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# ***Jelou Pipol: Computer-mediated communication among Spanish-speaking gamers on Twitch***

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This study explores the characteristics of the language used in Twitch, one of the most popular streaming platforms worldwide, as an example of computer-mediated communication. Some of the most salient traits used to describe CMC are found in Twitch chat messages, as the paper will show, confirming that the communicative interaction that takes place among users of this platform matches the features of CMC described in the academic literature. Additionally, the synchronous and multimodal nature of this platform, as well as the pragmatic implications of the use of subscriber-exclusive emotes are peculiarities that must be considered for a comprehensive description of the language that takes place on Twitch. Lastly, in the case of the videogame chats in Spanish studied, the paper introduces as a key factor in the description of this language the characteristics of the lexicon: its foreign origin, its neological nature and its high level of terminological specialisation.

**Keywords:** Twitch, computer-mediated communication; cyberpragmatics; games; anglicisms; lexicon; multimodal communication

## 1. Introduction

Twitch is currently one of the most popular streaming platforms worldwide, especially among young users and in the world of videogames (Kavanagh 2019).<sup>1</sup> The exponential growth of the videogame industry in recent years has, in fact, boosted the development of such platforms. Twitch, in particular, reached around 3 million streamers in 2019 and a concurrent audience of close to 1.25 million users (Oh et al. 2020).

This success rate renders Twitch an exceptional source for researching the language of young people, owing both to the number of users producing and discussing a diverse range of content,<sup>2</sup> and to the wealth and idiosyncrasy of multimodal communication generated on this platform.<sup>3</sup>

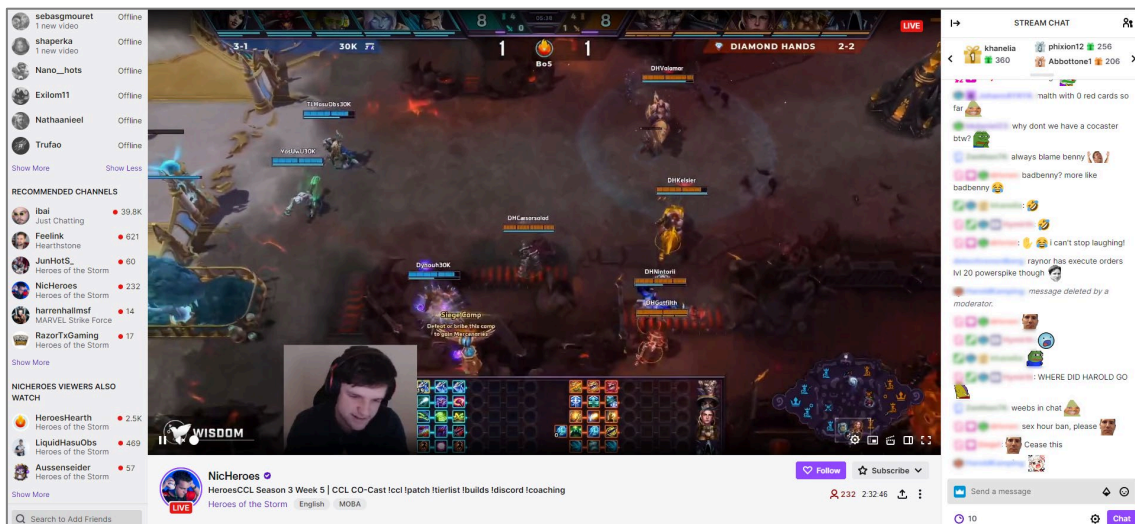


Figure 1. Screenshot of a videogame stream on Twitch

<sup>1</sup> “Of all the live streaming platforms, Twitch.tv is considered one of the biggest and most popular. It enjoys more than 15 million unique daily visitors, each spending an average of 95 minutes watching live gaming and other content. Between January and May of 2019, there were 4.2 million monthly streamers, and a cumulative 313 billion minutes watched by viewers” (Wohn and Freeman 2020: 1).

<sup>2</sup> “The growth of game live streaming wasn’t simply a story about esports but also about larger changes in game culture and sharing your play. While the competitive gaming activity on Twitch is tremendous, it’s not just esports that is finding a home in live streaming. The medium has offered players of all kinds an opportunity to build audiences interested in observing, commenting, and playing alongside them” (Taylor 2018: 6).

<sup>3</sup> In fact, in 2020 (?), as a consequence of the circumstances caused by the Covid-19 crisis, Twitch continued to increase its number of visitors, creators and followers, reaching a figure worldwide of 34 million hours watched in a single day and four million simultaneous spectators (Gutiérrez and Cuartero 2020: 163).

Twitch has integrated this multimodality in its interface: on accessing any of the thousands of open streams available simultaneously through Twitch, the main window of the stream can be seen, containing the live transmission of the videogame being played, with another, optional, embedded window showing the streamer's webcam. To the left of the video window is a navigation bar allowing users to change channel or streamer, and on the right-hand side is a scroll-down chat column in which members of the audience can communicate with the streamer or with each other.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1 An approach to understanding Twitch from the academic literature

Some features of communication on Twitch allow us, a priori, to perceive it as susceptible of being studied in the framework of computer-mediated communication (CMC): streamers transmit live while engaging in videogames, and simultaneously they are also participating in communication with their audience, generally through video-mediated communication (VMC), but occasionally also through internet relay chat (IRC). Viewers watch the live video and use the chat to contribute a running commentary (which would amount, therefore, to synchronous CMC), addressing the streamer and interacting with other members of the audience. Therefore, Twitch is an example of a multimodal environment in which its communicative channels are distributed asymmetrically, so that it will be predominantly video-mediated communication for streamers, while the viewers will use mostly textual communication. However, tools like bit donations, which allow the audience to have certain messages read out loud on the stream, provide Twitch users with different modes of communication to be used to achieve different communicative effects.

The studies published in recent years on the nature of Twitch as a digital meeting point and an example of 'participatory culture' (Velez et al. 2018) coincide in pointing out that the possibility of communicating with the streamer and with others, and of discussing the content of the stream, are the principal source of interest attracting the

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<sup>4</sup> The synchronous nature of Twitch generates a high demand for participation access, and this participation is not always symmetrical, since Twitch has developed several monetized mechanisms that allow viewers to increase their chances to participate in the stream in a more effective and visible way, and to contribute economically to the stream and the streamer. By paying a subscription or paying to acquire bits (a token that can be traded for different advantages, like typing a message that will be read out loud by a bot instantly on stream), viewers can unlock certain privileges that make their presence in the chat more prevalent. One of those privileges is related to the use of emotes, and it has, in fact, communicative effects that are discussed in Section 3.1.3.1.

audience's participation on this platform. As noted by Hamilton et al. (2014), we can also view Twitch under the concept of 'virtual third places,' to use the terminology proposed by Oldenburg (1997), that is to say, informal public spaces where people engage in sociability to form and maintain communities, which we might call, in the culture of streaming, 'stream communities.' It is also interesting to examine the reflection made by Sjöblom and Hamari (2017) who, in reply to the research question "why do people watch others play videogames," consider that the dynamic found on Twitch is merely the virtual transference of what was already present in the origins of videogaming; the 'social spectating element' that evolved with the advent of arcade games, when people would gather around the person playing the game to see how they were doing and cheer them on (Sjöblom and Hamari 2017: 987).

Although we are evidently still in the early days of conducting studies on Twitch,<sup>5</sup> a number of authors have voiced their reflections on the nature of this platform, both from technical and media viewpoints (Taylor 2018), and on the social and communication issues deriving from the interaction among content creators and spectators on the platform (Karhulahti 2016; Nesi et al. 2019; Sjöblom and Hamari 2017; Smith et al. 2013). Unfortunately, there is very limited literature centred on studying language as a whole on Twitch (some exceptions are Hamilton et al. 2014 and Recktenwald 2017),<sup>6</sup> this being one of the reasons for conducting the research described below.

## **2. Research Aims and Methodology**

This study aims to explore the characteristics of the language used in the Twitch environment as a possible example of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Some of the most salient traits (orthography, morphology and syntax) frequently used to describe digital communication have been taken into consideration (Werry 1996; Androutsopoulos 2007; Herring 2012; among others), in order to verify whether the language of Twitch matches this description, and to discuss some unique characteristics

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<sup>5</sup> "Research into online live streaming of video games is still in its infancy" (Recktenwald 2017: 69).

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton et al. 2014 suggest that streaming on Twitch establishes a new paradigm for online communities in a range of emerging contexts, and they consider solutions to the breakdown of participation in large communities due to information overload. Recktenwald (2017) develops a transcription scheme for online live streaming of video games that incorporated established conventions in combination with new solutions such as the transcription of game events based on game-internal criteria.

that the communication in this platform entails, as the highly-specialized topics of the conversations that occur in their chats (which manifests in a very specific jargon that serves as a marker of status), as well as the peculiar dynamics derived from the coexistence of subscribed and non-subscribed users who have different access in the way they participate in the chat, particularly through the use of Twitch emotes. In addition, special attention has been paid to the prevalence of foreign words and the use of specialised terms and jargon found in Twitch chat messages among Spanish speakers, taking these features as inherent both to digital communication and to videogaming language, and discussed the factors and pragmatic implications of this type of discursive practices.

As mentioned, the communicative exchanges in Spanish produced in Twitch are analysed in the framework of studies on computer-mediated communication (according to the terminology and classification proposed by Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore 1991, and subsequently developed and updated by Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015). For this research a corpus has been assembled from 50 streams (more than 200 hours of video and chat) broadcast on Twitch over a period of three months in 2020 containing live content from four highly popular videogames: League of Legends, Heroes of the Storm, Apex Legends and Fortnite. Of these streams, linguistic content was extracted in written mode, i.e., the text generated by the chats taking place during each stream, as per the conditions and criteria described below.

