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Surrounded by a wall: The hermetic language of the Polish community of video gamers.¹ Do Poles know the language of Polish gamers? The results of a survey-based study

“Currently in Poland there are no linguistic studies regarding such phenomena related to PC games as, e.g. (...) communication within games, mainly in online games, the special use of language when describing the interactions between a gamer and the world of a game, or the emergence of game-specific vocabulary.”²

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- 1 I created the expression *gracz wideo* [‘video gamer’] – which I had not encountered in academic or popular science literatures or in fiction – for the purpose of referring to the entire group of gamers, i.e. people who play video games regardless of the platform they use. The expression *gracz wideo* combines the extents of the existing and stable terms of *gracz konsolowy* [‘console gamer’] (a gamer who plays games on a game console/various game console. Such gamers usually possess several consoles. A console is an “electronic multimedia device enabling a person to play video games, and, in the case of some models, listen to music, watch films, and browse the internet” (www.sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/konsoli.html, accessed on: 6 Apr 2017) and *gracz komputerowy* [‘computer gamer’] (a gamer who plays on a computer), and, additionally, it emphasises not so much the hardware being used for gaming but, rather, the kind of games (differing from, e.g., board games or card games). The subordinate/attributive segment (‘video’) constitutes a specification of the object of activity. It already exists in combinations such as: ‘video games’, ‘video camera’ [i.e. *kamera wideo*, the Polish term for a ‘camcorder’], and ‘video cassette’ [*kaseta wideo*, the Polish term for a ‘VHS’]. I discussed this in more detail in the article titled “Soniaki, hardkorowcy i casualu, czyli o leksyce w komunikacji graczy konsolowych” (Kielce 2016).
- 2 K. Gądek, “Metodologiczne podstawy opisu języka graczy komputerowych”, [in:] *Biblioteka Lingwariów. Język z różnych stron widziany*, A. Czelakowska, M. Skarżyński (eds.), Kraków 2009.

The quoted fragment was written by Kamila Gądek over nine years ago, yet it remains valid even today. That text encouraged me to examine the language of the community of video gamers (mainly their lexis) more closely, and to check whether the metaphorical “walls” – which in this context I understand as a separation/isolation of the gamers’ lexis from the general Polish language – still stand.

I searched for academic studies on this topic, i.e. the lexis of the gamers’ community. What I found was only short fragments (in various articles and chapters of books) intended as explanations of a dozen, several dozen or, rarely, several hundred lexemes used in that community, which, considering the extent of the phenomenon of gaming, constituted only a fraction of the lexical resources. It is, simply, surprising that the area had not been the subject of a comprehensive examination. What is, then, the state of research into the vocabulary of gamers?

Apart from texts by Kamila Gądek (the opening quotation of this article came from her work), small/introductory studies into the lexis of gamers can be found in several other works. In the article titled “Elementy socjolektu graczy komputerowych”³ [“The Elements of the Sociolect of PC Gamers”], the author focused on defining the language of the online community of PC gamers; she studied its lexis and syntax. In the article titled “Komunikacja w świecie gier komputerowych”⁴ [“Communication in the World of PC Games”], the authors discussed the structure and the rules of how a gamer talks to a machine and an *avatar*⁵, how a game creator speaks to gamers, how gamers talk to game creators, as well as of the dialogue between gamers. They also quoted and explained a dozen or so terms associated with games. In the article titled “Nazwy własne a lokalizacja gier elektronicznych fantasy – o potrzebie przekładu oraz wybranych tendencjach w tłumaczeniu gier anglojęzycznych na rynek polski i niemiecki”⁶ [“Proper Names and the Localisation of Electronic Fantasy Games: On the Need for Translations and Selected Tendencies in the Translations of English-Language Games for the Polish and German Markets”], Krzysztof Inglot discussed the process of translating various proper names into Polish, e.g. names of characters, including monsters, and game titles.

3 D. Urbańska-Galanciak, “Elementy socjolektu graczy komputerowych”, [in:] *Język@multimedia*, A. Dytman-Stasieńko, J. Stasieńko (eds.), Wrocław 2005.

4 D. Chmielewska-Łuczak, T. Smejliś, “Komunikacja w świecie gier komputerowych”, [in:] *Język@multimedia*, A. Dytman-Stasieńko, J. Stasieńko (eds.), Wrocław 2005.

5 An avatar is “is a character a gamer shapes” (ibid., p. 327).

6 K. Inglot, “Nazwy własne a lokalizacja gier elektronicznych fantasy – o potrzebie przekładu oraz wybranych tendencjach w tłumaczeniu gier anglojęzycznych na rynek polski i niemiecki”, *Homo Ludens* 1(5)/2013, Poznań.

Apart from articles, there are also three books which are noteworthy⁷: *Wirtualny plac zabaw. Gry sieciowe i przemiany kultury współczesnej*⁸ by Mirosław Filiciak, *Fabularyzowane gry komputerowe w przestrzeni humanistycznej*⁹ by Rafał Kochanowicz, and *Homo players. Strategie odbioru gier komputerowych*¹⁰ by Dominika Urbańska-Galanciak. The author of the first one devoted a chapter (“Komunikacja werbalna – mechanizmy komunikacyjne oraz slang graczy” [“Verbal communication: Communicational Mechanisms and Gamers’ Slang”]) to explaining several dozen terms, mainly abbreviations used by the users of the online game *EverQuest*.¹¹ The author of the second book has indicated that gamers’ lexis quickly evolves and transforms, and, as a result, new terms emerge while older ones are abandoned.

As a conclusion of the overview of books, I must mention that the most extensive study of the topic (i.e. the language of Polish video gamers) which I managed to find is the thirty-page-long chapter “Języka cyberrozrywki” [“The Language of Cyberentertainment”] from Domika Urbańska-Galanciak’s work titled *Homo players. Strategie odbioru gier komputerowych*. In the chapter, the author included three sub-chapters: “Komputerowo mediatyzowana komunikacja” [“Computer-Mediated Communication”], “Tendencje rozszerzające – język jako czynnik wyodrębniający zbiorowość” [“Expanding Tendencies: Language as a Factor Defining a Community”], and “Tendencje upraszczające – język jako środek jednoczenia wspólnoty” [“Simplifying Tendencies: Language as a Means of Unifying a Community”]. In the first sub-chapter, Urbańska-Galanciak approached the question about the place of language within a social group; for this purpose, she quoted Edward Sapir, who noted that social groups bound by a common interest “tend to develop peculiarities of speech which have the symbolic function of somehow distinguishing the group from the larger group.”¹² The author also stressed the fact that “some of the words which originally formed in the language of gamers is transferred, often by themselves, to the colloquial language and used in other

7 There are, of course, more books which describe the community of video gamers (e.g. *Gry wideo. Zarys poetyki* by Piotr Kubiński (Kraków 2016), and *Game cultures: computer games as new media* by John Dovey and Helen W. Kennedy (Kraków 2011)), yet those failed to include a detailed definition of the lexis of the video gamers’ community.

