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Thesis

Deciphering L33t5p34k  
Internet Slang on Message Boards

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## **1. Introduction**

The most frequently heard question any master student is confronted with, is without a doubt: “What is the subject of your thesis?” My answer was: “I am writing a thesis about thirteen hundred thirty seven.” This statement was usually followed by a silence, in which my conversation partner was trying to figure out which historical event took place in that year. I have to admit, I was deliberately trying to confuse them. I could have said “I am writing a thesis about Leet,” but this probably would have left them clueless still. Explaining Leet or Leetspeak is an online slang, makes most of them smile and nod in approval, though I doubt if it made the matter crystal clear to all of them.

Being a student at the Faculty of Language and Literature and a webmaster in my spare time, I decided to combine these two passions of mine for my master paper: language and the Internet. As the administrator of our student union’s message board, I am confronted with both on a daily basis. Internet slang has been fascinating me for a while now, and though a lot of recent studies are dedicated to Internet language, only few of them mention Leetspeak. If there is some recognition of its existence, it is usually vaguely referred to as “the language of hackers” or “the language of geeks”. I am not a hacker, nor would I consider myself to be a prototypical “geek,” and yet I am familiar with Leetspeak and make use of it sporadically. The influence of this slang on our language use on the Internet should not be underestimated, and is worth an investigation.

The internet is often referred to as “the information superhighway”. Information can be spread among a large group of people in only a matter of seconds. This allowed the slang to be spread very quickly among internet communities. However, at the same time, it endangers the survival of Leetspeak. One can only wonder whether the slang will fall as fast as it has risen. It is necessary to examine this playful slang with a peculiar origin now. “Nothing on the Internet lasts forever” is an expression which contains a lot of truth. While you are reading this introduction, thousands of things are being permanently deleted from the World Wide Web, making room for new material. Contrary to popular belief, the Internet is a finite place.

## **2. Methodology**

This master paper consists of two main subjects: one is Leetspeak, and the other is the use of language on message boards in general. The goal of this master paper is to decipher Leetspeak, strip it down to its essence and to investigate its influence on general Internet

language (also called Netspeak). Analyzing Leetspeak and Netspeak in one research and comparing them will enable us to do two things. On one hand, we will be able to recognize the influence of Leetspeak on Netspeak. On the other hand, we will be able to correct some misconceptions about what Leetspeak really is when we look at the universal language use on the internet.

First of all I will focus on the general features of Netspeak. This dissertation will largely be based on “Language and the Internet,” written by David Crystal, a linguist who has had a large influence in this discipline. I will illustrate the theory with extracts taken from message boards. The three message boards which I used as a source for data, are described below.

The second main part is entirely dedicated to Leetspeak. I will discuss the history of Leetspeak and explain why it should be considered a slang. I will then describe the characteristics of Leetspeak. As very little sources describe the linguistic features of Leetspeak, this is where my own experience with the slang will be of use. Screenshots from an online game (Counterstrike) will serve as an illustration. In the following chapter I will deal with some of the misconceptions about Leetspeak. I will also make a distinction between Leet as a slang and Leet as a subculture.

In the last main part of this paper I will compare Leetspeak and Netspeak and discuss the slang’s influence on language use on message boards. Several linguistic trends I detected on the message boards will be scrutinized. Finally, I will devote short chapter to the use of Leetspeak outside the Internet.

Three message boards have been chosen to serve as a source for my corpus: 4chan, Geekstinkbreath and the Filologica Forum. All of the messages have been retrieved between December 2007 and July 2008, but there is no guaranty that these messages will still be available on the Internet in the near future. Though other similar studies on language and the Internet do not mention authorship (for example the research in “The Multilingual Internet” edited by Brenda Danet and Susan C. Herring), I will accompany my extracts with the nicknames of the people who wrote them. In doing so, I am respecting the authors’ e-privacy, but at the same time I acknowledge that the messages have been written by someone, an identity out there on the World Wide Web. As language on the Internet changes rapidly, I will also include the time in which the message was posted.

## 2.1 4chan

The first message board chosen for this master paper is 4chan (<http://www.4chan.org>). This is an image-based messages board<sup>1</sup> on which anyone can post anonymously, without registering. It was founded in September 2003 by Christopher Poole, who was only 15 years old at the time. He wanted to create an American version of the Japanese site 2chan, because he was fascinated with Japanese comics and television shows. (Brophy-Warren, online) The board consists of several subforums, each of them dedicated to a different subject. Because of the large size of 4chan, this paper will only include messages from the boards listed under “Interests” and “Creative”. The boards are often referred to by abbreviations, listed in the tables below.

Video Games	/v/
Comics & Cartoons	/co/
Technology	/g/
Television & Film	/tv/
Weapons	/k/
Auto	/o/
Animals & Nature	/an/
Traditional Games	/tg/
Sports	/sp/

Table 2.1: 4chan boards listed under “Interests”

Oekaki	/i/
Papercraft & Origami	/po/
Photography	/p/
Food & Cooking	/ck/
Artwork/Critique	/ic/
Wallpapers/General	/wg/
Music	/mu/
Fashion	/fa/
Toys	/toy/

Table 2.2: 4chan boards listed under “Creative”

The users of 4chan are known for their use of Leetspeak and Lolspeak (cfr. 4.5.4). Moreover, Lolspeak is often said to have originated on the boards of 4chan. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of messages from this corpus are derived from this image-based board. In fact, when I explained the subject of my master paper to my gamer friends, most of them

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<sup>1</sup> The main goal of image-based message boards is to share images, however it is not compulsory to attach pictures to a message.



suggested I should choose 4chan as one of my corpus sources. Because of its wide range of categories and the possibility to post anonymously, 4chan is a very popular board. The board therefore provides us with numerous posts to choose from. The other side of the coin is that the posts are only recorded for a small amount of time. By the time this master paper is completed, most of the messages will have disappeared from the board. Some posts might have been saved in the 4chan archive<sup>2</sup>. The way in which this archive works, is explained on the webpage's faq<sup>3</sup>: "The archive takes requests from 4chan users when they think that a thread is archive worthy. When enough people vote for archival a thread is archived. After archival the threads are pending to be reviewed and several janitors go through them and pick the best ones to officially publish them in the archive."

## 2.2 Geekstinkbreath

"Geekstinkbreath" is a website dedicated to the band "Green day". Its name is based on the title of one of the tracks on their album "Insomniac," which was released in 1995. The site provides a message board (<http://www.geekstinkbreath.net/board/>), which I have chosen as a second source for data. While the larger part of the forum is preserved for threads about the band, their music and members, there is room for discussions on various subjects on the general board. There even are subforums for people with native languages other than English: Croatian, Italian, German, French, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Polish and Australian subforums are listed at the bottom of the board index.

## 2.3 Filologica Forum

"Filologica" is a student union for those who study language and literature at the university of Ghent. It was founded in March 2004. Since I currently am the webmaster of Filologica myself, the Filologica forum (<http://forum.filologica.be>) was an obvious choice for me. The main language of the message board is Dutch, but, as will be proven in this research, the users make use of Leetspeak as well. From this it can be concluded that Leetspeak exceeds the boundaries of language difference and can be mixed in messages written in any language.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://4chanarchive.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Frequently asked questions

### 3. Netspeak

Before we can investigate the characteristics of Leetspeak, we must take a closer look at the language use on the Internet in general. This will enable us to differentiate between what Leetspeak truly is and what is characteristic of universal electronic discourse. Because the slang is based on the English language, only the features of English language use on the Internet (“Weblish” or “Netspeak”) will be discussed.

The Internet is not only an information superhighway, but it is a communicative power as well: it has created new social circumstances. The invention of other communication media in the past, such as writing, printing, phoning, faxing and text-messaging, have not only had an influence on our daily lives, but on our language as well. The invention of the Internet is no exception to this rule. David Crystal has written a book on the subject of language and the Internet. In this book he examines the features of language on the internet, or Netspeak, as he calls it. Other synonyms are for example “Netlish,” “Weblish” and “Cyberspeak”. What happens to our language when we communicate with others through the medium of this rather new technology? Is there such thing as one clear-cut Internet language or is it a matter of several varieties? Crystal points out that the different types of online communication have to be taken into account. He distinguishes between seven online situations, each of which creates a language variety. There are rules in each language situation which govern the use of language. In comparison, the language used in a pub will for example differ from the language in court. For anyone to function normally in any situation, they must respect the rules imposed by that situation. As Crystal explains: “[...] if people do decide to speak or write without paying any attention to the sociolinguistic expectations and mores of their interlocutors, and of the community as a whole, they must expect to be judged accordingly.” (Crystal: 2006, 7) In other words: if people want to be accepted, they must live up to the expectations of their peers. The distinction between written language varieties is based on five features: discourse, lexical, graphic, orthographic and grammatical features.

#### 3.1 The seven internet situations

Technological evolution is at high speed, as David Crystal noticed. In the first version of his book “Language and the internet,” he distinguished between five electronic situations in which language is used. Only five years later, in 2006, he adds two more. From this point of view the term “superhighway” does not only refer to the quick accessibility to information the Internet provides us with. The system itself changes rapidly as well. The seven main groups,

according to Crystal, are e-mail, synchronous chatgroups, asynchronous chatgroups, virtual worlds, World Wide Web, instant messaging and blogging. He investigates the distinctive features of language use in these different situations.

The seven internet situations have certain linguistic properties in common. These overlapping features are the core of what is Netspeak. In determining what is Internet language, two elements need to be taken into account. Each internet user is restricted by hardware and software. Hardware is an umbrella term for the physical parts of your computer, such as your screen, printer, mouse and keyboard. Software on the other hand is a term used to describe computer programmes. Keyboards (hardware) provide us with a limited number of symbols. You can add special signs to a text by making use of ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) codes, provided that your text editor (software) recognizes them. For example, the combination of holding down the alt key and typing down the number sequence “0165” should make the symbol “¥” appear on your screen.

In the following chapters the features which apply to Internet language on message boards will be discussed, as the focus of this master paper is on this type of online communication. The characteristics will be illustrated with extracts from the corpus.

## 3.2 Characteristics of Netspeak

### 3.2.1 *Discourse features*

Internet language is a combination of written and spoken language. Though at first sight the Internet is dominated by written text, the term “*Netspeak*” already reveals that the Internet language is highly influenced by oral language. The online interaction shares certain characteristics with the act of speech: “They are time-governed, expecting or demanding immediate response; they are transient, in the sense that messages may be immediately deleted (as in e-mails) or be lost to attention as they scroll off the screen (as in chatgroups); and their utterances display much of the urgency and energetic force which is characteristic of face-to-face conversation.” (Crystal: 2006, 32) Traces of speech included in the extract below are the loose sentence construction (the suspension points and the lack of a main verb in the end) and the expression “geez”.

1. “That must be the new "SuperSloMo Nuclear Weapon" that sci-fi and other artists always seem to draw up. Why people think such events happen in "TV time" where

you get to see what's going on is beyond me.

The two viewers there and the rest of the cityscape would have been either incinerated in a few millionths of a second or they'd be blind (could be already, the image doesn't show that much) but... geez... by the time the mushroom had grown that large, that whole place... wasted.

/nitpick<sup>4</sup>,

Anonymous - 03/05/08 – 4chan

People on message boards are well aware of the asynchronous aspect of their communication. They know the reaction signals are delayed, but that does not make the waiting any less awkward. The eager repetition of question marks and plea for answers expose the author's anxiety in the extract below.

2. “My favourite songs are – 10,000 light years;; when I come around;; Jesus Of Suburbia && Boulevard of Broken Dreams.

What's yours??? Anyone??

Please write backk=]

lawrawwr – 03/12/2008 – geekstinkbreath

Back-channelling devices like “yeah” and “indeed” serve as feedback during conversations. They signal that the speaker is being listened to and understood. Even though the communication on message boards is asynchronous, these devices can be applied in this type of communication. “What is surprising, of course, is that sometimes these close-binding links may appear in messages separated by long periods of time. The impression is always of a rapidly moving conversation – until we look at the headers, to find that G wrote his message in April and H wrote her reaction in December.” (Crystal: 2006, 148)

When several members are discussing a topic and are posting at a high rate, the order of messages can get interrupted. Other messages can creep in between a message and the message it is replying to. To indicate who you are addressing, you can add the nickname of that person in the beginning of your post. The nickname is usually preceded by “@,” indicating you are directing yourself at that person. The person in the extract below is addressing the member “Nimrodel”.

3. “@Nimrodel: zijn we niet gewoon allen zo?”  
Jeroentje C – 01/17/08 – Filologica Forum

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<sup>4</sup> Leetspeak, see 4.3.4

The caret can be used as an arrow to refer to the author of the previous message or the previous message itself. The opening angle bracket on the other hand can serve to indicate the author himself, because the personal information on a member (nickname, post number, forum rank) is usually located at the left side of a message.

4. “^ was late in the thread too  
< had to do the same”  
Spider Tre – 06/13/08

You can also cite other messages in your post. Most message boards provide special quote tools which put a citation in a separate box in your post. Both the Filologica Forum and Geekstinkbreath offer these tools. It is not uncommon to encounter several layers of quotes in a post. In figure 3.1 Kurtini quoted Bloodraine, and was then again quoted by Bloodraine.

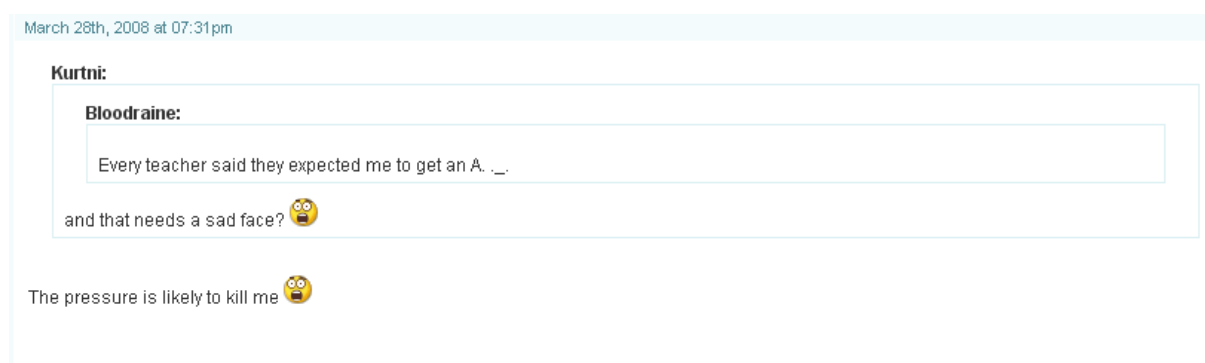


Figure 3.1: Quotations on Geekstinkbreath (<http://www.geekstinkbreath.net>) 03/28/08

If these separate boxes are not provided by the system, angle brackets can be used to indicate a quotation as well. The text preceded by the brackets in the following extract is a quotation. The actual comment in the extract is “You noobs<sup>5</sup> better go back to Google.”

5. “>aircrack  
>or you can try downloading the various WEP<sup>6</sup>-cracking utilities and attempt to break the key on your own.  
  
You noobs better go back to Google.”  
Anonymous - 02/17/08 - 4chan

<sup>5</sup> See 4.3.2.1

<sup>6</sup> Wireless Equivalent Privacy

### 3.2.2 Lexical features.

New lexicon was required to describe the technological novelties of the Internet. A distinction should be made between terminology associated with computer science and lexicon reserved for Internet-restricted situations. “Terms such as cable, disk, bit, binary, and computer form part of the jargon of science and technology which extends well beyond the Net.” (Crystal: 2006, 87) A couple of words out of the specific Internet jargon are discussed in the extracts below.

6. “thread 404rd”  
Anonymous - 12/20/07 – 4chan

A “404” is part of an error message which appears on your screen when a link<sup>7</sup> is not working. This error message, referred to with “404 message” or “not found message,” occurs when the content of a page has been moved or deleted. In this extract “404” is turned into a verb. Message boards consist of several threads or topics. Each thread is devoted to a specific subject. If the message above is interpreted literally, it means the thread is not working. The fact that the author was able to write and post the text, contradicts this interpretation. It is used here in a figurative way: the user does not agree with what has been posted in the thread, and therefore thinks it is full of errors.

7. “I didn't see any STALKER<sup>8</sup> threads and I've f5'd at least three times, what gives?”  
Anonymous - 07/13/08 – 4chan

The “f5” key on your keyboard enables you to refresh a page. Refreshing a page means you re-download the content of that page in your browser<sup>9</sup>, in order for you to see if any changes have been made since you last visited. This extract provides us with another example of word-class conversion: “f5” is used as a verb.

8. “Crap. I missed it due to family stuff, and I can't torret<sup>10</sup>. can someone rapidshare this please?”  
Anonymous - 03/01/08 – 4chan

BitTorrent is a programme which enables people to share files<sup>11</sup> with each other. Instead of copying a file from one user to another, the programme will copy pieces of the file from

<sup>7</sup> A link or a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) is the address where information is stored on the Internet

<sup>8</sup> Meaning S.t.a.l.k.e.r., a video game: <http://www.stalker-videogame.com/>

<sup>9</sup> A browser is software which enables you to access the Internet. The most common browsers are Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox and Opera.

<sup>10</sup> This is a typographical error, the author actually meant to type “torrent”.

several clients<sup>12</sup>. Because you are downloading<sup>13</sup> from different sources, the process will be less constraining and will cost less time. This is called “peer-to-peer file sharing”. Rapidshare refers to a site (<http://www.rapidshare.com>), on which you can upload<sup>14</sup> files for free. Both “torrent” and “rapidshare” have been converted and are used as a verb.