## **2.1 Selection, upload and treatment of research data**

Given that this research is based on multimodal material, the baseline materials consisted of verbalised linguistic content, which required transcription before it could be studied appropriately, and of linguistic material shared through a written channel, the portion of the communicative interaction (between viewers and the streamer, and among viewers) occurring in each stream's chat section. The latter modality fitted the chosen study design, fundamentally on account of the broad range of voices collected on the chats, the type of code used in these (hybrid or simulated orality), and also because this type of communication can be collected more rapidly (transcription being unnecessary), which allows researchers to work effectively on a huge amount of data. Previous authors have pointed out the advantages of this type of content: in a platform like Twitch, where an internet relay chat (IRC) interface is provided to facilitate interaction between viewers-

viewers and viewers-streamers, the viewers-viewers interactions “can fulfill the need of socialization by getting in touch with the other users who share the same interests” (Oh et. al 2020: 2).

For this study a corpus has been compiled of chats on Twitch that are representative of different themes within the world of videogames and were broadcast within a timeframe of a few months. The chosen streams were issued in Spanish during May, June, and July 2020, with live broadcasts of the videogames League of Legends, Heroes of the Storm, Apex Legends, and Fortnite.<sup>7</sup> Two streamers in Spain were selected for each of these four thematic channels. The eight streamers were chosen based on their steady updating and their relative popularity (one middle streamer and one small streamer were selected for each channel), bearing in mind the average number of spectators in their streams, as more than 600-700 spectators makes real communication or interaction almost impossible among participants in the chat because, owing to the rate of incoming messages, causes the so called ‘scroll factor’ (Yus 2020a) and it tends to become what Hamilton et al. (2014) have described as ‘an illegible waterfall of text’.<sup>8</sup>

With the above in view, 50 streams were selected. Given that the hours of live broadcast by each streamer vary significantly (some share their content for two hours, while others may continue to do so for eight or nine hours), hours of video were counted, adjusting the number of streams accordingly. To conduct a detailed analysis of the characteristics of language used by users of Twitch, the written chats of 16 of these streams were chosen, extracted, and encoded (2 chats per streamer), to compile a baseline database equivalent to a total of 74 hours of live video. In terms of the data size of the textual corpus of this study, the total amount of words written in the chats extracted from those 50 streams is close to one million. However, the word count distribution among the streams is not homogeneous. As an example, the two streamers selected for the Apex Legends videogame channel, Anytime and Kryp, hold very different viewerships: Anytime’s streams usually get between 600 and 700 viewers, while Kryp’s streams tend

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<sup>7</sup> The names and channels of these Spanish streamers are: AnytimeShield ([twitch.tv/anytimeshield](https://twitch.tv/anytimeshield)) and Kryp ([twitch.tv/kryp](https://twitch.tv/kryp)) for the game Apex Legends; Belvid ([twitch.tv/belvid](https://twitch.tv/belvid)) and Lulypop\_ ([twitch.tv/lulypop](https://twitch.tv/lulypop)) for the game Fortnite; Nano\_Hots ([twitch.tv/nano\\_hots](https://twitch.tv/nano_hots)) and Oli\_Mahonie ([twitch.tv/oli\\_mahonie](https://twitch.tv/oli_mahonie)) for the game Heroes of the Storm, and SevenJungle ([twitch.tv/sevenjungle](https://twitch.tv/sevenjungle)) and Xixauxas ([twitch.tv/xixauxas](https://twitch.tv/xixauxas)) for the game League of Legends.

<sup>8</sup> “In smaller streams, the focus is more on participation, on interacting with other viewers and building community. [...] As a stream grows, the chat becomes a source of breakdowns. It transforms from a meaningful medium of discussion into an illegible waterfall of text, scrolling up the page so quickly that it cannot be read. [...] We note that in streams that are this large, the quality of the chat stream changes to something like the roar of a crowd in a stadium” (Hamilton et al. 2014: 1321).

to draw about 100 viewers. This gap has an impact in the number of words that the extracted chats will contain. For example, while a Kryp's stream from 18 June 2020, with a 6h 20 min length generates a text file of barely 6,000 words, a stream broadcasted by Anytime in 16 June 2020, with a 6h 44min duration produces a file of more than 35,000 words.

The preliminary results from uploading and examining the data from the 50 extracted chat files (one per stream) have been structured (lexicographically lemmatized) into 592 different terms and over 2,000 examples, manually arranged in categories such as origin, morphological class, orthographical correction and terminological nature.

FORMA			DESCRIPCIÓN BÁSICA			ORIGEN		MORFOLOGÍA			OTROS ANÁLISIS		
ID	FORMA	LEMA	ÉTIMO	DEFINICIÓN	HOMONIMIA	ANGLICISMO	TIPO DE ANGLICISMO	CATEGORÍA GRAM.	GÉNERO GRAM.	ABREVIACIÓN	ORTOGR.	TERMINOLOGÍA	DRAE
147	diamante	diamante 1	diamond	*/ranking category	si	si	calco semántico	sustantivo	masculino	no	nr	si: APEX; HOTS	no def
148	diamante	diamante 2	diamond	*/player who belongs to the diamond category	si	si	calco semántico	sustantivo	masculino y femenino	no	nr	si: APEX	no def
149	diamond	diamond	diamond	*/franking category	si	si	patente no adaptado	sustantivo	masculino	no	nr	si: APEX	no
150	divear	divear	dive	atacar bajo torre, aún recibiendo el daño de esta.	no	si	hibrido	verbo	nr	no	nr	si: lol	no
151	dmg	dmg	dmg (damage)	cantidad de daño que ocasiona un personaje a otro(s) en un momento puntual o en el total de la partida	no	si	patente no adaptado	sustantivo	masculino	acortamiento	no	si: lol	no
152	dodgear	dodgear	dodge	*esquivar una habilidad o un ataque	no	si	hibrido	verbo	nr	no	nr	si: lol	no
153	donete	donete	(be) done	*estar muerto - acabado	no	si	hibrido	adjetivo	nr	no	nr	?	no
154	dps	dps	dps (damage per second)	Clase de personaje cuya mayor habilidad o principal función es causar gran cantidad de daño.	no	si	patente no adaptado	sustantivo	masculino	siglas	nr	si: HOTS	no
155	draft	draft	draft	Un tipo de selección de campeones donde los participantes deben primero atravesar el proceso de banning (bloqueo de campeones), pueden ver lo que el enemigo elige y no es posible repetir el mismo campeón en ambos bandos.	no	si	patente no adaptado	sustantivo	masculino	no	nr	si: lol	no
156	dummies	dummies	dummies	*/apex la bots	no	si	patente no adaptado	sustantivo	masculino	no	nr	si: APEX	no def

Example (clean text)	ID	Term	Source_ID	Source	Link to raw data
496 al diamante 1 pregunto, se que ya está en diamante	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>
497 Dicen q hay gente buena apartir de diamante 3	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>
498 uffff any diamante la cosa ya se complica un poco	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>
499 si creo que recien hay gente buena tanto en team y el e	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>
500 No entiendo cómo llegan a diamante xd	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>
501 Que hace en diamante ese personaje?	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>
502 Bro apartir de diamante es casi imposible subir de rango	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>
503 Lo malo que ya en diamante son full premades	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>
504 Despues de diamante 3 es casi imposible subir solo	147	diamante	2	APEX.ANY.20.06.15	<a href="#">Ver contexto</a>

**Figure 2** Partial screenshots of the relational database created for this study

As shown in the figure above, the database created for this study includes categorized information about terms that have been registered following lexicographical criteria and taking into account that the textual corpus of this investigation contains numerous examples of non-standard net-talk as well as a significative number of non-Spanish words. Thereby, each lemma may represent several forms that have been considered as different terms depending on the type of neologism or loanword they represent (*sololane*, for example, is a non-integrated loanword, while *sololínea* constitutes a form fully adapted to Spanish from a morphological and orthographical perspective). Those examples that show non-normative orthography traits as, for example, vowel or consonant lengthening, have been registered as variants and labelled



in another column as forms with additional communicative value. Also, different meanings are sorted under a same lemma, including the extended and conventional connotations observed for certain uses of a particular term.

One key feature of this database is the traceability between terms, examples, and raw data. Given any term, the examples associated with this term can be easily filtered in the Examples Table, and each recorded example has a hyperlink pointing out to the exact position of this example in the chat files used as raw input data. Thus, any recorded example can be traced back, automatically displaying it in its original context (i.e., with all precedent and following lines from the chat). This capability enabled not only the undertaking of a detailed lexical study of the language used in Twitch, but also to observe pragmatic elements specific to the conversations registered on the chat messages analysed.<sup>9</sup>

Subsequently, an initial approach to this analysis is proposed, for which the description of the characteristic traits of digital language established in the bibliography has been taken into consideration; a classification made on the basis of e-mails, chats, forums, instant messaging systems, etc. This allows a check to be made on the extent to which the language found on Twitch matches earlier descriptions of CMC, and invites reflection on whether these traits are sufficient to accurately describe it.

### **3. Description of the language of Twitch in the framework of CMC**

Originally, studies on CMC were for the most part text-based but, nevertheless, in a broad sense, they contained what today can still be viewed as appropriate definitions for this type of communication (Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore 1991), produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked or mobile computers, where ‘computers’ are defined broadly to include any digital communication device (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015: 127). This interpretation clearly encompasses myriad forms of CMC, such as e-mail, IRC, VoIP (Voice over IP), to name but a few, although all of these share certain features including, for instance, interactivity, hypertextuality, or the inclusion of multimedia content (Siitonen 2007). Studies on CMC have been updated in recent years as a response to technological advances that have

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<sup>9</sup> To download and extract videos and chats from the selected streams two free software tools were used. For the videos: TwitchLeecher (<https://github.com/Franiac/TwitchLeecher>) and for the written chats: TwitchDownloader (<https://github.com/lay295/TwitchDownloader>).

broadened the spectrum and frequency of forms through which speakers communicate digitally, and one of the aspects that must necessarily be taken into account today is the nature of CMC as a ‘fundamentally multimodal’ communication channel (Herring 2018: 12). This is an aspect of special interest to this research given that, as seen, it is a prominent feature in the Twitch environment.