8 M. Filiciak, *Wirtualny plac zabaw. Gry sieciowe i przemiany kultury współczesnej*, Warsaw 2006.

9 R. Kochanowicz, *Fabularyzowane gry komputerowe w przestrzeni humanistycznej*, Poznań 2012.

10 D. Urbańska-Galanciak, *Homo players. Strategie odbioru gier komputerowych*, Warsaw 2009.

11 An RPG (*role-playing game*) online game. A gamer controls a character they have created. They develop the character, thus being able to defeat ever stronger opponents. The game was created in 1999.

12 E. Sapir, *Kultura, język, osobowość*, trans. B. Stanosz, R. Zimand, PIW, Warsaw 1978, pp. 33–49; as quoted in: D. Urbańska-Galanciak, *op. cit.*, p. 107. [English version: E. Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1964.]

circumstances.”¹³ In the second sub-chapter (“Tendencje rozszerzające – język jako czynnik wyodrębniający zbiorowość”), Urbańska-Galanciak concluded that “the language of cyberentertainment is (...) a hermetic language accessible only for people with considerable knowledge of the world of virtual fun.”¹⁴ I cannot agree with that statement as more and more people are engaging in games and, naturally, the language is losing its hermetic nature. These people constantly communicate with each other, which is why terms which had originally been reserved exclusively for the gamers’ community are no longer so exclusive (which was also confirmed in the results of my survey-based study which I shall present later in this article), and the metaphorical ‘wall’ is gradually being brought down. The author wrote the book nine years ago. At that time, games were certainly a less common mode of spending one’s free time, and the lexis was more exclusive. In that sub-chapter, she also offered a rudimentary specification of the gamers’ lexis. She identified groups such as borrowings, neologisms, and abbreviations, and she listed several examples of lexemes which matched them. In the final sub-chapter (“Tendencje upraszczające – język jako środek jednoczenia wspólnoty”), the researcher wrote that “a sociolect not only separates a community which uses it, but it also unifies individuals who use it.”¹⁵ Further in the study, she analysed gamers’ selected utterances from the ‘Gry-Online’ internet forum.¹⁶

In my discussion of the subject literature I devoted most attention to this study as that thirty-page-long chapter written by a culture researcher constituted the most extensive (published) study of gamers’ lexis.

As for online studies, one should note *Słownik gracza* [*A Gamer’s Dictionary*], which is available at www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza.asp. The dictionary’s definitions “apply to words/phrases used both in articles published at the gry-online.pl information portal, and in conversations on our message board.” It is a dictionary developed by gamers and for gamers. In a simple manner it explains notions which exist in the gamers’ language. The entire dictionary holds only 365 entries, which, to my knowledge, constitutes a fraction of the entire plethora of the specialised lexis of the gamers’ community.

To sum up, there are few items in academic literature devoted to the lexis or, more broadly, language of video gamers. Having analysed it, I decided to check – by means of a survey – whether the lexis specific for the gamers’ community (selected from the above-discussed book and online studies) is known to random respondents and whether it permeates into the modern Polish language and, if so, to what extent.

¹³ D. Urbańska-Galanciak, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁶ The forum can be found at: www.gry-online.pl/Soo8.asp, accessed on: 11.06.2017.

To this purpose, I developed a survey consisting of eight questions (included at the end of the article). I decided not to limit the age of respondents or assign preference to either sex as my goal was to study the “living Polish language” spoken by Poles, not to study the relationship between the number of lexemes known to 20-year-old men and to 40-year-old women. I developed the survey in two variants: online and hard copy. With regard to the former one, I conducted the study mainly using the Facebook social platform; upon completing the survey, respondents were asked to share it with their Facebook friends. I used the hard copy of the survey mainly within the space of the University of Lodz.

In total, 271 people participated in the survey, aged 13–44, though the majority of the respondents were aged 19, 20, 21, and 22. The age distribution is indicated in the following diagram.

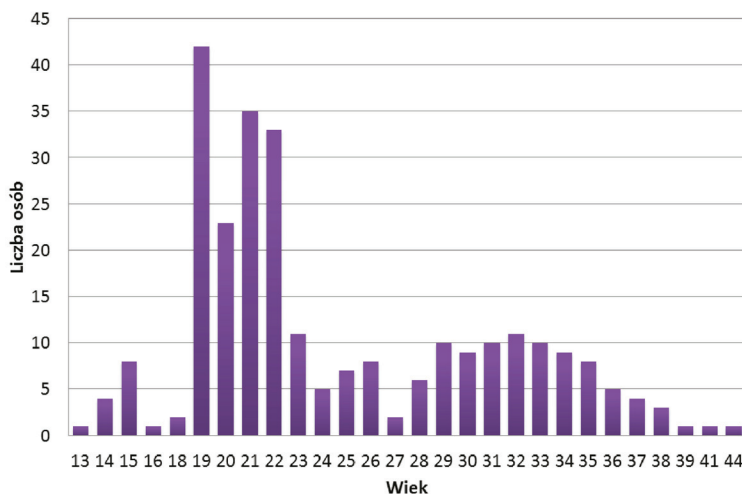


Diagram 1. Gamers' age.

Source: own study

Apart from the question about age, I also asked the respondents to specify how much time they spent on playing various video games (including on mobile devices).

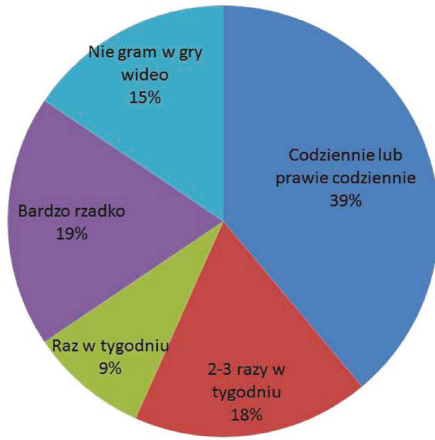


Diagram 2. Time spent playing video games
Source: own study

The diagram clearly indicates that the majority of the respondents did play video games. The group constituted 85% of all the respondents. The remaining 15% was not interested in such a form of spending their leisure time.

The final question intended for defining the respondent group was: What video game periodicals do you read? In the suggested answers I included only Polish periodicals as I was studying the popularity of Polish gamers’ lexis. Answers to the question were as follows:

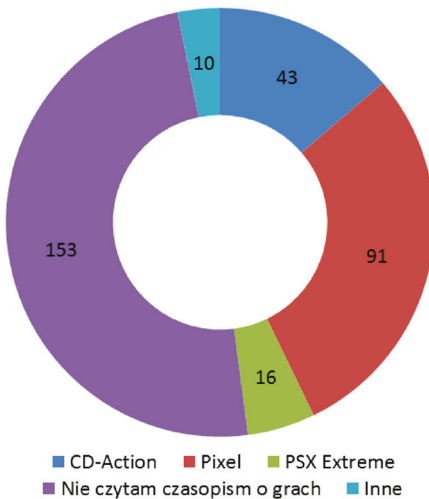


Diagram 3. Readership of video game periodicals
Source: own study

In this case, I decided not to provide percentage-based results as when I analysed the surveys it turned out there were instances when a respondent indicated reading more than one periodical. Thus, a percentage-based diagram would not be viable in this case.

