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DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH VOCABULARY: THE ANALYSIS OF GAMER
SLANG
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Kinnitus

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PREFACE

Video games have impacted many areas of people's lives: communication, culture, occupation, and so on. Today, video games are not a marginal past time activity; it is quite the opposite: many people worldwide play video games every day. Gamers use special slang to communicate with each other and exchange information faster. It helps, especially when gamers are involved in teamwork and cooperation. Suryanto and Setiawan (2016) state that generally, any slang is used to convey information faster in shorter sentences. Thus, playing video games leads to changes in the speech of gamers which may later transfer to general English, as well. Regarding vocabulary, such changes include coining of new words, or existing words acquiring a new meaning, as well as borrowing of words from other languages. When such new words appear in reputable dictionaries, it may be said that they have entered general English usage and, possibly, become part of Standard English. The aim of this research is to reveal the ways of coining of gamer slang terms (e.g. word formation, transference of meaning, borrowing). The second aim is to study which gamer slang terms have entered Standard English and why.

The research paper consists of four parts: the Introduction, two core chapters, and the Conclusion. The Introduction gives an overview of gaming as an essential part of the mainstream culture, provides gaming statistics, and describes the gaming community. It also includes the definition of a video game, types of video games, and considers the language of gaming. Chapter I *Neologisms as Part of Gamer Slang* concentrates on the concept of *neologism*, how and why new words appear in a language, and how they are formed. Chapter I also provides information about how neologisms can become Standard English and what it involves. Chapter II *Analysis of Word-formation Processes and Semantic Change in Gamer Slang* presents and discusses the findings of an empirical research into gamers slang. The Conclusion sums up the main theoretical and practical findings of the paper.

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INTRODUCTION

The Impact of Video Games on Mainstream Culture

Today, video games and gaming are an essential part of mainstream culture, i.e. culture which is shared and affected by a large number of people from various social strata, and transmitted via mass media (Zhao 2017). It can be seen, for instance, in the case of YouTube, an online video platform, which is the second most visited site in the world (Aslam 2021: para. 2). Many gamers upload their videos about gaming to YouTube (e.g., game guides and walkthroughs, etc.), while other gamers watch and comment on these videos. This platform helps to unite gamers all around the world. As of 2021, the most popular YouTube gamer is Pewdiepie, with 110 million subscribers.

Discussions of video games occur in many formats and places. For instance, children discuss video games on the playground, co-workers talk about them on their break, scientists do their research about video games. Social media (e.g., *Facebook*, *Twitter*) disseminate information (Nichols et al. 2016).

Video games also influence films, TV shows, and vice versa. *Hitman*, *Prince of Persia*, and *Warcraft* franchises are some examples of this case. The films based on these video games are *Hitman* (2007) and *Hitman: Agent 47* (2015), *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2010), *Warcraft* (2016). Usually, the plot in those films is not connected with the original games as the film directors can change it in their own way. However, video games make the film directors follow the personality and the appearance of the main characters, so they would be recognizable.

Video games based on films are often used to promote the film itself. For example, there are *Star Wars* games. Also, the companies that make animated films almost always release film-themed video games, such as *Shrek*, *Kung Fu Panda*, and other franchises. Usually, the names of the games are the same as the names of the films.

Video games do not bypass the music industry as well. An example of this is *K/DA*. *K/DA* is a virtual K-pop girl group, created by *Riot Games* to promote in-game purchasable “skins” in the wildly popular online battle game *League of Legends* (Lockyer 2018: para. 2). This band caught the attention of not only *League of Legends* players but also people who like K-

Pop and are completely unfamiliar with the game. As of 2021, the video for their first single, *POP/STARS*, has over 400 million views on YouTube.

The phenomenon of esports (electronic sports) is yet another proof of the video games impact on mainstream culture. Hamani and Sjöblom (2016: 211) define esports as “competitive (pro and amateur) video gaming that is often coordinated by different leagues, ladders and tournaments, and where players customarily belong to teams or other “sporting” organizations which are sponsored by various business organizations”. Furthermore, esports is streamed on such online platforms as Twitch and YouTube. Sometimes esports is even broadcasted in cinemas. This was the case of The 2018 EU League Championship Series. The broadcast of the Finals of this *League of Legends* Championship happened in Tallinn as well, in the Coca-Cola Plaza cinema, along with other cities of Europe. However, esports is not yet officially considered as sports (Chikish et al. 2019). It may change in the nearer future.

Gaming Community

By the end of 2020, there were approximately 2.69 billion gamers in the world (Gilbert 2020: para. 1). There is not any particular data about the number of Estonian gamers. However, the games that were the most popular in Estonia in 2020 were: *Grand Theft Auto V*, *The Sims 4*, *Euro Truck Simulator 2: Beyond The Baltic Sea*, *WRC 9*, and *Euro Truck Simulator 2* (Liivand 2021: para. 6).