Moreover, another issue under ongoing debate is the nature of language used in the above-mentioned contexts. Authors such as Varnhagen et al. (2009) argue that online communication imitates ‘real’ communication, rendered in a written modality within a digital space, where writing has undergone certain changes. However, Olaniran (2014) highlights the opposite phenomenon, that is, the way the Internet and social networks have left a clear footprint in how speakers express themselves in everyday life. In the words of Crystal (2001: 8): “Internet has encouraged a dramatic expansion in the variety and creativity of language”. In any case, the language produced in digital communication presents certain specific common traits that this research sets out to study in the material gathered.

### **3.1 Traits of the digital language observed in Twitch chat messages**

As pointed out by Androutsopoulos (2007: 5), the innovative traits observed in digital writing can be summed up in three items: orality, compensation, and economy. This is manifest in the use of pragmatic elements that depart from grammatical norms or present different functions in CMC, such as emojis, abbreviations, acronyms, capital letters of typographical repetitions (Tagliamonte y Denis 2008; Varnhagen et al. 2010). As it will be analysed through several examples selected from the corpus, these elements not only provide pragmatic, contextualizing and social cues in specific online environments, as well as a symbolic substitution for non-verbal cues missing in written communication, but they also emphasize the ludic, playful, character of certain online interactions. Crystal (2001: 52) notes, in a similar vein, three common strategies in communication online, motivated by the need for speedy and immediate exchanges: graphology (emoticons, punctuation), deviation (abbreviations, acronyms), and formality (slang). For the description of the language on Twitch given in this paper, in which care has been taken to verify how far communication on this platform matches the traits described as inherent to digital language in the framework of CMC, the categorization proposed by Herring (2012) has been followed for the various levels of ‘e-grammar’ encompassing

morphology, syntax, orthography and typography.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the lexical level of this language is addressed in a separate section, paying special attention to aspects of foreignness and terminology in the vocabulary employed in Twitch chat messages in Spanish.

### 3.1.1 Morphology: Abbreviation, acronym, clipping

Urgency in communication is one of the determinant factors shaping the grammar used in computer-mediated communication. Werry (1996) has observed that in multi-stranded IRC conversations, language is heavily abbreviated, with “syntactically reduced forms, the use of acronyms and symbols, [and] the clipping of words.” Varnhagen et al. (2009) have also pointed out that users taking part in instant messaging develop short-cuts for expressing words, phrases, and emotions. Indeed, on examining the examples drawn from the corpus, the use of abbreviation is a constant across all chat messages.<sup>11</sup>

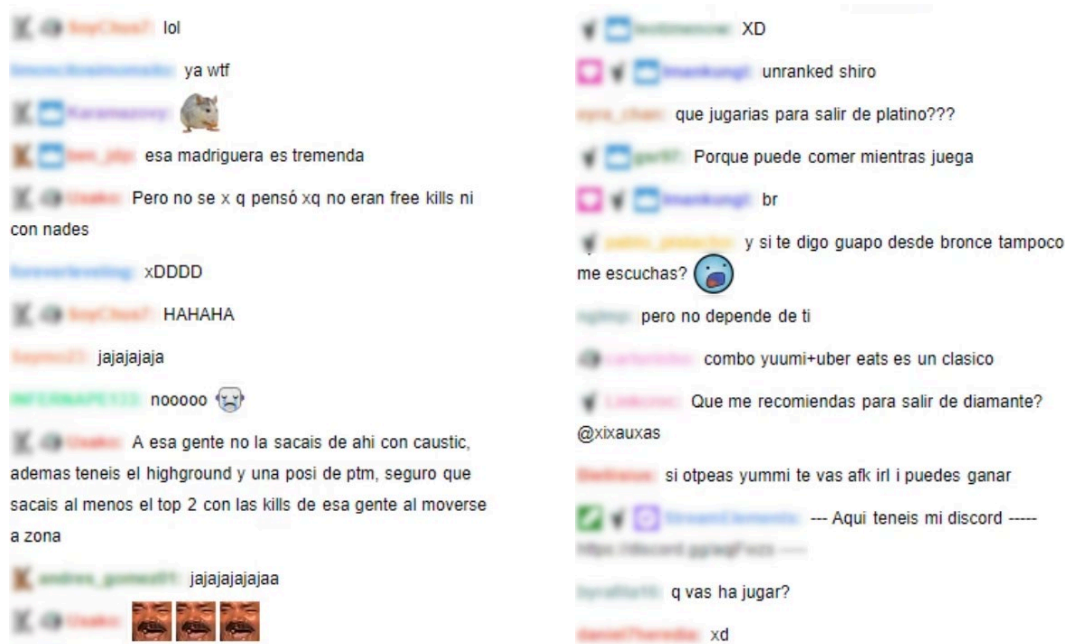
Recourse to abbreviation in these chats responds to the need for writing at speed as the chat proceeds, while keeping up with the events taking place in the stream. We should not overlook that one of these chats’ main purposes is to channel viewers’ remarks on the live broadcast, that is to say, the dominant subject of conversation is the gameplay shared by the streamer.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Herring does not include the phonology level in his categorization, since “CMC based phonology is largely irrelevant; typography and orthography take over the functions of sound” (Herring 2012: 1).

<sup>11</sup> Some examples for abbreviations are *afk* (away from keyboard), *ap* (ability power), *aram* (all random all mid), *cc* (crowd control), *cd* (cool down), *dps* (damage per second), *gg* (good game), *gl* (good luck), *gm* (grand master), *jg* (jungle), *op* (overpowered), *otp* (one trick poney), *pog* (play of the game), *qm* (quick match), *tf* (teamfight), *wr* (winrate); while examples for clipping are *exp* and *xp* (experience), *ez* (easy), *int* (intentionally dying), *penta* (pentakill), *solo* (sololane), *sub* (subscriber).

<sup>12</sup> As an example, one of the text documents extracted from the streams that form the corpus of this study has been analysed to show, statistically, how the gameplay shared by the streamer is the dominant subject of conversation in the chat. A small stream was chosen for this purpose: the total amount of chat messages posted during the stream was 391 and, of those, 288 (a 73,66%) were gameplay-related (comments on the events occurring through the games, the decisions made by the players, expressions of cheer and congratulations,...).



**Figure 3.** Examples of abbreviations in chat such as ‘lol’, ‘wtf’ and ‘afk’<sup>13</sup>

The referentiality of the examples chosen lies, in nearly all cases, in the videogaming environment, and in the case of certain terms is also specific to a given videogame type: for instance, ‘aram’ is used to designate a gaming mode in games such as League of Legends or Heroes of the Storm, and ‘jungle’ is a space on the map and a class of hero in League of Legends. Other constructs, such as ‘gg,’ ‘gl,’ ‘op’ o ‘pog,’ are found in all the Twitch channels selected for the corpus and, hence, may be considered general terms in the videogaming lexicon. Moreover, it is interesting to note that some of the abbreviations mentioned have undergone a process of semantic extension, taking on new connotations. Thus, ‘afk’ (a term appearing in the right-hand side screenshot in Figure 3), that literally stands for ‘away from keyboard’, is used to refer to players not participating appropriately in the game. Some of these abbreviations have values of a communicative, connotative or additive nature, and are usually sarcastic: otp (‘one trick pony’) alludes to players who can only master one character or hero, while ‘pog’ (‘play of the game’), initially with a positive meaning, is used in some streams to refer to failed moves or moments of ridicule during the game.

<sup>13</sup> Users’ names have been pixelated to safeguard anonymity.



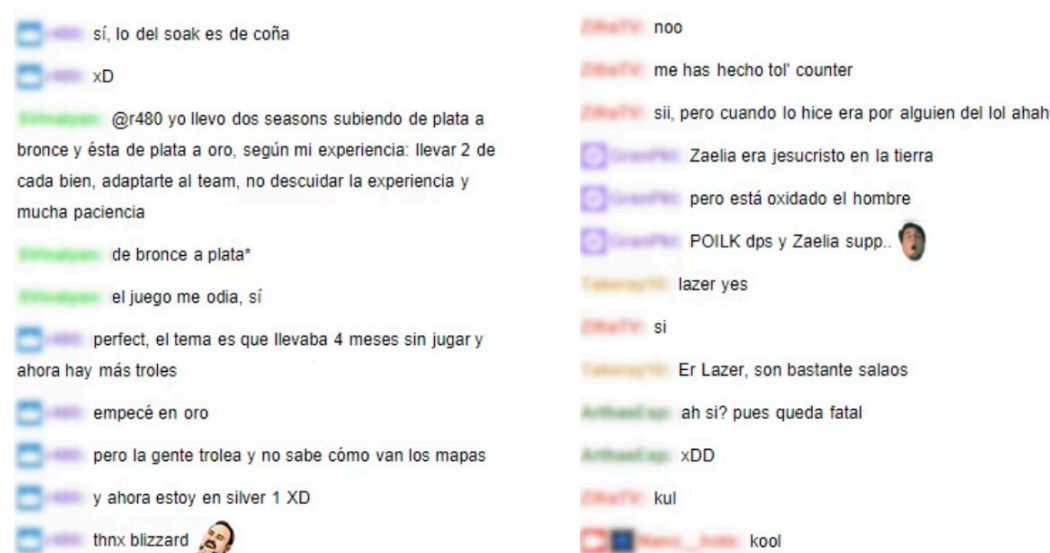
subsequent sections of this study, the presence of English in the chats on Twitch is key to describing the language used among Spanish-speaking users. In relation to this, it should be noted that from a morphological point of view, considerable neological creativity is displayed by users who, from initials or acronyms such as those mentioned above, create new hybrid words by adding Spanish suffixes. For example, ‘otp’ gives rise to *otpear*, through adding the Spanish suffix *-ear* to form a verb with the meaning ‘always playing the same character, the only one mastered by the player’ (this term appears in the right-hand screenshot in Figure 3), or *intear*, through adding the same suffix, with the same value as the original abbreviated expression: ‘to die intentionally.’