As many as 153 out of the 271 respondents did not read any periodicals related to video games. Among those who read such periodicals, a dominant position was occupied by the *Pixel*, which was indicated as known and read by 91 people; next was the *CD-Action*, with 43 people admitting reading it, and only 16 respondents admitting reading the *PSX Extreme*. Under the option *Other*, the respondents indicated mainly foreign titles, e.g. *Retro Gamer* (3 people), *EDGE* (3 people), *Gamer. mag* (3 people), and online periodicals (1 person).

Next, the survey included open-ended questions. I selected the lexical material which I used to develop this part of the survey in such a way that it should reflect the most extensive array of gamers' lexical items. Therefore, I included lexemes adapted (or created) by the gamers' community relatively long ago (e.g. *bug* [a bug] or *pirat* [a pirate]), as well as relatively new ones, which formed along the development and the diffusion of Internet access (e.g. *streamować* [to stream]).

Furthermore, I included more specialist lexical items derived from the domain of computer science (e.g. *emulator* [an emulator]), and items commonly known to gamers (not just IT specialists), e.g. 'gameplay'. In order to ensure the survey's diversity, I also included abbreviations and acronyms, and phrases. In the case of abbreviations and acronyms, I chose those which are often used in exchanges between gamers and their friends who are not gamers via various communicators (e.g. THX). I also added abbreviations more closely related to the world of games, i.e. names of gaming hardware. I chose the names of modern consoles (e.g. PS3) and of those which were popular a decade or so ago (e.g. PSX). This way I intended to check whether the respondents knew not only the names of new consoles, but also the older ones, and older gaming hardware in general. I chose phrases in such a way so that the terms used in them would more (*grać na iXie* ['to play the X']) or less (*gra chodzi* ['the game runs']) be associated with the gamers' community.

The first of the open-ended questions required respondents to define the indicated words. I selected the lexemes to be defined from specialist literature and video-gaming periodicals (e.g. the *PSX Extreme* and the *CD-Action*). The numbers of correctly defined lexemes are indicated in the following diagram:

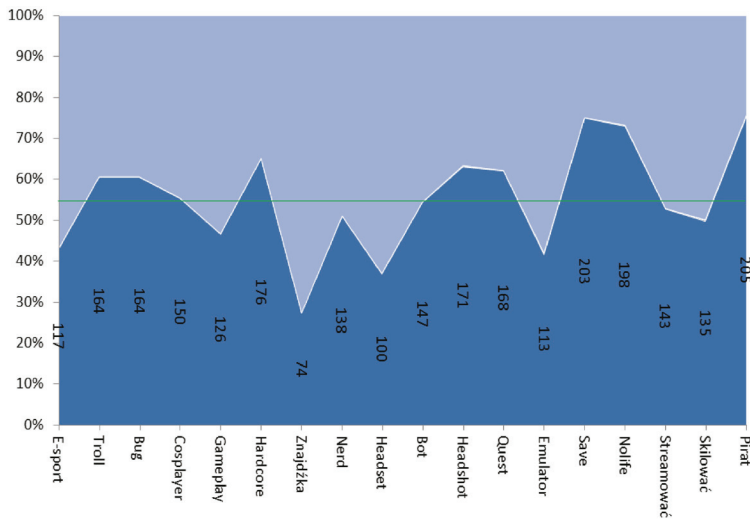


Diagram 4. Knowledge of the lexis used by the community of Polish video gamers

Source: own study

The diagram indicates the number of correct answers (navy blue) compared to incorrect definitions (light blue). For example, the lexeme ‘nerd’ was adequately defined by 138 people, while 133 people defined it incorrectly or not at all (271 of all the respondents). The green line indicates the percentage of all correct answers, 55.2% in this case. This means that on average one respondent was able to correctly define over a half of all indicated words. I determined whether a definition was correct based on my own proficiency as a gamer as well as through websites devoted to this pastime. Whenever I discuss a lexeme, I shall indicate my model definition in a footnote. The respondents have various meanings for some of the words which I inquired into, which was why I assumed that if a person indicated only one meaning, I would accept the answer. Below, I shall present the definitions of individual lexemes proposed by respondents. I shall provide the percentages of correct answers and the model definitions of individual words which I used for assessing the correctness of the respondents’ answers. Finally, I will provide a short summary and analysis of the most interesting definitions out of those that the respondents proposed.

E-sports¹⁷

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional video game competitions (professional = with training, sponsors, competitions with cash prizes) • a term for a group of games for which special ranking and tournament structures have been developed. Those are games in which gamers gain proficiency to achieve better results in direct confrontations with other gamers. Even though most online games meet those criteria, the term e-sports is reserved only for those which define themselves that way. • electronic sport – competitions of gamers in a specific game. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when you play games associated with sports, e.g. using kinect • online sports • video games related to sports

Percentage of correct definitions: 43.2%

The prefix 'e' often appears in various modern expressions, e.g. *e-mail*, *e-paper*, and *e-cigarette*. The term *e-sports* has developed in a similar manner; the respondents had no major problems with defining it if they decided to attempt this. Slightly over 43% of the respondents provided correct answers; the rest usually left the field blank, i.e. did not attempt to define the term.

Troll¹⁸

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a person who pesters other gamers by, e.g. adding mods in GTA V in which on a selected gamer a naked guy may appear • a person who tries to stir with their statements a rush of negative comments, cause a war among users • a person intentionally inciting others to engage in futile debates and become angry at each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an asshole • an idiot • someone who laughs ironically (can be the object or originator)

Percentage of correct definitions: 60.5%

¹⁷ Model definition: „Electronic sport. A non-Olympic discipline which consists of teams or individuals competing in video games” (<http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=318>, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

¹⁸ Model definition: a troll, someone who engages in trolling. Trolling is “an anti-social behaviour typical for message boards and other locations on the internet where discussions are held...” (www.pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trollowanie, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

Not every ‘asshole’, ‘idiot’ or ‘someone who laughs ironically’ is a *troll*, which was why I considered those answers incorrect. The phenomenon of trolling is quite common both online and in games, hence the high number of correct answers.

Bug¹⁹

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an error in a game • an error in the software (historically: the first computers were susceptible to vermin which caused circuits to short) • an Error in an application, game or an operating system which can interfere with the usage of a computer/console/software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to block • to block an account

Percentage of correct definitions: 60.5%

Those respondents who defined *bug* as “the blocking of something, e.g. an account”, probably mistook the lexeme for *ban* [a ban], i.e. “the blocking of an undesired interlocutor from accessing a chat room”²⁰, which somewhat resembles – e.g. in terms of its length – the word about which I inquired (*ban – bug*).

