

Benedek Bernát Bereznai ✓

Online and offline gamer identity and how it manifests through interaction*

Abstract

This paper explores how Hungarian players of *League of Legends* construct their online identities as individuals and as members of a group, and what matters to them in that regard, with great emphasis on the key attributes of their online group identity. This paper also explores how their online identities manifest through interaction. In order to do this, the players' face has to be accounted for as some of the participants want to save their face and do not share some key attributes of their online identities. The participants' answers were analysed as suggested by Brewer and Gardner (1996); that is, the similarities are pointed out between their individual online identities to discover the key attributes of their online group identity. The most important attributes of their online identities are performance, game knowledge, ranking, and even toxicity. These manifest in interaction, especially ranking, as players use ethos in interaction during arguments. Consequently, there are dominant and dominated online identities, and ranking decides whose online identity is dominant or dominated. Additionally, this paper compares the players' online identities to their offline identities. Their online identities are based on their offline identities, and they carry over certain attributes from their offline identities to their online identities. That is, players who are short-tempered or stressed in real life are more likely to be toxic in-game.

1. Introduction

I remember when my friends introduced me to this brand-new game called *League of Legends* back in 2012, and, as time has passed, we began to wonder about some things. For instance, why do we refer to ourselves as a member of the *League of Legends* community? What does it mean to be part of such a community? Why do players of other games do the same? Why is the *League of Legends* community so infamous for its toxic behaviour? These are some of the questions that will be explored in this thesis. But why are these and the 'gamer identity' relevant? It is just a video game after all. Well, as we grew up, so did the game and the gaming industry. Now, *League of Legends* is one of the most popular games ever, and the gaming industry is one of the most profitable industries.

1.1. Why is the gamer identity relevant?

Many scholars have been – and still are – interested in the concept of identity and identity construction. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no research that explores gamers' identity. So why is it worth doing?

When money is on the line, everything becomes relevant. Riot Games (developer and publisher of *League of Legends*) and the gaming industry, in general, generate a tremendous amount of revenue, and they are still growing. Riot Games currently (as of October 2021) has 180 million players across all of its games, according to PC Gamer (pcgamer.com), and *League of Legends* has around 100 million average monthly players, according to LeagueFeed (leaguefeed.net). Fur-

* BA Thesis. Supervisor: Thomas A. Williams.

thermore, there are 2.69 billion players worldwide (as of November 2021), according to Statista (statista.com). Nevertheless, the amount of research conducted on the gaming industry and its players is surprisingly low.

1.2. Background to the study

Before I present the results and discuss my findings, I will present the theoretical and empirical background of the study. This includes how scholars from various fields look at identity, how it is constructed, and what group identity is. Following that, a brief explanation is provided for what pragmatics is, and why it is essential when it comes to identity. Furthermore, certain notions of pragmatics will be presented that are crucial to this paper, such as face and certain aspects of Brown and Levinson's (1987 [1978]) politeness theory, for instance, face-threatening acts.

1.3. Aims of the study

The aims of the study are to find out how players of *League of Legends* construct their identity, what the key attributes of their online group identity are, and how this identity manifests through interaction. Additionally, this paper also attempts to explore the link between the players' real (offline) and gamer (online) identities. Thus, the paper sets out to answer the following questions: How do players of *League of Legends* construct their identity within the community? What matters to them in that regard? How does their gamer identity manifest through interaction? What is the link between their offline identity and gamer identity, if there is one?

Apart from that, there are a few hypotheses that I want to confirm or disconfirm. These hypotheses are stated in the Methodology section. Also, the research and the interview questions are constructed in such a way that the results I will present will be – roughly – applicable to any other competitive online video game.

2. Theoretical and empirical background

In this section, I present a review of all the relevant topics that are explored in this paper. First, I cover identity, its construction, and group identity. Then I discuss pragmatics, face, and, finally, politeness theory and face-threatening acts.

2.1. Identity

Identity has been – and most likely will continue to be – one of the main points and variables among scholars. The reason for this is that identity is an extremely complex and profound concept in itself. If we were to ask anybody what he or she thinks about identity, then we would probably hear the same answers as we would if we were to ask the question: "who are you?". Such answers might be the following: "I am a Hungarian", "I am a university student", or "I am a gamer". This is one of the many phenomena that Fearon (1999) deals with in his paper, and he points out that, in this sense, identity is just a matter of context. Fearon also argues that due to the arbitrary and ambiguous nature of identity as a concept, every academic text that covers identity should start by stating what is meant by identity instead of taking the readers' understanding of the concept for granted. Thus, we should do as such and start off this section of the paper by clarifying the concept of identity.

2.1.1. Definitions of identity

If we were simply to look up the definition of identity, we would be incredibly unsatisfied. Merriam-Webster, one of the most trustworthy online dictionaries, provides two basic definitions.

The first is the following: "Who someone is". This is extremely vague. The second definition is more precise: "The qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others". And while a definition like this would satisfy the average person, it is undoubtedly unsatisfactory for us. More thorough research is needed to find an adequate definition of identity; however, this leads to some complications. Every field of study has its own definition of this term. Although Fearon (1999) tries his best to explain identity, the ultimate answer is that it differs from field to field, and it differs within a given field from scholar to scholar. Thus, the best we can probably do is to look at different definitions from different fields and scholars and try to choose what is relevant and best for us.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 586) define identity as "the social positioning of self and other"; however, in their article, in which they look at identity as a product of linguistic interaction, they state that this definition is "deliberately broad and open-ended". Perhaps a more specific definition is called for. What follows is an overview of different definitions, of which three will be important for the purposes of this study. The primary definition of identity on which I construct this paper is the following: identity is "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg and Abrams, 2006 [1998]: 2). This definition will be one of the most, if not the most important. The second definition by Katzenstein (1996: 21) is the following: "The term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other". This is also relatively important for this paper, and it has been pointed out by others that identity is not a fixed point and that it is far from completed, but rather constantly evolving and continually constructed (e.g. Fougère, 2008; Ho, 2010; Simon, 2004). Finally, the last important definition we should look at is the following: "Identity is the product rather than the source of linguistic and other semiotic practices" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 585).

Thus, the three crucial definitions we must keep in mind while reading this paper are the following: (1) "[identity is] people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg and Abrams, 2006 [1998]: 2); (2) "[i]dentities are best understood as being continually constructed through interactions" (Fougère, 2008: 188); and (3) "identity is the product rather than the source of linguistic and other semiotic practices" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 585).

2.1.2. *Identity construction*

There are two different takes on identity construction. The most common perspective has already been noted in the previous section; that is, identity construction is an ongoing process and is never completed (e.g. Fougère, 2008; Graham, 2007; Ho, 2010). This is called the postmodern social constructionist perspective. The other one is the essentialist perspective, which holds that identity is born with us and that it merely unfolds while essentially remaining the same (Hall, 1992). The latter perspective assumes that identity can reach a point of completion (Ho, 2010). Since the postmodern social constructionist perspective of identity is more widely accepted – and I also happen to agree with it – it will be used throughout this paper. However, identity and its construction are not simple. As Ho (2010: 2253) aptly puts it, "various identities can be constructed by and for the same individual". And while Ho and many others are mainly focused on how an individual or individuals construct their identity, I will focus on how a group of people construct their identity. Before that, it is also crucial to take a look at what group identity is.

2.1.3. *Group identity*

Throughout history, humans have always formed groups, and, within those groups, they have formed hierarchical systems. This has been pointed out by Brewer and Caporael (1995), who proposed a model with four configurations – dyads, teams, bands, and tribes. The target group

of this study, the *League of Legends* community, falls under the tribe configuration, which is a “macro-band characterised by a shared identity and communication but without continual face-to-face interaction” (Brewer and Gardner, 1996: 84). The hierarchical system is a key concept because *League of Legends* is a competitive game with such a system – rankings (there is more information about this in section 3.2) – and this plays a key role in the players’ identity. Communication is also a key concept because the game has a unique terminology that all of the players use. Additionally, communication is crucial as it has been noted that identities are constructed through interactions (primarily through linguistic interaction).

As Ho (2010) argues, an individual can have multiple identities. Psychological theories of identity mainly distinguish two types: individual identity and collective identity. As Spencer-Oatey (2007: 641) puts it, “[i]ndividual identity refers to self-definition as a unique individual, whereas collective identity refers to self-definition as a group member”. Spencer-Oatey (2007) also observes that while some characteristics may seem to be part of someone’s collective identity, in reality, as Simon (2004) points it out, this is not the case. It mainly depends on what the individual thinks of a certain characteristic. That is, while ‘gaming’ as a characteristic can be seen as referring to someone who likes to play games (an individual characteristic), it can also be viewed as pointing to someone who is part of the gaming community (a collective characteristic). In the end, it boils down to what the individual thinks about it.

Brewer and Gardner (1996) note that the most conspicuous aspects of a group’s identity are those that are shared among its members. Therefore, it only seems logical to approach the group identity of the players through their individual identities and point out the similarities.

As a final note about group identity, Brewer and Gardner also created a table (cf. Table 1 below) about the “levels of representation of the self” (Brewer and Gardner, 1996: 84). This table contains the psychological theory of identity noted above, which refers to individual and collective identity, and also involves an interpersonal level. However, while this level is not important for the present paper, the table is included to help visualise the different levels of identity and to later help compare the players’ offline identity (individual) with their online gamer identity (group).

Table 1. *Levels of representation of the self* (Brewer and Gardner, 1996: 84)

Level of analysis	Self-concept	Basis of self-evaluation	Frame of reference	Basic social motivation
Individual	Personal	Traits	Interpersonal comparison	Self-interest
Interpersonal	Relational	Roles	Reflection	Other's benefit
Group	Collective	Group prototype	Intergroup comparison	Collective welfare

2.2. Pragmatics

Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac (2020) have described pragmatics as an ‘insecure science’. Hacking (1995: 352) has claimed that an insecure science is “a science whose leaders say they are in quest for a paradigm, or have just found a paradigm”. Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac say this because there are no pragmatic theories or frameworks which are generally accepted. Furthermore, “there is no consensus as to the domain of pragmatics” (Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac, 2020: 72).

2.2.1. *Pragmatics defined*

Generally, pragmatics deals with meaning in context. There are a few definitions of pragmatics, but these are usually described as attempts rather than actual definitions. Fasold (1990: 119) defines pragmatics as “the study of the use of context to make inferences about meaning”. O’Keeffe (2011) calls Fasold’s attempt a “user-friendly definition”. Senft (2014: 11) defines it as

the “study [of] how speakers use their language to generate specific meanings in a specific context”. Both of these definitions suggest that, therefore, pragmatics deals with how people use language to generate meaning in a given context.