### 3.1.2 Syntax: *Fragmentariness and performative predications*

Syntax in CMC is often described, where it departs from the norm, as “telegraphic and fragmented” (Herring 2012: 524). This not only implies that we are likely to find many incomplete sentences and instances of missing pronouns, prepositions, etc., but also that in this kind of communicative interaction users break down long interventions into several short chat messages (Baron 2010). As discussed in the foregoing section, in Twitch both the speed at which the stream progresses and that of the chat itself propitiate a communicative urgency that translates as morphological abbreviations and evident fragmentariness in the syntactic construction of messages. In streams with a large number of viewers, this may generate an apparently chaotic discourse.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “Crowdspeak may appear chaotic, meaningless, or cryptic. However, we discovered ‘practices of coherence’ that make massive chats legible, meaningful, and compelling to participants. By coherence, we simply mean that the chat makes sense to participants and is not experienced as a breakdown, overload, or other difficulty” (Ford et al. 2017).



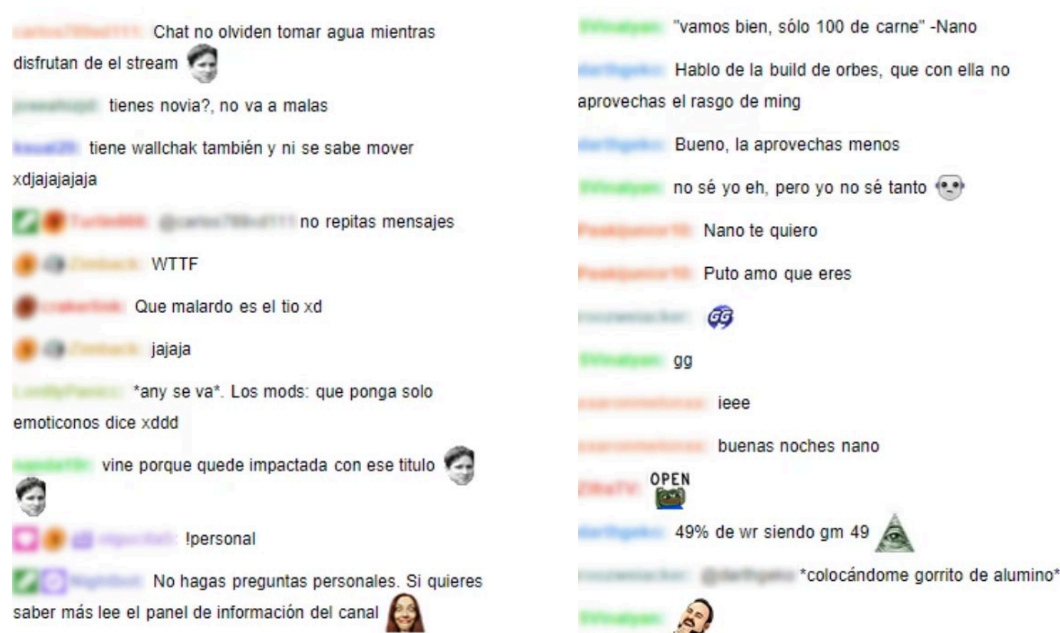
**Figure 5.** Examples of fragmentariness: a single user splits his contribution into several brief messages

The synchronous nature of Twitch concentrates much of the meaningful participation into a relatively short amount of time.<sup>15</sup> This intensifies the engagement of participants looking to contribute within the constrained time period compared with asynchronous participation. Particularly in smaller streams, the fragmentariness helps to keep the floor in the conversation and to get the attention to what the user wants to say not only from other participants in the chat but also from the streamer. Depending on the context, this fragmentariness can have additional communicative effects, as observed on the left image of Figure 5: an user is explaining a recent bad streak in the game (“I started in gold / but people are trolling and they don’t know how maps work), in a way that makes the last two chat messages hold a comical impact (“and now I am in silver XD / thanks Blizzard”), which is emphasized by the use of a typographical emoji (XD) and a Twitch emote that marks the sarcastic tone of the utterance.

A further aspect highlighted in the academic bibliography as characteristic of digital communication is performative predications, those that ‘can function alone as complete performative utterances, such as *\*waves\**, *<grin>*, *\*confused\**, and *\*in a bad mood\**’ (Herring, 2012). In semantic terms, such predications represent virtual actions or describe states, and their performative, paratextual nature is usually placed between asterisks. This study has found examples, albeit infrequent, of these performative predications, used both to describe actions performed by the streamer, as in *any se va* (*\*any se va\* Los mods: que*

<sup>15</sup> Once the stream is over, chat is closed and asynchronous participation is impossible.

*ponga solo emoticonos dice xddd*: ‘\*any is leaving\* The mods: that we turn only emoticons mod chat on he says xddd’), and figurative actions performed by a viewer, that in actual fact express a state: *colocándome gorrito de alumino* (‘putting on aluminium hat’), in which the predication functions as a playful response in collusion with a previous message by another user (49% de *wr* siendo *gm* 49, ‘49% *wr* while being *gm* 49’,<sup>16</sup> followed by a emote depicting an Eye of Providence, a known symbol for conspiracy theories):



**Figure 6.** Screenshots of chats in Apex Legends stream (left) and Heroes of the Storm (right)

### 3.1.3 Non-normative orthography and strange typographical forms

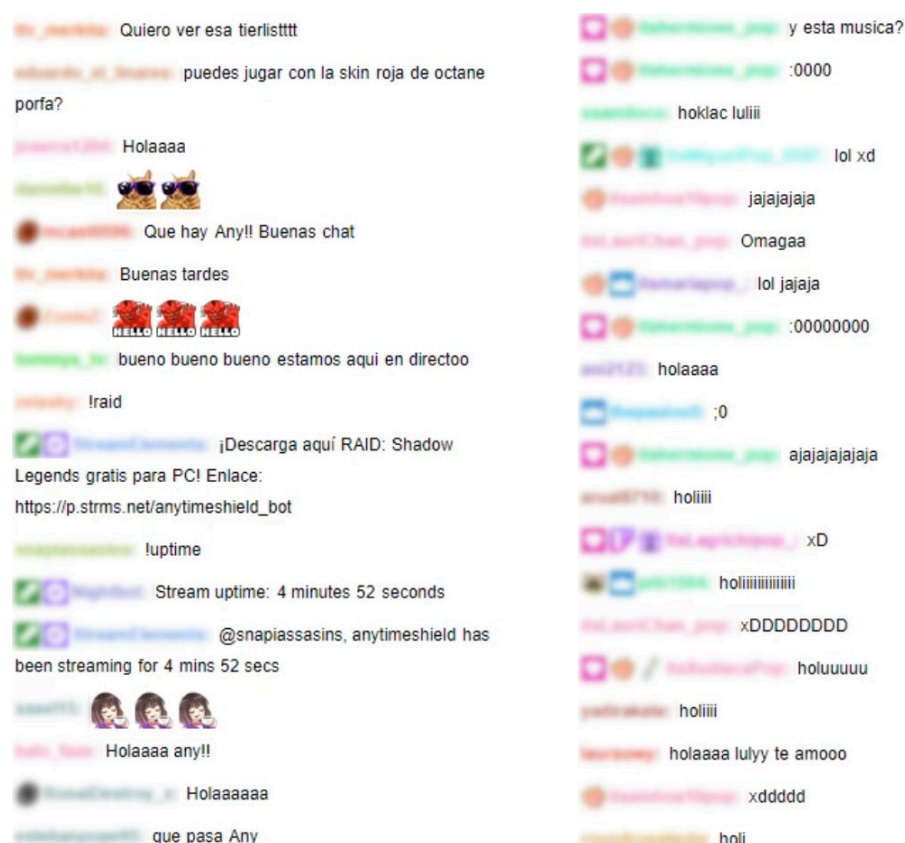
Departure from the orthographical norm is without doubt deemed the defining trait of CMC language (Herring 2012). In some cases, the academic literature has viewed such practices as typos or errors (Thurlow 2006), but the majority of studies in the field of CMC suggest that a large proportion of cases of non-orthographical writing is intentional (Werry 1996; Cherny 1999; Cho 2010), and the motivation for its use is, on the one hand, to compensate for the absence of the auditory signals, prosody, kinetics, proxemics, etc. provided in face-to-face conversation, and on the other hand, a ludic and creative factor inviting the departure from normative or standard writing. Furthermore, Hentschel (1998)

<sup>16</sup> The abbreviation *wr* refers to ‘winrate’ and *gm* means ‘grand master,’ one of the highest ranked levels of the game. The user is pointing out the numerical coincidence of these two unrelated stats.



is of the opinion that the language produced in IRC channels represents a new linguistic genre, as it makes no attempt to imitate spoken language but has developed expression and communication methods of its own.

These orthographical practices, which suggest a ‘flexible’ interpretation of the rules of grammar, result in graphic suppression or reduction, transliteration of pronunciation (informal, dialectal, emphatic, etc.), and typographical uses intended to represent prosody and certain paralinguistic features. In Twitch chats, non-standard orthography is constant, motivated not only by the brevity and speed needs that come naturally with a synchronous CMC, but, mostly, by pragmatic demands: the use of a wide range of onomatopoeic spellings adds prosodic impact to the written messages and, therefore, communicative immediacy; it also contributes to expressing the playful or friendly tone intended by the viewers that participate in the chat.