Cosplayer²¹

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • someone who dresses up as a game/ comic book character • a game nut who dresses up as a game character • a person whose one of the most favourite modes of indicating their affection for a film/ book/game/comic book, etc. is to dress up as a its character. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a person recreating a game’s reality

Percentage of correct definitions: 55.4%

The analysed surveys included several instances of answers similar to those which I inserted in the “not accepted definitions” column. I considered them

¹⁹ Model definition: “an error in a game. Usually a programming omission, less often an error at the design stage, resulting in an improper operation of a game in certain circumstances” (<http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=17>, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

²⁰ <http://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/ban.html>, accessed on: 12.06.2017.

²¹ Model definition: “a person usually aged 15–20 who dresses up and wears make-up to resemble a fictional character, usually from Japanese anime or popular and trendy games” (<http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-cosplayer>, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

incorrect as they were not accurate enough. An example of that would be the word *larpowiec* (a person who engages in LARPs, i.e. improvised theatre where people dress up as, e.g., fantasy characters, and play out a story), but not a *cos-player*.

Gameplay²²

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a film presenting how a game is played • a playing of a game/ a recording of the game (as opposed to: the intro clip/game promotional video) • a) a record of the actual playing and some pre-rendered cinematics; b) playability; :) ... golden... etc. :) that is the result of: rules of the game, graphic design, sound and satisfaction in playing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joint playing with users • a gamer • a film version of a game

Percentage of correct definitions: 46.5%

This difficult to define word caused the respondents many problems. They mistook *gameplay* for *gameplayer* (a ‘gamer’) or with *multiplayer*, i.e. “joint playing with other users”; there was even an answer that a *gameplay* is “the film version of a game.” The last respondent probably had in mind the second meaning of the unclear lexeme, i.e. “a kind of a video clip in which someone shows how they complete a game.” I considered that answer as insufficiently accurate, which was why I decided it was incorrect.

22 Model definition: ‘gameplay’ has two meanings. First of all, it is a video clip in which someone shows how they complete a game. Often in such video clips viewers cannot see the gamer, only hear their commentary. Secondly, it is an element of most games, i.e. the way gamers interact with a game. Together with the story line and the graphic design, the element forms a game (own definition).

Hardcore²³

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • something extremely difficult • something difficult, a slaughter or massacre. "the highest level of difficulty is an extreme hardcore which you cannot finish." Or "you can enter a shop, slash people with a chain-saw – in a narrow aisle that's true hardcore" • 1. something difficult, requiring effort or short reaction time. 2. An avid gamer, holder of those qualities the opposite – a casual, a gamer who has been playing for a long time, who can play demanding games 	

Percentage of correct definitions: 64.9%

Those respondents who knew the word *hardcore*, which can be defined in various ways, defined it correctly, while those who did not know it left the space blank, which is why there are no examples of not accepted definitions.

Znajdźka²⁴

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a minor object or a collectible hidden by the creators of a game in a strange place within the game • hidden objects to be found in games • a collectible found in a game, often giving gamers a bonus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an object found in a game • a dropped item • a thing collected in a game, an object • a loot • browser • those are items found in games

Percentage of correct definitions: 27.3%

Only 74 people defined the word correctly. It was the lowest number of correct answers throughout the survey. Not every "object found in a game" is a *znajdźka*; regular objects in games are called *itemy* [items]. Also *drop*, i.e. "a kind of a prize

²³ Model definition: "a colloquial term for extraordinary and extreme situations which cause extremely intensive impressions. In video games, the term *hardcore* usually applies to exceptionally exciting or extremely difficult moments, which require gamers to possess considerable skills, remain constantly focussed, and, sometimes, to be lucky" (<http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=105>, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

²⁴ Model definition: "a virtual object in a video game which on its own does not hold any major value for a gamer but after collecting an entire series, a gamer may gain an attractive prize. A *znajdźka* [a collectible] is usually cunningly hidden in levels, and as a result a search for it takes much time and requires extensive knowledge about a game's world" (<http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=342>, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

– an object which one acquires after defeating an opponent” and *loot*, i.e. “a kind of a prize – an object which you acquire upon completing a mission in a game”, are something else than the notion about which I inquired in the survey. A very interesting issue in terms of word formation was indicated by the answer stating that a *znajdźka* is a “browser”. Unfortunately, that answer was incorrect as the word does not entail that meaning either in the gamers’ community or in general Polish, yet it constituted a certainly very creative neo-semanticism, a substitute for the word *wyszukiwarka* [a browser], which would emphasise the fact that if one searches for something, they are surely going to find it.

Nerd²⁵

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a pejorative designation of a person who plays video games, who knows their ways with computers/games. Often a person who is not very social. • a person who displays a somewhat pathological interest in a topic, usually having extensive knowledge in it • a stereotype of a person whose main interests include computers and cutting-edge technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a geek • a loser • a withdrawn swot • a learned person • a person who is obtrusive • a synonym of a no life • a wise person

Percentage of correct definitions: 50.9%

Some of the respondents who attempted to define the word erroneously associated a *nerd* (definition further in the article) with a *geek*, i.e. “a term assigned to a person who has extended knowledge and skills in a specific field.” *Geek* is a term considerably less severe than *nerd*. Also, a *nolife* (definition further in the article) was treated by some respondents as a synonym of a *nerd*, which is, of course, incorrect. Also, not all ‘*inteligenci*’ [plural form of Polish *inteligent*], ‘losers’ and ‘swots’ are *nerds*.

25 Model definition: “a term borrowed from English indicating a person who is passionate about science, IT, video games, etc., often at the expense of being maladjusted to social life, their inability to maintain social relations, or their neglect of their appearance” (<http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Nerd>, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

Headset²⁶

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • headphones with a microphone • a mobile phone headset • a 'loudspeaking' set (what a stupid name) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • headphones • a microphone

Headset is a combination of headphones and a microphone. Separately, these devices cannot be referred to as a *headset*.

Bot²⁷

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an AI pretending a human gamer • a script used to simulate repetitive activities in multiplayer games • a programme simulating a person (either in a game or in other software environments) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an under-skilled gamer • they block someone • a person who is not good at playing

Percentage of correct definitions: 54.2%

Similar to the *bug* lexeme, this word was also mistaken by some respondents with the word *ban*. Others made a mistake and instead of defining the word *bot*, they assigned the definition of a *noob*, i.e. “a beginner player”, who is also an “under-skilled player” and “a person who is not good at playing.”

²⁶ Model definition: a device used for communicating, e.g. in online video games. It is a combination of headphones and a microphone (own definition).

