pro, and not to the distinguished linguist now residing in Girona, Spain. Please do correct that error as I have no idea how to do it myself. Thank you. Cedric
APPENDIX G

A selection of online symbols, acronyms, words, and phrases found in World of Warcraft and Final Fantasy XI (Glossary and Final Fantasy XI Dictionary). I place an asterisk (*) by a word or phrase whose exact meaning is generally unknown by those who use it, and a double asterisk (**) by an acronym that has become a word and is pronounced as it appears, when people use these acronyms they do not generally think about what they stand for. (Special thanks to Mike Dransfield for help compiling Appendices G and H, and for translating the words into a language I could understand.)

○

Symbol, indicates position of an item in the game. Example, Food: ○. Used to inform.

AFK (i.e. ‘Away From Keyboard’)

Acronym, used to inform other players that you are away from the game momentarily. Used to inform or warn.

add

Noun, an additional enemy that appears during a fight (see link). Example, OMG kill the adds! Often used in a warning.
**aggro**

1. Noun, (also called *hate* or *threat*) the direct attention of an enemy, caused by going near it, attacking it, etc. Example, *Dang, I have aggro.*

2. Noun, a feature that causes an enemy to attack the player who has the highest amount of it. Example, *That skill generates a lot of aggro.*

3. Verb, to gain the direct attention of an enemy, especially when the enemy is not yet engaged. Example, *Sorry... I accidentally aggro’d the second mob.* Often used to inform.

**AoE (i.e. ‘Area of Effect’)***

1. Verb, to use an ability or spell that affects an area in the game rather than a specific target (i.e. damaging multiple enemies at once). Example, *Gather all the adds together and AoE them down.*

2. Noun, a spell or ability that affects all enemies in an area instead of a single target. Example, *That thing’s AoE hurts really bad.*

3. Noun, a location, usually a circle on the ground around some source, within which a spell or ability affects all eligible targets. Example, *The monster attacked because it walked into our AoE.* Can be used as a warning, command, etc.

**avatar**

Noun, (also called *character*, *char*, or *toon*) a unit in a game that represents a player, which is controlled by the player.
boss

Noun, an enemy in a particular area which is much more difficult to kill than others around it, which often has a name (instead of a title or description) and special skills. Example, *This dungeon has four bosses.*

buff

1. Noun, a spell or ability cast on a player's character, which temporarily improves their abilities in some way. Example, *Mages, cast intellect buff please.*
2. Verb, to cast a spell or ability, which temporarily improves a character's abilities in some way. Example, *Buff up, then pull the boss.* Often used as a request.

burn

Verb, to put all energy into causing damage on a specific monster or enemy to kill it quickly, ignoring other enemies and dangers (see *nuke*). Example, *When he buffs an add, burn it fast.* Again used as a request, suggestion, etc.

camp

1. Noun, (found in Final Fantasy XI) the location where a group of players will remain to fight monsters.
2. Verb, (found in World of Warcraft) to remain at the location of a character's dead body in order to kill them repeatedly when they come alive again. Example, *A rogue is camping me.*
3. Verb, to remain in a certain vicinity in the game for an extended period of time where a (rare) item or creature is known to appear in order to obtain or kill it. Example, *I camped Jaggedy-Eared Jack for over 3 hours before he appeared.* Used as invitations, suggestions, etc.

**CC (i.e. ‘Crowd Control’)**

1. Verb, to use a spell or ability, which makes the target unable to move or act for a limited time. Example, *CC the left mob, kill the right.*

2. Noun, any character or number of characters which can be assigned to use spells or abilities to make targets unable to move or act. Example, *We need more CC.* Used in requests, etc.

*clear*

Verb, to kill all of the enemies in a given area. Example, *It took us 3 days to clear Black Temple.*

*cooldown (sometimes abbreviated as CD)*

Noun, a specific amount of time during which an item or ability cannot be used after being used once. Example, *I wish this ability had a shorter cooldown.* Can be used to elicit information, etc.
DC (i.e. ‘Disconnect’)

1. Verb, to be unable to control one’s character because of Internet latency issues. Example, *I think I'm dc'ing—nobody's moving on my screen.*

2. Verb, to be removed from the game because of Internet latency issues. Example, *Our group was going well until the tank dc'd.* Often used in an apology.

debuff

Noun, a spell or ability caused by an enemy which reduces a character's abilities in some way or causes damage to it (as opposed to *buff*). Example, *Healers are responsible for removing debuffs.* Can be used as a request, command, etc.

ding

1. Interjection, an announcement that the player’s character has gained a level of experience (i.e. rank in the game). Example, *DING! Lvl 65!* Usually made to a friend or group of friends whose characters are in a different area of the game, often followed by congratulations.