Thus, pragmatics is important when one sets out to explore identity. As has already been stated above, identity is constructed through interactions and mainly through linguistic interactions (verbal/nonverbal communication). Simply put, pragmatics deals with how people use language. While there are many important notions of pragmatics, even more crucial for this paper are politeness theory and the concept of face, given how closely related they are to identity. This similarity has been pointed out by Spencer-Oatey (2007: 644), who states that “both relate to the notion of ‘self’-image [...], and both comprise multiple self-aspects or attributes”.

2.2.2. Face (*vs. identity*)

The concept of face originally derives from the everyday English expressions ‘losing face’, as in being humiliated or embarrassed, and ‘saving face’, as in preventing this from happening. Building on that, Goffman (1972 [1967]: 1) defined face as follows: “The term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact”. The key here is “positive social value”, since the main difference between identity and face is that while identity can contain both positive and negative attributes, face can only contain positive attributes. The simple reason behind why face can only contain positive attributes is perfectly summarised by Lim (1994: 210): “Face is not what one thinks of oneself, but what one thinks others should think of one’s worth”. And who would want to present a negative image of him- or herself? Additionally, as Schlenker and Pontari (2000) argue, the self-presentation concerns of people are never absent and can either operate in background or foreground modes. They compare it to an anti-virus program on a computer, which is always operating, but we only notice it when a problem occurs. Furthermore, face is generally considered to be fragile and vulnerable.

2.2.3. Politeness theory and FTAs

Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) developed their politeness theory, which includes many influential notions. Their concept of face was based on that of Goffman’s, and it provides the foundation for their politeness theory. What is perhaps the most crucial for this paper in Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory is face-threatening acts (FTAs), presented as part of their dualistic model of face.

Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) proposed a dualistic model of face, that is, positive and negative face. Positive face is “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (Brown and Levinson, 1987 [1978]: 62). Therefore, positive face is the individual’s desire to be accepted, appreciated, and approved of by others. Negative face is “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others” (Brown and Levinson, 1987 [1978]: 62). Thus, negative face is the individual’s desire to be independent and to have freedom of action.

When it comes to FTAs, they can be aimed at either positive or negative face. Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]: 65) defined FTAs as follows: “certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker.” Furthermore, they clarify that by acts, they mean intentional verbal or non-verbal actions in communication, not unintentional ones.

3. Methodology

In this section, I state the research questions, define the context, and describe the participants, the data collection instrument, and the procedure of the study.

3.1. Research questions

The questions this research set out to seek answers to are the following:

1. How do players of *League of Legends* construct their identity within the community?
2. What matters to them in that regard?
3. How does their gamer identity manifest through interaction?
4. What is the link between their offline identity and gamer identity, if there is one?

Apart from these questions, I have three hypotheses:

- 1) Toxic/aggressive players of the game experience stress in their lives and use the game to relieve stress;
- 2) Players with higher rankings speak better English and think that good English skills are necessary; and
- 3) Players with higher rankings have a higher level of education, while players with lower rankings have a lower level of education.

3.2. The context

The context is the game *League of Legends* and its community. However, since it might not be evident what it is, I provide a brief overview of the game.

League of Legends is a competitive online video game within the MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) genre. It was created by Riot Games and published in 2009. In the game, there are two teams, and each of them consists of five players. The game heavily builds on teamwork and communication, and players have to make use of these in order to win. Apart from the in-game chat system, there are also ‘pings’ in the game that are used as a form of communication. Pings are a built-in system that allows players to quickly signal something to their teammates in the form of symbols. By design, pings can signal the following: danger (exclamation mark), on my way (arrow), assist me (flag), enemy missing (question mark), or the enemy sees this territory (eye). What is also notable about the game is its ranking system. The game currently has nine types of ranking: iron, bronze, silver, gold, platinum, diamond, master, grandmaster, and challenger.

The game, by nature, is intercultural – at least in Europe, there are quite a few players from different nations. However, in order to reasonably limit the scope of this paper, I chose to focus on Hungarian players only. Additionally, one of the main reasons why this game stands out and why I found it interesting to research is because the game is infamous for its toxic community.

3.3. Participants

A total of eleven participants were selected from the Facebook group called *LoL – EU Észak és Kelet csapatépítő* (LoL – EU Nordic and East teambuilder). However, one participant had to be excluded from this study because the participant did not actually answer the questions but instead talked about unrelated topics. Therefore, the total number of participants analysed is reduced to ten. The members of this group are Hungarians, and each of them plays the game. The ages and genders of the participants were irrelevant when they signed up for the interview; however, eight of the ten participants are male, and their age ranges from 15 to 29. What I specifically looked for are players who regularly play the game and have the following rankings:

bronze, silver, gold, platinum, or diamond. I chose these rankings because the number of players below or above these rankings is extremely low. The ranking of the players matters because I also want to compare their answers based on their ranking. Additionally, the names of the participants have been altered to protect their privacy, and they were aware of them being recorded and verbally agreed to it.

3.4. Data collection instrument and procedure

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, that is, by asking a set of questions of every participant which prompted them to talk freely. The set of questions was designed in light of the three definitions in section 2.1.1 and mainly with Hogg and Abrams' (2006 [1998]) definition in mind. I also asked additional questions when I felt that this was needed. The purpose of these additional questions was mainly to prompt the participant to supply a more detailed answer. For instance, it was difficult for some of the participants to answer the first question: "What are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about someone?" Thus, in order to encourage them to talk, I asked the following question: "What would be something that negatively influences your opinion about someone, and what would be something that positively influences it?". This method of breaking down the question into smaller parts usually worked, and it was used during the interviews when necessary.

The set of questions consists of two parts, and each part comprises two subparts. The first part deals with the players' offline identity, and the second part aims to collect data about the players' online identity. Each part started with a few short questions to collect basic information about the participants, such as name, age, and ranking; then the longer questions followed. Both main parts were designed in a way so that their offline and online identities could be easily compared. The set of questions can be found in the appendices both in English (translated) and in Hungarian (original). Additionally, the present paper contains excerpts from the interviews which are translated into English.

Before the actual interviews, I conducted one pilot interview. This provided sufficient results; therefore, the data collected during the pilot interview are included in the analysis. However, after this, I added new questions to the questionnaire. These are questions numbered 9 from the first part and 10, 14, and 21 from the second part. The complete, translated transcript of the pilot interview is included in the appendices.

The interviews were conducted through an online program called Discord. Due to the current Covid pandemic and the location of the participants, this was the best solution. Unfortunately, the main drawback of online interviews is that I was not able to record any gestures or facial expressions, since only verbal communication was recorded. The length of the interviews ranges from 30 to 90 minutes, but the rough average is 45–50 minutes.

The interviews started with a few minutes of small talk about how the participant had been, whether the participant had played that day and such, to break the ice. Also, this gave me enough time to set up the recording program. Thus, these first minutes of small talk were not recorded. After that, I explained that I was recording, to which all of them verbally agreed, and I proceeded to describe the project and explained what they needed to know about the interview. This included a description of the main goal of the study, which is to explore *League of Legends* players' identity, and an explanation of how much time the interview roughly takes and the structure of it. Then I started the interview.

3.5. Data analysis

In order to find out what makes someone a member of the *League of Legends* community, I use the approach suggested by Brewer and Gardner (1996). That is, I take the participants' answers and point out all the similarities. This provides a clear answer on what matters to them.

The main problem that arose during the research is that the participants might not supply genuine answers. This problem is the 'observer's paradox', which is "the concern that the inter-actants' awareness of being observed and recorded for research purposes may actually affect their communicative behaviour and thus distort the primary research data" (Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac, 2020: 82). In order to overcome this obstacle, the participants' answers have to be analysed with the concept of face in mind because the main reason why the participants might not provide genuine answers is due to the fact that they are trying to save face. Therefore, face helps us see through these answers and helps us read between the lines.

4. Results and discussion

In this section, I present the results of the research and discuss them in detail. First, I discuss the players' online identity including everything that the players say matters to them in that regard, the face of the players, their means of communication, and terminology. After that, I talk about the link between their offline and online identities. Finally, I explain the limitations of the study and how it could be potentially developed further.

4.1. The players' online identity

Exploring identity is challenging, and there are many aspects to it. Therefore, to overcome this challenge, this section consists of five subsections. First, I discuss how the participants might try to save their face. This is one of the most important sections, and the matters I discuss there apply to everything that follows this section. After that, I discuss the players' online identities and what matters to them in that regard. Following that, I discuss how they communicate with each other and their terminology.

4.1.1. Participants saving face

In order to overcome the observer's paradox, the face of the players has to be discussed. Not all of the participants provided genuine answers because they were clearly trying to save their face. As noted in section 2.2.2, face can only contain positive attributes because face is "what one thinks others should think of one's worth" (Lim, 1994: 210), and no one wants to present a negative image of him- or herself. However, identity can contain both positive and negative attributes. We have to take into consideration that the participants might not want to share certain negative information or attributes that would negatively affect their face. Since this paper sets out to explore the players' identities, this would jeopardise its goal. However, there were enough questions that they were eventually caught up in their answers. That is, not all of their answers lined up with each other perfectly.

To see how the participants might alter the truth to save their face, let us examine Tamás's answers. When he was asked the question, "Do you lose your temper easily, or do you think you are patient?", he offered the following answer:

(1)

Well it's... it's, well... umm, it depends on the situation. So... let's say... if I am tired, then I much more easily... lose my temper, but... well, I try, I try to be patient.

Tamás was hesitating a lot and was probably thinking of a good way to phrase what he was about to say to avoid putting himself in a negative light. After his answer, he went on to explain very carefully what makes him usually lose his temper. He mentioned *League of Legends* and his little brother. He talked the most about his little brother, about what he does that usually makes him “a bit frustrated”. The fact that he only mentioned situations where he lost his temper is already a good indication that he is not patient at all. After that, he asked for approval:

(2)

Do you think this is a situation where I can be frustrated?

In his case, I gave him my approval, and then he continued as follows:

(3)

Okay, but there is more, it makes me angry that it's like, so the book is... well... gee, I can't find words for their book, their English book. It's like zero, so there's no [explanation of the grammatical rules], they're supposed to be able to figure out [the grammatical rules] based on three sample sentences, but if it's not there, the basic, the raw stuff, I think [my brother] will never be able to figure it out. [...].

It immediately became evident that Tamás's speech had changed. He was no longer hesitating, and he was speaking faster and more fluently. Most importantly, he was speaking more confidently. What happened there is that I claimed common ground with Tamás by approving his positive face wants – his impatience and frustration in this case – which is a positive politeness strategy. “Positive politeness is redress directed at the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants should be thought of as desirable” (Brown and Levinson, 1987 [1978]: 101). That is, positive politeness strategies are aimed at the addressee's positive face such as, in this case, approving the addressee's positive face wants.