²⁷ Model definition: “In video games, the term bot has several meanings: a programme simulating real gamers in online FPS games; usually used as a training element or a supplement to a team if too few living gamers can play; a programme replacing a gamer in aiming and shooting in online FPS games; a programme conducting certain actions by a gamer’s character automatically in MMORPGs (e.g. fighting monsters, training to gain skills, collecting gold and items)” (<http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=20>, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

Headshot²⁸

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a shot to the head • literally “a shot to the head”; a hit to an opponent’s head (usually in shooters with a first-person perspective), usually associated with the resulting killing of the opponent, gaining points • a shot in the noddle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is an attack by a character which knocks others out with a single blow • a shot

Percentage of correct definitions: 63.1%

One respondent explained why he used in Polish the lexeme *headshot* instead of “a shot to the head”: “I use it because it’s too long in Polish.” Often when making the decision to use a term borrowed from English instead of its Polish counterpart, the point is to economise, i.e. a person wants to convey the same content using the minimum number of words/syllables/sounds.

Some of the answers were excessively general as not every “shot in a game” can be termed a *headshot*; most of them are normal *shoty* [shots].

Quest²⁹

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in other words a task (basically in RPGs – both physical and computer) • a task. There is exp. for a task EXPing is important • a mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a guest • it is a guest, a person who hasn’t signed in

Percentage of correct definitions: 62%

In this case, the errors were caused by negligence as there is only a single letter difference between the English lexemes *quest* and *guest*.

²⁸ Model definition: “1. Headshot (the act of eliminating an opponent with a single shot (to the head). This word is used in FPS games (e.g. Counter Strike, Call of Duty, etc.); 2. The word *headshot* can also be used when you hit someone with a ball (or a different object) on the head” (<http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Headshot>, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

²⁹ Model definition: “a mission, a task. A fragment of the story line which requires a character (or a group of characters) controlled by a gamer to complete a challenge” (<http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=199>, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

Emulator³⁰

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a tool simulating software from a different hardware platform • a programme 'imitating' another hardware/ computer; e.g. to run a game/programme unavailable for a device (e.g. because the device was withdrawn from production many years ago) • software for simulating another operating system – used for running games from other platforms (usually old ones) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • games, e.g. for running a farm, driving a car • a programme used for downloading files illegally • a device imitating some feelings • e.g. taste • an ingredient which can be found in soft drinks

Percentage of correct definitions: 41.7%

In this case, those respondents who provided incorrect answers mistook an *emulator* for an *emulgator*, i.e. “a chemical compound” or a game genre, i.e. a *simulator* – “an imitation of reality, e.g. a flight simulator”.

Save

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a saved moment in a game • a record of a game • “zasejwuj” instead of “zapisz” (both) to save imperative. what a shame that you cannot save your life and load it later :(

Percentage of correct definitions: 74.9%

In this case, the respondents either provided correct definitions or left the space blank. Considering the number of correct answers, the former reaction dominated.

³⁰ Model definition: “software which enables one to run an application on a computer or an operating system for which it was not originally intended” (<http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=48>, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

Nolife³¹

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a person who apart from the activity X (e.g. games) does nothing • an extreme gamer, a person who develops their hobby such as gaming at the expense of the lack of any personal life • a person who does nothing else but sits 24/7 and plays games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • = nerd • someone who engages in games • a noob • the same as nerd • a professional gamer

Percentage of correct definitions: 73.1%

Here, a very similar situation occurred to that with the definition of a *nerd*, i.e. for many the words are synonymous. For some, the word *nolife* is also synonymous with the word *noob*. Mind you, not all people who “engage in games” or who are “professional gamers” can be called nolifes.

Streamowac³²

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to send a video from one's own monitor live online] • broadcast of a video over the internet (e.g. broadcast of a gameplay); derived from a data stream, which means that data does not have to complete for someone to replay images (while sacrificing the quality) • to send via the internet one's gameplay, e.g. via YouTube 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a single game, many gamers, each on individual • computers. The events occur in one game, to play something online at the same time • to download something • to buy on steam • to play games on the steam platform

Percentage of correct definitions: 52.8%

31 Model definition: “a person who spends a lot of time in front of the computer usually gaming. They do not have (or have little) friends and colleagues outside the internet” (<http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-No+Lifer>, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

32 Model definition: “the word streaming has at least two meanings in reference to games. We talk about game streaming in the case of such services as Gaikai or Onlive which enable gamers to play games installed on a remote server which sends current game data to us. But we also talk about streaming if someone simply sends via the internet images and their gameplay – with optional commentary or additional video from their webcam. It can be viewed using a special internet service” (http://polygamia.pl/Polygamia/1,96455,13530333,Streaming___ogladanie_zamiast_grania_czy_zaczatek.html?bo=1, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

What is noteworthy is the incorrect answers such as “to buy on steam” or “to play games on the steam platform”. The respondents associated the lexeme *streamować* [to stream] with the name of the Internet game platform *Steam*. The sound and graphic similarity of the first part of the word is evident. This indicates that the Steam game platform is quite popular among the respondents.

Skillować³³

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to increase skills • to develop the skills of a character in an RPG or similar games (e.g. iack,n'slash) in order to eliminate more demanding opponents, in MMORPGs the main goal of a game which is the reason why those games are basically pointless as it is impossible to achieve any ultimate goal. • to hone skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to download • to kill (i.e. an action in process; imperfect form) • to kill (i.e. the perfect tense) • someone who trains

Percentage of correct definitions: 49.8%

The respondents often provided incorrect answers, indicating that *skillować* means “*zabijać*” [to kill *imperf.*] or “*zabić*” [to kill *perf.*] Those mistakes were probably caused by the fact that the lexeme *skillować* includes the component “kill”.

Pirat³⁴

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an illegal copy of a game • a game acquired outside the official distribution channels • an illegally copied copy of a video game • a game bought illegally 	

Percentage of correct definitions: 75.6%

When compared to all the above-discussed words, the lexeme *pirat* received the highest number of correct definitions; this might be due to the fact that it has been used in Polish for quite a long time now.

³³ Model definition: to gain new skills in a game or develop those already acquired (own definition).

³⁴ Model definition: “A colloquial term used for people who engage in prohibited copying of music, films, and software (including video games), propagating such illegal copies, and using them” (<http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=177>, accessed on: 13.06.2017). Often the term *pirat* [a ‘pirate’] is also used to denote illegally-acquired software, e.g. a pirated game is colloquially termed *pirat*.

In the next part of the survey, I asked respondents to expand the abbreviations and acronyms that are popular on the Internet and among gamers. I am presenting the results in the following diagram.