9. “There is a fake torrent of this, if anybody wanna<sup>15</sup> burn sum<sup>16</sup> bandwidth.”

Anonymous - 02/13/08 – 4chan

A fake torrent is a file which has a different content than is claimed. Anti-piracy companies can create fake torrents to prevent people from illegally sharing software or copyright material. Some fake torrents are maliciously created by individuals and will put viruses on your computer. Each user connected to the global network can only download a restricted amount of data on a monthly basis. The term “bandwidth” refers to measure of data flow rate. “Burning up bandwidth” is equal to “wasting you bandwidth”.

10. “Googling 'Compal' turned up a Taiwanese webpage?”

Anonymous - 07/13/08 – 4chan

“To google” means to look something up using “Google”. “Google” is a popular online search engine. The verb has officially been acknowledged and was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2006. (see 6)

The Netspeak lexicon is very specific and incomprehensible for anyone who is unfamiliar with the Internet. Some words, for example “file” or “to download” can immediately be recognized by anyone who often browses the Internet, because they are used so frequently. Other terms are more rare and require a more profound knowledge of electronic technology, such as “torrent”.

An illustration of the difficulty level of the Internet lexicon to people not so familiar with the Internet, is the reception of “Boten Anna”. Basshunter is a Swedish deejay who released this song in 2006. “Boten Anna” is a bot on an IRC (Internet Relay Chat) channel. IRC is a system consisting of several channels (or chat rooms) in which users can talk synchronously on several topics. A bot is a programme that guards the channels. It can ban users or do smaller tasks like telling the time. At the end of the song Anna reveals that she is an actual person and

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<sup>11</sup> A (computer) file is a general term for pictures, movies, text documents,...

<sup>12</sup> Clients or computers

<sup>13</sup> Downloading is taking something from the Internet and saving it temporarily or permanently to your computer

<sup>14</sup> Uploading is putting files on the Internet, so that others can download it

<sup>15</sup> Wants to

<sup>16</sup> Some

not an automated robot. Many people misinterpreted the lyrics and thought the song was about a boat. Well aware of this common misinterpretation of his song, Basshunter mockingly appears on a boat in the corresponding video clip. The Dutch version of the song, made by “De gebroeders Ko,” is about a boat, though the producers realized that that was not the original meaning of the lyrics. Below are the original Swedish chorus and its English translation.

Jag känner en bott, hon heter Anna, Anna heter hon  
 Och hon kan banna, banna dig så hårt  
 Hon röjer upp I våran kanal  
 Jag vill berätta för dig, att jag känner en bott

I know a bot, her name is Anna, Anna is her name  
 And she can ban, ban you so hard  
 She cleans up the channel  
 I want to tell you that I know a bot.  
 (Transcript and translation by author, with help of Niels Cuelenaere)

There are several differences between written electronic communication and face-to-face talk. As David Crystal says: “Messages sent via a computer are complete and unidirectional. When we send a message to someone, we type it keystroke at a time, but it does not arrive on that person’s screen a keystroke at a time [...] The message does not leave our computer until we ‘send’ it, and that means the whole message is transmitted at once, and arrives on the recipient’s screen at once.” (Crystal: 2006, 32-33) This time delay has got two consequences. First of all, the author of a message has to wait for response and gets no immediate feedback. Secondly, several other people contributing to the conversation, can post messages while you are still typing your reply. This could mean that the subject of your post has already been dealt with, or that questions have already been answered. Therefore new ways of reducing the amount of letters and enhancing typing speed, are welcomed. This is called “linguistic economy”. In order to get as much typed down in as little of time as possible, parts of words can be omitted. In the majority of cases vowels are being left out, whereas excluding consonants is more rare. Some examples are “srsly” or “rly,” which are abbreviations for “seriously” and “really”.

A second kind of abbreviation are acronyms and initialisms. Acronyms and initialisms are abbreviated forms, consisting of the initial letters of a phrase or expression. The difference between them consists in the fact that acronyms are pronounced as proper words. Initialisms are always spoken as individual letters. We can distinguish between two trends in the use of



these abbreviations. Firstly, they are used for naming electronic novelties (“HTTP” for “Hypertext Transfer Protocol” or “URL” for “Uniform Resource Locator”). Secondly, they are used to replace common expressions. A lot has already been written about acronyms such as “lol” (laughing out loud), “roflol” (rolling on the floor, laughing out loud) and “lmao” (laughing my ass off). Some popular abbreviations can be found in the examples below. The explanations can be found in table 3.1. It should be noted that the abbreviations can be used in upper-case or lower-case form, without any change in significance.

11. “omg. that's the greatest thing i've seen all day.”  
Anonymous - 12/22/07 – 4chan
12. “QFT. I once saw one swoop in and grab a pickle out of a burger that someone was literally taking a bite of from the other end.”  
Anonymous - 02/18/08 – 4chan
13. “Not well enough, I still use uTorrent every once in a while.  
brb uninstalling”  
Anonymous - 02/19/08 – 4chan
14. “Kaneko's style is far from typical anime IMO. And don't all the main characters dress in normal, contemporary attire?”  
Anonymous - 02/22/08 – 4chan
15. “lmao man if that isnt awesome i dont know what is i havent seen that in sooo many years!”  
Anonymous - 02/29/08 – 4chan
16. “When the person who made that video can't even spell "abortion" correctly, I wouldn't be too trusting of that information, tbh.”  
Start Something - 07/23/08 – Geekstinkbreath
17. “wtf is he trying to convey? Lol”  
Anonymous - 03/18/08 – 4chan

brb	Be Right Back
imo / imho	In My (Humble) Opinion
lmao	Laughing My Ass Off
lol	Laughing Out Loud
omg	Oh My God
qft	Quoted For Truth
tbh	To Be Honest
wtf	What The Fuck

Table 3.1: Frequently used acronyms and initialisms

### 3.2.3 Graphic features

The new technology has provided us with a range of tools to decorate our text. Bold, italic or underlined letters are at our display. We can also adjust the font and font colour of our text. Some of the most common fonts are Times New Roman and Arial. Each message board has a standard font, but most of them allow their users to apply another font. The author of extract 18 makes use of bold and italic letters. He is also fiddling with different colours. Extract 19 is written in the font Verdana and is painted blue. The last extract makes use of a variety of colours (so-called “rainbow text”) and is written in the font Arial. The extracts were taken from the Filologica Forum and Geekstingbreath, both of which are based on PHP<sup>17</sup>. The boards of 4chan do not offer font or colour tools, which illustrates the influence of software on Netspeak.

18. **"There are only two NUTS mentioned in the Holy Bible: *almonds* and *pistachios*."**

Emté – 06/22/08 – Filologica Forum

19. *honestly is ANYONE going to post here?!*

Skittles. - 08/11/07 – Geekstinkbreath

20. “*oh and rainbow text. this fad didnt last very long but i still love it, as you might of noticed xD*”

Harry Potter! – 03/27/07 - Geekstinkbreath

### 3.2.4 Orthographic features

In typography, a capital letter is formed by holding down the shift key (marked with the word “shift” or an arrow pointing upwards, or both) while tapping the key with the lower-case form of that letter. Another way of capitalizing letters is using the “caps lock” key. The difference between this key and the shift key, is that you don’t have to keep holding it down. You simply tap it once to turn to upper-case mode and again to return to lower-case mode. The “caps lock” key is preferred when a sequence of capital letters has to be typed. When only one letter needs to be capitalized, people turn to the shift key. The use of these keys can be regarded as a hazard while typing, which could explain the tendency to write everything in lower-case letters. Personal pronoun “I” is often not capitalized, nor is the initial letter of a phrase. While the graphic features of Cyberspeak depended on software, here we are dealing with hardware

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<sup>17</sup> Scripting language

influence. Ignoring capitalization rules equals saving time. Punctuation is often left out for the same reason, for example the apostrophe and period are omitted in the first example below.

21. “rap isnt music, its crap”

Anonymous - 01/06/08 – 4chan

22. “i wish i knew what that was, but you managed to find the smallest picture on the interwebs.<sup>18</sup>”

Anonymous - 02/22/08 – 4chan

Capitalization is used to put emphasis on words. In the first extract below, “delicious” is being emphasized, stressing the fact that the flavours are very good. Symbols strategically placed in front of and after a word also add emphasis to that word. In the examples below “veal” and “not” are emphasized by means of respectively asterisks and hyphens. Repeated letters or punctuation marks and extra spacing between letters inflict emphasis as well. An example can be found in extract 15: “[...] sooo many years”. The repetition of “o” emphasizes the longitude of time. Entire sentences written in upper-case form (or in “caps lock”) are perceived as “shouting.”

23. “Just look! Look at all these DELICIOUS flavors. They even have \*veal.\*”

Anonymous - 01/10/08 – 4chan

24. “soup is not a traditional breakfast meal because real soup generally takes a long time to cook. The first thing you do when you wake up in the morning is generally -not-spend hours making soup :/”

Anonymous - 01/10/08 – 4chan

Asterisks can also serve a second purpose: they can mark actions or facial expressions. (See 3.2.6.3)

### 3.2.5 Grammatical features

Lexical and orthographical innovations are more common than grammatical deviation. “When it does occur it tends to be restricted to a particular situation or group of users.” Crystal illustrates this statement with the phenomenon of verb reduplication: “A verb (from a fairly small set) is used twice in immediate succession to express a range of functions, such as an expression of pleasure of pain, as a sarcastic or exasperated reaction, or simply as a turn-taking marker, showing an utterance is ended.” (Crystal: 2006, 97) As this phenomenon is not

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<sup>18</sup> Slang for “the Internet”

universally encountered, it should not be frowned upon that it is nowhere to be found in this corpus. A striking trend on some message boards, (the Filologica Forum is one of them) is to flip around word order, especially by putting the object in initial position and repeating it at the end of the phrase by adding “it” or “them”.

25. “My throne, you has taken it!”  
Jeroentje C – 05/16/08 – Filologica Forum

26. “Big ego, I no has it. 😞”  
Tsjilp – 03/28/08 – Filologica Forum

This trend is influenced by the character Yoda from the “Star Wars” films, who is known for similar strange sentence constructions, such as “Strong I am with the force.” His words are associated with great wisdom. The verbs in extract 25 and 26 are not conjugated properly: the accordance between subject and verb is ignored. The incorrect conjugating of verbs is a characteristic of Lolspeak (See 4.5.4)

### 3.2.6 Paralanguage

#### 3.2.6.1 Smileys/emoticons

In online communication there is a lack of body language and intonation. One way of avoiding misunderstandings, is the use of smileys. Smileys consist of keyboard characters and are designed to imitate facial expressions. Western smileys should be read sideways. The colon usually represents the eyes. Sometimes the equal sign replaces the colon, a phenomenon becoming more and more popular. A reason for this could be that on most message boards the combinations of the basic smileys are a code for small icons or images. In the table below there is a survey of which codes trigger an image on the Filologica Forum. When you replace the colon with the equal sign, the board will not recognize the code and no image will be displayed. Some people prefer the image, while others favour the symbols. It has to do with personal taste. The equal sign can be combined with square brackets, turning the basic smileys into “=]” for a happy face and “=[” for a sad face. The use of a hyphen for a nose or omitting the nose altogether also depends on personal taste. Another determining factor in this is of course typing speed. Other popular emoticons are the heart-shaped “<3” and the broken heart “</3”.











	:D	Smiling broadly
	:)	Smiling or feeling happy
	:(	Feeling sad
	:o	In shock
	:?	Doubtful
	8)	Being cool, wearing sunglasses
	:x	Angry
	:P	Sticking out your tongue
	;)	Wink
	:	Apathetic

Table 3: Codes for smiley images on the Filologica Forum (<http://forum.filologica.be>)  
retrieved on 07/17/08

Japanese smileys or “kaomoji” are popping up more regularly on message boards. The major difference between these smileys and Western smileys is that they are read straight-up. Yukiko Nishimura adds: “Emoticons rendered in Roman typographic characters consist of colons, parentheses, and other characters. Because symbols available in Japanese are more varied, including nonlinguistic symbols, there appears to be more variety in Japanese “face marks”.” (Nishimura, 172) The prototype of Japanese smileys is “(^\_^)”. The parentheses represent the outline of the face, the neighbouring characters on the inside stand for the eyes, while the symbol in the middle corresponds to the mouth. The outline of the face is usually left out. While the mouth is an indispensable element in Western smileys, it can be omitted in Japanese smileys. Consequently a kaomoji can consist solely of a representation of the eyes. Two different Japanese smileys can be found in extract 27. The first one, consisting of carets, is a happy face, while the second one, consisting of angle brackets, represents an “annoyed, angry or dissatisfied face”. (Lee, 203). The smiley in extract 28 is used to express confusion.

27. “I agree with both of you ^^

On GSB<sup>19</sup>, I can be who I want to be and I can do that without feeling >< about it because people generally accept everyone on here. I can write the truth in my profile and I can talk to people easily unlike in my real life.

GSB = one great place for me tbh<sup>20</sup>.”  
Sarah – 03/21/08 – Geekstinkbreath

28. “@\_@ this thread has confused me!?”  
so, who is she??”  
Anonymous - 02/18/08 – 4chan

<sup>19</sup> Geekstinkbreath

<sup>20</sup> To Be Honest

Smileys or emoticons have a tendency to soften a message. However, their effect can also be the other way around: “Without care, moreover, they can lead to their own misunderstanding: adding a smile to an utterance which is plainly angry can increase rather than decrease the force of the “flame”. It is a common experience that a smile can go down the wrong way: “And you can wipe that smile off your face, as well!” Those who get into the habit of routinely using smileys can also find themselves in the position of having their unmarked utterances misinterpreted precisely because they have no smiley attached to them.” (Crystal: 2006, 39) Ambiguity has always been a part of written language, and yet smileys have never been introduced into our language use before. “In traditional writing, there is time to develop phrasing which makes personal attitudes clear; that is why the formal conventions of letter-writing developed. And when they are missing, something needs to replace them.”(Crystal: 2006, 41) Messages on the net lack this form of courtesy because the time span in which they have to be composed is considerably smaller.

#### 3.2.6.2 Imitating sounds

Attempts at imitating non-linguistic sounds in computer-mediated communication can be found in any language. Laughter is represented by onomatopoeic words like “hahaha” in English or “jajaja” in Spanish. “Kekeke,” the Korean substitute for laughter, is usually associated with Leetspeak. In fact Koreans represent laughter with a character from their own alphabet, which resembles the sound /k/. When software does not allow them to use the original character, Koreans use the Roman equivalent “k”. Other speech sounds include for example “hmmmm” (expressing doubt) or “grrr” (expressing anger).

#### 3.2.6.3 Imitating actions

As mentioned before, asterisks can be used to express action. In comics asterisks are applied for this function as well. Authors of comics try to imitate speech on paper. In the same way people are performing speech acts in computer-mediated communication. The author of the following message pretends that he is weeping quietly, while the author of extract 30 is rocking back and forth.

29. “SWEET EMPEROR, NO!

\*quiet weeping\*”

Anonymous - 02/18/08 – 4chan

30. “Ah yeah, I heard about Letterman...and Conan O'Brien's coming back too, isn't he? I heard that somewhere, that he was going to come back but purposely not be funny. Or something.

\*continues rocking back and forth in corner\*”

Janie Jones – 12/19/07 – Geekstinkbreath

## 4. Leetspeak

### 4.1 The origins of Leetspeak

Very little has been published on the subject of Leetspeak. The World Wide Web is where one would expect to find details on the Internet slang, its characteristics and its origins. When browsing the Web for information on Leetspeak, one of the most common explanations you will find is: “Leetspeak is the language of hackers.” This is a rather general statement. Who are these so-called hackers? In February of the year 2000 Jonas Löwgren, professor of interactive design at the Malmö University in Sweden, gave a lecture on “Hacker cultures”. He underlines the fact that he uses the plural “cultures,” denoting that there are several hacker subcultures. In traditional hacking, a distinction should be made between hobby hackers, academic hackers and network hackers. The members of the first group were originally radio amateurs, who already showed an interest in electronics in the 1920s. The first home computers were sold in the form of construction kits. Computer owners were therefore expected to have some technological knowledge, whereas nowadays people rely on experts to install their computers. The first academic hackers are linked to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). “MIT ran a project in the early 60s intended to develop a timesharing computer. This project became the core of the AI lab, where the first academic hacker culture emerged. Students specialized in mathematics and artificial intelligence spent 30 hours straight in programming sessions instead of going to regular classes. Ideas of free information developed. Several students learned to pick locks in order to better use the equipment in the building.” (Löwgren, online) The networking hackers were initially limited to the hacking of telephone networks. Using control demands from phone companies, they made free phone calls. As soon as computer networks emerged, network hacking was broadened.