After that, Tamás felt more comfortable talking about his impatience. However, in the first line of example three, we can see that he is still struggling with something. My strong assumption is that he wanted to use a curse word there to describe his little brother's English textbook. He refrained from doing so, since I have never approved of the use of such words; I only approved of his impatience. Unfortunately, after this, Tamás had returned to his safe, ‘slow and steady’ approach on the questions that followed.

Tamás is a perfect example of how some participants might want to alter their answers in order to save their face. While Tamás stated at the beginning, at least implicitly, that he is impatient, this is not the case with all the participants. Unfortunately, I was not always able to use strategies as I did in Tamás's case, but there were enough questions that the participants became caught up in them and implicitly revealed certain negative attributes of their identity.

Thus, for this paper, face is essential. We must keep it in mind as we continue to analyse the participants' answers, especially when toxicity is discussed.

4.1.2. Identity and face of the players

First, I discuss the similarities between the participants' answers, as suggested by Brewer and Gardner (1996). This section mainly focuses on the answers the participants have provided to the following longer questions, 1–3 and 9–12, from the second part of the interview. Let us go over them in order and analyse them.

The first question was the following: “What are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about other players?”. In short, the answers were the following with the numbers next to them indicating how many of the participants mentioned it: performance (9), farm (1), vision (1), map awareness (1), how they influence the game (3), what they communicate towards their teammates (1), playstyle (aggressive or passive) (1), build (1), what champion they play (2), their level of toxicity (3), their ranking (1), and the role they play

(2). At first glance, some of these answers might need an explanation, but to keep unnecessary complexity at a minimum, I explain briefly what they meant by these answers.

Farm, vision, influence on the game, build, and ranking, in simple terms, refer to a player's performance. Thus, despite nine of the ten participants directly noting performance as a major factor when constructing an opinion about other players, they elaborated further about what they meant by performance. The most probable reason why almost all of them noted performance as a key factor is because it has a direct effect on them. The other most common answers that are not related to performance were the champion they are playing, the role they play, and their level of toxicity. The first two answers are simply player preference with little to no impact on other players. The participants who mentioned these are prejudicial, according to other answers they have provided. These answers will be discussed in a later section (4.3). The latter answer refers to the abusive behaviour of other players. Given the toxicity of the game, it is rather surprising that only three participants made mention of it. This leads to the conclusion that most of the players do not mind or do not care about the toxic environment within the game. The toxicity of the *League of Legends* community will be discussed in later sections.

The second question was the following: "Do you usually do a background check on your teammates? If yes, please explain why". By background check, I mean the websites or applications that offer the players the option to check their teammates and enemies before the match starts. These websites usually contain all sorts of information about the players, such as win rates, rankings, and games played, and it is quite common to do a background check before the match starts. In short, the answers were the following with the number next to them indicating how many of the participants mentioned it: no (7), sometimes (1), and yes (2). The participants who answered 'no' gave the following explanations: they feel that they cannot draw any conclusion from the information they would find (4), they do not care (3), and they do not like it/feel that it is cheating (2), while one participant said that he does not want the information that he would find there to influence him (1).

At first, it seems that it is not at all common among players to do a background check. The most common reason why they do not check their teammates and enemies is that they feel they cannot draw any concrete conclusions from it; they cannot tell how a player will perform based on the information that these websites and applications provide. However, in order to know this, they had to do it at least once, but realistically more than once to arrive at this conclusion. Thus, even though they have not explicitly said that have ever done a background check, they have done so implicitly. This is further borne out by other participants' answers. Although there were only two participants who answered 'yes', they explained their answers similarly to those who answered 'no'. Both of them mentioned that they could not draw conclusions from it. This reinforces the claim that those who answered 'no' have indeed done a background check in the past.

However, despite most of them answering 'no' here, it does not mean that doing a background check is not common. Let us keep face in mind and examine two 'no' answers. Anna said the following:

(4)

Anna:

No, I don't. Every- many people in my circle of friends do, too, but I don't. I don't care about that. Okay, sure, if [the game] shows their [rankings], then I check that, but if it doesn't, then I don't check what [champions] they are playing with and umm, their statistics. I don't care. I don't check the enemy either.

Me:

Could you elaborate a bit more on why you do not do a background check? Or is it that you just don't care and that's it?

Anna:

To some degree... Can I talk about the enemy too?

Me:

Yes, of course.

Anna:

If I check the enemy's statistics, okay, I know that the option is given, but to some degree, I feel like it's cheating, or I don't know. I think it is morally wrong to check how they [usually perform]. And it doesn't even matter, it can be really misleading like... really. I don't like it. And I don't check my teammates either because it can be a basis for judgement. For that reason, I don't do it, this... I don't know what applications are out there, porofessor and the like. I don't like it. I don't do it.

Now, let us see Csenge's answer:

(5)

Csenge:

No. Porofessor and programs like that? No, and it really makes me mad when I play with someone, and they start saying what the enemy is like and what our teammates are like, like 'oh, everyone in the enemy team is on a winning streak and everyone in our team is on a losing streak'. Then I usually shut them up, because I do not care. There is a reason why I don't have programs like that downloaded. [...].

One thing immediately becomes apparent: even though they said that they do not do background checks, both of them know people who do it. This is a recurring theme. That is, participants state that they are aware of others doing something, but they themselves are not one of them. While Csenge's answer seems to be truthful, given how she did not elaborate further and became offended by me even mentioning the phenomenon of background checks, Anna is most likely trying to save her face. It is safe to conclude that background checks are common, and based on how Csenge became offended and Anna mentioned that she thinks it "feels like cheating" and is "morally wrong", they consider it a negative attribute of their online identity.

The reason why they consider it a negative attribute is also answered by those who said 'yes' to the question. One of them said the following:

(6)

Well, first I check out the enemy bot lane, the enemy role, to know how they perform [...].

The other participant mentioned that he mostly checks out the players' rankings but also stated that he thinks ranking is not important. These and Anna and Csenge's answers imply that they do background checks to compare each other. It is also important to note that the participants use the words *performance*, *game knowledge*, and *rankings* interchangeably, although they mostly avoid using rankings and instead use *performance* or *game knowledge* because *rankings* implies comparative behaviour. Thus, it is not the act of doing background checks that they necessarily consider a negative attribute of their online identity, but the act of comparing each other. These claims are further confirmed by the answers they provided for the next questions.

The third question was the following: "How do you react when there is a significantly lower- or higher-ranked player than you in your team (or in the enemy team)?". Only two of the ten participants said that they could not answer this question, one of them being Csenge, because they do not do background checks. This confirms four points. First, Csenge was telling the truth and was not trying to save face. Second, Anna was trying to save her face. Eight par-

ticipants gave a detailed answer about how they feel or react, and almost all of them immediately thought of a situation where there is a higher-ranking player in the enemy team. This is important because there is no way of knowing from the game itself the rankings of the enemy team's players. That is, they have to use an external website or application to acquire this information. This demonstrates that background checks are common. And finally, since the question was not asking whether or not they are comparing each other, but how they react, they implicitly revealed that they in fact compare each other, but consider comparative behaviour a negative attribute.

The ninth and tenth questions have to be analysed together. They go as follows: "Do you want to achieve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why" and "Do you think you deserve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why". As regards the former question, all of them answered 'yes'. The reason they want to achieve a higher ranking is also the same most of the time. The reasons are the following: they want to be better at the game, perform better, and/or have better game knowledge. Some of them mentioned that they think ranking is not important; therefore, I asked them if they think that ranking can provide feedback about a player's performance and/or game knowledge. All of them answered 'yes', although hesitantly. This further reinforces the claim that performance and, therefore, ranking are the most important to them, but they refrain from saying it out loud. Three of the participants even mentioned that they want to achieve a higher ranking so they can show other players that they are better than them.

As to the latter question, almost all of them answered 'no'. However, despite most of them doing so, the participants also stated that they feel they have the game knowledge or skill to achieve a higher ranking, but they do not put enough effort into the game. This is false, since the participants, on average, play 20–25 hours a week. Thus, based on their answers, if only game knowledge, skill, and investment of energy are needed to achieve a higher ranking, then most of them lack the skill and/or game knowledge. The most probable reason why they lied about this is that they do not want to weaken their online identity. It is evident at this point that performance, game knowledge, and, thus, ranking are crucial to them, and this is confirmed even further by the answers they provided to the previous and current questions.

The eleventh and twelfth questions also have to be analysed together. They are the following: "What do you think of those who do not want to achieve a higher ranking?" and "What do you think of those who do not play ranked games at all?" The former question was about players who play ranked games regularly but do not necessarily want to achieve a higher ranking. On this question, most of them said that they do not understand them, they do not like them, or they outright hate them. This shows again how important ranking is to them. The latter question was about players who have never played ranked games and do not intend to. On this, they provided the following answers: I understand them (5), I do not understand them (1), no opinion (2), and I like them (2). Most of them understand players who do not play ranked games and only play normal games. They explained that ranked games are stressful, and they understand if someone just wants to enjoy the game or play the game. These answers and how sharply they contrast with their previous answers imply that they think that players who do not have a ranking or do not play ranked matches regularly are not part of the community. Therefore, not only is ranking important to them, but it is a necessary attribute of their online and group identity. It provides them the basis for self-evaluation, comparison, and a place in their group.

Thus, let us answer the research question: "What matters to them regarding their online group identity?" The most important key attributes are performance, game knowledge, and ranking. Out of these three, undoubtedly, ranking is the most essential. The players regularly

compare each other based on their rankings. Furthermore, it is a necessary attribute if someone wants to claim a place within their group.

4.1.3. Communication and terminology

In this section, I discuss the players' main means of communication and the content of their communication, and offer an insight into their terminology. This section mainly focuses on the answers the participants have provided to the following longer questions, 13–17, from the second part of the interview.

There are two ways the players can communicate with each other in-game: in-game chat and pings. According to the participants' answers, players use both the in-game chat and the pings; however, pings are much more dominant. They stated that while they use the in-game chat almost every game, they use the built-in pings every game without exception.

The content of their communication is mainly restricted to the game itself. That is, they are informing their teammates about something or sharing strategic information with them. According to the participants, they are not really communicating with their enemies (using the 'all-chat' that both teams can see). Furthermore, the participants have stated that when they use the in-game chat, they mostly communicate with other players in English. However, I asked the following question as a follow-up: "Have you ever written in Hungarian to a teammate or enemy that you knew would not understand it?" Almost all of them answered 'yes'. They said that they only do this when they become really frustrated or angry. There are two possible reasons why they do this. First, they cannot express themselves sufficiently in English to relieve the frustration. Second, they use the language barrier so the not-so-kind message they have sent would not be understood by other players. Additionally, Csenge and Ádám said the following:

(7)

Csenge:

When I see that there are Hungarians, I try to hide the fact that I am Hungarian too.