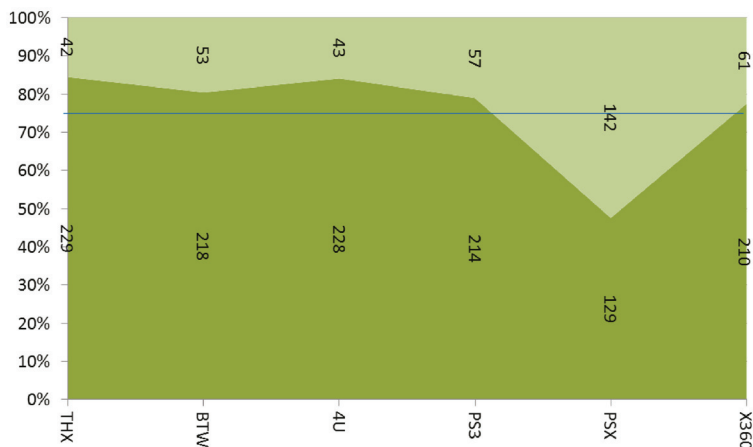


Diagram 5. Abbreviations and acronyms used in the community of Polish video gamers
Source: own study

The respondents coped very well with this part of the survey, as clearly indicated by the number of correct answers (75.5%), which I indicated in the diagram with a blue line. The light green area indicates the incorrect answers, while the dark green colour indicates the correct answers. The abbreviation THX received the highest number of correct answers, while PSX featured the lowest number. I considered as correct the clarifications of abbreviations and acronyms indicated by respondents regardless of whether they were indicated in English or Polish (if those were not abbreviations of proper names which exist only in English). The abbreviations and acronyms were expanded as:

THX was ‘thanks – thank you’ or various variants of the Polish ‘*dziękuję*’ e.g. ‘*dzięki*’.

BTW was ‘by the way’ or the Polish ‘*a tak przy okazji*’, ‘*swoją drogą*’.

4U was ‘for you’ or ‘*dla Ciebie*’.

PS3 was ‘Playstation 3’, PSX was ‘Playstation’ (I also accepted the variant Playstation X³⁵), and X360 was ‘Xbox 360’. Those are names of game consoles.

35 It is “a 2003 Sony device which contained the insides of PlayStation 2 to function as a console – apart from that it had quite a few other multimedia functions (...) Additionally, we had such technological innovations as composite IN and a 160 or 250 GB hard drive (...) on which you could record television shows! Therefore, PSX was the first true combination of a console and

In many of the filled out surveys, I noticed that the respondents who were correctly defining the abbreviation of PS3, when they were defining PSX they stated that it was “Playstation X”; it is unclear whether that was an intentional reference to a specific hardware (a combination of Playstation 2 and a recorded) or whether they noticed an analogy between the two abbreviations and since PS3 expands to Playstation 3 then PSX must have meant Playstation X.

In the final open-ended question, I asked respondents to explain three expressions: “*gra chodzi*”, “*wersja na PieCa*”, and “*grać na iXie*”.

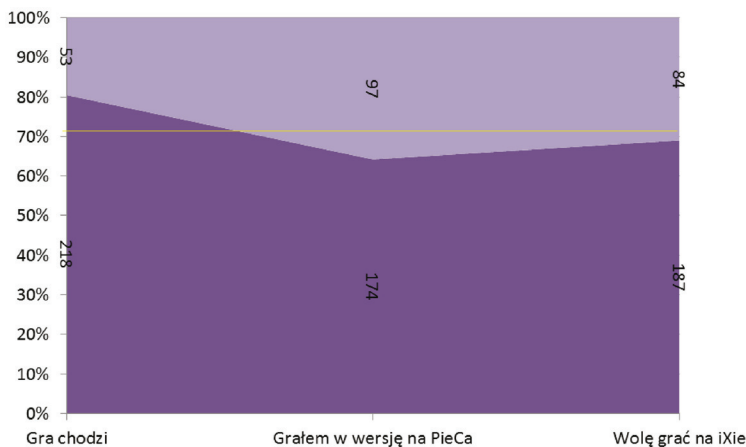


Diagram 6. Expressions

Source: own study

Correct answers constituted 71.2% of the total. The easiest to explain was the expression “*gra chodzi*”, while the most difficult was that a game was released in a version for “*PieCa*”. In the case of the former expression, the most common correct answers stated that “*gra działa*” [a game works] or “*uruchamia się*” [it starts]. In the case of the latter expression, the dominant answer was: “*na PC*” [for PC], “*na komputer osobisty*” [for personal computer], and “*na komputer stacjonarny*” [for desktop computer]. Finally, the expression “*wolę grać na iXie*” was explained by the respondents as “*wolę grać na xboxie*” [I prefer playing Xbox] (with various spelling variants, e.g. “*na x-boxie*” or “*na xboksie*”).

The last part of the survey consisted of two summarising closed questions.

The first one was: “How often do you use the terms specified in questions 4–6?” The results were the following:

a DVR (<https://gamedot.pl/news,na-xbox-one-nagrasz-programy-z-tv-ale-to-nie-pierwsza-konsola-ktora-to-potrafi>, accessed on: 14.06.2017).

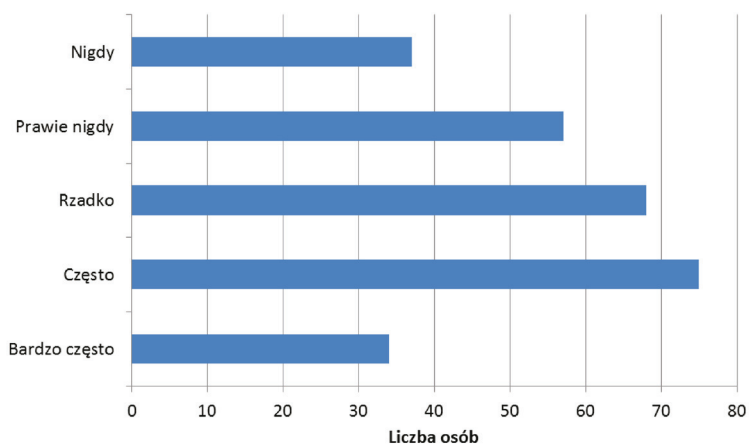


Diagram 7. Frequency of term usage

Source: own study

The second one: “How often do you hear your colleagues using the terms specified in questions 4–6?” Diagram 8 presents a summary of the results:

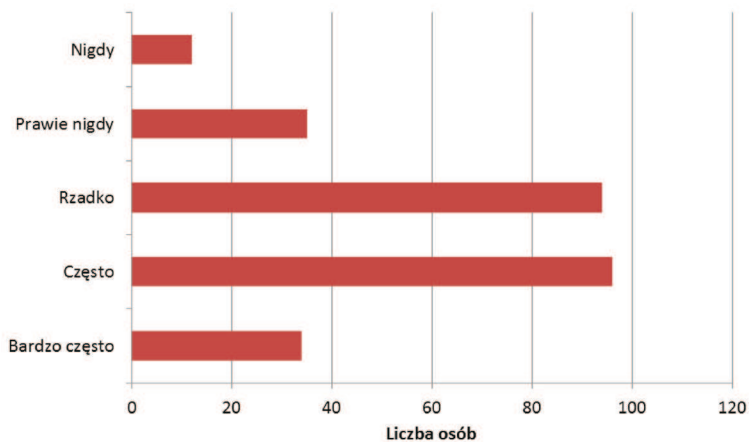


Diagram 8. Frequency of term usage (by colleagues)