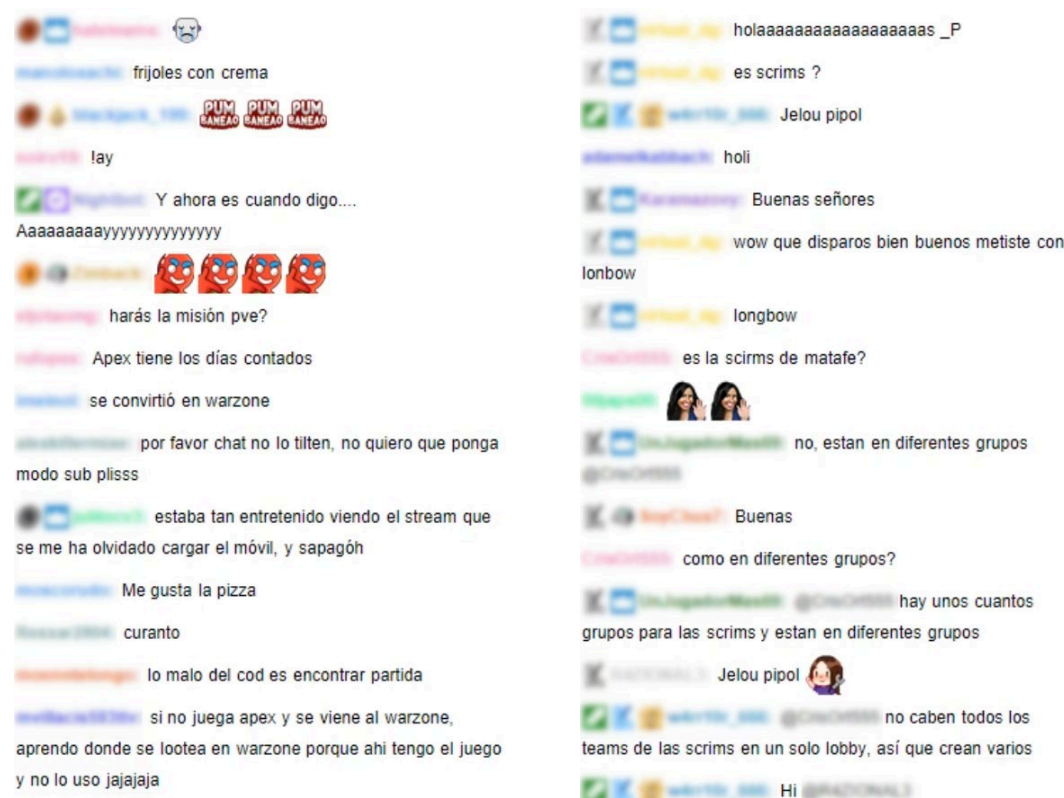
**Figure 7.** Examples of vowel and consonant lengthening

One of the most commonly used tools in the language of these chat messages is the representation of orality by means of graphic distortions. Vowel lengthening is the most frequent, and usually represents an expressive or emphatic intonation, as seen in the final

vowel in *hola* (*holaaaa*), *holi* (*holiiii*) and *holu* (*holuuuu*) (different variations of ‘hello’), or the final vowel in *directo* (*bueno bueno bueno estamos aqui en directo*) (‘well, well, well, we are here on stream’) and *te amo* (*lulyy te amooo*: ‘luly, I love you’). However, examples of consonant lengthening have also been identified, as in ‘tierlist’ (left screenshot). As shown in the above examples, onomatopoeic spellings are not only trying to mimic spoken language but displaying additional pragmatic information that would be not easily provided otherwise. Without the lengthening of the final vowels in *hola*, *holi* or *holu* (the second and third forms, already an example of informality and expressive writing), the messages will be devoid of an important part of the emotional content intended by the users; the expression of emphasis, happiness, and friendliness. Furthermore, in interactions such as greetings, the vowel lengthening is so extended and normalized that typing a standard *hola* in these chats could cause the intent conveyed by the utterance to be perceived as ambiguous; it could even suggest that the user is upset or being intentionally rude. In fact, the last line shown in Figure 7 presents a greeting without iterated vowels, but the fact that the chosen form is *holi* and not *hola* already captures certain informality and friendliness, even if the tone would be not perceived as emphatic as the rest of the examples.

Another common recourse to express this type of intonation is to use capitals (Ortigosa and Ibáñez 2006), but on Twitch chats this is generally penalised with a timeout or a ban (expulsion from the chat for a limited time or for good), as writing in capital letters is considered equivalent to ‘shouting’ or an inconvenient way of bringing attention to certain messages by one user. For this reason this trait is rarely found in the corpus.

Punctuation signs are almost totally absent, while exclamation and interrogation signs are also duplicated or repeated. In Spanish, a further peculiarity is observed: the orthographic rule in Spanish requires exclamative and interrogative phrases to be written between two (opening and closing) punctuation signs: “¿?” and “¡!”. However, influenced by English and the keyboards used on many electronic devices, written CMC increasingly contains only the closing exclamation and interrogation signs (Galán 2002; Ridao and Rodríguez 2013). Similarly, the accent mark is rarely used: the interrogative pronoun *qué* (‘what’) should carry the accent mark, but seldom does in Twitch chats, and the same applies to words like *aquí* (‘here’) or *música* (‘music’), as shown in Figure 7 (*y esta musica?*).



**Figure 8.** Examples of ‘eye dialect’ like *sapagóh* (‘it switched off’) and *jelou pipol* (‘hello people’)

As for representing pronunciation in writing, an example is *sapagóh* (*estaba tan entretenido viendo el stream que se me ha olvidado cargar el móvil, y sapagóh*: ‘I was so entranced watching the stream that I forgot to charge my phone and now it switched off’) in the left-hand screenshot in Figure 8, where the phrase *se apagó* (‘it switched off’) is written as a single word, with its own graphic oxytone accent and an aspirated ending indicated by the letter *h*, giving the message a dialectal characterisation. In studies on written CMC, this phenomenon is known as ‘eye dialect’ (Herring 2012), and is more visible in non-phonetic orthographies, such as that of English, than in others whose standard graphic representation is very close to the sounds of the language, such as Spanish. Therefore, many instances of ‘eye dialect’ found in Twitch chats correspond, precisely, to expressions written in English (*jelou pipol*, another evident example of dialectal characterisation for ‘hello people’) rather than in Spanish.

As shown in the examples above, the use of non-standard orthography not only serves the need for abbreviation and phonological representation in written chat messages, but it is also an important resource that allows the users to express themselves creatively.

### 3.1.3.1 Emotes on Twitch

The most widely studied pragmatic and paralinguistic elements of CMC are probably emoticons. These have been viewed as iconic indicators of emotions (Dresner and Herring 2010), although in more recent papers authors such as Li and Yang (2018) have pointed out that emoticons fulfil a number of additional pragmatic functions: they act, for example, as markers of illocutionary force or structuring devices (Spina 2018), or activate courtesy strategies (Walther and D'Addario 2001; Maíz-Arévalo 2015; Darics 2010; Kavanagh 2016). In the case of Twitch, emotes (term preferred in the Twitch jargon)<sup>17</sup> have also sparked a significant wave of academic discussion. Nakandala et al. (2016) have used the number and type of emotes used in chats as one of the indicators for measuring the 'gendered conversations' found in videogame streams on this platform, and they observe that this aspect is more related to popularity than gender (as the rate of messages increases, these become shorter and contain more emotes).<sup>18</sup>

In the chats considered for this study, the use of emotes does not appear to be motivated by the users or streamers gender but, as Nakandala et al. (2016: 7) also point out, small streams do not show, in general terms, such as a clear contrast regarding gendered conversations. Kim et al. (2020) demonstrate that the spectator reactions captured from the early-stage of live streams hold essential markers of the eventual popularity of video streams, through a prediction model that captures various aspects of audience reactions, including emote usage and chat frequency. They focus on the emotes that imply "relatable emotion toward the streamer" (Kim et al. 2020: 152) as a positive indicator of future popularity, and they make a distinction for those emotes that are specific for a certain community or channel (Kim et al. 2020: 151).

Twitch offers around 250 general emotes but also a varying number of subscriber emotes (depending on the streamer popularity, emotes slots are progressively unlocked). These are only available for viewers with paid subscriptions to the channel but can be used by those users in chats of any streamer, once acquired, and the image of those emotes is visible for every user, regardless they are paid subscribers or not. As Kobs et al. (2020)