(8)

Ádám:

I meet very few Hungarians, but they tend to be more toxic than [you might initially think].

It seems that they are not keen on meeting other Hungarians in the game, and they think that Hungarians are more toxic than players from other nations. Although the present paper cannot confirm whether Hungarians are more toxic than players from other nations, the reason they might feel this way is due to the language barrier not being present. Thus, Hungarians are more prone to being toxic towards each other. This also confirms the second claim about why they use the Hungarian language when they know others would not understand it.

It is also important to talk about the players' terminology because, as has been noted, the *League of Legends* community falls under the tribe configuration, which has "shared [...] communication but without continual face-to-face interaction" (Brewer and Gardner, 1996: 84). A table that contains some of the terms they used during the interviews has been included (cf. Table 2 below). It contains some of the most often mentioned words, the number of participants that used that word, the total number of times that word was mentioned, and whether the word is originally in the game and, therefore, has a Hungarian translation. The words that are included were noted by the participants in the exact form as they are presented in the table.

Table 2. Rudimentary terminology of League of Legends based on the participants' answers

Words	The number of participants mentioning the word	The total number of times the word was mentioned	Is the word originally in the game and does it thus have a Hungarian translation?
Ranked	8 (80%)	50	Yes
Mute	8 (80%)	25	Yes
Lane	8 (80%)	34	Yes
Int/Feed	7 (70%)	16	No
Top	7 (70%)	18	Yes
Plat/Platinum	6 (60%)	34	Yes
Support	6 (60%)	16	Yes
Role	4 (40%)	11	Yes

Four of the participants noted that good foreign language skills are not necessary for the game, and five mentioned that it is somewhat important or important. Eight of the participants started playing after there was a Hungarian translation of the game (after 2015). The participants who observed that foreign language skills are not important also said that they think it is not important because the game has a Hungarian translation. However, their terminology is based on the English language. Despite most of them having a Hungarian translation directly in the game, the players use the terms in their English form. Furthermore, we can see that one term in the table has no Hungarian translation (int/feed). Terms like that refer to tactics, strategies, or actions that are originally not in the game, but the players have come up with them. These terms are constantly changing, and every year new terms come into existence. Although the participants rarely used terms that have no Hungarian translation – mostly because they are extremely specific – they are important to their terminology and, therefore, important to mention, nonetheless.

There are other notable findings about their communication. Most of the participants noted at some point during the interview that they either do not care or find the toxicity entertaining. Also, they stated that they do not really use the all-chat function of the game to communicate with their enemies. However, later (in answer to questions 18–21 from the second part of the interview) most of them admitted using the all-chat function, although they emphasised that they only rarely use it and that they are not being toxic. At the end of 2021, Riot Games wanted to disable the all-chat function due to “negative interactions outweigh[ing] the positives” (Roon and Lee, 2021). However, the company failed to do so due to a community backlash. That is, the players wanted to keep the all-chat function despite the fact that it is mostly used for negative interactions. Furthermore, during the second part of the interview, the participants' speech changed, and they started using curse words slightly more often or, in some cases, significantly more so. All of these observations and the fact that Riot Games is aware of the toxicity and tried to combat it by removing the all-chat, but the community was furious even by the idea of removing it, lead to the conclusion that toxicity is so deeply embedded in the community that we can say that, at this point, it is part of their online group identity. As has been discussed in section 2.1.2, identity is not a fixed point, but rather constantly evolving (e.g. Fougere, 2008; Ho, 2010; Simon, 2004). Let us presume that toxicity was not always present in the game as it is today. However, with time, toxicity grew bigger and started growing roots. By roots, I mean that the game is no longer toxic because of the players, but rather vice versa; the players are toxic because of the game. Because, as newcomers arrive, they will become accustomed to this environment. Moreover, given the toxic environment of the game, it is now more attractive to players who want to relieve the stress they are experiencing in their lives here or are just more

prone to this type of behaviour (e.g. being short-tempered). I discuss these types of players in section 4.3.1.

Finally, there is one last important finding about how their identities manifest through interaction. Some of the participants mentioned that during an argument or dispute, they are likely to bring up rankings as an argument. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle (2004) talked about the “modes of persuasion” (Aristotle, 2004: 8). There are three modes: “The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself” (Aristotle, 2004: 8). The first mode is ethos, that is, persuasion based on the speaker’s character or, in this case, identity. Based on what the participants said, they are likely to use ethos as a mode of persuasion. Consequently then, some online identities are more dominant than others. That is, higher-ranking players have more dominant online identities than their lower-ranking counterparts, and players are willing to make use of their dominant online identities in interaction. Furthermore, based on my own experience, if a player has a dominant online identity, the other, dominated player might try to weaken it during an argument. The dominated player might use words such as ‘boosted’, by which they mean that the dominant player did not achieve their ranking legitimately or by themselves, and, thus, their ethos is invalid as a mode of persuasion. This further demonstrates how important ranking is to their online identities, and ranking provides them with the basis for self-evaluation, comparison, and a place in their group.

Thus, let us answer the research question: “How does their gamer identity manifest through interaction?” Their online identity manifests through interaction in the form of toxicity and ethos. Toxicity, at this point, is so persistent that we can say it is part of their online group identity. Ethos is frequently used during arguments. Consequently, there are dominant and dominated online identities, and ranking decides whose online identity is dominant. Additionally, *League of Legends* players have a unique terminology, which is based on the English language.

4.2. Hypotheses results

Let us see which of the three hypotheses have been demonstrated to be true and which have not. To recap, the hypotheses are the following:

- 1) Toxic/aggressive players of the game experience stress in their lives and use the game to relieve stress;
- 2) Players with higher rankings speak better English and think that good English skills are necessary; and
- 3) Players with higher rankings have a higher level of education, while players with lower rankings have a lower level of education.

The latter two are demonstrably wrong. Higher-ranking players do not necessarily speak better English and/or have a higher level of education. There is no connection between them. Furthermore, it is not within the scope of this paper to answer the question of why they have higher rankings. Most of them said that it is good to have good English language skills but that it is not at all important. There is no clear indication that language skills, education, or even investment of energy have a role in their rankings. Higher-ranking players play better, and they understand the game better than players with lower rankings. However, it is unclear why.

The first hypothesis has been confirmed, and it is discussed in detail in section 4.3.1.

4.3. Link between the players' offline and online identity

As has been observed, “various identities can be constructed by and for the same individual” (Ho, 2010: 2253). In our case, these are the players’ offline and online identities. However, these are not completely separate identities. The players’ online identities are based on their offline identities, and they carry over certain attributes and characteristics from their offline identities to their online identities.

For instance, participants who are originally prejudicial are also more likely to be prejudicial in-game. Let us examine two of these players. I asked them the following question: “What are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about someone?” Csaba answered this as follows:

(9)

Pfuh, well, I don’t know, I think you can tell what someone is like just by looking at them.
[...]

Csenge provided the following answer to the same question:

(10)

Everyone has stereotypes, everyone has these, umm, different degrees of prejudice. And I form [my opinion] based on that at first glance, I have an opinion about everybody and then it’s not really that significantly present with me, so I like to get to know people and to have them talk about themselves, umm, but I’m basically, so at first glance, really – shameful or not – these stereotypes umm... umm... I form my opinion based on them.

These are the participants noted in section 4.1.2 that form their opinions about other players based on what champions they play or what role other players play. These factors have nothing to do with performance, game knowledge, or ranking. They are purely preferences of the players with little to no impact on the game. Thus, we can see that players who are prejudicial in real life carry over this attribute of their offline identities to their online identities.

Furthermore, players that are short-tempered in real life are more likely to be toxic in the game. For instance, Tamás has already been discussed in section 4.1.1 as being impatient and short-tempered. Later, in answer to questions 18–21 from the second part of the interview, he said that he is prone to being toxic and apt to verbally confront or scold other players. Additionally, seven of the ten participants mentioned that their lives are stressful, and five of those seven participants noted that they use *League of Legends* as a method to relieve stress. These demonstrate that the game indeed attracts people who are prone to being toxic and want to relieve stress. This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in the next subsection.

Finally, let us compare the players’ offline and online identities based on Table 1 (Brewer and Gardner, 1996: 84). Here, I mainly focus on the frame of reference and basic social motivation.

As a frame of reference, Brewer and Gardner (1996) note an interpersonal comparison at the individual level and an intergroup comparison at the group level. That is, at the individual level, individuals compare themselves to other individuals. This is present here with the participants. They compare themselves to others based on how they look, their styles, and their communicative skills. They also form an opinion based on these factors. However, at the group level, they compare themselves to other players within the group. As has been discussed in previous sections, ranking is the single most important factor on which their comparison is based. That is an attribute that every member of the group has, and, therefore, they base their comparison on that.

Finally, Brewer and Gardner (1996) point to basic social motivation. At the individual level, it refers to self-interest, and at the group level, it refers to collective welfare. While it is true that self-interest is the basic social motivation when it comes to the players’ individual offline identities, collective welfare is not noticeable in their online group identity as a basic social motivation. That is, at the individual level, they engage in actions that benefit them as an individual,

such as pursuing higher education or finding a better job to be able to afford a more comfortable lifestyle. However, at the group level, collective welfare is not really present. That is, while the fact that they are trying to win a match could count as collective welfare, in reality, it does not. The players are not trying to win a match so their team could win. The players are trying to win a match so they, as individuals, could win. This has been emphasised by numerous participants: "I came here to win". By winning, they increase their rankings, and, therefore, they achieve more dominant online identities. Collective welfare as motivation is only present when Riot Games announces a change that the community does not like (e.g. disabling all-chat). Thus, even at the group level, self-interest is the basic motivational force.

Thus, let us answer the following research questions: "How do players of *League of Legends* construct their identity within the community?" and "What is the link between their offline identity and gamer identity, if there is one?"

First, let us answer the latter research question. Their online identity is based on their offline identity, and they carry over certain attributes. Players who want to relieve stress or are more prone to behave in a toxic manner are attracted to the game because of its toxicity. Furthermore, Brewer and Gardner's (1996: 84) table (cf. Table 1) mostly applies in this context; however, interestingly, collective welfare is not noticeable in their online group identity, and it seems self-interest is the basic motivational force.

Finally, let us answer the first research question. There are two crucial factors when it comes to the players' online identity construction. First, as has been noted, the players' online identities are based on their offline identities. Second, apart from playing the game regularly, ranking is the single most important factor players have to effectively claim for themselves to construct their online identity within the community.

4.3.1. Stress and toxicity

Toxicity has been discussed throughout various parts of this paper. I have claimed that toxicity is part of the players' online group identity, the game, *League of Legends*, attracts players who are more prone to this type of behaviour, and players use the game as a method to relieve stress in their lives. Also, it has been noted that seven out of the ten participants' lives are stressful, and five of those seven participants mentioned that they use *League of Legends* as a method to relieve stress. Thus, the following hypothesis has been confirmed: toxic/aggressive players of the game experience stress in their lives and use the game to relieve stress. To further confirm this claim, let us examine Csenge's answers.

