Gamers know grammar and aren't afraid to use it

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Gamers use good grammar? Strange as it might sound, that's one the findings from studies of online gaming chat led by Colorado State University researcher. The studies found that Millennials – young people notorious for misused language and sloppy typing – are actually more accomplished communicators than many believed.

"Online chat – especially in games – is often thought of as eroding the typing and self-expression skills of younger people, but our study shows that they are very expressive and do pay attention to how they communicate both with text and non-verbally with their avatars," said Rosa Mikeal Martey, the study's lead author and a professor in Colorado State University's Department of Journalism and Technical Communication.

The studies, conducted by researchers at CSU, Syracuse University, Concordia University and the University at Albany, analyzed the chat, movement and appearance of 201 participants as they played a custom-built quest game in Second Life—a 3D virtual world where users can design their own environments and avatars. A follow-up study compared these findings to 375 players of the multiplayer online game World of Warcraft. The studies set out to see if a player's age is revealed in how they communicate and interact.

The study's Second Life participants ranged in age from 18 to 64 with an average age of 37, and World of Warcraft participants were between 18 and 54 with an average age of 29. Their appearance, movement, chat and

mouse clicks were recorded as they played a two-hour quest game designed by the researchers in each world.

"People often have a sense of how old other people are after spending time with them online, even if they've never met offline – they notice things like how polite people are, their language use and how they express themselves," said Martey, who became an accomplished World of Warcraft player before immersing herself in the gaming study.

"It's not just what people say, it's the types of phrases they use and how they visually interact in virtual space that serve as cues about people's age online," says study co-author Jennifer Stromer-Galley, a professor at the School of Information Studies at Syracuse.

The researchers found that in both Second Life and World of Warcraft, older players were more polite and less emotionally expressive than younger players. In Second Life, older players also used avatars that were more stereotypically attractive than younger players and about half the number of emoticons. In World of Warcraft, younger players jumped about twice as much, moved around 15 percent more and moved backwards 30 percent more than older ones.

"As we found in in our studies of gender, movement reveals a lot about people online – in fact, if you combine gender and age, you see even more clearly that the ones who jump, move backward, and wander around more are most likely to be men under 30," Martey explained. "Younger players are taking full advantage of the expressive possibilities of the avatar, not just chat – they use that digital self to express themselves just as much if not more than they use words."

Provided by Colorado State University