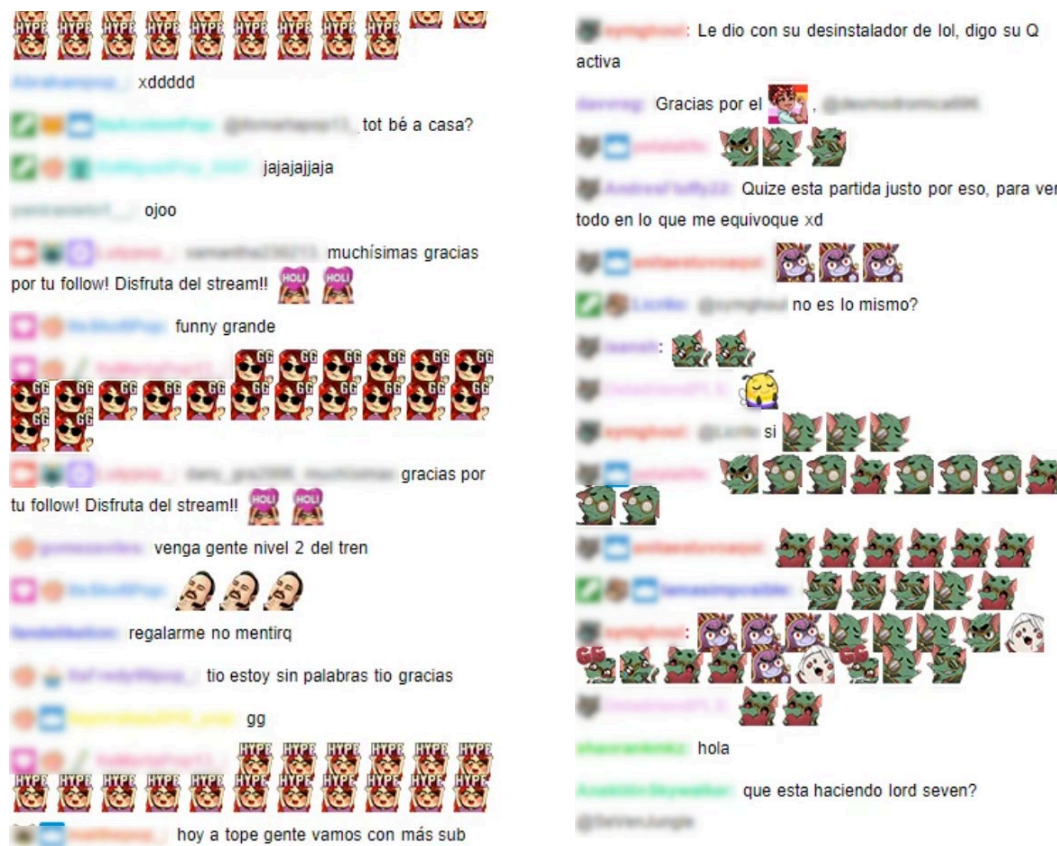
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<sup>17</sup> "Twitch emotes are named little pictures or animations available to Twitch users in the comment section next to streams. [...] We distinguish between emotes and unicode emojis that are used for example in messaging apps and are available on multiple platforms" (Kobs et al. 2020).

<sup>18</sup> According to Nakandala et al. (2016), popular channels display, however, a clear contrast between two genders: game related words are clearly overrepresented in male channels while words that signal objectification are strongly associated with female channels. Less popular female channels do not show clear signs of objectification.

point out, every emote on Twitch has its own meaning, back story, and use cases, and while some emotes' meanings can be inferred by looking at the image representation, others may not be easily decoded by users unfamiliar with Twitch or with specific streamers.

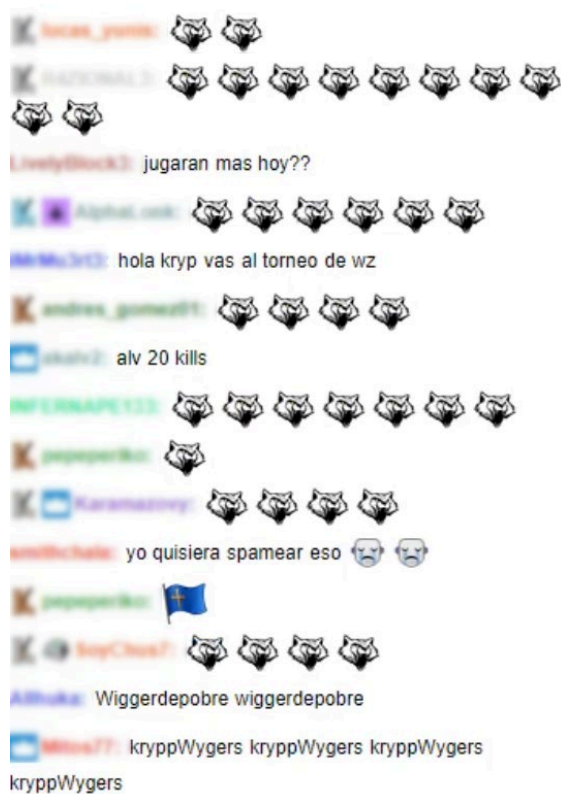
One of the most used emotes on Twitch is 'LUL' (Kobs et al. 2020), which can be found in Figure 5 and Figure 6 in this article, in both cases serving as a example of conventional uses of emotes in CMC. In Figure 5 the emote is placed at the end of a message ('thnx blizzard'), as a humour marker, but also as an interpretation indicator, signalling a non-literal meaning: the addition of this emote, together with contextual knowledge, reveals that the statement should not be interpreted literally, but rather that the meaning of the message is exactly the opposite. In Figure 6 the same emote appears alone, with no verbal modality next to it, as it is sufficient to express a reaction that is complementary to the previous interaction in Figure 5 (commented on Section 3.1.2), an answer to the previous humorous remarks and an indicator of shared laughter that emphasizes the ludic, playful character of the interaction.



**Figure 9.** Examples of emoticons available exclusively by subscription

Something different and unique to Twitch regarding the use of emotes can be observed in Figure 9. The screenshots show two chats where subscriber-exclusive emotes are being used. In the image of the left, the emotes represent the face of the streamer, which adds communicative value to their use, since displaying a smiling emote in that context not only expresses joy and agreement, but it also implies affective identification with the streamer represented in said emotes, and it strengthens the affective tone of the interactions: the streamer has won a game, so she is happy, and the chat reacts to that emotion with specific emotes that mirror the happy face of the streamer.

Not all subscriber-emotes represent the face of the streamer: on the right screenshot, emotes from a different stream reproduce a sort of ‘stream mascot,’ the image of the character most played by that streamer. It is interesting to note the iteration of those emotes; quite often subscriber-emotes are displayed just to show support and fanship; this is, not to contribute to message interpretation or to replace paralinguistic cues, but to express visually information (proof, even) about the adherence of the user to the streamer and their community. In gaming streams, this is particularly frequent when the streamer is part of a team, and one of the subscriber-emotes is the team logo, so this will be used multiple times during competitive encounters, mirroring the display of flags and banners in a real stadium. This particular use of emotes contributes to virtual community-building and it is also a status marker: viewers that do not have those exclusive emotes unlocked can feel like they are left outside, and interactions like the one show below can easily occur:



**Figure 10.** Examples of use of an emoticon available exclusively by subscription

After a victory of the streamer and his team ('Wygers'), his subscribers are spamming the chat with a subscriber-emote that represents the team logo. One user writes '*yo quisiera spamear eso*' ('I'd like to spam that') alongside with two emotes that show a crying face. Seconds later, another user types the code that corresponds to the subscriber-emote ('kryppWygers'), but because this user is not a subscriber, the code is printed as plain text in the chat, instead of being automatically converted to an emote.

As shown with the examples analysed above, emotes on Twitch not only provide a symbolic substitution for non-verbal cues missing in written communication, but they also emphasize the playful nature of certain online interactions and can contribute to identification and virtual community-building on the platform.

Many of the features observed throughout this section coincide with the characteristics of oralized and multimodal writing that, from the perspective of cyber-pragmatics (Yus 2010), is representative of the CMC (in particular when synchronous) among young speakers. As this same author points out, there is a growing trend toward these discursive practices becoming generally extensive to all communications produced in a digital environment (Yus 2020b: 419). Furthermore, as shown in this section, the distinctive features of digital writing (abbreviations, non-standard orthography and typography, use of emotes...) convey certain communicative effects on Twitch chats.



This occurs in a virtual space in which immediacy reduces the need for conventional message form, and where users are also using language creatively, in the context of an interface that encourages not only ludic and playful interactions but, also, through peculiarities unique to Twitch such as the existence of subscriber-exclusive emotes, fosters status markers and community-building among its users.

#### **4. Language used in Twitch among Spanish speakers: Anglicism, terminological characteristics and pragmatic consequences**

One of the conclusions reached in recent studies on CMC is that what is known as ‘Netspeak’ (Crystal 2001) is not universal (Herring 2012). Several contributions have shown that users of CMC who are speakers of tongues other than English present certain characteristics of their own regarding their use of typography and orthography in digital environments (thus, for instance, Anis 2007, for French and SMS; Herring and Zelenkauskaitė 2009, for Italian and SMS; Gómez Camacho and Gómez del Castillo 2007, for Spanish conversations on Whatsapp). Nonetheless, this does not deny the influence of English, as intercultural *lingua franca* –especially in certain communication scenarios– on the digital language used by speakers whose mother tongue or sole language is not English (Androutsopoulos 2007). For Spanish and the videogaming language used on Twitch, the impact of English is observed most clearly on the lexical level.

With regard to videogaming language, whether this is produced in the context of CMC (Morales 2015; Badia 2018) or through other more traditional transmission channels such as periodical publications (Rodríguez and Cabrera 2008; Álvarez-Bolado 2010), the bibliography for Spanish has already shown that the presence of anglicisms is one of its foremost characteristics. In their analysis of gaming magazines in Spanish, Rodríguez and Cabrera (2008) give an example consisting of a database dump of two issues of magazines published in December 2004, in which 744 anglicisms were counted (not restricted to videogames, but also including expressions such as *clon*, *cameo*, *motel*, *penalti*, etc.), which represents an average of 3.6 anglicisms per page analysed (Rodríguez and Cabrera 2008: 413).

In the corpus for this study, extracted from Twitch chat messages, the figures are also revealing: practically all words relating to the videogaming lexicon originate from



English (589 of the 592 studied),<sup>19</sup> and in addition, their categorization highlights that over half of these anglicisms have not been morphologically or orthographically adapted to Spanish; in other words, they are patently non-integrated loanwords.<sup>20</sup>

As shown both in the screenshots discussed in the foregoing sections and in some examples given above, the terminological characteristics of many of the words used in the videogame stream chats on Twitch are evident. The degree of specialisation in some cases leads us to consider these words not only as belonging to the videogaming lexicon, but also as a set of terms inherent and exclusive to a specific type of videogame, the knowledge of which is essential to decipher the meaning of the term.

The following table contains a small sample of general and specific terms in the language of videogames. While the examples of general terms were found in the streams of all four of the videogames selected, the examples of specific terms were found distributed in game-specific streams of the corpus. In Table 1, the column ‘Subtype’ indicates if the specific term corresponds either to shooters and battle royal games (i.e., *Fortnite* and *Apex Legends*), or to strategy-based games (i.e., *League of Legends* and *Heroes of the Storm*).