Csenge is one of the most interesting of the ten participants: mostly because she was not trying to save her face and she provided helpful details in her answers. For instance, she mentioned that she used to be toxic. While this claim is not outstanding, since most of the participants claimed this to save their face – that is, they used to be toxic, but now they are not toxic anymore – Csenge did not use it to save her face. She mentioned that her life is stressful and sought professional care to help her deal with the stress she experiences in her life. Before this, she explained, she used the game to relieve stress and used to be toxic. However, ever since she began receiving professional help to deal with her stress, she simply does not become so frustrated that she behaves toxically in-game. She no longer uses the game to relieve stress. She was not trying to save her face because, during the interview, she did not realise the correlation between stress and toxicity, and what I described here came to light through the course of a 53-minute-long interview.

Csenge's example demonstrates that toxic/aggressive players use the game to relieve stress in their lives. Furthermore, all of these claims are linked to each other. That is, players who experience stress in their real lives are attracted to this game to relieve that stress because it is acceptable to engage in toxic behaviour – which is a stress reliever.

4.4. Strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the study

In this section, I discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the current study. Furthermore, I offer potential guidelines for how it could be further developed.

There are many strengths and weaknesses of the present paper. This study sheds light upon the players' online group identity and highlights the key attributes that are important to them. Since most of these attributes are negative – or at least they think of them as negative – I have had to work around their face, which I have managed to do so. However, at the same time, this is one of the main weaknesses of the current paper. The interview questions were designed not be offensive to them or to have them assume anything about their identity. Furthermore, I, too, took a careful approach not to offend them or assume anything. These precautions permitted the participants too much freedom to save their face. However, it would probably have been more beneficial for this paper to ask them more direct questions without any regard for their face and leave them less room for saving their face. For instance, I could have included questions like the following:

- Do you think ranking is important?
- Do you often compare players based on their ranking?
- Do you think other players are toxic?
- Do you think you are toxic? If so, why? If not, why not?

Questions like these could have eliminated the problem of face or could have made the analysis process easier.

Finally, I want to discuss the limitations of the present study and how it could be developed further. While this paper covers the key attributes of the players' online group identity and while most of it is applicable to other online competitive video games, I do not think it covers it all. More research is needed to cover other attributes of their online group identity. Furthermore, it can be taken further to see how companies capitalise on gamers' online identities with these free games. For instance, *Trackmania 2020*, a competitive racing game, is initially free. However, for the players to have a ranking or to achieve a higher ranking in the game – therefore, to be genuinely part of the community – the players have to subscribe to the game and pay a monthly fee. While *League of Legends* is free at all times, Riot Games makes enormous profits from the game through microtransactions, such as buying skins or crates. A new, more elaborate study that explores other attributes of the players' online identity, such as their desire for distinction or money-spending habits, could explain how players distinguish themselves from other players by buying skins and other cosmetics. Although I am sure that companies are aware of this to some degree, they are probably looking at it through the lens of marketing and numbers.

5. Conclusion

There are many key attributes to the players' online identities. Performance, game knowledge, and ranking are all essential key attributes. Out of these attributes, ranking is undoubtedly the most important. The players compare each other on a regular basis based on their rankings, and this is necessary if one wants to join their group. Thus, it provides them with a basis for self-evaluation, comparison, and their place in the group. Furthermore, we can say that toxicity is also part of their online group identity.

These attributes manifest through interaction. Ranking manifests in their communication as they use ethos as a mode of persuasion. Thus, there are dominant and dominated online identities. Toxicity also manifests in their communication; however, it is hard to say the extent of it due to the participants saving face. Still, the fact that Riot Games even tried to remove the all-chat function to combat toxicity implies that its presence is significant.

Furthermore, we can see that the players' online identities are based on their offline identities and that they carry over certain attributes from their offline identities to their online identities. Also, it is clear that toxic/aggressive players use the game to relieve stress, which confirms the hypothesis. Additionally, the well-known toxicity of the game attracts players who are more prone to this type of behaviour.

Bibliography

Aristotle. 2004. 2. In Aristotle and W. Rhys Roberts (translator), eds. *Rhetoric*. Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 7–14.

Brewer, Marilynn B. and Linnda R. Caporael. 1995. Hierarchical evolutionary theory: There is an alternative and it's not creationism. *Psychological Inquiry*, 6:31–34.

Brewer, Marilynn B. and Wendi Gardner. 1996. Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71:83–93.

Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987 [1978]. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bucholtz, Mary and Kira Hall. 2005. Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 7:585–614.

Clement, J. 2021. Number of active video gamers worldwide from 2015 to 2023. June 1. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/748044/number-video-gamers-world/> (Date of access: November 20, 2021)

Fasold, Ralph W. 1990. *The sociolinguistics of language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Feehan, James D. 1999. *What is identity (as we use the word)?* Stanford: Stanford University.

Fougeré, Martin. 2008. Adaptation and identity. In Spencer-Oatey, Helen, ed. *Culturally speaking*. 2nd ed. New York: Continuum, 187–203.

Goffman, Erving. 1972 [1967]. Introduction. In Goffman, Erving, ed. *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behaviour*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1–8.

Graham, Sage Lambert. 2007. Disagreeing to agree: Conflict, (im)politeness and identity in a computer-mediated community. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39:742–759.

Hacking, Ian. 1995. The looping effects of human kinds. In Sperber, Dan, David Premack and Ann James Premack, eds. *Causal cognition: A multidisciplinary debate*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 351–384.

Hall, Stuart. 1992. Three concepts of identity. In Hall, Stuart, ed. *Modernity and its features*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 275–277.

Ho, Victor. 2010. Constructing identities through request e-mail discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42:2253–2261.

Hogg, Michael A. and Dominic Abrams. 2006 [1998]. Introduction. In Hogg, Michael A. and Dominic Abrams, eds. *Social identifications*. New York: Routledge, 1–5.

Katzenstein, Peter J., Ronald L. Jepperson and Alexander Wendt. 1996. Norms, identity, and culture in national security. In Katzenstein, Peter J., ed. *The culture of national security*. New York: Columbia University Press, 8–43.

Lim, Tae-Sop. 1994. Facework and interpersonal relationships. In Ting-Toomey, Stella, ed. *The challenge of facework*. New York: State University of New York Press, 209–229.

Merriam-Webster. n.d. Essential meaning of identity. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity> (Date of access: December 16, 2021)

O'Keeffe, Anne. 2011. Introduction. In O'Keeffe, Anne, Brian Clancy and Svenja Adolphs, eds. *Introducing pragmatics in use*. New York: Routledge, 1–17.

Roon, Andrei Van, Jeremy Lee. 2021. Disabling all chat. <https://www.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/news/game-updates/disabling-all-chat/> (Date of access: March 29, 2022)

Schlenker, Barry and Beth Pontari, 2000. The strategic control of information: Impression management and self-presentation in daily life. In Tesser, Abraham, Richard B. Felson and Jerry M. Suls, eds. *Psychological perspectives on self and identity*. Washington: American Psychological Association, 199–232.

Senft, Gunter. 2014. Introduction. In Senft, Gunter, ed. *Understanding pragmatics*. New York: Routledge, 1–10.

Simon, Bernd. 2004. *Identity in modern society: A social psychological perspective*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Spencer-Oatey, Helen and Vladimir Žegarac. 2020. Pragmatics. In Schmitt, Norbert and Michael P.H. Rodgers, eds. *An introduction to applied linguistics*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 72–90.

Spencer-Oatey, Helen. 2007. Theories of identity and the analysis of face. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39:639–656.

Spezzy. 2021. How many people play League of Legends? <https://leaguefeed.net/did-you-know-total-league-of-legends-player-count-updated/> (Date of access: November 15, 2021)

Stanton, Rich. 2021. With 180 million players, League of Legends games have more active users than Steam. November 2. <https://www.pcgamer.com/uk/with-180-million-players-league-of-legends-games-have-more-active-users-than-steam/> (Date of access: November 15, 2021)

Appendices

1. Interview questions in English (translated)

Questions about offline identity	
Short questions	
1. What is your name?	
2. How old are you?	
3. What do you study/do for a living?	
4. What is your highest level of education?	
5. What is your mother's and father's highest level of education?	
Long questions	
Questions	Purpose of the questions
1. What are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about someone?	How do they relate to others?
2. How do you relate to those who work in a lower position than you, or have a lower education than you?	
3. Do you think your life is stressful?	How do they handle pressure, what their temper is like.
4. How do you handle stress in your life?	
5. Do you lose your temper easily, or do you think you are patient?	
6. After a failure, can you get up on your feet easily, or does it have an effect on you long afterwards?	
7. If you do not succeed at first, do you keep trying, do you put off the problem, or do you give up entirely?	
8. Do you want to improve your life? Be it your current financial status, work position, better grades at school or achieving a higher education. If yes, please explain why.	
9. Do you think you deserve to live better? If so, please explain why.	
10. What do you think of those who are not working to improve their life?	Improving one's life.