DoT (i.e. ‘Damage over Time’)**

1. Noun, a spell or ability that causes damage periodically for a certain amount of time. Example, *Warlocks attack mostly with DoTs.*
2. Verb, to apply a ‘debuff’ on an enemy, which will damage it periodically for a certain amount of time. Example, *DoT up all the adds before concentrating on the boss.* Often used in a request, order, etc.

*DPS* (i.e. ‘Damage Per Second’)

1. Noun, the average amount of damage a player can deal in one second; damage caused by a player. Example, *You should have at least 3k DPS for this fight.*

2. Noun, any player whose primary function in a group is to cause damage to the enemy. Example, *The average group consists of a tank, a healer, and three DPS.*

3. Verb, to cause damage. Example, *When the boss drops its shield, everyone DPS.* Used in a request, etc.

*drop*

1. Noun, an item that players can take from a monster or enemy after killing it. Example, *Man, I want that drop so bad.*

2. Verb, to make an item available for players to take upon being killed. Example, *What does this boss drop?*

3. Verb, to significantly or completely reduce the value of something. Example, *When this boss enters phase 2, he drops all aggro.* Used primarily to inform.
epic
1. Noun, (found in World of Warcraft) a rare and highly prized game item earned by
killing difficult monsters or completing difficult tasks. Example, *How many epics do you
have?*
2. Adjective, highly valuable and useful to a player. Example, *We cleared the dungeon
for epic loot.*
3. Adjective, very impressive or praiseworthy. Example, *I just beat six guys by myself—it
was epic.* Often used in congratulations.

face pull
1. Verb, to draw an enemy to oneself by going into its proximity rather than attacking it.
Example, *lol, the healer face pulled.* Often an unexpected mistake and the subject of
ridicule or irritation from other group members.
2. Noun, the act of going near an enemy, causing it to attack. Example, *lol, face pull.*
Used in an insult, primarily.

farm
1. Verb, to dedicate an extended amount of time to gathering game items by killing many
of a certain type of enemy or by patrolling a certain area. Example, *Does anyone know a
good place to farm runecloth?*
2. Verb, to do something repeatedly to allot points or items for an extended amount of
time, especially killing a certain type of enemy (see grind). Example, *Every day I spent
half an hour farming rep with the Thorium Brotherhood.*
gank
Verb, to kill a player’s character as an individual or group when the victim has no chance of survival. Example, *If you go to SV you will be ganked a lot.*

gimp (found in Final Fantasy XI)
1. Adjective, weak or inefficient, generally because of lack of skill or attention. Example, *Look at this ranger’s gimp equipment.*
2. Verb, to be deteriorated in quality or success because of one’s poor performance, skill, or unpreparedness. Example, *Because of your crappy weapon, our DPS is gimped.*
Primarily used is an insult.
3. Verb, to weaken or make less potent via game design (see *nerf*). Example, *That spell got gimped in the last patch.*

grind
Verb, to do something repeatedly to allot points or items. Generally expressed as boring and time-consuming (see *farm*). Example, *I’ve been grinding Argent Dawn rep for four hours.*

hearth (found in World of Warcraft)
1. Verb, to use an item called ‘hearthstone’ to teleport to a predetermined location. Example, *Once I finished the quest, I hearthed.*
2. Noun, the location that is predetermined by the player that their ‘hearthstone’ will teleport them to. Example, *Where is your hearth set?*
*HoT (i.e. ‘Heal over Time’)*

Noun, a spell or ability that replenishes a character's health periodically over a certain amount of time. Example, *It's impossible to kill a Resto Druid because of all their HoTs.*

*inc* (short for ‘incoming’)

1. Noun, any number of enemies that is approaching a group or the location of the speaker. Example, *Huge inc to lumber mill.* Used almost exclusively to warn other group members of danger.
2. Verb, to be approaching a group or location. Example, *Pat inc!* Used in warnings.