Around the world, there are many local and international gaming communities, which are very different from each other. However, one thing that connects them is their interest in one specific game, game series, or genre. It is quite often that one player can be a part of multiple gaming communities. The members of the gaming communities can interact with each other directly while playing the game, or they can communicate on forums. Commonly, they also discuss something in comments about video game guides. However, direct communication of players in one game is possible only in the case of multiplayer online games. Then, the gamers use in-game chats or even voice chats. Everyone can become a part of the gaming community. In fact, every player that spends their time regularly on the particular game is a part of the gaming community, even if the player does not think about it explicitly. It is also partly because the players can spend money on the game, giving the developers of the game income. Their achievements and the time they spend in the game also add to the entire gaming statistics. In other words, every gamer is a member of at least one gaming community.

Types of Videogames

A video game itself is an electronic game that needs particular equipment to play (e.g., a keyboard and mouse, controller, etc.). The information about the game and the gaming itself are displayed on the screen (a computer or TV screen). Usually, the player controls the main character(s) of the game.

Video games can be offline (single-player) and online (multiplayer). Offline games provide the plot, which players can experience via the character(s). Online games can also provide the plot, however, several players are needed to play. Nevertheless, most online games are focused on the player's character, which can be customizable in appearance and/or can develop skills. The character with the most advanced skills has more advantages. A characteristic feature of online games is teamwork. All players must cooperate to fulfill the object of the game or confront the enemy team. It is also essential for esports mentioned above. Esports implies the opposition between the teams fighting for the first place in the tournament.

Video games are also divided into genres. There are many genres, for instance, adventure, action, role-playing, simulation. Genres also can be mixed to describe the particular game: gothic RPG (role-playing game), fantasy adventure, etc. (Ensslin 2011). One game can include in itself several genres simultaneously.

The Language of Gaming

The language needed in different video games is diverse and differs from one game to another, but, nevertheless, it has common features, one of which is terminology. Ensslin (2011) believes that theoretically, each game has its own language, however, natural languages are described by diversities (e.g., dialects). In that case all languages of video games should be considered as one, the language of gaming. The language of gaming is flexible. It changes under the influence of the gaming industry, as it is increasing in volume and new products emerge (Ensslin 2011). Compared to Standard English, the language of gaming is considered slang. Tereshchenko (2019: 146) claims that “slang is not considered to be a part of literary language, meaning the words and combinations that are not included into Standard English sublanguage and are not subject to the requirements of the modern literary norm.”

Spelling in the language of gaming is often deliberately incorrect. It is connected with two factors: firstly, fast transfer of information and secondly, players' wish to express feelings towards other players or a game as well as irony and sarcasm. For instance, when players want to say: "You too.", usually they write it as "u 2" or even "u2" due to the same pronunciation of these two phrases. Such spelling as in "get rekt", which means "get wrecked", is used to show the player's negative attitude towards another player. It is used in situations when one player beats another. Tereshchenko (2019: 146) provides an example of a mocking phrase "git gud", which means "get good".

According to Nichols et al. (2016: 106) "players learn to speak their desires through a codified vocabulary through which they can legitimate not only their interest in games but themselves as gamers." Gamers have introduced quite a few new words into English. Some gaming words can be spelled correctly in line with Standard English, yet their meaning might be different. Tereshchenko (2019: 146) gives an example of the word "uninstall." When players use this word, it implies that someone's skills are not enough to play the game efficiently, and they propose to delete the game. It is a case of a change of meaning of existing English words.

New words can also be made by coinage, which involves various types of word-formation, such as blending and compounding, for example. For instance, "speedrunning" means to play a game and complete it as fast as possible. It involves skipping cutscenes and finding shortcuts that were not intended for ordinary playing (e.g., jumping through the textures). A player who speedruns the game is called a "speedrunner."

There are also borrowings from other languages in used by gamers. "Juggernaut" is a word that comes from Hindi. Cambridge online dictionary (n.d.) lists as one of its meanings "a large powerful force or organization that cannot be stopped". Juggernauts, in video games, are typically characters who are not easy to defeat. They have got tremendous stamina and strength. They can take enormous damage, but they can also be an extreme threat to the player. Usually, a whole team or a certain strategy is needed to defeat a juggernaut.

New words or phrases that enter the language are called neologisms. Neologisms occur with the development of different fields of human activities, such as technology, science, discoveries, cultural and social changes, and are formed in various ways are formed in various ways. They can be borrowed from other languages, coined anew, or result from a

change of meaning of existing words. The gaming world also contributes to the occurrence of neologisms in English.

It appears that not much research has been done previously into the language of gaming and particularly gamers' slang. However, an example of such research, called *Video games slang*, was conducted by Tereshchenko (2019). The author concluded that gamer's slang is used for convenience and emotional expressivity. In addition, the author claims that gamers use their language outside the context of gaming to communicate with other members of the same gaming community. This way, being used in a wider context, neologisms enter the language and may become part of the Standard English words in time. In addition, two more authors studied the language of MMOGs (Massively Multiplayer Online games). Chien (2019) particularly studied vocabulary in Minecraft gameplay. The author concluded that L2 learners can enhance their vocabulary greatly by playing Minecraft. Bawa (2018) studied the corpus of MMOGs gamers. The author mentioned that Minecraft gamers created a special jargon.