11. Do you think you are talkative? 12. Do you adapt to your conversation partner? (topic, vocabulary, tone, aggression) 13. What languages do you speak? 14. Do you think good foreign language skills are important? 15. How do you react when someone is insulting you? 16. If someone is underperforming at your workplace or at a group project at school, do you scold them? 17. Do you often taunt others? If so, how? In what situations? If not, why not?	Pragmatic questions.																								
Questions about online identity																									
Short questions																									
1. What is your current ranking in the game? 2. How long have you been playing the game? 3. How many hours do you usually play a week?																									
Long questions																									
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Questions</th><th style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Purpose of the questions</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">1. What are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about other players?</td><td style="padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;">How do they relate to other players?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">2. Do you usually do a background check on your teammates? If yes, please explain why.</td><td rowspan="6" style="padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;">How do they handle pressure, what their temper is like.</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">3. How do you react when there is a significantly lower- or higher-ranked player than you on your team (or on the enemy team)?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">4. Do you think this game is stressful?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">5. Do you easily lose your temper when you are playing?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">6. Does a bad match have an effect on you afterwards or can you let it go easily?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">7. Can you close out the day with a loss, or do you play until you win?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">8. Are you prone to forfeiting the match if you are behind, or do you play until the end?</td><td rowspan="5" style="padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;">Improving at the game.</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">9. Do you want to achieve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why.</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">10. Do you think you deserve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why.</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">11. What do you think of those who do not want to achieve a higher ranking?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">12. What do you think of those who do not play ranked games at all?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">13. Do you use the chat function? If so, how often?</td><td rowspan="6" style="padding: 5px; vertical-align: top;">Pragmatic questions.</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">14. Do you use the pings in game? If so, how often?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">15. What do you usually write to your teammates/enemies?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">16. What language do you use to communicate with them?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">17. Do you think good foreign language skills are important regarding the game?</td></tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">18. How do you react when someone verbally abuses you in chat within the game?</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Questions	Purpose of the questions	1. What are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about other players?	How do they relate to other players?	2. Do you usually do a background check on your teammates? If yes, please explain why.	How do they handle pressure, what their temper is like.	3. How do you react when there is a significantly lower- or higher-ranked player than you on your team (or on the enemy team)?	4. Do you think this game is stressful?	5. Do you easily lose your temper when you are playing?	6. Does a bad match have an effect on you afterwards or can you let it go easily?	7. Can you close out the day with a loss, or do you play until you win?	8. Are you prone to forfeiting the match if you are behind, or do you play until the end?	Improving at the game.	9. Do you want to achieve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why.	10. Do you think you deserve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why.	11. What do you think of those who do not want to achieve a higher ranking?	12. What do you think of those who do not play ranked games at all?	13. Do you use the chat function? If so, how often?	Pragmatic questions.	14. Do you use the pings in game? If so, how often?	15. What do you usually write to your teammates/enemies?	16. What language do you use to communicate with them?	17. Do you think good foreign language skills are important regarding the game?	18. How do you react when someone verbally abuses you in chat within the game?
Questions	Purpose of the questions																								
1. What are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about other players?	How do they relate to other players?																								
2. Do you usually do a background check on your teammates? If yes, please explain why.	How do they handle pressure, what their temper is like.																								
3. How do you react when there is a significantly lower- or higher-ranked player than you on your team (or on the enemy team)?																									
4. Do you think this game is stressful?																									
5. Do you easily lose your temper when you are playing?																									
6. Does a bad match have an effect on you afterwards or can you let it go easily?																									
7. Can you close out the day with a loss, or do you play until you win?																									
8. Are you prone to forfeiting the match if you are behind, or do you play until the end?	Improving at the game.																								
9. Do you want to achieve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why.																									
10. Do you think you deserve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why.																									
11. What do you think of those who do not want to achieve a higher ranking?																									
12. What do you think of those who do not play ranked games at all?																									
13. Do you use the chat function? If so, how often?	Pragmatic questions.																								
14. Do you use the pings in game? If so, how often?																									
15. What do you usually write to your teammates/enemies?																									
16. What language do you use to communicate with them?																									
17. Do you think good foreign language skills are important regarding the game?																									
18. How do you react when someone verbally abuses you in chat within the game?																									

19. Do you scold your teammates if they are underperforming, or if they are doing something you consider stupid?	
20. Do you often taunt your enemies? If so, how? In what situations? If not, why not?	
21. Do you taunt your teammates with pings? If so, why?	

2. Interview questions in Hungarian (original)

Kérdések az offline identitással kapcsolatban	
Rövid kérdések	
1. Hogy hívnak?	
2. Hány éves vagy?	
3. Mit tanulsz vagy dolgozol?	
4. Mi a legmagasabb iskolai végzettséged?	
5. Mi a szüleid legmagasabb végzettsége?	
Hosszabb kérdések	
Kérdések	Kérdések célja
1. Mik azok a dolgok, amik alapján kialakítod másokról a véleményed?	Hogyan viszonyulnak másokhoz?
2. Hogyan viszonyulsz azokhoz, akik alacsonyabb pozícióban dolgoznak, vagy alacsonyabb iskolai végzettséggel rendelkeznek mint te?	
3. Stresszesnek tartod az életedet?	Hogyan kezelik a nyomást, milyen a természetük?
4. Hogyan kezeled a stresszt az életedben?	
5. Könnyen ki szoktál borulni vagy türelmesnek tartod magad?	
6. Egy kudarc után könnyen fel tudsz állni, vagy utána még sokáig hatással van rád?	
7. Ha valami nem sikerül, akkor addig dolgozol rajta, amíg végre sikerül, vagy inkább későbbre hagyod a dolgot/problémát, esetleg végleg feladod?	
8. Szeretnél-e feljebb kerülni az életedben? Legyen ez pénzügyi helyzet, munkahelyi pozíció, vagy jobb jegyek/magasabb végzettség elérése a tanulmányaidban. Ha igen, miért?	Feljebb kerülés az életben.
9. Szerinted jobb életet érdemelnél-e? Kérlek fejtsd ki a válaszodat.	
10. Mi a véleményed azokról, akik nem küzdenek azért, hogy előrébb jussanak az életükben?	
11. Mennyire tartod magad beszédesnek?	Pragmatikai kérdések.
12. Szoktál alkalmazkodni a beszélőpartneredhez? (téma, szóhasználat, hangsúly, agresszió)	
13. Milyen nyelveken beszélsz?	
14. Fontosnak tartod-e a jó nyelvtudást?	
15. Hogyan reagálsz, ha valaki sérteget téged?	
16. Ha munkahelyen vagy iskolai csoportunkában valaki rosszul teljesít, akkor le szoktad őket szidni?	
17. Szoktál cukkolni másokat? Ha igen, akkor hogyan? Milyen szituációkban? Ha nem, akkor miért nem?	

Kérdések az online identitással kapcsolatban	
Rövid kérdések	
1. Mi a jelenlegi rangod a játékban?	
2. Mióta játszol a játékkal?	
3. Hány órát szoktál átlagosan egy héten játszani?	
Hosszabb kérdések	
Kérdések	Kérdések célja
1. Mik azok a dolgok, amik alapján kialakítod más játékosokról a véleményed?	Hogyan viszonyulnak a többi játékoshoz?
2. Meg szoktad-e nézni a csapattársaidat játék előtt? Ha igen, miért?	
3. Hogyan reagálsz, hogyha látod, hogy a csapatodban (vagy az ellenfél csapatában) jelentősen alacsonyabb vagy magasabb rangú játékos van?	
4. Stresszesnek tartod a játékot?	Hogyan kezelik a nyomást, milyen a természetük?
5. Könnyen ki szoktál borulni mikor játszol?	
6. Egy rossz meccs a játék befejezése után is hatással van rád, vagy könnyen el tudod engedni?	
7. Le tudod zárnai a napot egy vereséggel, vagy addig játszol amíg nem nyersz?	Feljebb kerülés a játékban.
8. Hajlamos vagy feladni a mérkőzést, ha rosszul állsz, vagy inkább végig játszod?	
9. Szeretnél magasabb rangot elérni? Ha igen, miért?	
10. Szerinted magasabb rangot érdemelnél-e? Kérlek fejtsd ki a válaszodat.	Feljebb kerülés a játékban.
11. Mi a véleményed azokról, akik nem akarnak magasabb rangot elérni?	
12. Mi a véleményed azokról, akik egyáltalán nem rankedeznek?	
13. Szoktad használni a játékon belüli chat funkciót? Ha igen, milyen gyakran?	Pragmatikai kérdések.
14. Szoktál pingeket használni játékon belül? Ha igen, milyen gyakran?	
15. Mit szoktál általában írni a csapattársaidnak/ellenfelednek?	
16. Milyen nyelven szoktál nekik írni?	Pragmatikai kérdések.
17. Fontosnak tartod-e a jó nyelvtudást játékon belül?	
18. Hogyan reagálsz, ha valaki a játékon belül chaten verbálisan bántalmaz?	
19. Le szoktad szidni a csapattársaidat, ha rosszul teljesítenek vagy hülyeséget csinálnak?	Pragmatikai kérdések.
20. Szoktad cukkolni az ellenfeleidet chaten? Ha igen, akkor hogyan? Milyensituációkban? Ha nem, akkor miért nem?	
21. Szoktad pingekkel cukkolni a csapattársaidat? Ha igen, miért?	

3. Transcript of the pilot interview (translated)

Me: *Before we start, I am currently recording, but it is protocol that you have to agree to it and give permission to use your answers for my B.A Thesis. I will use your answers discretely, of course. I only need a verbal agreement from you that you are aware of that and you agree.*

Interviewee: I am aware of that. You can use the audio. I agree.

Alright. Although we know each other, I will still ask you the short questions. The interview consists of two parts. The first part is about you, and the second part is also about you, but within the game. So, the interview is about your real self and your in-game self. Let's start with the short questions. What is your name?

I am XXXXX XXXX.

How old are you?

23.

What do you study or do for a living?

I'm attending secondary school and work in a kitchen.

What is your highest level of education?

Primary school.

And what is your parents' highest level of education?

My father, I don't know, primary school I guess, my mother has a profession.

Now, with that, we are done with the short questions. Now, let's move on to the longer questions. The first question is: what are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about someone?

Mmm, in-game or in real life?

No, in real life, if you meet someone, what are the things that you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about someone. What are the things you take note of?

Well, how s/he looks, his/her posture, speaking style, umm, clothes. Well, these are the first impressions. And how clean s/he is.

So, everything that you can see at first.

Sure, of course. As first impressions, yes. And there are the subconscious stuffs, but I don't know much about that.

But not just as first impressions, but in general, how do you construct your opinion. So not just the first impressions [...]

Ooh, so like after 5–10 minutes of talking?

Yes, basically, just in general.

Umm, well, I don't know. The problem is that if someone's personality doesn't impress me in the first 5 minutes, I don't really pay attention to them, because they are not an interesting person. But what really matters is what they are interested in, how do they relate to others, so whether or not they listen to others, are they willing to talk, are they capable of arguing at all, is it worth talking to them. Umm, are they responsive to other topics, like, to topics that you like, and not only to those that they like. Do we have common interests. That's all I guess. That's all I can know about someone in half an hour.

Okay, fair enough. Then I move on to the next question. How do you relate to those who work in a lower position than you, or have a lower education than you? What is your opinion about them?

Well, I don't really judge, because I am not in the highest ranking either. I, too, haven't achieved what I wanted. Everyone has their reason why they are there where they are. And if they want to do something to be better, to be more, then they will do something, and if not, then... Well, that depends on the age, too, because you know, if someone at the age of 30 still only has a high school degree, then that is pretty cringe, then I judge that, but if they are in their 20s and they are not attending university, or they still don't have a profession, then I can't judge them for that, because there might be other reasons why they are there where they are. I hope it was understandable.

Got it. So, if they are trying to do something to improve, then it's completely fine.

Yea-yea.

And why the age of 30, by the way? So, you said that you understand people who are not at the peak of their lives in their 20s, but if someone in their 30s, as you said, still only has a high school degree, then that is pretty "cringe". Why is that? Why people in their 30s? Why is 30 the age when you say that [...]