Hacker cultures from the present arose from these three groups. Academic hackers encourage the use of the verb “cracking” to denote malicious hacking. “Some hacker cultures view intrusion as a means for learning more about computers and networks. If data are altered, it is typically done as a practical joke. Basically, the hackers view the intrusions as harmless, in spite of corporate security policies and perhaps legislation, as long as the consequences of the intrusions can be undone (by someone with adequate system knowledge, of course). Another common hacker argument for exposing security flaws by intrusion is to help build safer systems in the future.” (Löwgren, online) Unlike academic hackers, they work anonymously, though they do often mark their work with a graffiti-style tag image. Leetspeak should be seen in the light of these hackers. They used the symbolic language to encrypt certain messages and secretly share illegal software and pornographic material. The use of Leetspeak also allowed them to escape filters. They could use words which otherwise would be banned. For example they would write “p0rn” with a zero instead of “porn”. Eventually this even turned into “pr0n”. “Warez,” as a plural form of “ware”, referred to pirated software or illegally copied software. One hacker group associated with the origins of Leetspeak is “Cult of the Dead Cow” (cDc). In this stage, Leetspeak was nothing more than an alphabet. Leetspeak then further developed in online multiplayer games, IRC channels and on bulletin boards. Gamers used the slang to send secret game messages to each other. Only a small group of insiders understood what was being said, creating a strong gap between the elite (or the “leet”) and the newcomers (or the “newbies”). The latter were thus excluded from communication. At this point Leetspeak became more than just an alphabet, as new lexicon was created. This new vocabulary is of course related to the world of gaming. Some grammatical changes can be noticed as well.

The use of Leetspeak on message boards and IRC channels, caused the slang to spread to a larger group of people. As the original purpose of the slang was to hide messages, Leetspeak is often with good reason considered to be incomprehensible by outsiders. Because of the increasing popularity of the slang, this group of outsiders is becoming smaller and smaller. Ironically, this could become the slang’s death. Some original leetspeakers do not like the spreading of the slang, which was supposed to be part of their private subculture. Other leetspeakers, however, continue to play with language and keep on pushing the limits of legibility. The term “Leet” can either refer to the language or the subculture. The increasing popularity of Leetspeak also caused some resentment among Internet users.



According to some, Leetspeak has exceeded its expiration date. The slang was supposedly “cool” ten to fifteen years ago. People using the Leet alphabet can be looked down upon and are sometimes called “leetards,” which is a pun on the word “retards”. When the question “Why do you use Leetspeak?” was raised on the forum of World of War<sup>21</sup> in May 2006, immediately a distinction was established between the use of hardcore Leetspeak and the occasional mentioning of Leet-inspired words (like “pwn” or “j00”). It seems the latter is tolerated by the majority, while the former is perceived as annoying. Some claim the use of hardcore Leetspeak “dumbs people down” and it should therefore not be used in seriousness. One user<sup>22</sup> shares his personal experience with Leetspeak: “My friends and I use leetspeak as internet slang, and it mostly started as a tongue-in-cheek way of making fun of people who used it. Sadly we now all use it in limited fashion, mostly because it makes things sound funny.” Kristof Van de Velde and Jeroen Meuleman reached similar conclusions in their research paper on lexical tensions in “Internet English”: Leetspeak was primarily used in an ironic way on the message boards they had chosen to investigate. People nowadays use Leetspeak to show that they are part of the subculture or precisely to mock the existence thereof. Leetspeak is no longer solely the language of hackers, or even gamers. It has become the language of “residents” of the internet.

One of the advantages of the Leetspeak code is the fact that it can be used to create more secure passwords. Many online services (for example free mail services) have a filter which shows you how secure your password is. Words which can be found in dictionaries score quite low on the security scale, because they are easier to crack. It is advisable to use a combination of letters and numbers (or other symbols, if the system allows this) as a password. Words written in the Leetspeak alphabet provide you with this combination of letters and other characters, but at the same time remain easy to remember.

The increasing popularity of Leetspeak has caused some concerns in parental organizations. Parents are being warned: “Do you know what your children are saying? They could be talking about drugs.” Several parental guides were published online, including one on the site of Microsoft. The Microsoft guide to Leetspeak was presumably published in 2005, as the

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.worldofwar.net/> The complete discussion referred to can be found here:  
<http://www.worldofwar.net/forums/showthread.php?t=368641> It was still available when last checked on 07/18/08

<sup>22</sup> The user’s nickname is djIgneo. Unfortunately no further information on this person is available

discussions on the guide were held on message boards<sup>23</sup> in that year. The reason the guide was so busily discussed, were the misconceptions and amateurish definitions. The guide included a list with “Leet words possibly indicating illegal activity.” Leetspeakers took pleasure in the fact that “Pwn” and “pwn3d” (cfr 4.3.2.2) were listed under this section. Meanwhile, the Microsoft’s parents guide to Leetspeak has been replaced with an article on netiquette (online etiquette)<sup>24</sup>.

The influence Leetspeak has had on language on the internet should not be underestimated. The negative attitude towards Leetspeak have not stopped some from (and perhaps even encouraged them to continue) using the slang in online communication.

#### 4.2 Leetspeak as a slang

Tough Karl Sornig carefully states that it is impossible to “give an ultimate and exhaustive definition of slang” (Sornig, 1), the Oxford English Dictionary provides us with a couple of attempts at defining the term:

Slang, n.<sup>3</sup>

**1. a.** The special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character; language of a low and vulgar type. (Now merged in c.) **b.** The special vocabulary or phraseology of a particular calling or profession; the cant or jargon of a certain class or period. **c.** Language of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense.

<http://www.oed.com>

Originally, the “set of persons” using Leetspeak consisted of hackers and gamers, also referred to as “geeks”. Anyone who is not familiar with slang terms, is unable to unriddle their meaning. Moreover, “any person who has not used it or has not heard it being used remains a stranger to its real communicative, i.e. sociosemantic/pragmatic force and value.” (Sornig, 1) Sornig indicates fear, secretiveness and playfulness as factors which stimulate innovative language use, which we can recognize in the genesis of Leetspeak.

What is peculiar about this slang, is the fact that it originated in a written medium, instead of an oral one. It does not fit into the traditional language description, because before the rise of the Internet, language variation arose only out of spoken communication. Written

<sup>23</sup> One of those message boards is Hardforum. The discussion on the Microsoft guide can be found at <http://www.hardforum.com/showthread.php?t=869447> and was still available last time visited on 25/07/08

<sup>24</sup> The article can be found here: <http://www.microsoft.com/protect/computer/basics/netiquette.msp>

communication has been around for a long time, and yet this is the first occasion in which a slang develops out of it. What is so special about online communication that it can give birth to slang? In fact, classifying online communication as “written communication” and therefore limiting it to the characteristics associated with the written medium, is not entirely correct. Any language used on the internet can be placed under the umbrella term “speech,” because the online communication resembles speech acts in great amount. For example, the element of turn-taking is present in both computer-mediated conversation and face-to-face talk.

Some words and phrases are already being transmitted to oral language situations, such as “owned” and “noob”. However, the slang can never fully be transmitted to oral language, because one of its main characteristics is the alternation of spelling. In any non-written situation, this feature is completely lost. Another problem in the transition from written to oral language use, is the correct pronunciation of some of the words. In Leetspeak “owned” can be written as “powned” or “pwned”. The question remains whether the “p” in the second word should be pronounced or not. Though some people prefer to pronounce the “p,” others consider the pronunciation of the “p” to be an error made by wannabes. The pronunciation of the third version of the word becomes even more problematic.

Slang terms come into existence through innovation. A novelty has to be taken up and repeated. Though people use slang terms in their daily lives, they are not deemed worthy to appear in official dictionaries. Some slang terms can find their way into standard language. The first step in this process is popularization. The popularity of the term “w00t” might turn it into the first Leetspeak term to become accepted in “ordinary” dictionaries. (See 5.2.9)

Many of the original Leetspeakers are not happy with the increased popularity of Leetspeak. The language was considered to be preserved for the “l33t” or “elite” only. It was used for a small group to communicate, while the others (the so-called “n00bs”) were unable to understand what was being said. Many have turned against the slang, and consider the excessive use of Leetspeak on message boards as wannabe-behaviour. While the slang used to be perceived as the language of geeks, haters now often associate it with teenagers who think it is still “cool” to talk that way. In fact, this assumption is based on a misconception: Leetspeak is often confused with AOL speak. The latter is used by teenagers on chatsites. (See 4.4)

### 4.3 The characteristics of Leetspeak

English is the dominant language on the internet. This means that when two people are communicating online, they are most likely to use the English language. Out of an estimated 1,407,724,320 world Internet users, 417,000,000 users use English. Figure 4.1 shows us the ten most popular Internet languages, presented by Internet World Stats<sup>25</sup>. It is not difficult to imagine that a slang originated on the world wide web, is based on English.

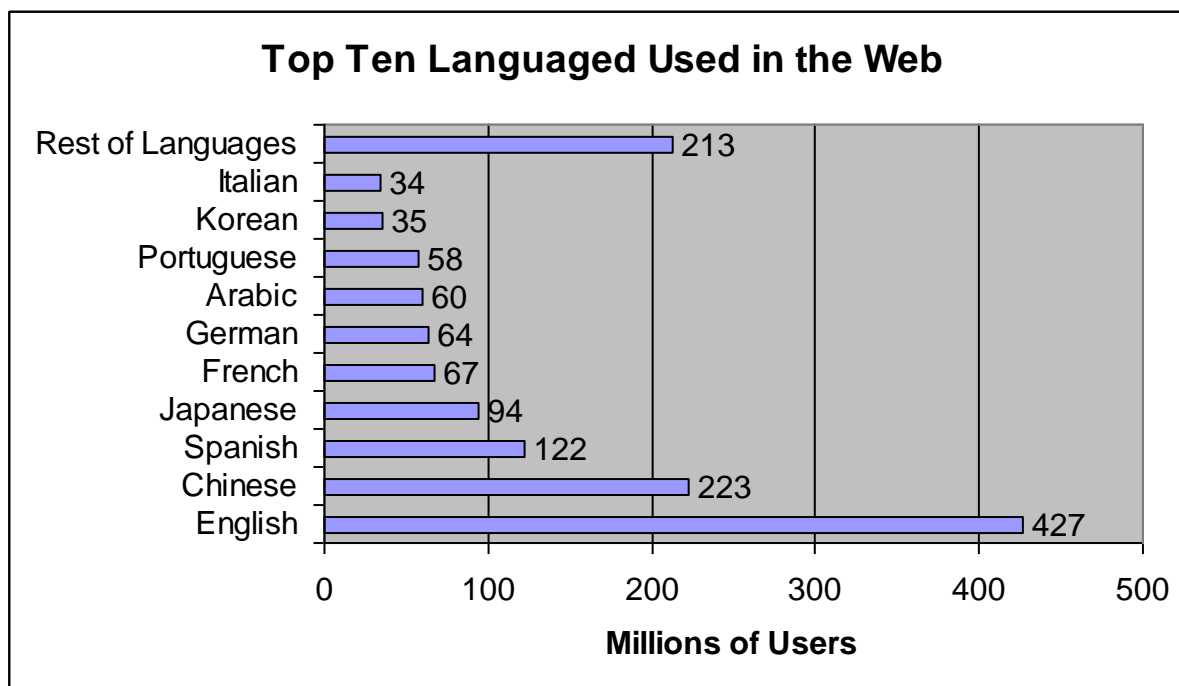


Figure 4.1: TopTen Languages Used in the Web – May 2008,  
<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>, retrieved July 16 2008

Leetspeak can be seen as a transformed or deformed version of English. It seems to corrupt the commonly accepted spelling and grammar rules, as its original purpose was to be used as an encrypting code. In addition to this, it adds new words to the English vocabulary. In the following chapters I will deal with the linguistic features, which characterize Leetspeak. I will loosely base this dissertation on Wikipedia<sup>26</sup>, the online encyclopaedia. Wikipedia can be edited by anyone, and it is therefore advisable to handle its content carefully and critically. Unfortunately many people take what they read on Wikipedia as truth. Especially in the case of topics which aren't largely discussed in other sources, like Leetspeak, this could cause large-scale misconceptions. I will discuss some misconceptions about Leetspeak later on.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.internetworldstats.com>

<sup>26</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leet>

### 4.3.1 Spelling

One of the main characteristics of Leetspeak, is the replacement of letters with other characters. Instead of limiting yourself to the 26 letters of the Roman alphabet used in the English language, you can use any character in the repertoire of the UCS (Universal Character Set). Basically that means you can use any character which can be formed with a standard azerty or qwerty keyboard. Though there are no real restrictions on replacing a certain letter with another character or other characters, there is one rule that needs to be respected. The original letter and replacing character(s) need to have a relation of similarity. This similarity can be based on either typography or pronunciation.

#### 4.3.1.1 The new alphabet

Homoglyphs are characters in typography which resemble one another. Because of their similarity in shape, it is hard to tell them apart. Multi-letter homoglyphs contain several characters, for example “vv” looks like “w”. The Leet alphabet makes use of homoglyphs, and multi-letter homoglyphs. The most common homoglyphs in Leetspeak are the numbers. The table below shows which numbers can be used to represent which letters. The number “0” resembles the letter “o,” the number “3” can be seen as a reversed “E,” while the number “4” bears similarities to the capital “A”. Though the similarity in shape is based on either the majuscule or the minuscule, the numbers can represent both in the Leet alphabet. Notice how some numbers can represent diverse letters. This is what makes Leetspeak ambiguous and difficult. A combination of numbers can be used as well: “13” for “B” or “12” for “R”. This adds even more to the complexity of Leetspeak. Sometimes it is hard to determine where one letter stops, and another one begins. The number “13” for example can be seen as the letter “b” or as a combination of two letters, namely “ie” or even “le”.

0	o
1	i l
2	R z
3	E M
4	A
5	s
6	B G
7	L T
8	B
9	g P Q

Table 4.1: Typographical similarities between letters and numbers

Other typographic characters can be used to replace letters as well. For example, the at sign “@” can replace the letter “a,” while the number sign “#” is similar to the capital “H”. Again, these characters can represent either a capital letter or a lower-case letter. Letters can be replaced by other letters as well, based on similar pronunciation. “Ph” can for example be replaced with “f”. Based on the previous explanation, the word “fat” can be written as “phat”. If we take it one step further, we can also spell it out as “p#@7”.

On Wikipedia the table below can be found, which shows us some of the characters the letters can be replaced with. This table is far from complete, as new combinations can be found at any time, turning Leetspeak into an ever-changing slang. Especially because creativity is highly rewarded among Leetspeakers. The table does, however, provide a good overview of some of the most frequently used characters and gives us an approximation of the spelling system. A rule that needs to be respected is that you need to be consistent. One and the same letter cannot be replaced with two different symbols in one message. For example, once you started replacing the letter “a” with the number “4,” you need to keep this up. Rarely you will find “4” as well as “@” replacing the letter “a” in one and the same message.

A	4 ^ @ /- \ ^ aye d
B	8 6 13 I3  3 B P>  : !3 (3 /3 )3 ∞
C	[ ¢ < ( { ©
D	)  o   I>  > ? T)  ) 0 d
E	3 & € £ ë [-  =-
F	= f  # ph /=
G	6 & (-+ 9 C- gee (γ, (-
H	# /- [-] ]- [ )- ( -) ::  ~   -  ]~[ ]} }- {
I	1 !   eye 3y3 i
J	_  _/ ] i </ (/ j
K	X  <  { k
L	1 £ 1_   _ lJ 7
M	v  ]V[ /\V\ \V  /\ (u) (V) (V) /\ ^^ / / //. .\ /^^ \ /V\ []V[]
N	\ ^/ /\V/ ^/ [] < > {} [] // [] /V w [] []
O	0 () oh [] ʌ □ Ω
P	*  o  °  ^(o)  >  " 9 []D   7 p ¶
Q	(_) ()_ 0_ <
R	2  ? /2 I2  ^ lz ®  2 [z 12 Я  2 ʁ
S	5 \$ z § ehs es
T	7 + - - 1 '[]' †
U	(_)  _  v L
V	√ √

W	\V \v // \^ \n \V/ \X/ \_ \_/_ \:_/ (\^) III u
X	% >< X }{ ecks × * )(
Y	J ` / Ψ φ λ Ȳ ¥
Z	2 ~/_ % >_ 3 7_

Table 4.2: the Leet alphabet as presented on <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leetspeak>, retrieved on 03/27/08

There are different levels in Leetspeak spelling. When you replace every letter, the legibility of your text becomes problematic. A solution is to only replace certain letters. By means of an illustration, a couple of different translations of Shakespeare's opening line in one of his famous sonnets can be found below. The first example is Shakespeare's original text, while the others are written in Leetspeak. The deciphering of the second phrase is by far the most difficult process. Deciphering the third phrase is easier, because it makes more use of numbers. Numbers occur more often in Leetspeak and are therefore easier to recognize. In the last example, only numbers are being used, alongside the opening parenthesis, which represents the letter "c". All the other letters have remained intact. This example is more clear and easier to read, while the others require more puzzling. The second and the third phrase are examples of hardcore Leet, whereas the forth phrase is considered to be soft Leet. "Leet is adding new vocabulary and transpositions that are harder to decipher, especially in hardcore leet where every original letter is transposed. Soft Leet forms may only transpose one letter in a word or phrase." (Mitchell, online) Soft Leet is more common, because it contains the element of coding and at the same time does not cause great deciphering difficulties. "The innovative orthography not only catches the eye, but it appears familiar enough to a reader to allow him or her to understand the intended words, while distancing itself from ordinary or conventional writing." (LeBlanc, 32)

- A. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
- B. \$#@££ ‡ (0µ¶@?= 7#== 70 @ \$vµµ=?'§ D@Ψi
- C. 5#4|\_| 1 (0^^|°4|23 +#33 +0 4 5v^^^3|2'5 )4'/i
- D. 5h4ll 1 (0mp4123 7h33 70 4 5umme12's d4y?