Source: own study

The following diagram is a combination of Diagrams 7 and 8:

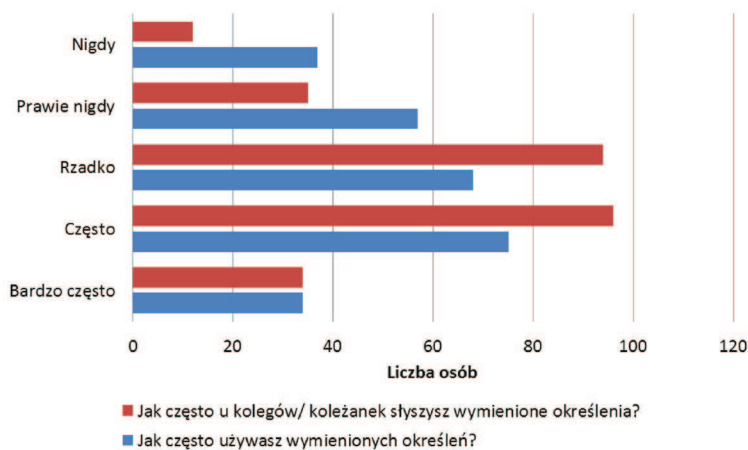


Diagram 9. Frequency of term usage (summarised)

Source: own study

I summarised these diagrams to indicate that the respondents heard the terms associated with the gamers' community from their acquaintances more often than they used them themselves. A total of 95.6% of the respondents stated that they heard them in their colleagues' speech specialist gamers' lexis, while 86.3% stated that they themselves used them more or less often. Only 37 people (13.7%) had never used them, and 12 (4.4%) had not heard their colleagues use them.

Finally, to complement the presentation of the study results, one should examine the surveys filled out by persons who stressed that they did not play video games. I called that group "non-gamers" and in the remainder of the article I shall apply this term. I shall compare the results acquired in the case of non-gamers with those acquired from all the respondents (referring to those as total results).

There were 41 individuals who declared that they never played video games, and this was also the number of surveys I analysed. The resulting data is included in the following table:

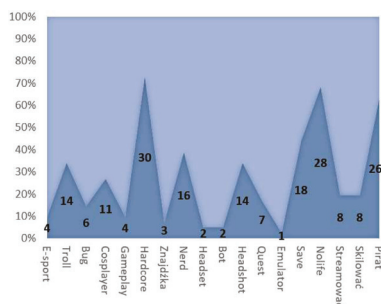


Diagram 10. Knowledge of the lexis used by & in the community of Polish video gamers (non-gamers' group)
Source: own study

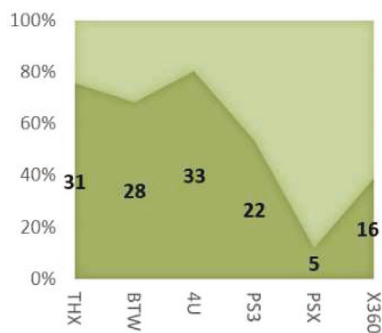


Diagram 11. Abbreviations and acronyms used in the community of Polish video gamers (non-gamers' group)
Source: own study

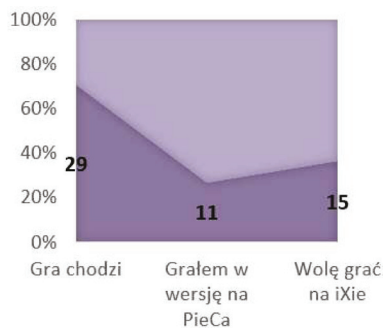


Diagram 12. Expressions (non-gamers' group)
Source: own study

When comparing the total results and those acquired only for non-gamers, one can clearly see that in the case of the latter ones the identifiability of lexemes was much lower and thus the number of correct answers was also lower. On average, a single respondent correctly identified every fourth word (27% of all respondents). When comparing the number of correct definitions of individual lexemes used by the gamers' community, one can clearly see that almost always the knowledge of these was lower in the case of the non-gamers' group. One deviation applied to the lexeme *hardcore*, which in the total analysis was correctly defined by nearly 65% respondents, while in the group of non-gamers it was correctly defined by 73% respondents.

The level of 50% of correct definitions was also exceeded by explanations of the words *nolife* (correctly defined by 68% of non-gamers), and *pirat* (63% correct definitions), yet high results in the case of these lexemes also applied to the entire study (*nolife* – 73%, *pirat* – 76%).

Then, non-gamers were almost completely unfamiliar with the lexeme *emulator*. It was defined correctly by only one person, which might be surprising considering the total results. In this case, it was defined correctly 113 times (41%) so it was not a word which was known to the smallest number of respondents. Only one non-gamer (2% of the total results) was able to provide a correct definition of the lexeme. The words *headset* and *bot* also ranked low – only two people managed to define them correctly. Additionally, it was rather surprising that *znajdźka*, a clearly Polish word, did not rank last among the non-gamers as it did in the case of a total analysis of the surveys; it ranked 15th (out of 18 in total).

Considering the results of the knowledge of abbreviations and acronyms, non-gamers had as much difficulty with properly expanding the abbreviation PSX as all other respondents, i.e. only 5 people managed to do that. The explanations of other abbreviations and acronyms were also problematic. The respondents coped best with deciphering the full name of PS3, i.e. a modern game console. When analysing all the expanded versions of the abbreviations and acronyms, the average respondent provided correct definitions of every other instance (55%).

In the case of the three expressions, the task of defining them for non-gamers was much easier than the task of defining lexemes, but more difficult than expanding abbreviations as in this case a single respondent displayed knowledge of 47% expressions.

The results of non-gamers indicate that the group recognised much fewer lexemes than people who played video games. The fact of coming into contact with games, even to a minor extent, considerably increased their understanding of the analysed lexemes. The most popular lexeme among non-gamers was *hardkor* [a polonised version of *hardcore*]. The widespread awareness of the lexeme could be explained by the fact that it was used in a very popular YouTube clip titled ‘*Jestem hardcorem*’ [‘I’m a hardcore’]. It used to be very popular and now it could be referred to as a cult piece among various subcultures. The studied group displayed a complete lack of knowledge of the word *emulator*. That was surely due to the fact that the knowledge of the lexeme was useful only to those who used “programmes «imitating» other devices/computers” and non-gamers did not need that programme as they were not interested in this form of leisure. In the case of *hardkor*, the matter was somewhat different as it could be used in various situations (e.g. to describe a difficult situation or to refer to a person who performs something extremely difficult), hence its higher level of familiarity.