Two former students of Narva College of the University of Tartu have also studied previously topics connected with the language of gaming and internet slang. Titov (2016) focused more on the vocabulary of the language of gaming. He analyzed whether the participants of his survey were familiar with the gaming terms and if they use them in real life. Titov (2016) concluded that "58% of respondents declared that they could use words from survey in real life". He also revealed that the terms that were chosen by the respondents are not connected to a particular game. Lilenko (2013) studied the word-formation and semantics of English internet slang and memes and their impact on Russian. His analysis aimed to discover which processes (semantic and word-formation) are mostly used based on internet slang and memes. He revealed that these processes are: abbreviation, shortening and semantic shift.

The topic of this research has not been studied broadly yet. Nevertheless, video games are part of mainstream culture, and they constantly evolve. With their development, gaming community also contribute new words into English, and then these may enter Standard English. This research brings attention to the language of gaming, vocabulary in particular, and its impact on Standard English.

The research questions of the paper are:

- 1) How are gaming slang terms coined in English?
- 2) Which gaming slang terms have entered Standard English?

CHAPTER I. NEOLOGISMS AS PART OF GAMER SLANG

1.1 The Definition of Neologism

To begin with, it is important to define the concept of *neologism*, which was briefly mentioned in the Introduction. The Russian educational journal *Textologia* (n.d.) defines *neologism* as “a word or an expression created to denote a new concept.” After the word is in widespread use, it is no longer considered a neologism. The journal mentions that some neologisms can be purely stylistic. For instance, they appear in the author’s work and are used there to emphasize some details. Usually, such neologisms stay in the author's work and do not enter into the widespread usage by the language speakers. Cambridge online dictionary (n.d.) defines *neologism* as “a new word or expression, or a new meaning for an existing word.”

New concepts occur because of changing human activities. Technology, science, medicine, discovering new fields, and others — all introduce neologisms to the language. For instance, the word “computer” in the meaning of an electronic machine was once a neologism. Today, it is the word of widespread use. One of the modern neologisms in the field of technology and science is “climate tech”. According to Cambridge online dictionary (2021: para. 5), “climate tech” is the use of technology to create suitable conditions and/or products that will help humankind to adapt to climate change. Perhaps, this term will become standard English as climate change is the current problem.

The lifespan of some neologisms is quite short, and is more continuous of others. As mentioned above, it depends on what kind of neologism it is. Stylistic neologisms usually stay in the book (if the field of the potential use of neologism is too narrow). They also do not need a definition. The reader can understand what the word means because it can be easily deduced from the context, is strongly connected with the plot, or is made up with several words that are used widely. However, some authors have managed to create neologisms that are used in Standard English today. White (n.d.) mentions that O. Henry created the term “banana republic” in his book *Cabbages and Kings*. “Banana republic” means a country that has high poverty rate, the industry that it heavily depends on (e.g., banana industry), and other problem connected with politics, such as corruption, destabilized government. This term is used today mainly by journalists and economists to show the

disapproval of the situation in a certain country and has a negative connotation. It is why, officially, there are not any countries that are considered to be banana republics. However, such situation described by the term exists in many countries.

Ordinary (non-stylistic) neologisms are created by researchers of different areas and general users of the language. However, it does not mean that such neologisms have a higher chance to adapt to the language and become Standard English. Some people find that neologisms only spoil the language with unnecessary concepts which can be explained with other words (Cozianu 2014). Perhaps such “more traditional” explanation could be rather long, but it has all the words that are already familiar and used in the language constantly. Despite this, neologisms are in demand, which is proven by their existence and constant emergence of new words in dictionaries. They are in demand especially when the language lacks even the slightest idea of a new concept. If a neologism is stopped being used and does not become Standard English, then it can be concluded that it was not so necessary in the beginning. It means that the language can handle the concept with the words that are long accepted as the norm.

1.2 Standard English

The next concept that is crucial in this paper is the term “Standard English”. According to *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary (n.d.) Standard English is English that has proper grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Despite this, it still has regional differences, which are also acceptable. It is used in formal and informal speech and writing by the educated and it is widely recognized. Intrinsically, Standard English is a literary norm.

There is also non-standard English. The difference is that Standard English does not include slang words, deliberate incorrect spelling, abbreviations in the text (like as soon as possible is short “asap”), etc. Non-standard English is often used in informal conversations or on the Internet (e.g., friend texting).

When neologisms enter the language, they often fit the description of non-standard English. One of the examples in the gamers’ world can be the word “sus”. “Sus” is the shortening for suspicious. It is considered to be a slang word. “Sus” appeared to be used widely after the game *Among Us* became popular during the pandemic (Merriam-Webster online dictionary; n.d.). There are crewmates in this game, and one of them is an impostor. The crewmates must finish the tasks or identify the impostor to win. So when the behavior of one of the crewmates

is “sus”, it means that other crewmates think they are an impostor. The gamers use “sus” in everyday life as well. For instance, they can describe that the situation as “sus”. It means it is not trustworthy. “Sus” can also be used for describing people. It also means that some people are not trustworthy, or they try to hide something.