As can be seen in the second and third example, punctuation marks can be altered as well. The question and exclamation mark can be replaced with their inverted forms, originating from the Spanish language.

#### 4.3.1.2 Typographical errors

Typo's or typographical errors are mistakes which occur when someone accidentally makes a mistake while typing. Especially while chatting, people tend to make typo's because they are trying to type too fast. Typographical errors are a perfect illustration of how Internet language is influenced by hardware (see 3.1). There are different kind of typo's: some are caused by neighbouring key strikes, extra strikes, inverted strikes, missing strikes in a word or connecting two words. Most people spend time reviewing their writings and correcting spelling errors, because they make you look "sloppy" or "incompetent". Leetspeakers, however, seem to have turned it into a sport to deliberately put typo's in their writing.

Sometimes a letter gets mixed up with another letter, because both letters are close to each other on the keyboard. For example, the letter "o" and the letter "p" are often mixed up, because their keys are right next to each other on an azerty keyboard. Another example of a typo is when two succeeding letters in a word are switched in place. Leetspeakers started making these mistakes intentionally. Amazingly, these typographical errors do not cause a lot of interpretation problems. The human brain is capable of interpreting words, regardless of typo's. It has been proven by linguists that people are able to decipher a word in a matter of milliseconds if only the first and final letters are put in the right position.

"The" is for example often spelled as "teh". "Owned" is misspelled as "pwned" and even as "powned". The past tense can be also be spelled as "pwnt". Another example of typo's is when someone makes an incorrect use of the shift key. On a qwerty keyboard, the number one and the exclamation sign are on the same key, while on an azerty keyboard, the exclamation sign is combined with "8" on one key. When the shift key is used incorrectly, the exclamation sign can accidentally be mixed up with one of these numbers. This explains why both of the following expressions can be found.

E. This is so exciting!!!1!!!!11

F. This is so exciting888888

Leetspeakers can even take it a step further and spell out the number, or even "exclamation mark" for comic effect.

G. This is so exciting!!!one!!exclamationmark!eleven



The question mark has gone through the same process. On qwerty keyboards this punctuation mark is situated on the same key as the slash.

H. What are you talking about??/?/slash??questionmark

Another example of intentional typo's can be found in the behaviour of so-called typosquatters. They register internet domains which look like existing ones, hoping internet users will accidentally surf to their sites. For example, someone could register <http://newyorktmies.com/>. Every time an internet user makes that typo while trying to visit the site of the New York Times, they would end up on the typosquatter's site. Typosquatting is a variant of cybersquatting (purchasing domain names with the intent to resell it for a higher price).

#### 4.3.1.3 Abbreviations, acronyms, initialisms

Leetspeakers use abbreviated forms excessively, which causes outsiders to become even more puzzled if they are not familiar with the conventional abbreviations. For Leetspeakers these abbreviations serve more than just a time-saving purpose. It makes their language more obscure and incomprehensible, especially when making a sequence of acronyms without spacing left between them. It should be noted that the use of abbreviations is not an exclusive Leetspeak characteristic. Users all over the Internet abbreviate their words in online communication.

#### 4.3.2 *Lexicon*

##### 4.3.2.1 L33t versus n00b

In the world of gamers, there is a strong division between l33t and n00b. When someone is good at gaming, they will be called "l33t". This word is derived from "elite" and is preserved for a limited group of players. It can also be used to describe a successful action, as is shown in the first example below. The use of the definite article in the second example enhances the intensity and is an equivalent for "very". Bad gamers, on the other hand are called "n00bs". The prototypical image of a n00b is a someone who is new and makes a lot of beginners'

mistakes. “N00b” is another way of spelling “newb”, which is derived from the word “newbie”. People who do not understand Leetspeak are also called n00bs. Leetspeak owes its name to the adjective “elite”, which immediately shows that the slang is considered to be preserved for an exclusive group.

I. That move was l33t.

J. You are teh l33t.

K. You are such a n00b.

While “hacker” has a bad connotation in the language use of non-technical communities, it is used as a compliment in Leetspeak-circles. This semantic change is called amelioration: “A lexeme develops a positive sense of approval.” (Crystal: 2003, 138) In this positive use, the term connotes someone with a lot of computer knowledge, rather than a criminal intruder. Jonas Löwgren also noticed the positive connotation, though he warns that the term should be used carefully. “It is better to be described as a hacker by others than to describe oneself that way. Hackers consider themselves something of an elite (a meritocracy based on ability), though one to which new members are gladly welcome. There is thus a certain ego satisfaction to be had in identifying yourself as a hacker (but if you claim to be one and are not, you'll quickly be labelled bogus).” (Löwgren, online) The Oxford English Dictionary lists both connotations. The earliest record included in this dictionary, in which “hacker” is used in a positive way, dates from 1976: “The compulsive programmer, or hacker as he calls himself, is usually a superb technician.” It is a fragment from “Computer Power & Human Reason” from J. Weizenbaum.

Hacker, n.

1. One who hacks; one who hoes with a hack.
2. That which hacks; an implement for hacking, chopping wood, or breaking up earth; a chopper, cleaver; a hoe, mattock.
3. **a.** A person with an enthusiasm for programming or using computers as an end in itself. *colloq.* (orig. *U.S.*). **b.** A person who uses his skill with computers to try to gain unauthorized access to computer files or networks. *colloq.*

<http://www.oed.com>

#### 4.3.2.2 Own and w00t

When we look up the verb “own” in the Oxford English Dictionary, we find a large series of definitions:

Own, v.

1. *trans.* **a.** To have or hold as one's own; to have belonging to one, be the proprietor of, possess. **b.** *fig.* and in extended use. To have control over or direction of (a person or thing). **c.** To have as one's function or responsibility. *Obs.* **d.** orig. *U.S.* To be or feel responsible for considering or solving (a problem, issue, task, etc.).
2. *trans.* To make (a thing) one's own; to gain possession or control of; to appropriate, seize, win; to adopt as one's own. *Obs*
3. *trans.* **a.** To claim as being one's own; to lay claim to. In early use (*Anglo-Saxon Law*): to declare (a thing) one's own property. Now *rare* (*Sc.* and *Eng. regional (north.)* in later use). **b.** To call (a person or thing) one's own; to acknowledge as belonging to oneself, esp. in respect of kinship or authorship. **c.** To acknowledge as an acquaintance; to recognize as familiar. Now *Irish English, Sc., and Eng. regional (north.)*. **d.** To attribute (a thing) to some source. *Obs. rare.*
4. *trans.* **a.** To acknowledge as due; = [OWE](#) v. 3a. With *unto* or indirect object. *Obs.* **b.** To acknowledge as due to oneself; to accept as deserved or merited. *Obs. rare.* **c.** To acknowledge as having supremacy, authority, or power over oneself; to recognize or profess obedience to (a greater power, a superior, etc.). In later use only with abstract objects, esp. in *to own* (a person's) *sway*. Now somewhat *arch.*
5. **a.** *trans.* To acknowledge (a person or thing) as affecting oneself; (more generally) to acknowledge (a thing) to be as claimed, or to be a fact; to confess to be valid, true, or actual; to admit. (a) With simple object. (b). With object and complement. In later use chiefly *refl.* (c) With clause as object (in 18th cent. also with *to*-infinitive). **b.** *intr.* To confess or admit to something; = *to own up* at sense 5c. Now somewhat *literary.* **c.** *intr.* orig. *U.S. colloq. to own up*: to make a full admission or confession, esp. when challenged or pressed; to confess frankly (to something). Also with *that* and clause.
6. *trans.* Esp. of God: to acknowledge as approved or accepted; to declare or indicate acceptance or approval of; to countenance, vindicate. Now *rare.*
7. *trans. Hunting.* Of a hound: to show recognition of (the scent of the quarry).

<http://www.oed.com>

The way in which Leetspeakers use the verb cannot be associated with any of these definitions. They add a new definition to the verb. When a team is defeated at the end of a game, that team has been “owned”. Consequently, when you defeat another player, you have “owned” that player. In this usage, the verb involves the sense of humiliation. In other words, “to own someone” means to defeat that person in a humiliating way. W00t, or woot is used as an interjection and is said to be an acronym for “We Own the Other Team,” though this is doubted by some (see 5.2.9).

### 4.3.3 Grammar

#### 4.3.3.1 Nominalisation

Verbs and adjectives are frequently nominalised without undergoing any morphological transformation.

L. You are (the) win!

In other cases a suffix can be added, for example “-age” or “-ness”.

M. That is pure pwnage.

N. Your leetness impresses me.

The affixes do not trigger any real semantic changes. They can be compared to familiarity markers: “Sometimes an abbreviation and an affix combine, producing a lexeme which is highly informal in tone, and often used as a part of the slang of a close-knit social group.” (Crystal: 2003, 131) These familiarity markers do not alter the class of a word. In Leetspeak the suffixes can, however, cause a change in a word’s grammatical status. For example the verb “own” is turned into the noun “ownage” by the suffix “-age”. Though prefixes rarely cause a class conversion, one prefix in particular is very popular among Leetspeakers. (See 4.3.3.2) David Crystal briefly mentions the use of suffixes as part of “the playful jargon used by hackers.” He enumerates “-ity,” “-itude” and “-ification” as popular extensions. “For example, the noun-forming suffix “-ity” [...] might be used in dubiousity (from dubious), obviosity (from obvious) and other such “-ous” instances”. (Crystal: 2006, 89)

#### 4.3.3.2 Comparative forms

The definitive article “the” serves a special function in the first example below. It could be replaced with “very”. Adding the article in front of a gradable adjective, makes it stronger. The French article “le” can be used as well. A second way of increasing this degree is by adding prefix “über-” (also written as “uber” or “ueber”) to the adjective.

O. This game is the awesome. This game is le awesome.

P. This game is übercool

According to Karl Sornig foreign borrowings are common in slang usage: “The utilization of foreign or strange lexical material is an old practice and might at some time or other have served the purpose of camouflage and/or secrecy.” (Sornig, 4)

#### 4.3.3.2 Morpheme “z0r”

The suffix “-zor” or “-z0r” is added to a word in order to intensify its meaning. When that word ends in “ck,” the final consonant cluster is omitted and “-xor” or “-xxor” is added, as can be seen in the last examples, in which the morpheme is added to respectively “suck” and “rock.” The morpheme can be added to all of the tenses of a verb. The first example can be rephrased as: “That gamer owned”, used to compliment a gamer’s skills. The “-s” which signals the third person singular in the second example, can be replaced with a “-z.” The expression “to rox0r your box0r” illustrates that Leetspeakers have a great liking for rhyming. Contrary to popular belief, “box0rs” does not refer to “boxers” or underwear. It comes from “boxes” or “boxen” and is slang for computers.

Q. That gamer pwnz0red

R. That suxors. That suxorz.

S. That rox0rz your box0rz

T. You is the roxx0r.

#### 4.3.3.3 Capitalization

The rules of capitalization are ignored. Lower-case and upper-case letters are mixed randomly. The personal pronoun “I” is rarely capitalized, nor are the initial letters of the first word of a phrase, but this is a common habit in computer-mediated communication. The used of capitals in the example below, however, is typically Leetspeak.

U. You aRe teh UbeRhaxXxX.

#### 4.3.4 *<body> language*

HTML, or HyperText Markup Language, is a code used by webmasters to create websites. This code is translated by a web browser (such as Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox), which then displays the site correctly on the computer screen, in order to enable surfers to read the content. One significant characteristic of HTML is the use of tags. A code always consists of an opening and a closing tag. Otherwise the web browser will display an error message. The tags always come in pairs: one tag indicates where a command begins, while a second tag closes the code. The tags are surrounded by chevrons, or angle brackets. The closing tag can be recognized by its additional stroke or slash. A letter or abbreviation is placed between the chevrons, which triggers a certain action. The letter “b”, for example, stands for bold letters. In the example below, the text between the tags will be displayed in bold letters.

`<b>Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?</b>` Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

When the web browser detects the first tag, it will recognize that the following text should be displayed in bold letters. As soon as the browser reaches the second tag, it will end the procedure and display the remaining text in a normal way. The text will therefore appear on the computer screen as follows:

**Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?** Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

Hackers started to adapt the method of tags in their texts to indicate the beginning or moreover the ending of something. Notice that in both the examples below, the opening tag is dropped. In the last example, even the chevrons are left out. The chevrons can be replaced with square brackets as well. A gamer could use these following phrases when he is sure victory is in sight. He signals that the game is as good as over.

V. You got owned. `</game>`

W. You got owned. `/game`

David Crystal calls the use of tags “hacker-influenced conversation” (Crystal: 2006, 96) In order to use tags correctly, you have to know where it comes from and understand the basics of HTML.

#### 4.4 Misconceptions about Leetspeak

Rebus writing or “the use of a single symbol to represent a word or syllable with a similar sound” is not Leetspeak, though it is often mistaken to be a characteristic of the slang. This phenomenon “seems motivated as much by word play and play with writing as by a desire to speed up typing.” (Nishimura, 173)<sup>1</sup> The purpose of Leetspeak is not to enhance typing speed. If anything, encrypting messages in Leetspeak will slow the typing down. The element of word play is certainly one that should not be neglected, but the major function of the use of symbols instead of letters in Leetspeak, is to simply write in code. The code creates a barrier between insiders and outsiders and manifests adhesion to the subculture of gamers. Phrases like “R u going 2 the party 2night?” never cause any problems with interpretation, because the use of the symbols is very transparent. It is therefore far removed from what Leetspeak is all about. Rebus writing is a characteristic of Netspeak, as well as text messaging. The foremost reason for rebus writing is timesaving, but in the case of text messaging the economic constraints are an extra impulse. The cost of an SMS message depends on the length of that message. The symbols take up less space than the word or syllable they represent and are therefore preferred.

The combination of rebus writing and phonetic spelling is called “AOL speak”. Phonetic spelling is described by Jacques Anis as the “transcription of standard pronunciation (e.g., English almost-standard “nite” for “night” or unconventional “guyz” for “guys”) or socially marked variants (“luv” for “love,” “wanna” for “want to”).” (Anis, 97) Though Leetspeak and AOL speak are not similar in nature, they are often confused.

How do we know the popular abbreviations (for example acronym “lol”) are not a characteristic derived from Leetspeak? They are used in e-mails, text-messaging and therefore can be considered a general feature of technologic speech. Instead of considering acronyms as a feature of Leetspeak, it should be acknowledged that it is a general characteristic of language on the Internet. Their function is to enhance typing speed. While limiting the time spent typing certainly is an important factor in the use of abbreviations by Leetspeakers, they use it for an additional reason. It makes their writing more incomprehensible and creates a strong division between insiders and outsiders. An excess of abbreviations, especially

when no spacing is left between separate abbreviations, can be considered as an influence of Leetspeak, but the use of “roflol” or “lmao” is not Leetspeak. The combination of these two, namely “roflmao” is another story. Leetspeakers tend to make sequences of acronyms and initialisms. It is not uncommon to find “omgwtf” or “imotbh” without any spacing. The absurd addition of “bbq” (barbeque) in “omgwtfbbq” adds a sarcastic touch and is a perfect illustration of word play.

#### 4.5 Leet as a subculture: Internet memes

Leet is as much a subculture as it is a slang. Memes (a term coined by Richard Dawkins in “The Selfish Gene”) are cultural traits. “Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.” (Dawkins, online) In the case of the internet, memes can be said to leap from computer to computer. Considering that on the World Wide Web a large amount of people can be reached in a short amount of time, Internet memes can be spread easily. Several memetrackers can be found online, such as digg (<http://www.digg.com/>) and technorati (<http://www.technorati.com>), keeping track of trends on the internet.

Different types of memes can be found on message boards. Image macros (are images with catch-phrases placed on top of them) are quite popular. They are made for humorous effect and are often of an absurd nature. It is hard, if not impossible, to determine who started a certain meme or who created this or that image macro. In the following chapters some Internet memes will be discussed. These memes are part of the Leet subculture, but should not be associated with Leetspeak as a slang.

##### 4.5.1 *All your base are belong to us*

This line comes from a poorly translated English version of “Zero Wing,” a 1989 Japanese video game. It is part of the introductory cut scene<sup>27</sup> to the game. The poor translation is due to the rush in which the European version had to be released in 1991. The rediscovery of

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<sup>27</sup> A cut scene is a scene in a game in which background information is given. The player has got no control over these scenes, which break up the gameplay.



“Zero Wing” in 1999, resulted in an internet phenomenon. Gamers started quoting the broken English phrase “All your base are belong to us.” The phrase is often accompanied with a screenshot of the scene (see figure 4.1). Originally it was used to parody a premature proclamation of victory. Later on, it lost its original sense of premature cheering, and was used simply to express victory. The correct English translation of the Japanese line would be: “We have taken over all of your bases.” The complete text of the badly translated scene, as can be found on Wikipedia, is as follows:

Narrator: In A.D. 2101, war was beginning.  
 Captain: What happen ?  
 Mechanic: Somebody set up us the bomb.  
 Operator: We get signal.  
 Captain: What !  
 Operator: Main screen turn on.  
 Captain: It's you !!  
 CATS: How are you gentlemen !!  
 CATS: All your base are belong to us.  
 CATS: You are on the way to destruction.  
 Captain: What you say !!  
 CATS: You have no chance to survive make your time.  
 CATS: Ha Ha Ha Ha ....  
 Operator: Captain !!  
 Captain: Take off every 'ZIG'!!  
 Captain: You know what you doing.  
 Captain: Move 'ZIG'.  
 Captain: For great justice.  
 (<http://www.wikipedia.org>)



Figure 4.1: screenshot of the famous scene in “Zero Wing”, <http://www.allyourbasearebelongtous.com/>, retrieved on 07/21/2008

The expression in the following extract is based on the poor English translation from “Zero Wing”. It is an inside joke, only people who are familiar with “All your base are belong to us” will understand.