When I was analysing the group’s familiarity with abbreviations and acronyms, it became evident that these respondents knew those words which could also be used in communication which applied to topics not necessarily associated with games. Their utility stemmed from the fact that they were shorter and, thus, more economical. In terms of the abbreviated names of consoles, it became clear that many non-gamers knew the names of new consoles (*PSX*, *XBOX360*) as they could be purchased in supermarkets, meaning their names were visible to the respondents

while, e.g., doing daily shopping, and they became consolidated in their memory, hence their identifiability. Then, the abbreviated name of an older device, i.e. PlayStation (PSX) was not so common as the console was no longer available.

When analysing the results of the respondents' familiarity with expressions, I noticed that both non-gamers and gamers displayed similar levels of familiarity.

When summarising the results of the entire survey, it must be stated that most respondents knew the terminology specific to the gamers' community. This conclusion could be drawn from the analysis of the definitions of individual lexemes (question 4), where over 55% of the provided answers were correct. The respondents coped even better with explaining expressions (questions 6). In this case, ≈71% answers were correct. The most correct answers were provided in response to question 5, i.e. when they were requested to expand abbreviations and acronyms. In this case, 75% of answers were correct.

Does this mean that the terminology specific to the gamers' community is known to randomly inquired respondents? The answer is yes, at least to the 271 random respondents I inquired.

What, then, is the level of familiarity with the terminology? Based on the survey, I have to conclude that it is considerable.

Is gamers' lexis permeating into modern Polish? This question can be answered using the answers to the final two questions of the survey (7 and 8), which indicated that as many as around 86% respondents used some lexemes specific to gamers in their communication, while around 96% heard them every day when talking to their colleagues.

Not so long ago, the community of Polish gamers and its lexis was reserved exclusively for a small group of video game aficionados. In Poland, gaming was a niche, so there were few gamers. They detached from the rest of the society and engaged in their hobby. Therefore, there emerged a kind of a wall separating gamers from the rest of the society. In that isolated setting, terminology specific to the community emerged. The core of the group included young people; actually, even today this is the stereotype – that video games are for children. Yet in time, those people became older, got jobs, and started families. Subsequently, the hermetic wall was not there anymore as those people transferred into general Polish (be it in professional or personal relations) the lexemes they used in the gaming community in which they grew up. There is, however, a considerable portion of the society which did not grow up in those times and this is where I see the role of linguists who should explain the unintelligible for a part of the society terminology of the gamers' community, which, as the study indicated, is gradually becoming familiar.³⁶

36 For the purposes of this article, two other papers proved essential: "O języku młodego Internetu" (A. Wileczek, *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze*, 3-4, W. Pisarek (ed.), Kraków 2011, pp. 82-99), and "O opozycji *hardcore/casual*" (P. Grabarczyk, *Homo Ludens* 7(1), Poznań 2015, pp. 89-109).

SURVEY

1. Your age:

2. How often do you play video games (computer games, console games of “mobile” games, e.g. in a mobile telephone)? Select one answer.

Every day or almost every day

2–3 times a week

Once a week

Very rarely

I don't play video games

3. What are the video game periodicals that you read? (you can indicate more than one)

CD-Action

Pixel

PSX Extreme

I don't read gaming periodicals

Other (specify)

4. Please provide a short definition of the following words (example usage will be appreciated):

e-sport

troll

bug

cosplayer

gameplay

hardcore

znajdźka

nerd

headset

bot

headshot

quest

emulator

save

nolife

streamować

skillować

pirat

5. Please expand the following abbreviations

TXT

PS3

BTW

PSX

4U

X360

6. What do the bold elements mean?

Gra **chodzi**

I was playing the **PieCa** version

I prefer playing on **iXie**

7. How often do you use the terms specified in questions 4–6?

- Very often
- Often
- Rarely
- Almost never
- Never

8. How often do you hear your colleagues using the terms specified in questions 4–6?

- Very often
- Often
- Rarely
- Almost never
- Never

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Rafał Maćkowiak

Otoczony murem, hermetyczny język środowiska polskich graczy wideo? Czy język środowiska polskich graczy jest znany Polakom? – wyniki badań ankietowych

Streszczenie

Branża gier wideo to w dzisiejszych czasach jedna z najszybciej rozwijających się gałęzi przemysłu rozrywkowego. Korporacje takie jak: Microsoft, Sony czy Nintendo inwestują coraz większe środki pieniężne w produkcję sprzętu do gier (np. komputerów, konsol, tabletów) oraz w produkcję gier na różne platformy.

Niewątpliwie powstał i prężnie się rozwija duży zbiór słownictwa, który ze względu na coraz bardziej spójną grupę użytkowników zmierza w kierunku wytworzenia socjolektu. Do tej pory językoznawcy nie przyjrzeni się dokładnie leksyce graczy z tego względu konieczne jest jej zbadanie, zważywszy na ogrom zjawiska i wielkość środowiska graczy.

Gracze wideo stanowią bardzo dużą grupę. Warto tutaj pokreślić, że środowisko graczy, więc także i leksyka charakterystyczna dla tego środowiska, nie istnieje w izolacji. Leksyka używana przez nich coraz częściej przedostaje się poza pierwotne środowisko, np. do innych mediów czy języka potocznego.

Autor przeprowadził ankietę i postanowił sprawdzić, czy leksyka graczy wideo jest znana wśród przypadkowych respondentów. W artykule zaprezentowane są wyniki ankiety.

Słowa kluczowe: Gry wideo, leksyka, współczesna polszczyzna, socjolekt, ankieta

Surrounded by a wall: The hermetic language of the Polish community of video gamers

Do Poles know the language of Polish gamers?

The results of a survey-based study

Summary

The video game industry is today one of the most rapidly developing branches of the entertainment industry. Such corporations as Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo are increasing their investment engagement in the manufacture of gaming hardware (e.g. computers, consoles, and tablets), and in game development for various platforms.

There has developed and continues to expand an extensive terminology which due to the increasing consolidation of the user base is progressing towards producing a sociolect. Linguists have not yet examined the lexis of gamers which is why it must be studied considering the extent of the phenomenon and the sheer size of the gamer community.

Video gamers form a large group. At this point it must be stressed that the gamer community and the lexis specific for it does not exist in isolation. The lexis used by gamers continues to permeate outside the community, e.g. to other media or the colloquial language.

The author of this article conducted a survey to check whether the lexis of video gamers is known to random respondents. This article presents the results of the survey.

Keywords: Video games, lexis, modern Polish language, sociolect, survey

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Diagrams

Diagram 1.

Number of people		
	Age	

Diagram 2.

	I don't play video games	
Very rarely		Every day or almost every day
Once a week	2-3 times a week	

Diagram 3.

I don't read gaming periodicals Other

Diagram 6.

Game runs	I played the PC version	I prefer on X
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Diagram 7.

Never	
Almost never	
Rarely	
Often	
Very often	
	Number of people

Diagram 8.

see above

Diagram 9.

Never	
Almost never	
Rarely	
Often	
Very often	
	Number of people
How often do you hear your colleagues using the indicated terms?	
How often do you use the indicated terms?	