**Table 1.** Sample of general and specific terms in the language of videogames found in the corpus

Type	Subtype	Term	Meaning
General	-	<i>buffar/buffear</i>	from ‘to buff’: to strengthen a given character, weapon, or aspect of the game
General	-	<i>callear</i>	from ‘to call’: take tactical decisions in the game that are communicated to the team
General	-	<i>career/carrilear</i>	from ‘to carry’: to become the main actor in winning the game
General	-	<i>focusear</i>	from ‘to focus’: to centre one’s attention on the game or on a given aspect or character of the game
Specific	Shooters	<i>lootear</i>	from ‘to loot’: to collect items of value in the game shown on the map or from defeated enemies
Specific	Shooters	<i>campear</i>	from ‘to camp’: a player remains concealed or hidden during a large part of the game to avoid being defeated
Specific	Strategy	<i>banear</i>	from ‘to ban’: to block a character so that no player may choose it before a game
Specific	Strategy	<i>gankear</i>	from ‘to gank’: to set an ambush for one or more enemies with assistance from other players in the same team

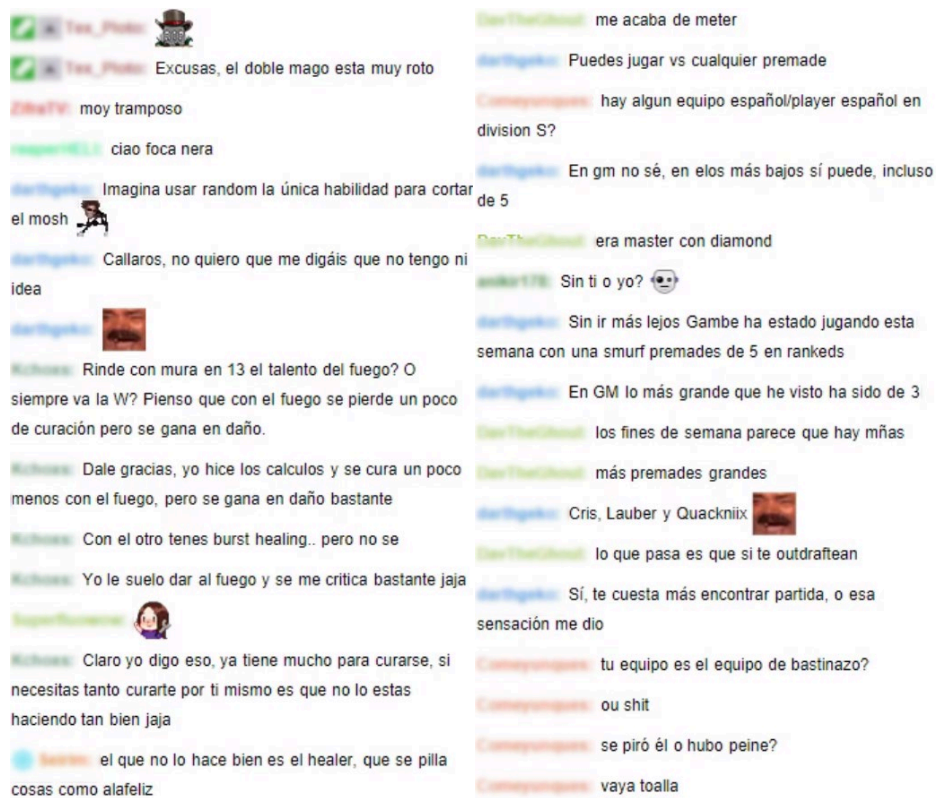
<sup>19</sup> The two examples in the database from the field of videogaming and not borrowed from English are the lexical unit *niño rata* (rat kid: ‘a very young or childish player’), the verb *estamparse* and the deverbal noun *estampada* (‘to lose a game in a crushing manner’ and ‘crushing defeat’).

<sup>20</sup> A lexical study of some of the anglicisms used in Twitch can be found in Coteló (2021).

In most cases, term specialisation derives from the mechanisms specific to each type of game. Thus, *Apex* and *Fortnite* are ‘shooters’ in ‘battle royale’ mode, i.e., they are games in which the principal aim is to shoot down and eliminate the rest of the players (hence the action *campear*, for instance), whereas *League of Legends* and *Heroes of the Storm* are games of strategy based on the distribution of control over a map between two opponent teams (which makes *gankear*, for example, an action that is essential to making tactical progress within the game).

This study considers that this trend toward terminological specificity is driven by two factors associated both with the nature of the videogaming environment and with the Twitch platform itself. On the one hand, the existence of jargon in multi-player videogaming communities has been described as a trait inherent to such communities and, more than that, a ‘marker of status’ (Consalvo 2008). In this respect, categorisations have been proposed such as that of Siitonen (2007), who distinguishes four levels in the usage and specificity of the jargon used, the last two of which are the most relevant to this study, since they entail ‘game-specific expressions’ such as abbreviations for certain characters and quests or patterns of behaviour. On the most specific level, a community might have its own set of terms that only the members of it understand, which makes its jargon the most difficult to grasp by outsiders, since it requires involvement with the community to be understood (such as *lootear*, *campear*, *banear* and *gankear*, included in Table 1).

Moreover, the development and establishment of a jargon within one or several channels on Twitch is necessarily linked to the capacity of a platform of this type for creating ‘meaningful social ties’ in the thematic environment of videogames. As we know, a shared linguistic repertoire, common linguistic objectives and a specific linguistic context are the principal characteristics of a discursive community (Swales 1990). Such communities do not necessarily require interpersonal communication among members to generate a sense of belonging centred around a subject of common interest. This shared interest is expressed through a specialised discourse that is rich in meanings and specific terms. In the context of Twitch, spectators communicate with others whose ideas are similar to their own and who share their deep interest in videogames, and “streamers engage in reporting that is full of gamer jargon to express complex game events and their decision making” (Recktenwald 2018: 189).

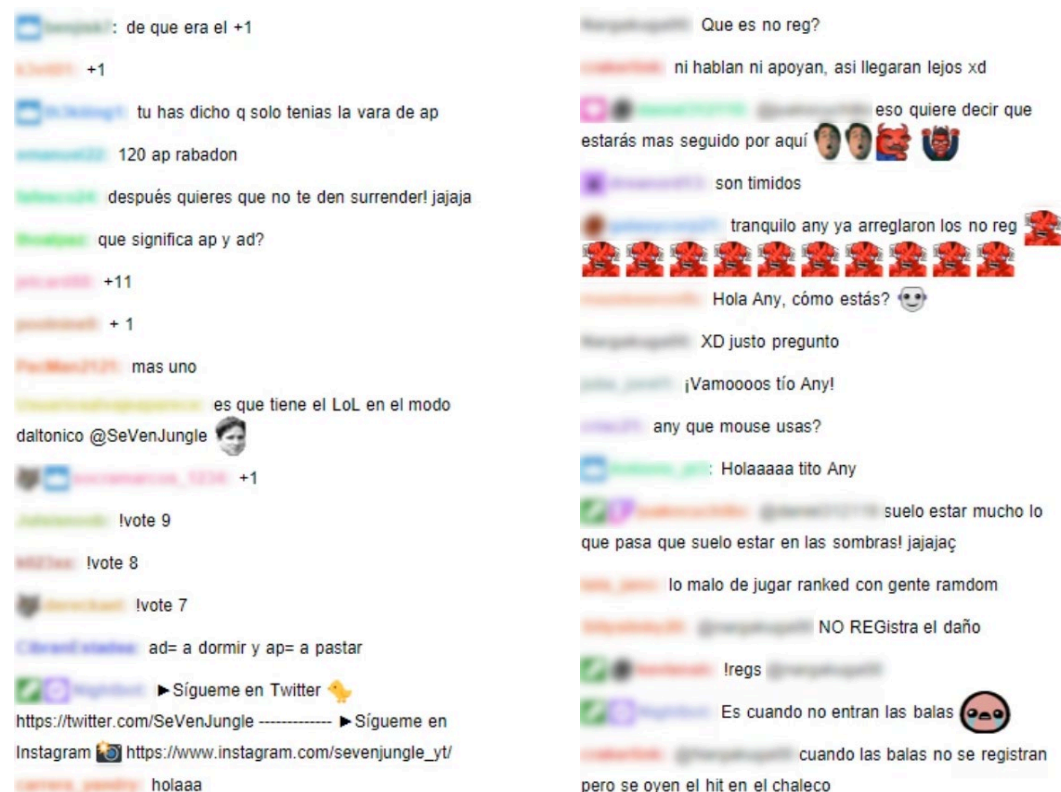


**Figure 11.** Screenshots of a chat stream, showing the examples described below

On the examples shown above, viewers write their opinions in a peculiar register that includes numerous localisms and colloquial terms but presents also extremely specific jargon. Highly expressive colloquialisms in Peninsular Spanish such as *callaros* (instead of ‘*callaos*’, the normative form, to tell someone to ‘shut up’); *se piró* (a very colloquial way to say ‘he took off’); or *vaya toalla* (an informal way to express awe or ponderation regarding a situation) coexist in the same chat with technicisms as ‘*doble mago*’ (‘double mage’: a particular team composition); ‘mosh’ (‘mosh pit’: an ability of one of the characters of the game); ‘mura’ (abbreviature of ‘Muradin,’ a character of the game); ‘burst healing’ (a healing that is applied to a character very fast); ‘premade’ (a group of players playing together); ‘gm’; ‘master’ and ‘diamond’ (different ranks of the game) or ‘smurf’ (a secondary account of a player). To the eyes of the outsider or even to casual players of the game (in this case, the game being Heroes of the Storm), the conversation can be nearly incomprehensible for the most part. Yet, the use of jargon allows for complex but efficient communication while the game occurs, in addition to mark game expertise for the users that display it in the chat interactions.