The chances of such words entering Standard English are unknown. However, Standard English is changing by constantly adding new vocabulary. The frequent use of neologisms in speech improves the chances of the words becoming Standard English. The language is determined by its native speakers. Lexicographers merely make edits about which words are used widely and which disappear entirely. For example, the word “brunch” (breakfast and lunch) is used by the language speakers. It is not a neologism anymore but Standard English.

Some neologisms can enter the language if they are connected with terminology. Then they are used by the specialists of the particular (professional) field like scientists, businessmen, artists, etc. It is still Standard English but with narrower use. For instance, the term “data mining” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary n.d.) means analyzing a large amount of data of one user to find their preferences, patterns.

To enter Standard English a neologism should be used frequently by speakers. It is also essential that it appears in English dictionaries that are trustworthy (e.g., Oxford, Cambridge). There should not be a remark that this word is a neologism. However, there could be a remark that the word is from a professional field.

1.3 How Neologisms are Formed

Neologisms can be coined anew via different word-formation methods. Word-formation includes: 1) coinage, 2) borrowing, 3) compounding, 4) blending, 5) clipping, 6) backformation, 7) conversion, 8) acronyms, 9) derivation. (Yule 2010: 53-58). Sometimes these methods are combined. For instance, borrowing from other languages and then blending.

1) Coinage is the least used word-formation process. It involves the creation of totally new terms (Yule 2010: 53). Often the words were originally a part of products. However, now these words are used more for the general concept. Some examples include aspirin, vaseline, and others. The contemporary widely used term is *to google*, which originally derived from

the company of the same name, is now used in the meaning of searching for information on the Internet.

Eponyms are words based on the name of a person or a place (Yule 2010). They are referred to as coinage as well. Yule (2010) provides some examples: sandwich (Earl of Sandwich is believed to have “invented” this type of food), jeans (after the city of Genoa, where this cloth was made).

2) Borrowing words from other languages is more common than coinage. For instance, these English words were once borrowed from other languages: entrepreneur (French), rendezvous (French), kindergarten (German), patio (Spanish), tsunami (Japanese), and others. According to Yule (2010), there is a type of borrowing called calque or loan-translation, which is a direct translation of the parts of the borrowed words. For instance, it is believed that the English word *superman* is calque for German *Übermensch*.

3) Compounding is the word-formation process which involves joining two words to produce a new word (Yule 2010). It is very common in English. Some examples are: popcorn (verb pop + noun corn), mailbox (noun mail + noun box), basketball (noun basket + noun ball). Compounding can also form two words, but with one meaning. Separately these words have their own meaning. For instance: living room, hot dog, full moon, ice cream. In addition, words can be combined with the help of a hyphen: father-in-law, long-term, full-time (worker), up-to-date.

4) Blending is the word-formation process which also combines two words to produce a new word. The difference between compounding and blending is that blending often takes only the beginning of the word and connects it with the end of another word (Yule 2010). As a result, a new word has a new meaning. The new meaning often follows the logic of the original meaning of both words. For instance, the word *smog* appeared as a result of blending words *smoke* and *fog*. Cambridge online dictionary (n.d.) defines *smog* as “air pollution caused by smoke or chemicals mixing with fog.” The words *brunch* comes from *breakfast* and *lunch*. Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines *brunch* as “a meal eaten in the late morning that is a combination of breakfast and lunch.”

5) Clipping is a word-formation process the key feature of which is shortening. According to Yule (2010), it occurs “when a word of more than one syllable (facsimile) is reduced to a

shorter form (fax), usually beginning in casual speech.” Some examples that are commonly used: ad (advertisement), flu (influenza), fridge (refrigerator), gym (gymnasium), teen (teenager), sub (submarine), exam (examination), and many more.

6) Backformation is the word-formation process that involves transforming a word of one part of speech into another part of speech. The changes in the structure of the words (affixes) are present in this process. This word-formation process is similar to clipping. However, clipping does not change the part of speech but merely shortens the word. For instance, the verb *to babysit* was formed by clipping the word *babysitter*; *to eavesdrop* was formed from the noun *eavesdropper*.

7) Conversion is the word-formation process in which the change in the function of the word occurs (Yule 2010). Conversion does not affect the word in spelling, pronunciation. It means that only the part of speech changes and the word meaning according to this particular part of speech. Conversion examples: email (noun) — to email (verb), fool (noun) — to fool (verb), to call (verb) — call (noun), to fear (verb) — fear (noun), green (adjective) — to green (verb).

According to Yule (2010), conversion is considered a common way to produce new words in English. Usually, verbs become nouns, but they also can become adjectives. And vice versa, adjectives might become verbs (dirty — to dirty, empty — to empty).