31. “All your fristi<sup>28</sup> are belong to us!”  
Naga – 05/28/08 – Filologica Forum

#### 4.5.2 *Roflcopter*

The “roflcopter,” a blend consisting of “rofl” (Rolling On the Floor, Laughing) and “helicopter,” indicates that something is hilariously funny. It is a pictographic piece of art, more precisely ASCII art, made entirely out of ASCII characters. “ASCII is an acronym for “American Standard Code for Information Interchange”; established in the 1960s, it contains 128 seven-bit codes (unique combinations of 1’s and 0’s), 94 of which are available for use as graphical characters (excluding the space character). This character set is based on the Roman alphabet and the sounds of the English language.” (Danet and Herring, 8) “Graphical characters” are characters which can be printed and are opposed to control characters. An example of the latter is the code “127,” which stands for the action “delete.” Spacing is considered to be a printed character. Smileys or emoticons are the simplest form of ASCII art.

! " # \$ % & ' ( ) * + , - . / 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 : ; < = > ? @ A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z [ \ ] ^ _ ` a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z {   } ~
---

Figure 4.2: Graphical ASCII characters, <http://www.asciitable.com/>, retrieved on 05/15/08

Characters from figure 4.2 are combined to imitate a helicopter. In the example shown below the propellers on top of the helicopter are represented by the terms “roflol,” while those at the back are formed with the words “lol.” This image has been turned into an animated gif as well. Similar phenomena are the lollercoaster and the lollerskates.

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<sup>28</sup> A brand of drinks



{o,o}  _)_ -"-" O RLY?	{-.-}  _)_ -"-" YA RLY	{0,0} (_ _ -"-" NO WAI!
---------------------------------	---------------------------------	----------------------------------

Figure 4.5: ASCII art: the only owls

In the extracts below “o rly” and “orly” are put into use. They are not Leetspeak in se, but do belong to the Leet subculture.

32. “o rly? Have you even looked at the specs?”

Anonymous - 12/23/07 – 4chan

33. “Dead people are classified as vagrants, although the law likely has no means to arrest the dead.

orly?”

In Utero – 03/28/08 - Geekstinkbreath

#### 4.5.4 Lolcats

Lolcats are image macros of cats. The humorous caption on the picture reflects what the cat supposedly is thinking, saying or doing. They are written in Lolspeak, which can be seen as a variant of Leetspeak. While the main focus in Leetspeak is on spelling and lexicon, the latter is more about spelling and grammar. The principle of Lolspeak can be compared to the principle of Leetspeak: defying the accomplished and generally accepted rules. First of all, words are misspelled. Secondly, the grammatical rules are ignored: for example verbs are conjugated incorrectly and auxiliaries are mixed. The result is a language full of errors, perceived as “cute” and associated with baby talk. “Part of the lolcats' appeal lies in the way it domesticates the wild linguistic frontier of the Internet, rife with chat abbreviations, hacker acronyms, typos and trans-hemispherical East-West garblings.” (Grossman, online) Some of the most popular captions are those in the “I’m in ur<sup>29</sup> X doing ur Y” format. This phrase was first used in an online game, where one gamer answered “I am in ur base, killing ur d00dz” (“I am in your base, killing your dudes<sup>30</sup>”) to the question “Where are you?” Another popular phrase is “I can has cheezburger?” (“Can I Have a cheeseburger?”) which is at the same time the title of the website containing a large lolcats archive (<http://icanhascheezburger.com/>).

<sup>29</sup> Your

<sup>30</sup> Referring to the team-mates of the other player.



Figure 4.6: Lolcat, <http://icanhascheezburger.com/>, retrieved on 07/21/08

#### 4.5.5 Oh noes

“Oh noes” is the ungrammatical plural form of the exclamation “Oh, no!” It expresses bewilderment and shock. Like many other online catchphrases, it is used in a sarcastic way.

34. “all of them are green ohnoes”  
Anonymous - 12/20/07 – 4chan

35. OH NOES I HAVE TO LIVE ON CUP RAMEN FOR A WHILE TO KEEP MY  
DOG ALIVES? WUT NO WAI! \*kills dog\*  
Anonymous - 02/17/08 – 4chan

“Oh noes” is used in a sarcastic way in both of the extracts. The plural form of the expression resembles the plural use of adverbs, which sometimes occurs in speech. The adverb “anyway” can for example be pluralized into “anyways”. In extract 35 “alives” is written in plural as well, though the author is only referring to one dog. A second common expression can be found at the end. “No wai” or “no way” is usually used in combination with “orly”. The asterisks are used to indicate an action, in this case the killing of the dog.

#### 4.5.6 Fail or win

The abundance of the terms “win” and “fail” illustrate a fondness of extremes. Rarely anything is ever qualified as “moderate”. The verbs are used as nouns and adjectives, without any morphological alternations. Something good is said to be “win” or “made out of win”. The highest form of failure is commented on with the phrase “epic fail” or “epic phail”. When

you like something, you can use the expression “for the win”, or its shortened form “ftw”. This expression might be a reference to the television game show “Hollywood Squares,” in which gamers had to earn squares in order to get “the win”. The contestants were said to be “playing for the win”. On the site of Urban Dictionary, the game show is mentioned in the third definition (as can be seen below). The definitions on this slang dictionary are submitted by users, and then voted on by other users.

For the win

1. Something cool or good, usually used amongst gamers. This phrase can be used for online and real life.
  2. (Phrase) Typically used to indicate how good some action is. Also used in seemingly random intervals to indicate your lack of sleep and sanity. Used in contrast with "for the loss."
  3. In gaming parlance, a choice or strategy that should guarantee victory. The phrase comes from the TV game show Hollywood Squares. Contestants choosing a square which would give them 3 in a row would frequently say something like "I'll take Paul Lynde for the win."
- (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/>)

The opposite of this expression, “for the lose” or “for the loss” also circulates on the Net.

#### 4.5.7 *To rickroll someone*

A very recent practical joke consists of “rickrolling someone”. The joke relies in intentionally misdirecting them to a video featuring Rick Astley singing “Never gonna give you up.” You can trick others by pretending a certain Web link will take them somewhere else. When a person clicks the link, he is said to have been “rickrolled”. “Rickrolling is a descendant of an older Internet joke called duckrolling. A Web site or blog post would offer a link to something popular — say celebrity photos or video gaming news — that led unsuspecting viewers to a bizarre image of a duck on wheels.” (Nussenbaum, online) The rickrolling joke was widely copied by thousands and even exceeded the boundaries of the Internet. On March 8, 2008 two people, one of them dressed up as Rick Astley, rickrolled an entire audience by playing the 80’s hit song on their stereo at a women’s basketball game at Eastern Washington University. In an interview with David Sarno, the Web scout from Los Angeles Times, Rick Astley commented on the revival of his hit: “I think it’s just one of those odd things where something gets picked up and people run with it, but that’s what’s brilliant about the Internet.”

#### 4.6 Leetspeak in online games

Counter-strike is a shooting game in which a team of counter-terrorists has to battle a team of terrorists in a couple of rounds. A player can join either groups. Each round can be won by reaching the mission objective, for example planting a bomb (in case of the terrorists) or rescuing the hostages (in case of the counter-terrorists). Another way of winning a round is by killing all your opponents. The game can be played online against others. During the game, players are able to send instant messages (a form of real-time communication). The appendix contains some screenshots which were taken inside the game. Some of them were provided to me by my friend Niels Cuelenaere, others were taken from gamer sites “A-teamClan” (<http://www.a-teamclan.com/>) and “World of pwnage” (<http://www.worldofpwnage.com/>). Most of the screenshots were taken when the scoreboard was shown. Taking screenshots during the action interrupts the game, as you actually have to leave the window of the game in order to save your screenshot. It is easier to find screenshots of the scoreboard, as the players are free to leave the main window, without having to worry about missing the action. The scoreboards provide us with series of nicknames

In the first screenshot one of the gamers has chosen “[34m = ][oLL 3!n3R 4LL3!n m8\$” for a nickname. It is linguistic joke containing a German backronym (a false acronym). When deciphered it reads: “Team = Toll Einer Allein Machts”. Other nicknames containing the Leetspeak alphabet are “\$tink\$ock3” and “-=[JuMb0]=-” The latter contains hyphens and equal signs as ornaments. “JuMb0” is written in both lower-case and upper-case letters, while the “o” is replaced with zero.

“P@Ni(” in appendix B consists of the same alternation between upper-case and lower-case letters. The at sign and opening round bracket replace the letters “a” and “c”. In “DynamO” the first and last letter are capitalized.

The following appendix contains the nickname “Ch@ll3ng3r [N33D Cl@N]” or “Challenger (need clan)”. On appendix D the players “ik ben een roxxor” (i am the roxor) and “Karschann is een roxor” (Karschann is the roxor) are listed under the counter-terrorists.

In the left corner on the bottom of appendix E, we get a glimpse of the instant messaging between two players:

```
niezleh: gg
Xan: hacker
niezleh: su imo
```

When filling in the abbreviations, the conversation becomes more comprehensible:

niezleh: good game  
 Xan: hacker  
 niezleh: shut up in my opinion

What the players actually are saying, is:

niezleh: That was a good game.  
 Xan: You are a hacker!  
 niezleh: I think you need to shut up.

Player niezleh scored 57 points, which makes him the best player of the game. He comments “good game” to emphasize his victory. Player Xan picks up on the mocking attitude of niezleh and accuses the player of hacking the game. Niezleh is insulted because he is called a cheater and tells Xan to shut up. The entire conversation is held by means of only 13 letters. This is a clear illustration of linguistic economy, a typical phenomenon in online communication.

On appendix F the gamers “D3VISTAT3R” is enlisted (literally devastator, referring to devastator). This nickname contains numbers to represent letters. These kind of letter replacements are legion, and as a result the translation is obvious and many players will be able to decipher his nickname. The second player in the counter-terrorist list uses less current symbols, but the word “Jesus” is still very recognizable. The player “/i/i IRAGE?” probably uses the slash and “i” to form the letter “m”. His nickname then reads out “MIRAGE?”. This is harder to decipher because of two reasons. Firstly, the combination of these characters is less current. Secondly, the deciphering process is more difficult when several symbols are used to present one letter. There is no clear connection between the original character and replacing symbols, unlike the transparent resemblance between for example the letter “s” and the dollar sign “\$”. His nickname is much more dubious than the previous ones, and we cannot be certain that this interpretation is in fact the correct one.

Another dubious nickname is the third one in the terrorist list in appendix G. The nickname ends in “124c312,” which could stand for “racer” if the numbers “12,” “4,” and “3” are indeed used for the letters “r,” “a,” and “e”. “DaNg3rNuBz,” on the other hand, is a transparent version of “dangernubz” or “dangernoobs”.

The last screenshot contains a conversation between several players:

SiLeNt\_KiLLa\_ElltE: bet t all  
 #One<sup>1</sup>Shot’ MaG: OMFG  
 «SAS» |-|USTLER: NO DMG?  
 Secxcex @ CT Spawn (RADIO): Fire in the hole!  
 «SAS» |-|USTLER: fuck off



The expression “bet t all” is a way of gambling in the game. Starting with the word “bet,” and then adding “t” for “terrorists” or “ct” for “counter-terrorists,” you indicate which team will be the winning team according to you. The last part indicates how many survivors you think will be left. The options are “all,” “half” or a number. The gamer in this extract thinks the terrorists will win the game. “OMFG” stands for “oh my fucking god” and “DMG” stands for “damage”. Again, abbreviations are characteristic of language use on the Internet. “Fire in the hole” is a warning used when something is about to explode. The nicknames in this extract contain some interesting elements as well. For example, the palindrome “secxcex” should be read as “success”. The initial letter of “|\_|USTLER” is “h”. Though the letter is replaced with a sequence of characters, it can be recognized at a single glance.

The Leetspeak alphabet is used in the gamers’ nicknames. It is an indication that the gamers belong to the Leet subculture, but at the same time it serves as a means of decoration. The gamers seem to pay a lot of attention to the appearance of their nickname. While the face is the signboard in real life, the nickname takes over this function when there is no face-to-face contact. It can be compared to the signatures graffiti artists leave behind on city walls. (See figure 4.7) Originality and attracting attention come in first place, legibility is less important. The software of the game does not provide tools to decorate the graphic appearance by means of colour or fonts, and therefore the Leet alphabet serves as decoration. Other elements which contribute to a unique appearance are the use of symmetrically placed symbols in front and after the nicknames (~>\$h0guN<~), the alternation in capitalization (SiLeNt\_KiLLa\_ElItE) and the invented palindrome (secxcex). Some words are separated by dashes or periods (The\_werewolf).



Figure 4.7 <http://bigeyedeer.wordpress.com/>, retrieved on 06/23/08

The conversations on the screenshots contain less elements of Leetspeak, but are characterized by time-saving Netspeak features. The gamers' language is quite aggressive, which is not only due to the context of the violent game. Netspeak in general is more hostile, as the anonymity makes people less inhibited. "There are obviously inherent risks when talking to someone we do not know, and instances of harassment, insulting or aggressive language, and subterfuge are legion." (Crystal: 2006, 54)

## 5. Language on message boards

### 5.1 Message boards

This research focuses on the medium of message boards, which can be placed under "asynchronous chatgroups" in David Crystal's dissertation in "Language and the Internet". Other terms to refer to message boards are "bulletin boards," "forums," or "discussion boards." Anyone can contribute a message to such a board, be it anonymous or not. The communication is asynchronous, but the messages are stored (temporarily), so that anyone can flip back and look at messages which were written in the past. Most message boards are

public and can be accessed by anyone. Other message boards, on the other hand, require a registration in order to post messages or even read them. Registration involves choosing a nickname, which will be displayed every time you post a message. This does not mean your true identity is given away. All your messages can be traced down and linked to your nickname. Unless you decide to share your personal information, your true identity remains hidden. Lurkers are people who read message boards, but never actually post messages themselves.

Message boards or forums can be divided into subforums, which in their turn contain several topics or threads. A thread is dedicated to one specific subject. When guests go “off topic,” which means they drift away from the original subject of a thread, they will be asked to remain “on topic” by the forum’s administrators or moderators. This Web team is also responsible for deleting spam, flames and floods from their boards. In general, spam are messages which are not constructive and do not contribute anything to the topic of a thread. Spambots create auto-generated messages, usually containing advertising for a certain product or website. Regular surfers, however, can also commit the Internet crime of spamming by continually drifting off topic and posting short nonsense messages. An excess of spamming often results in a permanent or temporary ban. Flames, on the other hand, are insulting messages. People who are out to provoke other people and post irrelevant messages on discussion boards are called “flamers” or “trolls”. A third punishable phenomenon is “flooding”. This term refers to the deliberate excessive posting in a short amount of time, usually to achieve a new forum rank. Most forums provide different ranks, which are related to the total amount of a user’s posts.

Hot topics are located at the top of the board’s index, while older topics slowly drop to the bottom and will eventually end up on another page. A topic can be “bumped”: by posting a message in an old, forgotten topic, it will skyrocket to top of the list.

Message boards are more suitable for research than e-mail or chatsites. First of all, the majority of e-mails are private in nature. According to Yukiko Nishimura both e-mail messages and posts on message boards need to be divided into personal and non-personal. Personal e-mails are stored by senders and recipients, and are not accessible without their permission. Messages on bulletin boards, on the other hand, are publicly posted, whether they are of a personal nature or not. Their subjects can range from personal interests to scientific expositions. Secondly, messages on chatsites are almost immediately deleted, while posts on message boards are stored for a longer period. A minus point for linguistic research on language on the Internet in general, is the anonymity. People can easily assume false identities

on the Internet, consequentially no personal information is reliable. Therefore research on the language users is problematic.

The data collected for this paper were gathered from three different message boards: 4chan, the Filologica Forum and Geekstinkbreath. The data were retrieved between December 2007 and July 2008. Unfortunately the Internet is not a vast medium. In the time spent collecting data, processing data, and writing out this master paper, most of the messages have already disappeared from the surface of the World Wide Web. Since I am the administrator of the Filologica Forum myself, I have some control over the survival of certain messages. In the end, however, these messages will face the same fortune as those on other message boards. They will have to make room for new messages. An excellent reason for performing studies on language and message boards now, rather than later.

The messages collected here are personal and are therefore more likely to contain traces of slang. In conversations on the subject of non-personal information, people tend to turn to Standard English.

## 5.2 Linguistic trends on message boards: corpus-based research

In this chapter I will take a closer look at the corpus and distinguish between different linguistic trends. This research should clarify and illustrate the theory dealt with in the previous chapters. A clear distinction will be made between what has been influenced by Leetspeak, and what should not be associated with it.