*IRL* (i.e. ‘In Real Life’)

Acronym, used to explain that whatever is being talked about is happening not in the virtual game world, but in the real world.

*kite*

1. Verb, to avoid damage from a monster or enemy by remaining out of its attack range while it pursues the character. Example, *If you pull aggro, try to kite it for as long as possible.*
2. Verb, to slowly kill something difficult by continually running away from it in combination with other abilities. Example, *With a slow spell, mages can kite almost anything.*
**LFG** (i.e. ‘Looking For Group’)

Acronym, used in general chat channels by a player who is looking for more players to join him/her in a common goal. In almost all situations is used as a request.

**LFM** (i.e. ‘Looking For More’)

Acronym, used in general chat channels by more than one player who are looking for more participants in a common goal. In almost all situations is used a request.

**LFP** (i.e. ‘Looking For Party’, found in Final Fantasy XI)

Acronym, same as *LFG*. In almost all situations is used a request.

**link**

1. Verb, to join a battle already underway, can happen as a result of proximity to the character or group engaged for instance. Example, *If you attack a mob that has a pet, its pet will always link*. Often used in warnings.

2. Noun, a monster or enemy that attacks a character or group which is already engaged in combat with another monster or enemy (see *add*). Example, *Watch out; link*.

3. Verb, (Found in World of Warcraft) to display an item or quest in a chat channel which allows other players to click on it to examine it. Example, *Link that sword, I want to check its stats*.

**loot**

1. Noun, a specific game item players earn by killing monsters (see *drop*).
2. Verb, to examine a dead monster in order take game items as a reward.

*LoS (i.e. ‘Line of Sight’)*

Noun, a straight line between a player and an enemy, which must be unobstructed in order for abilities to be used between them.

*mob (i.e. ‘Mobile Object Block’)*

Noun, a creature or computer-controlled character that can be attacked by players.

Example, *Let’s kill one mob at a time, please.*

*MT (i.e. ‘Mistype’)*

Verb, to accidentally type something in the wrong chat channel. Example, *oops, mt... was talking to my friend.* Used in an apology often.

*ninja*

1. Verb, to take loot when it is not needed, or is not allocated to you; to steal. Example, *He just ninja’d the healer ring.*

2. Noun, a person who takes, or attempts to take, loot which is desired by and allotted to other group members. Example, *Boot him, he’s a ninja.*

*noob*

Noun, a player who is considered inexperienced, stupid, or unskilled. Example, *I wish I didn’t have to play this game with noobs.* Used as an insult.
NPC (i.e. ‘Non-Player Character’)*

Noun, a character in the game designed as part of the environment (or designed to facilitate game-play: to give information, sell or buy items, etc.).

nuke

1. Verb, to cause a very large amount of damage to an enemy in a very short amount of time. Example, If you nuke too hard you will pull aggro. Used in an order, command, etc.
2. Verb, to put all effort into damaging a specific target, ignoring other factors (see burn). Example, Ignore the adds, nuke the boss!
3. Noun, a single spell that causes a large amount of damage to an enemy. Example, His nuke did over 13k damage.

OMW (i.e. ‘On My Way’)

Acronym, used to notify other players you are traveling to their location in the virtual world. Used as an explanation or apology generally.

OOM (i.e. ‘Out Of Magic’)

Acronym, used to notify other players you are out of magic.

own

1. Verb, to skillfully defeat an opponent or group of enemies, often intentionally misspelled as pwn, Example, Haha, I just pwned a noob warlock. Used as an insult primarily.
2. Verb, to retort with a resounding insult.

*pat* (short for ‘patrol’ or ‘patroller’)
Noun, an enemy that patrols an area in a set pattern. Example, *Watch out for pat!*

*pop*
1. Verb, to appear somewhere in the game; to be generated in a particular spot (see *spawn*). Example, *Kill it as soon as it pops.*
2. Verb, to use an ability, especially one that can only be used rarely. Example, *Pop Heroism at the beginning of the fight.* Used as a command, etc.