Well because in your 30s, I don't know, it's time to think about... where you want to live. So, let's say you want to move abroad, then... Well, it's time to do something to achieve your goals, that's how I see it. I mean, alright, by going to school you are doing something to achieve your goals, but if you are 30 and you don't have, I don't know, you don't have stable points in your

life by yourself or something, then that's lame, I think. ... Or I don't know, at the age of 30... Alright, people are getting married in their 20s, too, and what f***ing not, but I think that is early, but at the age of 30 everyone has a plant, I mean kid [...]

[laughter]

[...] you know.

I know. Alright, Do you think your life is stressful?

Umm, very f***ing much.

And why?

Well umm, because not everything happened the way I wanted them to happen, and I am depressed, and umm, I don't know what I want from myself, but these are, I don't know, personal stuff that, you know, that I don't know what I want, I am clueless, I am like, I don't know, like a 16-year-old who doesn't know what he wants from the world, and I still don't know what I want from the world. But the fact that I don't know what the meaning of life is also has an effect on me and stuff like that, but yea, that's why.

I understand, so basically purposelessness.

Exactly.

And how do you handle stress in your life?

Well umm, not easily..? I don't know, I have no idea. I play League of Legends. Last year, I did sports which helped me a lot, umm, and that's it. I try to keep my head busy with tasks.

So, you keep yourself busy with different tasks, one of which is League of Legends.

Exactly.

Do you lose your temper easily, or do you think you are patient?

Well, in real life, I am very f***ing patient. It is really hard to make me angry, yea, it is very hard to make me angry. I think I am very patient in real life.

After a failure, can you get up on your feet easily, or does it have an effect on you long afterwards? So, if something doesn't work out for the first time the way you wanted. This could be small things or more significant things.

I think I can give up easily, but who knows. Not too quickly, but relatively quickly.

Not giving up but standing up on your feet. So can you leave it behind you or does it have an effect on you.

Well, evidently, every failure has an effect on people. This is obvious.

Not necessarily.

Well, it has an effect on me. I put it that way then. But I can continue. After a failure I can keep doing my tasks. There is no problem with that, but it has an effect on me.

And what effect? So, do you feel hopeless, or maybe angry? What does it make you feel?

Ooh, so those types of effects.

Well, those, too.

Well, let's say, now I say something for example, if I go to a new place to work, and they say that I am not good enough, then I reevaluate why that is. ... Of course, I will feel like s***t, but I will learn from it, you know, so that next time how I should do it better. But it will lurk in me later what I f***ed up, how I f***ed up, and why I wasn't able to do it.

I see. If you do not succeed at first, do you keep trying, do you put off the problem, or do you give up entirely?

I keep trying.

So you keep trying painlessly, you do not put off the problem, you don't give up.

Yes, yes. Of course, there are smaller breaks and all, but I am working on things with full steam. So, it really bothers me if something doesn't work out. So, I can't just leave it as it is, and say "okay, this didn't work out, I'm done, let it be" because evidently... I start something, because I am interested in it, and if it doesn't work out for the first time, then it will for the second or the third time.

Mm-mmb. Do you want to improve your life? Be it your current financial status, work position, better grades at school or achieving a higher education. If yes, please explain why.

Of course, I want to. And obviously for the money, and... I don't know, anybody who says anything against it that lies. Everything is for the f***ing money, and so others would accept you.

So it isn't really about the money, but... well, the money, and so others would accept you.

Umm, well, I wouldn't say that I want to be accepted by others, because, in reality, I don't give a f**k about others' opinions, but... mmm... Money. Let's stay with money. Money is good for everything.

Fair enough. What do you think of those who are not working to improve their life?

They deserve to be where they are. That's all I can say, nothing else really.

Fair enough. Moving on to different types of questions: do you think you are talkative?

Depends on the person. It depends on who I am talking to, because I can't really talk to an entirely new person, to a random person, or I don't really like to. But I gladly talk to people who I knew for a long time about anything, but it depends really on sympathy, too. If the other is sympathetic, I can talk to them gladly and very well. But if they are not sympathetic, then I can't talk to them, even if I try.

So, you have a difficulty meeting new people, opening up, but you gladly talk to people, who you knew for a long time?
I can easily get to know people who... who are interesting. So, if they have an interesting personality, if they have the same interests as me. But if I see that someone is... is... I don't know, not sympathetic, or... simply not sympathetic, then I'm not able to have a conversation with them, even if I try. Not even small talk.

And do you adapt to your conversation partner? Be it topic, vocabulary, tone, even aggression.

Mmm That's a good question, I don't know, if I adapt to others with my tone, topic [...] These are just examples [...]

[...] U-hu, I see. Obviously, I adapt. That also depends on sympathy and on who I am adapting to and who I am not. But of course, I am open to others, since I am interested in new things, and in order to be at the same page, I have to adapt, so I obviously adapt. This is the precondition of that we could talk about a given topic.

So, you are not adapting to everybody. So, for example, I don't know, if... there is an unsuccessful alcoholic person, you meet him at a party [...]

Mm-mmh.

Could you adapt to him as a conversation partner, or could you rather adapt to somebody who's, I don't know, more successful, has a place on his own, a stable job, not alcoholic, lives a healthy life, etc. Which one of the two could you adapt to better and why?

Mmm ... Oh f**k, this won't sound good, but I don't give a s**t. I could adapt obviously better to the unsuccessful alcoholic, because I had a phase like that, when I was like that and umm, well, I went to parties numerous times a week, and I was in that [drunk] state numerous times so... I obviously adapt better to the unsuccessful person. Listen, I swear I phrased this lightly, I was expecting so much worse.

So, you say you are adapting better to people in lower positions than people in higher positions, if we try to look at these things simply.

Yes, yes, yes.

What languages do you speak?

Well, umm, English, and Krankenwagen is all I know in German. [laughter]
[laughter]

I don't know if that counts at least half a point. [laughter]

Well [laughter] this isn't a test, but it counts half a point for me.

[laughter]

How do you react when someone is insulting you?

In real life?

Yes.

Umm... Mmm... it depends on what kind of relationship we have, and if the insults are serious, then... I have no idea. I rather back off, let's say that. There are numerous factors, but I rather back off.

That's not a problem, if there are many factors, we are not in a hurry, so if you feel that would help, you can say examples. I am sure there was an incident when someone insulted you or something.

Once – this is what came to my mind first – I was in front of the tobacco shop, and a drunk old guy barked at me. Well, not that old, like 30 or 40 years old, barked at me, and I was blind drunk, I can't remember the details, but I do remember that I f***ing headbutted him and blood started running out of my nose. The next thing I know is that I am home. But by default, I am not that aggressive, but then it just came out of me. Another example is when we were at my friend's house party, and there was a kid, who was in good terms with the host, and he started to bully me and I didn't do anything there. So, I just let it go, I don't care, I don't really know the guy. My friend, the host, is in good terms with him, and it isn't worth enough to me to start a show at a five-people house party at dawn, so I just let it go.

So, you usually just let it go?

It rather depends on the situation, I say.

I mean when you are not under any influence.

U-hu. Don't kno', I think if I wasn't drinking, I would have let it go at the thing, at the tobacco shop, I would have just walked away.

Mm-mmb. If someone is underperforming at your workplace or at a group project at school, do you scold them?

No. I tell them how they should do it, what is good, and if they take it as an insult, then I tell them they shouldn't take it as an insult. But the problem is that, I don't know, many people – so I usually tell that to people or help those who are not at my level – let's say they are new or something, and you can tell that they want to insult me or something, so by default, I have an arrogant voice or I don't know how to phrase it to you... They usually took it as an insult, but then I tell them that they shouldn't take it as an insult, because I only want to help. So, I don't have bad initiatives. I don't want to scold them at all.

Do you often taunt others? If so, how? In what situations? If not, why not?

Well, umm...

Maybe, I don't know, poking at others.

Got it, I got it. Umm... mmm... I think I always taunt others, but only those whom I have good relations with, and to make it even better. I can do that with them, for fun, really.

So, you don't taunt others in real life for the sole purpose of making them angry, you only do it friendly [...]

Not at all! My god, no. Absolutely no. I don't taunt others to make them angry. So, I don't taunt anybody with bad intentions at all.

So just with your friends for fun.

Yes, exactly.

Well, we are done with the questions about your real life and now I move on to the game-related questions. First, I start with the shorter ones. What is your current ranking in the game?

Gold 2.

How long have you been playing the game?

I have been playing since Season 7.

So, since 2017. And how many hours do you usually spend playing a week?

Well, it depends on how much free time I have, but if I have a f**k-ton of free time, then, I think... Wait, let me calculate this...

If it is easier, you can say how much you play a day.

Six hours a day. That's... 40 hours a week. That's how much I managed to play during quarantine.

With that, we are done with the short questions, and we are moving on to the longer ones. What are the things you take into consideration when you construct your opinion about other players?

No clue. What ranking they have, is he playing his main role, and what impact they have on the game, and that's it, I guess.

By impact, you mean how do they perform in the game?

Exactly. That's what I meant by impact, how they perform.

And do you usually do a background check on your teammates? If yes, please explain why.

Before almost every match, and exactly to... Well, first I check out the enemy bot lane, the enemy role, to know how they perform, so I know how aggressively I can play, and because I play on a role where I am not alone, but there is another player, here... if the other player is not playing his main role, then I have to pick up a completely different playstyle. Don't kno', I have to take into consideration how [the other player] plays, what kind of games [the other player] has played in the given role, because if he is s**t, then... then I relate to him completely differently. Then I pray to hit the 14th minute mark, or the 16th, and get the hell out of bot lane, so I wouldn't have to play with [the other player] on the same lane, but if [the other player] plays good then we get ahead, right. The others, I don't really check out the jungler, because... well, it is pointless to check out the jungler, how he plays and don't kno', how good his KDA is, because I can't tell out of that whether or not he will gank if I freeze the lane. And the problem really is that there are a lot of smurfs here. In my previous match, I had a silver 1 Akali with a 45% win rate, and he came out of lane with a 7/1 [KDA] and the only death he had was during roaming. So, the problem is that I could check them out all I want on porofessor and all that s**t, but I can't really draw conclusions from that. Maybe I check out how many games they played that day and how good their win rate is. So, let's say they played 6 games and won only 2, that's not the best... Well, that's not their best day.

So, going back to the question itself, you check out your teammates so you can gather basic information about them. What you mentioned was their rankings, what role they play on, and how they perform. [...]

Yes, yes.

[...] So, you can collect those. And how do you react when there is a significantly lower or higher ranked player than you in your team or in the enemy team?

It depends on how many games I have played [that day]. If it is in one of my first games, in the first 2 or 3, then I'm like: "this is doable". But if, let's say, I'm at one of my last matches [for the day], and let's say after a s**ty day, like, don't kno', lost 6 games out of 10, and I see the [ranking] diff, then... don't kno', then I am done, then it ruins me mentally to see that it is me again who is getting f**ked over, who draw the shortest. But after a winning spree, let's say I won 8 matches out of 10, and I see that my team is weaker than the enemy, then I am more accepting, then I am like: "it is doable". I can handle one lose. So, you know, it depends on what kind of day I had.