### 5.2.1 Leet alphabet versus rebus writing

#### 36. "ITZ BUNDAY EVERY1"

Anonymous - 01/27/08 – 4chan

Bunday is a themed day on 4chan. Users are expected to post pictures of bunnies on Sunday. These themed days are quite popular on 4chan. The most known and probably original themed day is Caturday. On Saturdays members were encouraged to post pictures of cats. This phenomenon led to the birth of lolcats and its many image macros (see 4.5.4). The message is written in capital letters, revealing the author's excitement. There are no punctuation marks and the apostrophe is left out as well. The third person singular marker "-s" is replaced with a "-z". All of these are general characteristics of Netspeak. The use of the number "1" in "EVERY1" is not Leetspeak, though it might be wrongfully associated with it. Only if the number is used to replace a single letter, for example the letter "i" or "l", are we

dealing with Leetspeak. Here the number replaces “one” and functions as a time-saving device. In traditional written language the message would be: “It’s Bunday, everyone!”

37. “Eye C whut u did thar”  
Anonymous - 12/24/07 – 4chan

In this extract, the author is stating: “I see what you did there.” “Eye” and “I” are both pronounced as /aɪ/. “C” and “see” are pronounced in the same way as well: /si:/. The letter is written in capital, even though there is no direct reason to do so. The letter “u” and personal pronoun “you” are also similar in sound: /ju:/. The letters are used to replace entire words, in order to increase typing speed. The use of “eye” instead of “I” has an opposite effect. Even though “whut” and “what” slightly differ in pronunciation, “what” is replaced with “whut”. The same happened with “thar” and “there”. The use of “eye” is Leetspeak, while all the other words in this extract (apart from “did,” which did not undergo any changes) are Lolspeak. Lolspeak and Leetspeak are being used alongside each other, which causes confusion and disables people to distinguish them properly.

38. “u r rite indeed.  
nobody cares though.”  
Anonymous - 02/13/08 – 4chan

“You” again is replaced with the letter “u”. In the same way “r” represents “are”. “Rite” and “right” are homophones, and are also interchanged. The first line should be read as: “You are right, indeed.” No capitals are begun used, though there are punctuation marks. This extract does not contain Leetspeak.

39. “z0mG!!!1!!1 P41nT 5uXxXx0rz!!1”  
Echoes – 11/21/06 – Filologica forum

In contrast to the previous extract, this entire phrase is written in Leetspeak. “Omg” is an initialism, which stands for “Oh My God.” The initial letter “z” is added as an intentional typo. The shift key is used incorrectly, resulting in the alternation between upper-case and lower-case letters, for example minuscule “m” and majuscule “G” in “z0mG”. The use of the number “1” instead of the exclamation mark also points in the direction of shift lock abuse. Some letters have been replaced with numbers as well. After deciphering the second sentence,

you can read “Paint<sup>31</sup> sucks!” The final consonant cluster of the verb “to suck” is omitted and the suffix “-xx0r” is added. The repetition of “xx” increases the excitement. The third person singular is marked by “-z” instead of the conventional “-s”.

While hardcore Leetspeak is very hard to be found, soft Leetspeak did find its way to message boards. One reason could be that hard Leetspeak is very difficult to decipher and can be perceived as irritating. It also takes longer to encrypt a message in hard Leetspeak, which could explain why soft Leetspeak is preferred. Acronyms and other shortenings also prove to be quite popular. They enhance typing speed and can be used to keep newcomers at distance. One has to be familiar with the conventions of the abbreviations in order to understand them. In conclusion we can say that Leetspeakers compromise the legibility of their message. They will use everything in their access to make their posts more puzzling to outsiders. The most obvious way of doing so is by replacing letters by other characters. In order to make the deciphering of their writings even more complex, they can also leave out spacing between words.

40. “Channel 11? More like Channel 5 amirite?”

Anonymous - 02/13/08 – 4chan

The lack of spacing at the end of the hamper the interpretation of this short message. The writer is simply asking “am I right?”. “Right” is being replaced by its homophone “rite” and “I” is written in lower-case letters, both of which are typical features of language on the Internet. The only element which is Leet in this extract is the intentional omitting of spacing.

### 5.2.2 *D00ds and n00ds*

41. “FOR GREAT JUSTICE.

thx d00dz”

Anonymous - 02/21/08 – 4chan

42. “D00ds, ik lach niet met Morel omdat hij die film bekijkt, ik lach omdat hij enkel en alleen dat soort films bekijkt”

mddrfkkr – 03/05/06 – The Filologica Forum

43. “We’re talking about American Idiot movie, not the American Idiot videos.. 😊

So, stay on topic d00ds =]”

Cecilia – 03/06/06 - Geekstinkbreath

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<sup>31</sup> The author is talking about Microsoft Paint, a graphic programme.

“Dood” or “d00d” and “dude” are both pronounced as /du:d/. In the first extract, the morpheme indicating the plural is changed into a “z”. “Thx” is an abbreviation for “thanks”. The second sentence in extract 41 can therefore be rephrased as: “Thanks, dudes.” The term “d00dz” is influenced by Leetspeak because of the replacement of “o” with zero. “Thx” on the other hand is one of the many abbreviations which circulate the Net. The use of capitals at the beginning of the extract 41 functions as a way of putting the emphasis on the first sentence. This is a typical feature of Netspeak. Because of the lack of intonation and body language in online communication, people turn to capitalization, letter spacing or asterisks to add emphasis.

44. “Also, while your there check out the RMD article. Warning: it contains n00ds.”  
Anonymous - 07/12/08 – 4chan

In the same way “d00ds” replaces “dudes”, “nudes” is here substituted with “n00ds” In the first phase of this translation process “nudes” is turned into “noods” because they sound similar. In the second step, the “o” is replaced with zero. As if trying to outsmart a censoring filter, the author writes “n00ds” instead of “nudes,” which is a colloquialism for “nudity”.

### 5.2.3 Phear my Leet skills

45. “Which animals does /an/ ph34r?”  
Anonymous - 03/05/08 – 4chan

46. “Archlord... en dan nog niet eens echt spelen, maar wel het kapitalistische zwijn  
uithangen en miljoenen ingame coins verdienen. Ph34r m3!”  
Florian – 12/19/07 – Filologica forum

47. “PHEAR US LIEVJURNAL.  
PHEAR US GUD.”  
Peardrops – 05/03/08 - Geekstinkbreath

“Ph34r” stands for “fear”. While the swapping between “ph” and “f” is based on similarity in pronunciation, “3” and “4” substitute “e” and “a” because of their similarity in orthography. Though this similarity is based on the capital letters “E” and “A,” the numbers can be used to replace the lower-case letters as well. In the second example “m3” is another way of writing “me”. Both “ph34r” and “m3” are Leetspeak. In the first example the author uses “/an/” as a title to address the members posting in /an/, the subforum of 4chan dedicated to animals. This is a typical phenomenon on the boards of 4chan. “LIEVJURNAL” contains an intentional

typo: “liev” instead of “live”. Both “ou” and “oo” are replaced with “u”, based on similar pronunciation. Livejournal is a community where members can start a blog.

48. “None of our goldfish ever lived beyond 3 months. Maybe we phail too much.”  
Anonymous - 02/19/08 – 4chan

“Fail” is a term commonly used by Leetspeakers. Here it is presented by the non-word “phail”. Like in the previous extracts, “f” is replaced with “ph” because of their common pronunciation. It is not unusual to find “fail” in combination with “epic” or “epik,” as shown in the extracts below.

49. “The quality of this image leads me to the phrase EPIC FAIL”  
Anonymous - 03/18/08 – 4chan

50. “i just got an application to work at a shoe store tbh. epic phail”  
Chris Fafalios. – 05/30/08 – Geekstinkbreath

51. “Troost je, het was toch een epik phail gebleven”  
ievil knievil – 07/08/08 – Filologica Forum

#### 5.2.4 *zomgbbq*

52. “It's obviously evil because it's better known by its chemical name.

Do you think everyone would panic if labels stopped using generic terms for everything and broke it down into chemicals?

Ingredients: carbonated dihydrogen-monoxide, hydroxypropane carboxylic acid, and saccharose

**ZOMG UNHEALTHY!”**

Anonymous - 03/18/08 – 4chan

Like in extract 39, “omg” is preceded by the letter “z”. The last phrase is written in capitals, and should be read as a loud exclamation. The author mocks the reaction some people might have when reading chemical terms. The adding of “z” as an extra strike is quite absurd, considering “o” and “z” are not neighbouring strikes on the keyboard. What is even more absurd, is adding “bbq” in a sequence of initialisms:

53. If The Guys From Green Day Died What Would Their Last Words Be? **OMG WTF BBQ**  
Slappy J. – 06/17/08 – Geekstinkbreath



54. foto tbh wtf bbq  
L'Escargot – 07/08/08 – Filologica Forum

Adding “bbq” in these messages is a linguistic joke.

### 5.2.5 *Moar nao*

55. “Hey guys, it's Varg tiem nao!!!  
I know it's not Burzday, but I'm in the mood of some Burzumz0r!!11  
Post your best pics!”  
Anonymous - 02/18/08 – 4chan

The first phrase can be translated as: “Hey guys, it's Varg time now!!!” “Tiem” is an intentional typo, while “nao” replaces “now,” based on their phonetic resemblance. Burzum is a musical project by Varg Vikernes. Burzday is a word play, and is a combination of Burzum and Thursday. In other words, on Thursdays users should post pictures of Burzum. This is another themed day on the boards of 4chan. The use of the number “1” instead of the exclamation mark in the second sentence emphasize the poster's excitement. Notice also the use of suffix “-z0r” in “Burzumz0r”. The gist of the message is that the author requests that everyone should post pictures of Burzum or Varg Vikernes, even though it is not the right day to do so (the message was posted on a Monday).

56. “moar liek this”  
Anonymous - 02/12/08 – 4chan
57. “I suggest you lurk a bit moar”  
Anonymous - 02/18/08 – 4chan
58. “Moar picshurs less talk  
kaay???”  
Fred Astaire – 05/07/08 – Filologica forum
59. “He'd be even moar badass than he is now 🤔”  
Trusty Chords. – 04/25/08 - Geekstinkbreath

In these examples, “more” is replaced with “moar”, based on their phonetic resemblance. The first example also contains an intentional typo: the letters “k” and “e” from the word “like” are swapped in place. Extract 56, 58 and 59 show a lack of punctuation marks, while the question mark in the remaining example is repeated. The vowel “a” in “kay” is repeated as well. The repetition draws attention to the phrase and indicate the author's impatience. Non-

standard spellings which reflect pronunciation, such as “kay” for “okay” are characteristic of Netspeak. In the same example “picshurs” should be read as “pictures”. In extract 57 someone is asked to lurk more. Whereas lurkers (people who read message boards but do not contribute any messages themselves) were viewed negatively at first, newcomers are now often advised to “lurk” before starting to post any messages. This way, they can get acquainted with the group’s etiquette (or netiquette) and habits. The use of the verb “to lurk” in this context is part of the Netspeak lexicon and is mentioned in a draft note in the Oxford English Dictionary

Lurk, v.

**1. a. intr.** To hide oneself; to lie in ambush; to remain furtively or unobserved about one spot. (Now only with indication of place.) Also, to live in concealment or retirement. **b.** To shirk work; to idle. *Obs.*

**2. trans. and fig.** Of things: To escape observation, to be concealed or latent.

**3.** To move about in a secret and furtive manner; to ‘steal’ *along, away, out*. Now *rare*.

**4.** To peer furtively or slyly. *Obs.*

**5.** [Perh. connected with [LURCH](#) v.<sup>2</sup>] In pa. pple.: beaten, lost (in a game of chance) (see also quot. 1929). *slang*.

DRAFT ADDITIONS JULY 2001

**lurk**, v. ► *intr. Computing slang.* To read communications to an electronic network without actively contributing or making one’s presence known. Cf. earlier [LURKER](#) n.<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oed.com>

One of the differences between the Netspeak lexicon and Leetspeak lexicon is the fact that the former is being accepted in standard language. As the Leetspeak lexicon is being used more frequently, some terms might be accepted in official dictionaries in the future. (see 5.2.9)

### 5.2.6 Unconventional capitalization

60. “so true.. memory these days is like government cheese, unless you pay to get the H4X0R brand high-speed memory. But why bother when you can just buy MORE cheap memory and get better performance than overclocking anyways?”  
Anonymous - 02/28/08 – 4chan

In this extract “H4X0R” and “MORE” are emphasized by means of capitalization. “H4X0R” or “haxor” consists of the verb “to hack” and the suffix “-zor”. The final consonant cluster of the verb and the initial consonant of the suffix are replaced with “x,” based on the sound resemblance. Here “haxor” is used as an adjective, modifying the noun “brand”. The author probably means “a fancy brand”, one which techie kids (or people with a lot of knowledge on the subject) would advice you to buy. “Overclocking” is a technological term, referring to a

process which increases the performance of your computer. “Anyways” is a colloquial expression, revealing the influence speech has on Netspeak. In formal written language use, adverbs never appear in an ungrammatical plural form. The use of capitalization in order to emphasize something, is a characteristic of Internet language.

61. “HAY GUISE!!! WHAT BE IRL STAND FOR?!?!?”

Anonymous - 02/22/08 – 4chan

“Hay guise” replaces “Hey guys”, because both of them are read as /heI gaIz/. The author is asking what the acronym “irl” (In Real Life) stands for. He mistakenly uses the verb “to be” as an auxiliary, instead of “to do”. Moreover, he does not conjugate the verb. He is in fact using Lolspeak to mock the people who do not understand the acronym. The message should be read in a sarcastic way. The capitals are not used for emphasis, but are used in a sarcastic way as well.

62. tHIS tHREAD iS A pRETTY cOOL gUY, eH sAGE'S aND dOESN'T aFRAID oF aNYTHING.

Anonymous - 03/05/08 – 4chan

This extract is an illustration of incorrect use of capitals. The rules of capitalization have been reversed: the first letter of a word is written in lowercase letter, while the remainder is written in uppercase letters. Normally only the first word of a sentence is capitalized, but here the capitalization infects every word. This corruption of capitalization is influenced by Leetspeak. Again this extract should be read in a sarcastic way. First of all, the author refers to the thread as being a “guy”, i.e. a human being. Secondly “to be” and “to do” are being mixed up. These kind of grammatical errors are a characteristic of Lolspeak. “Sage” refers to the act of posting a message without bumping a thread on 4chan, as can be read on their Frequently Asked Questions page: “Entering “sage” (by itself) into the [E-mail] field while replying will cause the thread not to bump to the top of the page, while still counting against its reply count.”<sup>32</sup>

While capital letters usually serve to add emphasis to a word or phrase in Netspeak, we notice capitalization has been given a new function. It is used to mock excitement and clueless behaviour. This illustrates the strong gap between the “leet” and the “noobs”. The former are still trying to protect their obscure group and exclude inexperienced newcomers. Words are not capitalized in a conventional way. We would expect to see either the initial letter of a word or the entire word in capitals. Instead we notice that any letter can be capitalized

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.4chan.org/faq.php>

randomly. First person singular “I” is often written in minuscule, a trend which can be spotted in all types of online or electronic communication.

### 5.2.7 Abbreviations

63. “Did you even read what I said? I sad stalling the engine is no more damaging than shutting it off normally. Hence not damaging at all. Lrn2read.”  
Anonymous - 02/29/08 – 4chan

64. “Lol what? no one is bagging on their sense of style. Even though most of them are idiots who try too hard to be esoteric. L2read.”  
Anonymous - 02/22/08 – 4chan

“Lrn2read” and “L2read” both stand for “learn to read”. Learn is shortened to “lrn” or “l,” while “to” is replaced with the number “2”. Both of these and the verb which they accompany, are written without spacing (intentional typographical error). A member has to be familiar with this phenomenon in order to understand its meaning. The board is once again divided into the in-crowd and the outsiders. The fact that there is no spacing, makes it harder to decipher. The second example also includes the acronym “lol”.

65. That doesn't do shit when there's camera shake.

lrn2holdcamera  
Anonymous - 02/18/08 – 4chan

Based on the previous expressions, the remark added in the end of this message should be read as “learn to hold a camera”. The abbreviation of “learn to X” is a popular phenomenon on 4chan, but cannot be found on the other two message boards. It should therefore not be regarded as Leetspeak, but as a craze, a habit confined to one board.

66. “gb2/b/plz”  
Anonymous - 02/28/08 – 4chan

“Gb” is an initialism for “Go Back.” The number “2” stands for “to”, while “plz” replaces “please”. The author of this message is asking another user to please go back to /b/, which is a subforum of 4chan in which random topics can be discussed. Again the lack of spacing between different words makes the interpreting this message more difficult.

67. “ITT your favorite hockey team

Picture \*VERY\* related (no Zednik jokes plzkthx)”  
Anonymous - 02/20/08 – 4chan

“ITT” stands for “In This Topic.” The user is asking the other members to post pictures of their favourite hockey team in the thread. He adds that the picture he has attached to his message is very related or “on topic”, meaning that the picture features his favourite hockey team. The emphasis is on “very”, because it is written in capital letters and surrounded with asterisks. “Plzkthx” actually consists of three words, though there are no spaces left between them. It can be rephrased as: “Please? Okay? Thanks.”

68. “Laten we het nu allemaal onthouden. Voor eens en voor altijd.  
Kkthxbye”  
Teunerd – 06-22-07 – Filologica Forum

“K” is often used in combination with “thx”. The repetition of “k” in this extract might represent Korean laughter imitation, though it is more likely the author uses it merely as a repetition of the abbreviation of “okay”.

Abbreviations are often associated with Leetspeak, though their genesis is more closely related to general language use on the Internet. Some abbreviations are used widely, while others are restricted to a certain message board.