*port* (found in World of Warcraft)
1. Verb, to create a portal that players can use to travel to a virtual city in the game. Example, *Can you port me to Shattrath please?*
2. Noun, a portal created by a certain character (called a ‘mage’) that players can use to travel to a city. Example, *Making port to Dalaran.*

*pot* (a shortened word for ‘potion’)
1. Noun, an item used to instantly regain health or magic power for a character in the game. Example, *Does anyone have some extra mana pots?*
2. Verb, to use a potion. Example, *I had to pot or I would have died.*
**proc** (‘Processed Random Occurrence’)*

1. Verb, to activate something that has a random percentage-based chance of happening. Example, *How often does that item bonus proc?*

**PST** (i.e. ‘Please Send Tell’)**

Verb, to send a private message. Example, *PST me for invite.* Used as a request, etc.

**pull**

1. Verb, to attack a monster with the intention of drawing it to the rest of a group at the commencement of a fight. Example, *Want me to pull?* Used as an order, request, etc.

2. Noun, the act of attacking an enemy and luring it to the rest of a group. Example, *I messed up on the pull and aggro’d two mobs instead of one.*

**pull/draw aggro**

Verb, to draw the enemy’s attention onto oneself, generally by mistake. Example, *If you die from pulling aggro, it’s your own fault.* Used as an order, etc.

**QQ**

Verb, to complain or whine. Example, *QQ more, noob; nobody cares.* Used to degrade or dismiss a complaint.

**roflstomp**

Verb, to defeat another player or group of players easily. Used often to putdown or mock.
RP (i.e. ‘Role-Play’)  
Verb, to pretend or play as if the player were actually the character they control, i.e. typing solely as dialogue as if the character in the game were speaking and not a player playing the game.

solo  
1. Verb, to play the game without the aid of other players. Example, I prefer to solo because I can go at my own pace; it’s less stressful.  
2. Verb, to accomplish a task (i.e. killing an enemy, fulfilling a quest, etc.) without the aid of other players. Example, Do you think I can solo this quest?

spam  
1. Verb, to press a button repeatedly in order to use an ability, often frantically. Example, I was spamming interrupt but he still cast the spell.  
2. Verb, to post an identical message in a chat channel repeatedly and frequently, often long advertisements.

spawn  
1. Verb, to appear in the game (see pop).  
2. Verb, to generate an additional computer-controlled character in the game as an ability or when certain conditions are met. Example, When he gets to 10% health he spawns a million adds.
tank

1. Noun, the player designated as the primary focus of an opponent’s attacks.
2. Verb, to hold the attention and bear the attacks of an enemy.

tick

Noun, a measurement of time that a given element takes to update in the game—varies based on the particular element. Example, *The spell was doing about 1k damage per tick.*

trash

Noun, enemies considered weak or not profitable to kill in themselves, but may be required to kill in order to move forward in the game. Example, *This is a bad group – we wiped on trash.*

voke (found in Final Fantasy XI)

1. Verb, to use an ability (usually ‘Provoke’) that forces an enemy to attack the player which is using it. Example, *Voke it off him!* Used as a request, warning, etc.
2. Noun, the ability called ‘Provoke’, which forces an enemy to attack the player who is using it.

wipe

1. Noun, a scenario in which all or most members of a group have died and defeating the enemy is impossible. Example, *Just die, it’s a wipe.*
2. Verb, to fail in an encounter with an enemy as a group by dying. Example, *We wiped with the boss at 4% health.*

*WTB* (i.e. ‘Want to Buy’)
1. Acronym, used to advertise in general chat channels the desire to buy a specific item. Used almost always as a request.
2. Verb, to want, often with scorn or sarcasm. Example, *WTB healer who knows wtf he’s doing.*

*WTS* (i.e. ‘Want to Sell’)
Acronym, used to advertise in general chat channels the desire to sell an item that the player has. Used almost always as a request.

*wtfpwn*
Verb, to defeat someone so quickly or skillfully that the victim does not understand how he was defeated, or did not have a chance to defend himself. Example, *Before I could move, 2 rogues wtfpwned me.* Again used primarily to insult.