In some cases of conversion, words can change their meaning to a great extent (Yule 2010). For instance, a word did not have any positive or negative meaning, it was neutral, and after conversion, the word acquired either a positive or negative meaning. Yule (2010: 58) gives the following examples: doctor (noun) — to doctor (verb), total (noun) — total (verb). According to Cambridge online dictionary (n.d.), *to doctor* means “to change a document in order to deceive people” or “to secretly put a harmful or poisonous substance into food or drink”. *To total* means “to damage a vehicle so badly that it cannot be repaired” (Cambridge online dictionary n.d.).

8) Acronyms are the words formed from initial letters (Yule 2010). Acronyms are pronounced differently. The new word might require the pronunciation of each letter separately (e.g., CD — *the compact disk*, ATM — *automatic teller machine*). Acronyms also

can be pronounced as words (e.g., UNESCO, NATO). Sometimes acronyms become so widely used that speakers do not consider that there is a certain specific meaning behind them (e.g., ATM, PIN, etc.) (Yule 2010). Acronyms are commonly used by gamers, too. Some examples are: RPG — *role-playing game*, AFK — *away from the keyboard*, GG — *good game*, AoE — *Area of effect*, CS — *creep score*, HP: — *health points*, XP: — *experience points*.

9) Derivation is the word-formation process that includes adding affixes (suffixes and prefixes) to the word to create a new one. Derivation is considered the most common word-formation process among others in the English language (Yule 2010). Sometimes only suffixes are added, or only prefixes. However, they also can be combined, so suffix and prefix can be added to the word simultaneously. Examples with prefixes: -un (unwell), -dis (disconnect), -mis (mislead), -im (impolite), -re (rewrite). Examples with suffixes: -ful (useful), -less (careless), -ness (illness), -ment (development), -ive (active). Examples with both affixes: disrespectful, unresponsive, interactive.

1.4 Semantic Change

Semantic change is the change of the word meaning or the process of developing a new meaning during the historical development of the language (Zykova 2008). Some neologisms are formed by means of semantic change. For instance, Ensslin (2012: 73) provides the term *tank* in video games, which means the character who can resist a heavy damage in a team fight. Naturally, the meaning of this term has changed from the original, which is a heavy military vehicle that can shoot.

1.4.1 Types of Semantic Change

There are many types of semantic change: 1) broadening, 2) narrowing, 3) metaphor, 4) metonymy, 5) meiosis, 6) hyperbole, 7) amelioration, 8) euphemism, 9) degradation.

1) Broadening is also known as “generalization”. Zykova (2008: 28) states that “If the word with extended meaning passes from the specialized vocabulary to common use, the result of semantic change is described as generalization.” For example, an Old English word *docga* meant a particular breed of dog, while today the word *dog* is generalized for all breeds of dogs (Yule 2010: 233).

2) Narrowing is the opposite process of broadening. It is the process when the word acquires the meaning, which becomes a part of specialized vocabulary and is limited in use. (Zykova 2008). Yule (2010: 233) provides another example from Old English: “version of the word *wife* could be used to refer to any woman, but has narrowed in its application nowadays to only married women.”

3) Metaphor is a figure of speech, which is based on the similarity of meanings. It is the semantic process when two referents are associated. One of these referents bears a resemblance to another in some way (Zykova 2008). The words that are metaphors are not meant literally. It is a hidden comparison.

4) Metonymy is also a figure of speech, which is based on the association of contiguity. It is a semantic process. There are also two referents associated. However, one of the referents makes part of another or is closely connected with it (Zykova 2008). Zykova (2008: 28) provides an example of the word *tongue*. *The tongue* is an organ of speech, but it is also used in the meaning of language (*mother tongue*).

5) Meiosis is a figure of speech which makes something appear smaller or less significant than it really is (Young n.d.) For instance, the Atlantic Ocean is often called “the pond”. Another example: “The Troubles” as a name for decades of violence in Northern Ireland.

6) Hyperbole is a figure of speech which is opposite of meiosis. Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration for extra effect (Leengen 2019). For instance, I am drowning in paperwork (which means “I have to do a lot of paperwork and it stacks”); I could eat a horse right now (which means that a person has not eaten in a long period and their appetite is enormous right now). Hyperbole is used in the gaming industry, primarily in video games reviews. For example, when the authors say that a certain game is revolutionary.

7) Amelioration (sometimes called elevation) is the process which implies the positive improvement of the meaning (Zykova 2008). For instance, the adjective *terrific* is used to mean causing terror. Now it is a synonym to such words as *incredible*, *breathtaking*, *tremendous*.

8) Euphemism is an expression which is used to describe something negative in a neutral way. Euphemisms substitute taboo words and expressions that could be inappropriate or

offensive (Deguzman 2021). Some examples: “passed away” instead of “died”, “in a family way” instead of “pregnant”, “restroom” instead of “toilet”.

9) Degradation is the opposite process of amelioration. The word loses its positive connotation or gains a negative one (Zykova 2008). Sometimes the word can obtain multiple negative meanings during this process. For instance, Zykova (2008: 29) provides an example of the word *boor*. *Boor* used to denote “a peasant” and then acquired the meaning of “a clumsy or ill-bread fellow”.