As any other jargon, this implies a certain secretiveness creating a visible rift between advanced gamers and ‘newbies’ or infrequent players, for whom learning the

lingo is essential to be able to join any specific community (Consalvo 2008: 308). On this point, however, it should be mentioned that it is not unusual for users of a channel to help each other understand the more obscure or complex terms:



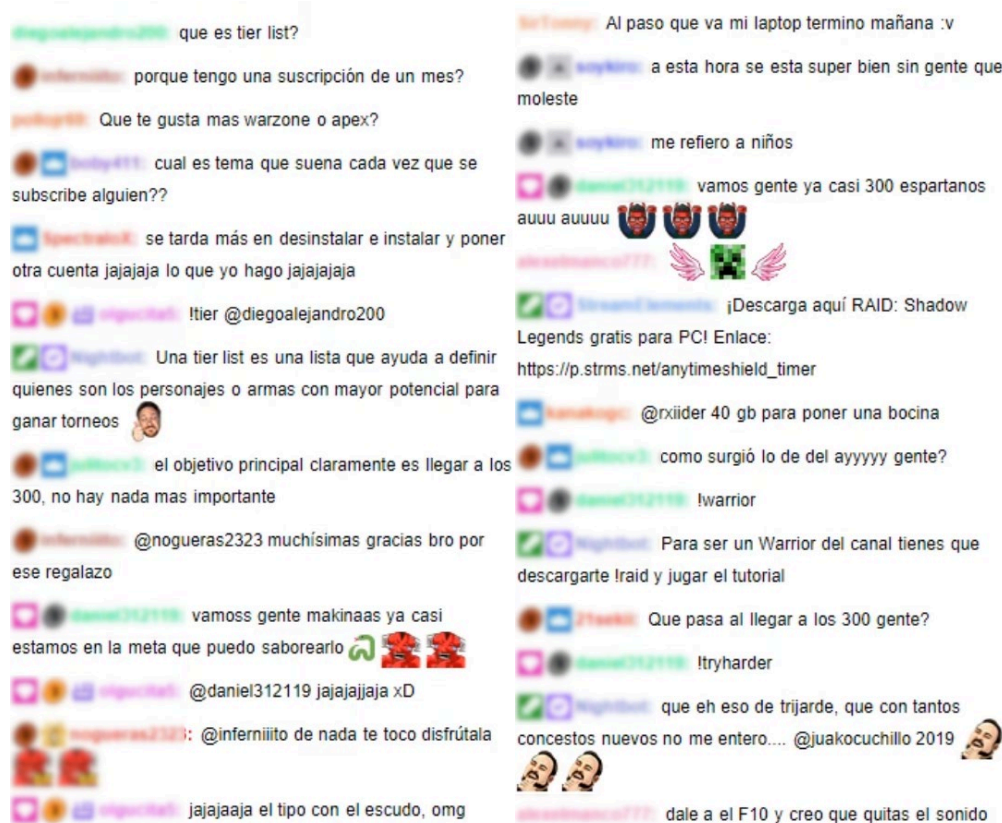
**Figure 12.** Screenshots of chats streams showing the examples described below

In the left-hand screenshot in Figure 12, a chat member of a League of Legends stream asks about the meaning of the abbreviations ‘ap’ and ‘ad’ (*que significa ap y ad?*: ‘what do ap and ad mean?’). These initials refer to the phrases ‘ability power’ and ‘attack damage,’ respectively, used to describe different ways in which videogame characters can cause harm during the game. The only answer this user received is: *ad= a dormir y ap= a pastar*, in which *a dormir* literally means ‘go to sleep’ and *a pastar*, ‘go out to graze.’ Both expressions refer, in euphemistic and informal terms, to eliminating or killing another character in the game. Thus, the user is not given a truly informative answer, but a playful or sarcastic one.

However, in the screenshot on the right, a user asks the meaning of *no reg* (*Que es no reg*), an expression appearing frequently in Apex Legends chat messages (*no reg*: *no hit registration*), referring to an error in the game that fails to register instances of harm caused to other gamers despite the player’s visual and auditory perception of having hit his opponent. Another user in the chat replies providing the full unabbreviated expression (*NO REGistra el daño*: ‘NO hit REGistration’), while another completes the information

clarifying the meaning (*Cuando las balas no se registran pero se oyen el hit en el chaleco*: ‘When the bullets are not registered but you hear the hit on the vest’).

Another example of how the obstacle of specific language can be managed in these chats involves one of the most peculiar features that Twitch offers as a resource to help administer its chats: programmable commands.



**Figure 13.** Screenshots of chats streams showing the examples of commands described below

There are several free bots that allow streamers (or chat moderators designated by them) to create simple commands that consist of a kit of keywords that, when written in chat after an exclamation mark, automatically produce a certain message that contains an explanation related to said word. As shown above (Figure 13), when an user asks what is a ‘tierlist’, another user can type ‘!tierlist,’ or the streamer can indicate the user asking to type it, and a message generated by a bot will post the answer (‘a tierlist is a list that helps to determine what are the characters or weapons with best potential to win competitions’). It works, ultimately, as an integrated FAQ that will be different for every chat, as it is responsibility of the streamer to set it up. It may be used, as well, with playful purposes, as the right-hand image in Figure 13 shows: the command ‘!tryharder’ generates, instead of an informative answer about the meaning of the term, a quotation of an old message from another user, written in a hypercharacterized variety of Andalusian Spanish (‘que

eh eso de trijarde, que con tantos concestos nuevos no me entero...’), that reflects humorously on the fact that there are too many new terms to keep track of all of them.

In conclusion, whether we are speaking of strategies to create status distancing from users who are not familiar with the jargon, or strategies to facilitate access by new players to an understanding of the interaction in the chat messages, it is evident, as noted by Yus (2020b), that language is an extremely valuable tool for strengthening the sense of belonging to a group.<sup>21</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

For years, it has been a popular impression that the language of CMC is less correct, less coherent, and less creative than traditional written language. However, an increasing number of studies state that only a small percentage of the non-standard features recorded in this type of communication are caused by carelessness or ignorance of the grammatical norm (Herring 2015), and in fact the majority are the result of deliberate decisions taken by users, in response to the pragmatic conditions of CMC, either to save writing time, to represent features of spoken language, or to play with the language to express themselves creatively.

The foregoing pages demonstrate the presence of these characteristics in Twitch chat messages, confirming that the type of communicative interaction that takes place on this digital context matches the features of CMC described in the academic literature. Additionally, Twitch’s synchronous and multimodal nature should be considered as a prominent feature of the language of this platform. The rapid speed at which this type of communication sometimes unfolds, driven by the number of participants and contributions to the chat or by the rate at which events occur in the stream, intensifies the engagement of participants looking to contribute within the constrained time period, compared with asynchronous participation environments.

Other particular characteristics should be taken into account for a comprehensive description of Twitch as an example of CMC: first, the constant use of non-standard orthography and onomatopoeic spellings, motivated not only by speed needs but, mostly, by pragmatic demands, as this allows users to express themselves creatively, to search for prosodic impact and communicative immediacy, and even to represent dialectal

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<sup>21</sup> This is further amplified in digital communities, in which bonding may occur more rapidly than in social dynamics in face-to-face conditions (Siitonen 2007).

characterisation of certain Spanish and English expressions (e.g., *jelou pipol*: ‘hello people’). Secondly, the use of emotes on Twitch entails some unique features: in addition to serve as humour markers or interpretation indicators, a good portion of Twitch emotes are only available to users subscribed to the channel in which they are participating. Most of these subscriber-exclusive emotes represent the face of the streamer, which adds communicative value to their use and implies affective identification with the streamer represented in said emotes. Especially in competitive e-gaming streams, subscriber-exclusive emotes are displayed to show support and fanship; and when “spammed” on chat, tend to mirror the display of flags and banners that would happen in a real stadium. Emotes on Twitch, then, not only help to provide message interpretation or replace paralinguistic cues, but contribute to identification and virtual community-building on the platform.

Lastly, in the case of the videogame chats in Spanish studied, a key factor in describing this language involves the lexicon: its foreign origin, its neological nature and its high level of terminological specialisation. Thus, to the innovative character that is regularly mentioned in referring to digital language, that is manifested, as we have seen, in the use of morphological abbreviations, syntactic fragmentariness, typographical and orthographical uses with specific communicative values, or the inclusion of emotes and visual elements in writing, it is deemed necessary to add the innovative nature of the lexical level within the language used in Twitch. Lexical creativity, a penchant for neologisms, and semantic specialisation are traits observed in all the streams studied for the corpus, and these phenomena multiply and feedback thanks to the vast quantity of participants simultaneously active in a single communicative location. This is a language undergoing constant renewal, and that is already beginning to impact the ordinary language produced out of the digital world (expressions such as ‘gg’, for example, are already in use among young speakers of Spanish out of Twitch to convey happiness or celebration).

Authors such as Logan (2004) or Stein (2006) have reflected on how great the impact of the language of Internet will be on the way we speak, today and in the future, outside of the environment of Internet, and on how the changes brought by the virtual world to ‘real world’ language are nothing other than the natural progression driven by an increasingly pressing need for change demanded by languages in present times. However, such changes should not be viewed as harmful to the language: “language change is being affected and effected by Internet communication, and that if anything, e-grammar



enriches rather than impoverishes language users and languages themselves” (Herring 2012: 8).

For all the above, this researcher believes that linguistic studies on the language of Internet, on relatively recent but enormously successful platforms such as Twitch, represent a scarcely explored field that nonetheless offers huge potential to researchers, and trusts that this study will also serve to showcase the potential of these platforms as a source of linguistic data and a diversity of perspectives from which to study language.

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