### 5.2.8 *Lol, I lolled for the lulz*

69. “lol you made them in paint and didn't manage to fit the pic right so you get HUGE  
white parts on your pics rofl”  
Anonymous - 02/13/08 – 4chan

70. “lol you are angry at the internet”  
Anonymous - 02/18/08 – 4chan

71. lol, i hope this thread is a troll  
Anonymous - 12/21/07 – 4chan

All of these extracts contain the acronym “lol”. The first one also contains “rofl”. The acronyms indicate that the author is laughing, or thinks something is funny. They make up for the lack of body language in online communication. The author from the last message thinks a certain thread is ridiculous, and expresses his opinion by stating that he hopes the thread is a troll, meaning written for non-serious reasons. The use of capitals in the first extract emphasizes the huge size of the white parts on the picture.

72. “lulz@ car 'facts' from top gear, do you get your news from the sun?”

Anonymous - 02/18/08 – 4chan

73. “Doesn't it balance itself out with Japan's overfishing?”

Really, lulz.”

Anonymous - 01/10/08 – 4chan

74. “Mijn zeldzame notities die aantonen dat, als ik in de les raak 's morgens, er eigenlijk niet zou moeten zitten omdat ik te moe ben. Zo las ik daarnet bijvoorbeeld: *"Women yous more tag questions."* Lawl”

Woody – 10/26/04 – Filologica forum

While “lol” is an expression often used in online communication, “lulz” or “lawl” are variants used only by Leetspeakers. When you are only joking and are not taking a matter seriously, you “are doing it for the lulz”. In this expression “lulz” is used as a noun.

75. “Meet The Spartans looks so fucking win.

Aw, it's Happy Feet

WHO YOU CALLIN HAPPY CRACKA!

I lol irl everytime @ that.”

Anonymous - 01/06/08 – 4chan

76. “i lol'd and i don't know why”

Anonymous - 12/30/07 – 4chan

77. “I lawl'd because it's true.”

Anonymous - 02/17/08 – 4chan

78. “Good movie. I've downloaded it without knowing anything about film and enjoyed Keys and loled at Affleck.”

Anonymous - 02/13/08 – 4chan

79. “I like the songs "My Only" and the cover of "Milkshake". I loled the first time I heard that song.”

The Last Firstborn. – 02/03/08 - Geekstinkbreath

80. “I lolled quite hard.”

Michiel – 12/01/05 – Filologica forum

The acronym “lol” or its equivalent “lawl” can be used as a verb as well. The past tense can be spelled out in different ways: either with an apostrophe “lol'd” or without “loled”. The

doubling of the “l” can be found as well: “lolloed”. In the first extract of this series, “win” is used as an adjective.

The acronym “lol” usually obtains an initial or final position. It is becoming less and less associated with the original phrase “laughing out loud” and is becoming an expression in itself. It can even be used as a noun or a verb. “Lol” and its equivalents occur in abundance, so readers will not be flabbergasted when a member is claiming to be “rolling on the floor” once again. It seems the excessive presence of these sort of acronyms in online communication has desensitized people. If a member wants his words to have a larger impact, he can turn to the absurd blends “lollercoaster,” “lollerskates” or even “roflcopter”. These hardly ever go by unnoticed. Or he can avoid the risk of face-loss and simply draw more attention to his words by repeating a syllable: “roflololololol”.

81. “stare at the sun ofzoiets van thrice is best mooi. Heb hier zelfs ergens een vergeten cd liggen . lololol”  
Nemelendelle – 01/18/08 – Filologica forum

#### 5.2.9 *The etymology of “w00t”*

82. “w00t! I might make a special birthday graphic!”  
bjtp – 08/23/07 – Geekstinkbreath
83. “Ik zit al op pagina 21 van de “Basiscursus InDesign CS”, w00t.”  
Teunerd – 07/08/08 – Filologica forum

Some claim “woot” or “w00t” is an acronym for “We Owned the Other Team”<sup>33</sup>, or in other words: “we have beaten the other team gloriously”. It was therefore a highly context-related expression, used only in games. Most people using it on message boards are unaware of that connotation. They use it to express general feelings of excitement or unexpected joy. In this case, we notice a trend which Karl Sornig called the “eclipse of etymological memory”. (Sornig, 12) People tend to forget what words originally signified, which causes semantic change.

Others believe the previous explanation is an example of “etymological fallacy”. They claim the phrase “We Owned the Other Team” is a “backronym”, which means it was constructed after the word had come into existence. Such errors are called folk etymology or popular

<sup>33</sup> The second definition on Urban Dictionary (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/>): “w00t was originally an acronym for “we owned other team” but used 1337\$P34|< for some of the letters(w00t instead of woot). It is now commonly used as an interjection of joy.”

etymology: people try to guess where words come from, but are often mistaken. Lexicographer Grant Barrett posted an entry dedicated to the term “woot” on his award winning blog “Double-Tongued Dictionary”. He says “woot” has been around before Leetspeakers started to use it. “After a couple of examples of “whoot” or “woot” as an onomatopoeic representation of video game sounds in news stories from 1982, the earliest clear-cut use of the word found so far is in the name of the Atlantic City, N.J., entertainment tabloid *The Whoot!* [...] Current *AC Weekly* editor Michael Epifanio says that *The Whoot* was so-named by founder Lew Steiner after “night owls who would pull all-nighters to scout out the bars, clubs and restaurants and then send the publication out to print.” (Barrett, online) According to Barrett, another theory with little adherents is that “Woot” is a blend of “Wow, loot!” or “Wondrous loot,” expressions from games like “Dungeons and Dragons” and “Everquest”. He suggests that the word originated in the dance scene: “The most likely explanation, as is usually the case, is far simpler. *Woot* is, with some caveats, probably derived from and most likely popularized by the dance catch phrase of 1993, “whoot, there it is!” In clubs and on dance floors across the country, in half-time shows and in baseball stadiums, “whoot, there it is” and plain old “woot!” were shouted long and loud by millions. It was used by hype men at hip-hop shows, dancers and cheerleaders at ball games, DJs at discos, and probably by ball-callers at bingos.” (Barrett, online)

Unfortunately pinpointing one clarification and accepting it as the universal truth is impossible, as is often the case when dealing with etymological enigmas. Whether it originated in multiplayer games or in the music industry, the fact remains that gamers contributed to the spreading of “woot”. The popularity of the variant “w00t,” in which the vowels are replaced with numbers, proves that Leetspeak played an important role. One could wonder why the word was spread via computer-mediated communication, if it in fact originated from popular dance music. This could lead us to accepting the gaming theory rather than Barrett’s suggestion. One of the obstacles in this discussion is the lack of sources. When trying to find out whether “woot” was used on IRC channels before songs like “Whoot, there it is” were released, we need larger archives. Many of the conversations on IRC have been lost forever, because they were not recorded at the time.

The discussion on the etymology of “woot” was heated when it was named word of the year in December 2007 by Merriam-Webster: “Thousands of you took part in the search for Merriam-Webster’s Word of the Year for 2007, and the vast majority of you chose a small word that packs a pretty big punch. The word you’ve selected hasn’t found its way into a



regular Merriam-Webster dictionary yet—but its inclusion in our online *Open Dictionary*, along with the top honors it's now been awarded—might just improve its chances.”<sup>34</sup>

1. W00t	6. Sardoodledom
2. Facebook	7. Apathetic
3. Conundrum	8. Pecksniffian
4. Quixotic	9. Hypocrite
5. Blamestorm	10. Charlatan

Table 5.1: Top Ten List “Word of the year” in 2007, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>, retrieved on 07/14/08

### 5.2.10 Generalization of pwning n00bs

84. Hey man I'm just giving advice to the n00b.  
Anonymous - 01/26/08 – 4chan

85. How are they a newb? Really high and mighty of you to assume that they don't know anything about ferrets. How do you know that ferret didn't get into something sticky or gross?  
Get a life.  
Anonymous - 01/26/08 – 4chan

86. I am a noob at photography ( and will not pretend otherwise) just wanted to thank some of you here as lurking /p/<sup>35</sup> has helped me gain knowledge in this field  
Anonymous - 02/18/08 - 4chan

87. GGGGGGRRRRRRRR i hatez being a noob, i used to have an account but i lost it, i dont know what happened to it, and i honestly forgot the name of it (XD)  
theGDfan94SG – 03/19/08 – Geekstinkbreath

Whereas a “n00b” was originally someone new and inexperienced in gaming or Leetspeak, the word has now gained a broader meaning. It can be spelled as “noob” or “newb” as well. Extract number 87 contains a lot of Netspeak characteristics: sound imitation (the capitalized “GGGGGGRRRRRRRR”), the lack of proper capitalization (the first person singular pronoun “I” is not capitalized), the lack of punctuation (no apostrophe in “don’t” and no period at the end of the phrase) and the use of smileys (“XD” represents a face with eyes closed while broadly smiling). The construction of the sentence is rather dubious, it seems to reflect the stream of thoughts. The verb “to hate” is not conjugated correctly: the morpheme “z” (replacing “s”) is an indicator of the third person singular, though the subject is first person

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/info/07words.htm>

<sup>35</sup> The board on 4chan dedicated to photography

singular. This grammatical error is a reflection of the fact that the author is a (self-proclaimed) noob.

88. “There might be some people who know me from INO<sup>36</sup>.  
I know message board etiquette and everything after being on INO over a year, so you don’t have to worry about another n00b coming in to the boards.”  
schmetallica. – 03/24/08 – Geekstinkbreath

Noobs are usually not welcomed with open arms on message boards. They are unfamiliar with netiquette, or etiquette on the Web. For example, newcomers might not realize that messages written entirely in capitalized letters are read as “shouting” and can therefore come across as “insulting” or “rude”.

89. “yeah, so I got first post and I pwn you all”  
Meski – 03/28/08 – Geekstinkbreath

On message boards it is considered an achievement to “get first post” or be the first one to reply. The author has therefore “pwned” the other members.

90. “Ik heb het weer eens geflikt. Trojan horses, spyware, malware, foutmeldingen, en nog van dat leuks, hebben m'n pc weer naar de kloten geholpen.  
Iemand nog van recente wondermiddelen gehoord? Een veilig internet bvb?  
  
Altijd owned by self als het op informatica aankomt.”  
Woody – 01/20/08

Semantic changes can be spotted when we look at the use of the words “own” and “noob”. A “noob” is no longer a novice at gaming, but could be new at anything: a new member on the board, a recently started photographer,... The term can also refer to people who are ignorant in certain areas. In gaming you “own” someone by defeating them in a humiliating way. In a more general usage, you can “own” someone by giving a sarcastic remark or pointing out their mistakes. There need not always be an external force: you can get “owned” by yourself when you do something to make a fool out of yourself. You can get owned by inanimate objects as well: for example when your computer crashes just when you are about to save an important document. Initially these terms belonged to the gaming word, but they were later gained a broader meaning. This is called extension or generalization: “A lexeme widens its meaning. Numerous examples of this process have occurred in the religious field, where

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<sup>36</sup> Probably referring to the message board from “I’m Not Okay,” a fan site dedicated to the band “My Chemical Romance): <http://www.imnotokay.net/>

*office, doctrine, novice* and many other terms have taken on a more general, secular range of meanings.” (Crystal: 2003, 138)

### 5.2.11 Morpheme “-zor”

91. “Ik vind de affiche pretty fucking rox0r, en ga bijgevolg vrij tot zeer zeker.”

Fred Astaire – 04/20/08 – Filologica forum

92. “the wipers - telepathic love, awmgadzorz”

photek - 12/27/04 – Filologica forum

In these extracts the suffix “-zor” or “-z0r” is added to respectively an adjective and an abbreviation. The verb “to rock” is used as an adjective, to which the suffix is then added: “rockz0r”. The combination of the vowels in the middle of the word is replaced with the letter “x,” because they are both pronounced in the same way. “Awmgad” stands for “oh my god”.

### 5.2.12 The awesomeness

93. “I meant to say I like your taste. The pins are le awesome.”

Anonymous - 02/22/08 – 4chan

94. “Im new, so I apologise for the newbieness off my profile etc etccc.

I Looooove Billie Joe – He is le awesome.”

lawrawwr – 03/12/2008 – geekstinkbreath

In both of these extracts the French article “le” is used in front of the adjective “awesome”. They enhance the degree of the adjective’s quality, and could be replaced with “very”. In the second extract “newbie” is combined with the suffix “-ness”. All of these features belong to Leetspeak. In the following extracts “-ness” is added to “awesome” and “nice,” turning them into nouns. The capitals in extract 95 are used for emphasis and to express excitement.

95. THIS IS NOW THE NEW LEVEL OF AWESOMENESS!

Anonymous - 07/18/08- 4chan

96. “Het tegen alle verwachtingen in gisteren nog vrij laat maken met allerlei ongein. Niceness.”

Siddhartha – 07/13/02 – Filologica Forum

“Awesome” can be used as a noun without any morphological changes as well, as can be seen in extract 97. The verb “win” is converted into a noun as well.

97. they are made of awesome and win.

Anonymous - 02/17/08 – 4chan

### 5.2.13 Paralanguage

98. “They all have their strengths and weaknesses.

"PS3 is superior" is a subjective, and therefore not logical statement to win an argument.

/thread.”

Anonymous - 07/13/08 – 4chan

99. “The Condemned sounds like a rip off of the movie Battle Royal. now thats a good movie [/spam]”

Neosteph – 10/05/07 - Geekstinkbreath

100. “mine too.

IT WAS RIGGED I SAY...../caps”

Chris Fafalios – 05/18/08 - Geekstinkbreath

Leetspeakers make use of tags in order to indicate the beginning and the end of something. When the opening tag is dropped, we can assume that the opening tag coincides with the beginning of the message. As is shown in the extracts above, the angle brackets can be dropped or be replaced with square brackets. In the first extract the author thinks he has beaten his opponents, resulting in the end of the discussion and therefore the end of the thread. The author in the following extract realizes that the message is off-topic. By adding “[/spam]” to the message, the author indicates that he will return “on topic” after the post. The use of these tags require some basic knowledge on the principles of HTML. The tags have become more popular among internet users and are now used more widely. A large group of people using them lack any knowledge on HTML, resulting in the production of various erroneous constructions. In the first extract below “end” is superfluous, because the stroke already indicates the end of the action. In the second extract the opening tag should not contain a stroke.

101. “Family guy pwns!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! [end exclamation mark abuse]

Swooney Todd. – 01/10/2006

102. “[/ironie] Of wij ook tijd voor andere vakken nodig hebben? Maar neen hoor! [/ironie]”

Netje – 05/20/08 – The Filologica Forum

## 6. Leetspeak beyond the internet.

As stated before, Leetspeak can never fully be transmitted to oral language. Its development was marked by the use of keyboards and this has left an indelible mark on the slang. However, in the future the Leetspeak lexicon might at one point be accepted in dictionaries. Some words are already being used in oral language. In the episode “Make love not Warcraft” (season 10, episode 8) of the animated series “Southpark” several characters use Leetspeak. The episode is dedicated to the game “World of Warcraft”.

Randy: I have a Warcraft character. I'm a newb, but I can log on and get the sword to Stan online.

[...]

Cartman: Looks like you're about to get pwned.

(<http://www.planearium2.de/scripts-1008.htm>)

“W00t” was chosen word of the year by Merriam-Webster, which improves its chance to be accepted in official dictionaries. In 2006 the verb “to google” reached second place in that year’s poll . It can now be found in the Oxford English Dictionary:

To Google, v:

1. *intr.* To use the Google search engine to find information on the Internet.
2. *trans.* To search for information about (a person or thing) using the Google search engine.

<http://www.oed.com>

The company “Google,” however, did not applaud the verb’s admittance to the dictionary. “Google's problem is one of the paradoxes of having a runaway successful brand. The bigger it gets, the more it becomes part of everyday English language and less a brand in its own right. Just as we talk about "hoovering" instead of vacuuming, people have started to say "google" to mean search. The word has become an eponym.” (Duffy, online) In February 2003, Paul McFedries, received a mail (see below) from a trademark counsel after publicly posting a definition of “to google” on his website. McFedries is the owner of wordspy (<http://www.wordspy.com>), a site which keeps track of new words and phrases.

Dear Mr. McFedries:

I am trademark counsel for Google. I have recently become aware of a definition of "google" on your website, [www.wordspy.com](http://www.wordspy.com). This definition implies that "google" is a verb synonymous with "search." Please note that Google is a trademark of Google Technology Inc. Our brand is very important to us, and as I'm sure you'll understand, we want to make sure that when people use "Google," they are referring to the services our company provides and not to Internet searching in general. I attach a copy of a short, informative piece regarding the proper use of "Google" for your reference.

We ask that you help us to protect our brand by deleting the definition of "google" found at wordspy.com or revising it to take into account the trademark status of Google.

(<http://listserv.linguistlist.org/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0302D&L=ads-l&P=R2450>)

The current wordspy article on the verb contains the following note: "Note that Google™ is a trademark identifying the search technology and services of Google Technologies Inc."

(<http://www.wordspy.com/words/google.asp>).