Word-formation processes define how new words, including gamer slang terms are formed. Semantic change of gamer slang terms can be compared to the original meaning of the words. This comparison may also show if certain gamer slang words have entered Standard English (if the meaning is present in dictionaries).

CHAPTER II. ANALYSIS OF WORD-FORMATION PROCESSES AND SEMANTIC CHANGE IN GAMER SLANG

2.1 Research Methodology

The aim of the empirical research is to analyze gamer slang in terms of its word-formation and semantic change processes. The data (gamer slang) were collected from “Reddit” and “Steam” community forums. “Reddit” is a popular platform for discussing various topics (including gaming topics) that people may have an interest in. Discussions are organized by subjects which are called “subreddits”. Gamer slang can be found in other discussions besides subreddits dedicated to video games. However, this research focused only on gaming subreddit to avoid confusion. The gaming subreddit includes over 32.5 million members. The gaming subreddit was created in 2007, and it is still used by its members. “Gamer slang” was typed in the gaming subreddit to find relevant information. There were five discussions that directly mentioned gamer slang. The most recent one was from 2021 and the oldest one is from 2018. New vocabulary is constantly being added to gamer slang with the release of new games, which is why these discussions of recent years were chosen. There were mentioned words that have been used for a long time as well as recent terms.

“Steam” is a video game digital distribution service. Gamers can purchase their games on Steam. There are also forum discussions, groups, and game guides. International gamers use mainly English to discuss games. Steam has its own statistics that show an average and maximum amount of players for the last 48 hours. On April 20, 2022, there was a peak of 26 million people online at the same time. Steam gaming forums were searched to find relevant information from 2021 and 2020, and four discussions mentioned gamer slang.

Another aim of the research is to reveal whether gamer slang has become part of Standard English. Cambridge, Macmillan, and Longman online dictionaries were used to check if the words have entered these dictionaries. Urban Dictionary was used to describe the meaning of the gamer slang words. 30 most common words were analyzed from discussions. These words were most often mentioned on the forums. The results of the research are presented in the table below.

2.2 Gamer Slang

Slang word	Meaning	Word-formation process	Semantic change	Present in dictionaries ?	Example
“AFK” (sometimes “afk”)	Used on online gaming, this literally means “Away From Keyboard”. Used to say if somebody is inactive.	Acronym	-	Yes	— “ <i>Where is he?</i> ” — “ <i>I think he went AFK.</i> ”
“Rekt”	A term for the word “wrecked”. “Rekt” means a player got completely outplayed, usually used in first person shooter games.	Coinage/ Clipping	Narrowing	Yes (informal)	“ <i>Get rekt!</i> ”
“Pwnd”	A variety/version of the word “owned”, used in the sense of beating/ defeating/ outclassing someone.	Coinage/ Misspelling	Narrowing	Yes (informal)	“ <i>Enemy team totally pwned us.</i> ”
“GG” or “gg”	Phrase said at the end of a match, either online or in person. Means “Good Game”. It can be used in the meaning of enjoyment or sarcasm.	Acronym	-	Yes	* <i>Team A wins*</i> <i>Team A: gg</i> <i>Team B: gg</i>
“Ez”	A shorter way of typing	Coinage/ Clipping	Broadening	Yes (informal)	“ <i>Ez win!</i> ”

	“easy”. Used in a game chat when a player wins a game or gets a kill. Often used to irritate other players.				
“noob”	A player who is new at a game. The player is inexperienced and/or ignorant and does not want to learn how to develop their gaming skills.	Coinage	-	Yes (informal)	<i>“You’re such a noob. Quit playing this game.”</i>
“wp”	It means “well played”. Usually used after the match with “gg”.	Acronym	-	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>*Match ends* A: gg wp</i>
“ragequit”	To stop playing a game out of an anger towards an event that transpired within the game.	Compounding	Hyperbole	Yes (informal)	<i>*Player A kills player B* *Player B leaves the game* Player A: he ragequit!</i>
“OP”	“OP” means overpowered; it is used in connection to a strong in-game weapon or a character who is able to defeat multiple	Acronym	-	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>“Demons are OP in this game.”</i>

	enemies by themselves.				
“Smurf”	An experienced player who plays on a new account to compete with less skilled players. Usually, smurfs create new accounts if theirs were banned. Also, it could be if they do not want to play with gamers of the same skill.	Coinage	Broadening (The Smurfs are originally characters from the comic franchise)	No	<i>“Of course you beat those noobs, you are a smurf!”</i>
“mb”	Literally means “my bad”. Used in a game chat by a player who made a mistake that led to an unfortunate outcome.	Acronym	-	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>A: Why did you do it? Now we are going to lose! B: mb</i>
“Cheater”	A player who uses third-party programs to have an unfair advantage over other players.	Derivation	Narrowing	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>“You’re a cheater, you can’t be that fast!”</i>
“XP”	“XP” means “experience”. In the context of role-playing games, usually given in a point	Acronym	-	No	<i>“This boss fight brought me over 500 XP, now I’ve got</i>