*zerg*
Verb, to overwhelm by sheer numbers. Example, *They are zerging the lumber mill, attack somewhere else.*
zone

1. Noun, a large area in the game with environmental or programmed borders; a region or area as defined by a map. Example, *What zone are you in right now?*

2. Verb, (found in Final Fantasy XI) to leave an area by exiting through a barrier and entering an adjacent area. Example, *These mobs are gonna kill us unless we zone now.*

3. Verb, (found in World of Warcraft) to enter or exit a specific region that is separated from the rest of the online world. Example, *Zone out, I need to reset the dungeon.*
APPENDIX H

A small selection of slash commands (e.g. ‘emotes’) found in World of Warcraft (Emotes and List of Slash Commands). Entries with an asterisk (*) are not emotes, but rather commands that force your character to do an action, or are simply a utility for game play, etc.

/?, /h, /help*
Displays some help about using various commands.

/a, /assist <player>*
Assists <player> or your current target by targeting what they are targeting.

/agree
Displays a message that you agree (or agree with a target).

/apologize
Displays a message that you apologize (or apologize to a target).

/applaud, /applause
Displays a message that you applaud (or applaud to a target), and your character claps its hands.
/bark
Displays a message that you bark (or that you bark at a target).

/cast, /spell <spell>*
Forces your character to cast the spell or use the ability <spell>.

/cheer
Displays a message that you cheer (or cheer at a target), and your character cheers with a gesture.

/chicken
Displays a message that your character flaps its arms and struts around and clucks like a chicken, as your character imitates a chicken.

/concede, /forfeit, /yield*
Cancels a duel that's currently in progress.

/dance
Displays a message that the character bursts into dance, and the character begins dancing until forced to stop.
/duel <player>*
Attempts to start a duel with <player> or a target. The player has to accept the duel before it is started.

/e, /em, /emote, /me <message>
Emotes <message> to all players in the general area, similar to /say, except displayed as Character <message>. For example, if Grice2009 were to type /emote loves to be brief it would be displayed on others’ screens as Grice2009 loves to be brief.

/f, /fol, /follow <player>*
Forces your character to start automatically following <player> or your current target.

/friend, /friends <player>*
Adds <player> or your current target to your friends list.

/golfclap
Displays the message <characters name> claps half heartedly, clearly unimpressed or <characters name> claps for (Target), clearly unimpressed if you have a target, and your character claps its hands.

/greet <target>
Displays a message greeting the target, and your character does an animated greeting.
/helpme
Displays a message requesting help.

/hiss
Displays a message that you hiss at everyone around you (or at a target).

/laugh
Displays a message that you laugh, and your character laughs with a gesture.

/mock
Displays a message that you are mocking your target.

/nod
Displays a message that you nod, and your character gestures.

/plead
Displays a message that you plead, and your character pleads in a gesture.

/pr, /promote <player>*
Makes <player> or your current target the party leader if you are currently the party leader.
/r, /reply <message>*
Replies to the last player to send you a private message.

/raise
Displays a message that you raise your hand in the air.

/rand, /random, /rnd, /roll <minimum> <maximum>*
Rolls a random number between <minimum> and <maximum>, inclusive. This number is then displayed to various people.

/readycheck*
Sends an ‘Are you ready?’ yes/no dialog window to all players in certain circumstances, to which they can reply.

/rdy, /ready
Displays a message that you are ready.

/s, /say <message>
Displays <message> to other players in your character’s close proximity.

/send, /t, /tell, /w, /whisper <player> <message>*
Sends the private message <message> to <player>. No other players can see the message.
/sh, /shout, /y, /yell <message>*
Displays <message> to other players in your character’s proximity. The area of players that will see the message is larger than the area when /say is used.

/sit
Forces your character to sit down.

/sigh
Displays a message that you let out a sigh.

/spit
Displays a message that you spit (or spit on a target).

/thank
Displays a message of appreciation, and has your character thank people or a target with a gesture.

/threaten
Displays a threat.

/time*
Displays the current in game time.
/tr, /trade <player>*
Brings up a trade window to commence a trade with <player> or your current target.

/use <item>*
Uses the specified item (food, trinkets etc.).

/violin
Displays the message <character’s name> begins to play the world's smallest violin or <character’s name> plays the world's smallest violin for (Target) if you have a specific target, to other characters, along with a gesture of your character doing so.

/whistle
Displays a message that you whistle (or whistle at a target), and has your character whistle out loud.
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