## 7. Conclusion

Slang arises out of fear, secretiveness and playfulness. All of these factors indeed played a role in the case of Leetspeak. Hackers feared to get caught by word filters and invented a new alphabet. Leetspeak then further developed and became a tool with which gamers and hackers distinguished themselves from others. The secret code created a gap between their subculture and the outsiders. As the popularity of Leetspeak increased, more and more people were able to crack the code. Now Leetspeak is primarily used because it "makes things sound funny". People love playing around with language, and Leetspeak gives them an opportunity to do so. A second function of the slang is its decorative aspect. Gamers use the Leet alphabet to embellish their nicknames. Haters find the use of Leetspeak on message boards irritating and see it as a deterioration of language. Another way of looking at it, is that it used precisely by those who are well aware of language and its different functions. Moreover, many of the accusations are based on misconceptions about Leetspeak. It is important that we distinguish between Leetspeak, Netspeak, Lolspeak and AOL speak.

The most striking feature of Leetspeak is its alphabet. The new alphabet is limited by hardware and software. Firstly you are bound to the series of characters your keyboard provides you with. Secondly, the programme you are using needs to recognize the symbols.

Any given letter from the Roman alphabet can be replaced with any other character or a series of characters. The replacement of the letters is based on similarity in either typography or sound. The number “3” can replace “e” because it looks like a reversed capital “E,” and with a little bit of imagination we can see a capital “E” in the following combination of a square bracket and hyphen: “[–”. Both of these can therefore be used to substitute for the letter “e,” but both will never occur in one single message. You have to be consistent when translating a message into Leetspeak, and can therefore type either “r3sp3ct” or “r[-sp[-ct,” but never “r3sp[-ct”. “Ph” on the other hand replaces “f” because of their similar pronunciation. Because of the fact that several characters can represent on single letter, the Leet code is rather dubious. At times it is hard to tell where one letter stops and another one begins. The reversed process is more rare: there are few occasions in which a combination of letters is replaced with one character. Examples are the “f” replacing “ph” or “x” replacing “cks”, both of which are based on similarity in sound. The most popular replacing characters are the numbers, in particular “0,” “1,” “3” and “4,” equivalents of respectively “o,” “i,” “e” and “a”. Soft Leetspeak, in which only a limited number of letters are exchanged (usually for numbers), is used more frequently on message boards. Hardcore Leetspeak is harder to decipher and its translation process takes up more time.

One of the most common misconceptions concerning Leetspeak is that its encoding is confused with rebus writing. This is a process in which syllables or entire words are replaced with a single character, for example “u” for “you” or “2” for “to”. The purpose of rebus writing is saving time, which does not coincide with the aims of Leetspeak. People who disapprove of rebus writing think it is a demonstration of laziness and carelessness. Phonetic spelling is often mistaken for Leetspeak as well. Words are being written in the way which they are pronounced, for example “nite” instead of “night”.

A second feature which characterizes the Leetspeak spelling, are typographical errors. Hackers deliberately put typo’s in their texts for the same reason they encoded their messages: escaping word filters. For example the term “pron” instead of “porn” would not be picked up by filters. There has always been a strong desire in people to mention linguistic taboos, but at the same time there was fear of crossing the interdiction of naming certain things. In the case of hackers, the fear was not so much social stigma, but getting caught during illegal activities. Two types of intentional typo’s are legion on message boards: those caused by neighbouring keys and inverted strikes. An illustration of the former is the swapping of “o” and “p”. On an azerty keyboards the key for “o” and the key for “p” are placed next to each other. It is therefore not uncommon to accidentally mix up these two letters. The most popular inverted

typing is “teh” instead of “the”. Other common inverted typo’s are found in words consisting of one syllable and ending in “-e”: “tiem” for “time” or “liek” for “like”. The incorrect use of the shift key, resulting in alternation between upper-case and lower-case letters can also be rated among typographical errors. A striking consequence of shift lock abuse is the replacing of the exclamation mark with the number “1” or “8”. On an azerty keyboard the exclamation mark and the number “8” are placed on the same key, while it is combined with “1” on a qwerty keyboard. Again this feature of spelling is influenced by hardware: typographical errors are first of all a characteristic of typography and secondly the nature of the typo’s depend on the preferences of your keyboard (azerty or qwerty).

When gamers started to use the Leetspeak alphabet in online games, IRC channels and message boards, the slang began to grow. It developed its own lexicon and grammatical features. The slang was preserved for an exclusive group, also called “the elite” or “leet”. They used it to distinguish themselves from the newcomers or “noobs”. Originally a “noob” was a novice at gaming, but eventually this term was generalized and could refer to any kind of newcomer. “Leet” can be used as an adjective to describe anything that is technologically superior or considered to be of good quality. A person who is “leet” is someone with a lot of (computer) knowledge. In this context it is a synonym for “hax”. This term is derived from the verb “to hack”. Whereas in standard language use “hacker” receives a bad connotation, it is used as a compliment in Leetspeak environments. The verb “to own” is given a new definition. It is used in games when someone is defeated in a humiliating way. Eventually this term also gained a broader meaning: you can “own” someone simply by humiliating them.

The difference between Leetspeak lexicon and Netspeak neologisms relies in the acceptance in standard language. The Netspeak vocabulary is being accepted in “ordinary” dictionaries. However, like any other slang lexicon, some of the Leetspeak vocabulary might be included in dictionaries in some point in the future. This acceptance depends on popularization. “Woot,” an interjection used to express excitement or joy, was voted “word of the year” on the site of Merriam-Webster in 2007. The verb “to google” received second place in a similar poll from Merriam-Webster the year before. Meanwhile, “to google” has been accepted into the Oxford English Dictionary. The winning position of “woot” enhances its chances to end up in official dictionaries. Though the Leetspeak lexicon is being transmitted to oral language use, and might at one point even be accepted in standard language use, true Leetspeak is in some way bound to written communication. One of its main characteristics is the special alphabet, which is completely lost in oral language use.



Though lexicon and spelling are the main areas in which Leetspeak stands out, some grammatical novelties characterize the slang as well. Firstly, a new morpheme has been created: “-zor” or “-xor”. These suffixes do not cause word class conversion, nor influence the semantic features of a word. They do seem to enhance the degree of quality of the word they are attached to. Other elements which influence the degree of quality of adjectives are prefix “über-” and the article “the” or its French equivalent “le”. Word class conversion is obtained by means of suffixes “-ness” and “-age,” or simply without any morphological changes. Leetspeak should not be confused with Lolspeak, which is mainly characterized by grammatical errors, for example the erroneous conjugation of verbs.

Language is highly influenced by the medium it is used in. While the language in online communication on message boards resembles speech acts, there are some differences between this type of communication and face-to-face conversations. Extralinguistic features, such as emphasis and facial expressions are missing in online communication. People find new ways to overcome these lacks: smileys, capitalization, the use of asterisks to express action, sound imitations... These are general characteristics of Netspeak. Hackers started making use of HTML tags to indicate the beginning or ending of a certain mood or action. This phenomenon was eventually copied widely, and is now used on message boards as a new way of expressing extra-linguistic features.

Though abbreviations and acronyms are associated with Leetspeak, they are not a distinguishing feature of the slang. They are popular in any type of electronic communication, because they enhance typing speed. Leetspeakers’ fondness of abbreviations results not only from its time-saving advantage, but from its obscurity as well. A user has to be familiar with an abbreviation in order to understand it. In Leetspeak, abbreviations often occur in sequence, with or without spacing left between them.

Leetspeak used to be the secret language of hackers and “geeks,” but now it has evolved into the language of “residents” of the Internet.

## 8. Appendix

### Appendix A

Scoreboard overlay for a Counter-Strike: Source match. The scoreboard is titled "LOOSER - SERVER @Tip-Hosting". It lists players for Terrorists (7 players) and Counter-Terrorists (8 players). The columns are Score, Deaths, and Latency. The player "Gammern [or ol' man]" is highlighted in blue, indicating they are the player whose perspective is shown. The player "porcine:::" is marked as "Dead".

Team	Player	Score	Deaths	Latency
Terrorists - 7 players	Unleashed	37	4	88
	guzz	34	4	45
	Packman	8	2	61
	biernot	8	8	68
	porcine:::	5	11	87
	LiA.akn	2	2	83
	fuernarsch	0	1	120
	<b>Gammern [or ol' man]</b>	0	0	0
Counter-Terrorists - 8 players	Gammern [or ol' man]	22	5	92
	\$tink\$ock3	9	10	57
	photek	8	2	64
	==[JuMb0]==	6	9	49
	coldbecks	5	12	44
	Bullet Tony	5	13	88
	][34m = ][oLL 3In3R 4LL3!n m8\$	5	13	103
	NEO	2	11	136

Chat messages:

- photek : mh :D
- Time Remaining: 27:10
- (Counter-Terrorist) \$tink\$ock3 : == STATUS: Ak47 / M4A1 ==
- Time Remaining: 26:56
- Bullet Tony (RADIO): Stick together, team.

## Appendix B

**Orbit-ET.com Public#2**

	Score	Deaths	Latency
<b>Terrorists - 7 players</b>	0	85	
Mouse	4	6	119
.M.B:tuerie	3	1	104
[P@Ni()] Der Pate	2	6	75
[*PgS*]FrameKiller@suchennochme	1	1	48
[P@Ni()] Siech	1	6	127
Trantor	0	1	76
salvation	0	6	49
<b>Counter-Terrorists - 7 players</b>	6	78	
ceppch	20	1	52
knOr	6	3	56
Stonie	3	2	43
DynamO	3	2	105
[TB] The_werewolf	2	2	95
xx*KamikaZe*xx	0	0	56
IG@R	0	0	144
<b>Spectators</b>			
casper			

100.0 fps 17 ms  
in : 159 3.43 k/s  
out: 21 1.88 k/s  
loss: 0 choke: 4

30 | 50%

## Appendix C



**#atmosfear.be Public Cs Server**

	Score	Deaths	Latency
<b>Terrorists - 6 players</b>	12		84
photek	30	6	81
FaCi	16	12	75
Dc.Khaldora	8	2	82
Abarth	8	4	75
Dc.deuS	7	1	78
Ch@ll3ng3r [N33D CL@N]	0	1	115
<b>Counter-Terrorists - 8 players</b>	1		87
SpITFire	16	22	75
Wiki	9	5	72
sTs	8	21	88
slam!	7	3	75
Druif	3	9	68
Golden_dragon	3	11	72
Visitor	3	12	79
Caneir4	0	1	170
<b>Spectators</b>			
HLTV Proxy			
a.beo <3 flexa			

Time Remaining: 16:13  
slam! : photek from 5gm ?  
FaCi (RADIO): Fire in the hole!  
Time Remaining: 16:03  
SpITFire : pure

100 47 0 2:52 14740

## Appendix D

Counter-Terrorists : 22    \$12075  
Terrorists : 51    1:00

games.skynet.be CS 1.6 2\_2

		Score	Deaths	Latency
<b>Terrorists - 7 players</b>		51		50
photek	Dead	21	4	54
GrosseBiroute	Dead	21	21	39
~>\$h0guN<~	Dead	19	20	47
LooserD07	Dead	11	3	54
ptitman	Dead	1	3	48
richa		0	0	74
Killer007	Dead	0	1	39
<b>Counter-Terrorists - 5 players</b>		22		52
ik ben een roxxor		21	17	55
Karschann is een roxor	Dead	14	16	37
J33t-Kun3-D0	Dead	7	17	104
Action Blood@GamerZ.be		2	4	37
Kest	Dead	1	9	27

Time Remaining: 1:46  
ik ben een roxxor chose cs\_assault  
Choosing finished. The nextmap will be cs\_assault  
Time Remaining: 1:31

ik ben een roxxor (23)



## Appendix E



## Appendix F

Counter-Terrorists : 0 \$16000  
Terrorists : 5 2:41

Urban-Assault-css.tk

	Score	Deaths	Latency
Terrorists - 12 players	5		46
[U][A]-The Pig	22	1	28
[U][A]-ICEMAN	12	0	70
[BiG] ACHILLE	6	2	28
Khura	5	2	41
Agent Chum Bucket	3	2	44
Schuby007	1	0	40
D3VISTAT3R	1	1	51
8*KingDaddy*8	1	3	52
tweed (Cyaegha)	0	0	42
boylerebels1	0	1	78
onooooo	0	1	43
Adanac	0	2	41
Counter-Terrorists - 12 players	0		54
EastSheridanJTB	7	6	18
金°Ł ĩęşŁŃ?Ł	5	5	58
[+B-Unit+ ]MadMax	4	6	62
[U][A]-Scenario	3	0	26
Death From Above	2	5	26
/i/i IRAGE?	2	5	71
ncxcstud	2	6	56
[+B-Unit+ ]DooM_47	1	4	55
BluePanther	0	1	78
kidney.thief	0	4	51
Peachball- :D	0	5	102
Mikeizzle	0	5	45
Spectator - 0 players			
«DemonWulf»			
[U][A]-VampeD			

\*DEAD\* ncxcstud :  
8\*KingDaddy\*8 (RA)

金°Ł ĩęşŁŃ?Ł (59)

<http://www.worldofpwnage.com/cspwnageguide.php>

## Appendix G

Counter-Terrorists : 10 \$14700  
Terrorists : 25 3:35

The A Team CS:S Clan Server

Team	Player	Score	Kills	Deaths	Assists
Terrorists - 4 players	[A-Team] Junk	Dead	25	43	
	[A-Team] - dh8.l0l	Dead	47	17	
	{«Crimson Diamonds»} 124c312	Dead	22	23	
	[A-Team] Someone1	Bomb	26	16	
Counter-Terrorists - 5 players	[A-Team] Shadow	10	50		
	OutIAw	37	27	45	
	PowerLoRd <Turk>	10	17	37	
	DaNg3rNuBz.	9	3	51	
	GuitarDude	2	5	31	

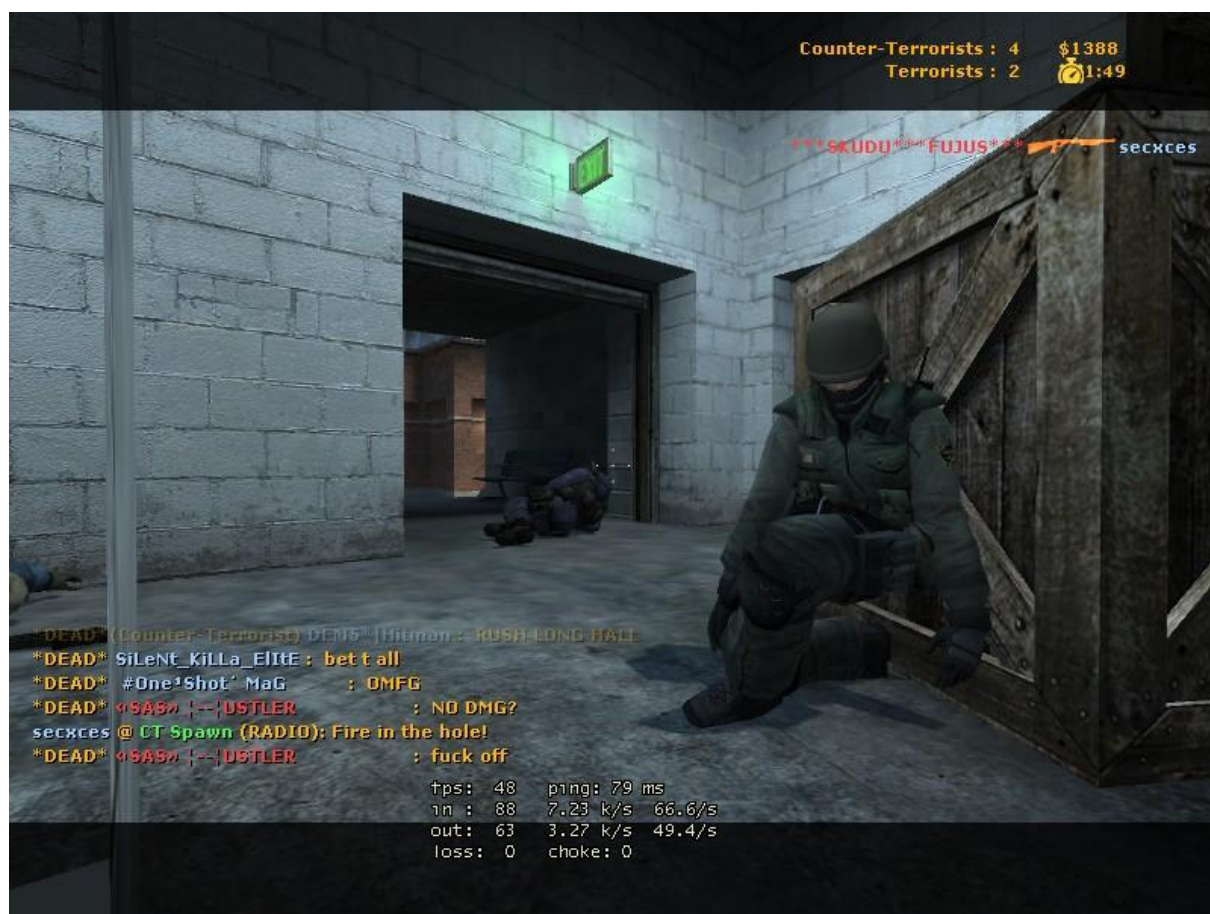
DaNg3rNuBz. c

fps: 59 ping: 56 ms  
in : 94 9.13 k/s 57.8/s  
out: 67 4.42 k/s 60.3/s  
loss: 0 choke: 0

<http://www.a-teamclan.com/media/screenshots/css.html>



## Appendix H



<http://www.a-teamclan.com/media/screenshots/css.html>

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