	value and used to determine a character's level.				<i>another level."</i>
"Selling"	When a player makes an unforced error which may cost the whole game match to their team.	Derivation	Degradation	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>"You're selling so hard right now. Stop it."</i>
"Camper"	Found in online multiplayer games. A camper stays in one spot and waits for enemies to walk past him before attacking. Usually, it may happen multiple times.	Derivation	Degradation	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>"You're such a camper!"</i>
"Cracked"	Internet gaming term used for people who are superior at something.	Derivation	Amelioration	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>"Damn! He's really cracked!"</i>
"AIDS"	An adjective to describe something that is unbearably terrible and creates high levels of anger and/or frustration. Also can describe something extremely	Acronym	Narrowing	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>"We're losing so bad. This game is AIDS."</i>

	uncomfortable. Used in-game chats.				
“Dog water”	When a player is bad at a videogame, other players call them “dog water”.	Compounding	-	No	<i>“You’re literally dog water.”</i>
“Sweaty”	A player in a game who tries too hard that later, everyone starts to despise.	Derivation	Degradation	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>“Stop trying so hard, you’re so sweaty.”</i>
“Goated”	“Goated” is another way of saying someone is “Greatest Of All Time”.	Acronym/ Derivation	-	No	<i>A: Bro, you’re goated. B: Thanks.</i>
“Git gud”	An intentionally misspelled phrase meaning “get good”. Generally used to mock inexperienced players in a particular video game.	Coinage/ Misspelling	Degradation	No	<i>“You need to git gud to play this game like a normal person.”</i>
“Carry”	When the team manages poorly with the enemy, and one of the team members has to do it all by themselves to win.	Conversion	Amelioration	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>“Yesterday I was a carry. My whole team was losing, it was such a long match. But I managed and we won.”</i>

“glhf”	A phrase that means “good luck, have fun”. Meant as a salutation at the beginning of a game.	Acronym	-	No	<i>*Match begins* Player A: glhf Player B: glhf</i>
“Rubberbanding”	It occurs in online gaming when the latency is relatively high. Players will appear to move in one direction and then suddenly be teleported back several meters where they once were a few seconds ago.	Compounding	-	No	<i>“Server is rubberbanding players so hard right now. I can’t even play this game!”</i>
“Glass cannon”	It applies to any character class that is good at attacking but can be easily defeated.	Compounding	-	No	<i>“I don’t recommend you play this glass cannon if you don’t know how to evade the enemy.”</i>
“Feeder”	A player who consistently dies to an enemy team or other player (either intentionally or due to inexperience), providing them with experience, gold, etc.	Derivation	Degradation	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	<i>“Feeder! It would be easier if you could leave the game.”</i>

“Farming”	It is when a player collects certain items to become more powerful (e.g. gold)	Derivation	Narrowing	Yes (not in the gamer’s slang meaning)	“ <i>Stop farming here! It’s my place!</i> ”
“Buff”	To make stronger a character, item, etc. in the game. Used for balancing purposes.	Coinage	Narrowing	Yes (not in the gamer slang meaning)	“ <i>Vi (a character’s name) was buffed with an increased damage.</i> ”
“Nerf”	To make worse or weaken, usually in the context of weakening something to balance a game.	Coinage/ Eponym	-	Yes (informal)	“ <i>This item was awesome until they nerfed it in the last patch.</i> ”
“Spawn”	The place where a character or item is placed in the game world.	Conversion	Narrowing	Yes (not in the gamer’s slang meaning)	“ <i>The monsters’ spawn is located in the west side of the map.</i> ”

Table 1. Gamer Slang

The results of the research demonstrate that among word-formation process are: acronym (30%), coinage (30%), derivation (26.6%), clipping (13%), compounding (13%), and conversion (6.6%). Among semantic changes: narrowing (23.3%), degradation (16.6%), broadening (6.6%), amelioration (6.6%), hyperbole (3.3%). 43% of the words did not have any semantic changes. Only 26.6% of the gaming words under analysis have entered Standard English; 46.6% are used in Standard English but with a different meaning. 26.6% of the words have not entered Standard English at all.

The results were expected. Acronyms are used widely by gamers to chat faster while gaming. Coinage is common among words with specialized use. It also might be the reason why it is

rare for gamer slang to enter Standard English. Many words did not experience any semantic changes because they are not part of Standard English. However, narrowing and degradation seem to be the most common. Narrowing makes the words change their meaning in a specialized way. Presumably, more words of gamer slang could enter Standard English if they were not so specialized, and narrowing was not the most common semantic change process. In addition, degradation is the second most common semantic change process because of the nature of gamers' communication with each other. Gamers' environment is not always friendly as there is tension in online games within the teams. The words that entered Standard English with their gamer slang meaning are: AFK, rekt (informal), pwned (informal), GG, ez (informal), noob (informal), ragequit (informal), nerf (informal).

CONCLUSION

The present research aimed to study English gamer slang in terms of its word-formation, and examine whether words from gamer slang have entered Standard English or not. This study has showed that gamer slang words slowly enter Standard English, mainly enriching its informal register.

Chapter I was focused on the definition of *neologism* and *Standard English* and what they imply. The first chapter also included information on how neologisms are formed, focusing on nine word-formation processes: 1) coinage, 2) borrowing, 3) compounding, 4) blending, 5) clipping, 6) backformation, 7) conversion, 8) acronyms, 9) derivation. Semantic change influences the formation of neologisms as it is the change of the word meaning or the process of developing a new meaning. Chapter I also discussed nine types of semantic change: 1) broadening, 2) narrowing, 3) metaphor, 4) metonymy, 5) meiosis, 6) hyperbole, 7) amelioration, 8) euphemism, 9) degradation.

Chapter II was focused on the analysis of the 30 most mentioned gaming words on *Reddit* and *Steam* forums in terms of their word-formation processes, semantic changes, and their presence or absence in three reputable dictionaries (Cambridge, Longman, Macmillan). The results showed that acronyms and coinage are the most common word-formation processes of gamer slang. The analysis showed that borrowing, blending, and backformation are very rare for gamer slang, as they were found not among the words analyzed. There were only five out of nine possible semantic changes, and the most common among them are narrowing and degradation. The research also revealed that only 26.6% of the words have entered Standard English, 46.6% are in Standard English but with a different meaning. As narrowing makes the words change their meaning in a specialized way, it is logical that so many gamer slang words are not in Standard English yet. However, some words have managed to enter dictionaries, but mainly saved their informal style. These words are: AFK, rekt (informal), pwned (informal), GG, ez (informal), noob (informal), ragequit (informal), nerf (informal).

To summarize, video games have already made an enormous impact on mainstream culture, and now slowly, with the influence of gaming communities, video games bring new words to Standard English, which people might use in the future more widely year by year with the development of digital technologies and new platforms, such as Metaverse, for example.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Käesoleva töö eesmärgiks oli analüüsida inglise sõnamoodustusprotsesse mängijate slängis ning uurida kas need sõnad on muutunud inglise kirjakeele osaks. Töö uurimise küsimused olid: 1) Kuidas mängijate slängi terminid inglise keeles moodustatakse? 2) Millised mängijate slängi terminid on inglise kirjakeelde sisenenud? Töö nimetus on INGLISE KEELE SÕNAVARA ARENG: MÄNGIJATE SLÄNGI ANALÜÜS.

Esimeses peatükis käsitletakse neologismi mõistet ning inglise kirjakeele määratlust. Neologismid moodustatakse üheksal viisil: 1) sõnade loomine, 2) tõlkelaen, 3) liitsõna, 4) segamine, 5) lühendamine, 6) taga-moodustamine, 7) konversioon, 8) akronüümid, 9) tuletamine. Semantilise mehhanismid ka mõjuvad neologismide moodustust, kuna nad muudavad sõnade tähendusi. Inglise keeles on üheksa semantilist mehhanismi: 1) avardumine, 2) ahenemine, 3) metafoor, 4) metonüümia, 5) meioos, 6) hüperbool, 7) melioratsioon, 8) eufemism, 9) degradatsioon.

Teine peatükk koosneb mängijate slängi analüüsist. Analüüsitakse 30 enim mainitud sõna *Reddit* ja *Steam* foorumites nende sõnamoodustusprotsesside, semantiliste muutuste ja nende olemasolu või puudumise osas inglise kirjakeeles. Tulemused näitasid, et akronüümid ja sõnade loomine on mängijate slängi kõige levinumad sõnamoodustusprotsessid. Analüüs näitas, et tõlkelaen, segamine ja taga-moodustamine on mängijate slängi puhul väga haruldased, kuna neid tabeli sõnade hulgas ei olnud. Kõige levinumad protsessid semantilistest muutustest on ahenemine ja degradeerumine. Need andmed mõjutasid tõsiasja, et ainult 26,6% sõnadest on sisenenud inglise kirjakeelde, 46,6% on inglise kirjakeeles, kuid erineva tähendusega. Kuna ahenemine vähendab sõnade tähenduste ulatust, see on loogiline, miks nii palju sõnu pole veel inglise kirjakeeles. Mõned sõnad on aga juba olemas inglise kirjakeeles, kuid peamiselt jäid nad oma mitteametlikku stiili. Need sõnad on: *AFK*, *rekt* (mitteametlik), *pwned* (mitteametlik), *GG*, *ez* (mitteametlik), *noob* (mitteametlik), *ragequit* (mitteametlik), *nerf* (mitteametlik).

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et videomängud on juba avaldanud peavoolukultuurile tohutut mõju ja nüüd toovad videomängud mängukommuunide mõjul tasapisi inglise kirjakeelde uusi sõnu, mida inimesed võiksid tulevikus aasta-aastalt aktiivsemalt kasutada.

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