U-hu.

On how I performed that day.

Mm-mmb. And do you think this game is stressful?

Very f***ing much. No question about that.

And why?

Well, umm, not everything depends on one person, so not everything depends on you, you can't communicate with the others the way you want to. And there are players, who die one or two times and lose their mental and proceed to int, and it doesn't matter if you tell them that they should just farm, it doesn't matter if you tell them that... don't kno', do what they have to do, don't engage unnecessarily, wait for the jungler, no, they don't care, they simply f***ing go in, die, and they say that their job here is done and throw the match. And there are many incidents like this that they go afk, or they are toxic. But I don't really mind toxic players. I don't really look at chat, and this bullying doesn't bother me either that much. Because if it bothers me, then I just mute them, that's it.

You mentioned that there is no communication, or not enough at least. By that, you mean that your teammates are not willing to communicate, or that the game doesn't provide enough opportunity to communicate?

Both. There is a given level, well, here in gold you can see that the others want to communicate, but just like we talked about it, you simply don't have time to write down what the correct play would be, because you are either on a lane farming or pushing, or you are in a fight or something, and if you ping in their faces that 'yes, you are going in', that doesn't mean anything. Now, you ping there an arrow... Okay, you want to engage, okay, but you can't write to them during a fight that "hey, listen" – to the tank – "you should engage, so we could go in too, 'cause, don't kno', if we fight this 4v5 then we can take baron after and then take towers." You can't write this before a fight or during a fight. [You can't write to them] what they should do, how they should do it. So there are no adequate means of communications available to you. And the others, well... don't kno', there are those who are open to communicate and there are those who aren't. Maybe this is because of the language, because we use one language and not everybody speaks English, maybe it isn't their strong side, or they just realized that it doesn't matter what they write, because there are kids who just go after their heads and don't give a s**t. By that, I mean that I pull the wave so I can freeze it, I waste 20% of my HP and my support starts to flame me that why am I so f***ing s**t that I lose 20% of my HP, why am I standing in the minion wave. Then I explain it to him in chat that I want to freeze the wave and he doesn't even have a f***ing clue what freezing is, but I am the retarded one. So, for example, it is pointless to communicate with these.

So, you think it is really frustrating, that the game doesn't provide enough ways to communicate and that there is a difference in skill between the players, that is, other players would not understand what you want to say to them.

Skill difference is... that's because of something else. Now, I could say that it is because I am not [at the ranking] where I should be, but maybe they aren't either. So, maybe they belong in silver elo and I should stay in gold, and then all the gold players would know what freezing is when they see me freeze. But this is only relevant to me because we play as two on bot, and if I were to be playing on top and freeze there, no one would care what freezing is, [no one would care] what I am doing on top. There is no one there who would bat an eye that I lose 20% of my HP. But that... Umm... That we are not able to communicate is f***ing frustrating. It would be much more enjoyable, everyone could concentrate more, and more... the matches would be more enjoyable. For the enemy, too. The enemy would perform better, and we would, too, and the game would be much more serious, it would be taken more seriously, 'cause if you can communicate, you could work together better. And umm, yea. Don't kno', that's it. The game would be much more enjoyable.

That is true, I agree with that. Do you easily lose your temper when you are playing?

Well, umm, it depends on what kind of day I had. It depends on how many games I have played. But compared to my real-life self, I lose my temper much more easily. There was a period, I think this was whole week, when I had been demoted from platinum to gold, that umm... my support died two times or I died- it doesn't matter, the enemy ADC got an advantage, he had a lead on lane, and I was like: "f**k this s**t, just surrender, I am not willing to play in late game". So, like, in 5 minutes, I completely lost my temper, and it happened on numerous matches in a row, and, well, I have fallen back to gold 4 or gold 3. But usually, I don't lose my temper this much, but compared to my real-life self, I lose it much more easily. I lose it way faster.

So you lose it easily.

Of course. And it also depends on whether or not I am playing solo or duo, because if I am playing duo, and my duo partner flames since the second minute mark, then that has an effect on me.

Of course... Does a bad match have an effect on you afterwards or can you let it go easily?

I think I can let it go easily.

So, when you start the next game, the previous bad game has no impact on your performance, on your thinking, and on your feelings.

Well, this year, after 1500 games, I can say that I can distinguish two matches. So, I can let [the previous game] go and jump into the next one. After this much- this many games, when you go 6-8 games a day, then one comes after the other. If I get really mad, then I take a small break, maybe go for a walk, go down to the store, or f***k knows, eat. Then I calm down, watch a movie. But no, it usually has no effect on the next game.

Alright. And can you close out the day with a loss, or do you play until you win?

Yeah, I can close it out. I think yesterday I closed it out with a loss, yea, I closed out the day yesterday with a loss. And I went 10/10/10, I won my lane, and then the show started.

So, if you lose a game, it really has no effect on you.

Not really. Well, if I have a free hour and a half, you know, what I otherwise want to spend on something else, like watching a movie or I don't know, and we lose the game, then I say okay, let's go another one, but if I don't have time for that, then I'm like okay, it is what it is, then I don't go another one.

And are you prone to forfeit the match if you are behind or your team is behind, or do you play until the end?

There are situations when it is unsavable, and you must surrender, 'cause let's say you see at 20th minute mark that this game is only winnable if it lasts for 45 minutes, but... Yesterday, I had two matches... I had two matches yesterday when, umm, they were hitting our nexus, and we- the enemy had all of its tier 2 [towers], and in the other [game] they only had tier 1 or tier 3 [towers], but really, they were f***ing hitting our nexus and we came back. I don't know how the f***k we did it, but we came back. But there are points, when you see that all of the lanes are f***ing losing, and the enemy scales better, then... then it is unsavable, you have to surrender, when you know you can't win this game, not even in late game. In fact, [when this happens] I am prone to, umm, I know that our only chance is a 5v5 fight, but I am sure that we would f***ing lose, nonetheless. So, I go to a side lane to farm, and if there is an objective or something, then I just simply don't give a f***ing s***t. I avoid the places where they are, I'll just go to the opposite side of the map, so the game would end sooner. I know this is a bulls***t thing to do and all, but if they can't surrender, when we are losing... But this usually lasts for 5 minutes, then they just lose a fight or two then it is over.

So you are prone to surrender [...]

Well, when it is unsavable.

[...] But only when you see that it is unwinnable.

Mm-mmh. Well, I play on a role that... and my champ... and I play with a champion whose point is to acquire your 4th or 5th item and then you can win a 2v3... or you can get the frags even in a 1v2. Doable, that is why I like to play as an ADC, because in late game you have big f***ing burst. But when even I see that I can't do much with [the enemy] then I'm like okay, this goes to the trash, go next.

Well, here comes the next question.

[laughter]

Do you want to achieve a higher ranking? If so, please explain why.

Of course, I want to, so I can get an *****- no, just kidding. So, I can brag about it to the others that I did it. And so, I can play with the big boys, so I can play quality games.

Mm-mmh. What do you mean by bragging?

Well, that [my roommates] will come here, and I show them that "f***ing look, you are my b***hes, I am at the same level as you or I am better than you".

Mm-mmh. Could you please say your roommates' rankings?

[One of my roommates] is now diamond 4, if I know it correctly, but let me check. Yea, he is diamond 4, and [the other one of my roommates] is... Mmm... Platinum 3 and ex-diamond. Yeah.

So, you want to be at the same level as they are?

Yeah. But I don't know. I think I am already at the same level as [the other roommate]. So I can play at the same level as he can, but don't kno'... so he would shut up. But [the other roommate] won't shut up, not even if I hit diamond. I'm sure he would say that I am boosted and, don't kno', s**t like that. I love it when he sits behind me and watches me miss [my skill shots] and f**k up, but whatever.

And what do you think of those, who do not want to achieve a higher ranking?

I don't know how they do it, what they enjoy in the game, how they can be so calm, but congratulations. They are the ones playing this game correctly, damn. They are the f***ing legends.

And what do you think of those, who do not play ranked games at all?

Well, it's the same, so I don't know.

So, those who don't have a ranking, so they don't finish their provision games, and don't play ranked games at all. So, the previous question was about those who have a ranking, but don't want to climb any higher, and this question is about those who don't have a ranking at all.

Oh, then disregard what I said. Then those who don't play ranked at all, they are the kings, and those who play ranked, but don't want to climb higher can suck my d**k, because they are the reason I have to tryhard to win the f***ing game while they are just f***ing doing nothing, because they are like "I will go another one" and they just enjoy the game. They can suck my d**k.

So, let's say [laughter] that you don't like them.

Well [laughter] no.

Alright then. Here comes another change in the questions. Do you use the chat function? If so, how often?

I do, but this also depends on the match. I usually just joke around with them nowadays. Umm, I don't know, I realised that if I win the bot lane, then I don't have to explain it to them to do baron, I just start taking it, and if they won't come, I just leave it there, and if they come, then we have baron without using chat beforehand. But... don't kno', I check them out in-game, and let's say that the enemy ADC and jungler is in duo, then I tell my support that "hey, you guys should be careful, because these two are in duo, and they will often come down here" and all these basic stuff. I don't really use it nowadays.

You basically answered the next question, too, which would have been 'what do you usually write to your teammates or enemies.' You said what you usually write to your teammates, but what do you write to your enemies?

Well, umm, either I bully them or joke around with them... these are the two options. Or... I don't know. Well, let's say if I kill two [enemies] on bot by myself, then I write "easy" to them, just to taunt them. Or if they have a funny name, then I tell them they have a cool name, or they have a cool skin. I usually just joke around with them.

So, just joke around. This taunting you mentioned, is it also to just joke around with them, or [...]

No! So, they know they are s**t. So, they know how f***ing s**t they are, and I am much better than them.

Really?

Yeah.

And in what situations do you taunt them? Or in what way?

Well, umm, I don't really know, I don't always taunt them. For example, when I had a pentakill almost by myself, I didn't taunt them. Then I didn't write to them at all. I don't know, if they have a big mouth, or if they spamming the chat and all. And usually I don't use chat, just when I see that somebody is open to it. So, if somebody is perma spamming the chat, [or] it is worth communicating with them, then I communicate with them. Or if they are f***ing toxic, let's say the enemy bot lane [is very toxic, then I tell them] to sit the f**k down, or if they are Hungarians, and they start to talk s**t and all, then obviously, after a double kill, I tell them "it's easy as that bro, you are nothing", but this depends on the situation, too. [It depends on the situation] what I write to them and in what way.

And what languages do you use to communicate with them?

Well, English and Hungarian. And sometimes... English and Hungarian. I don't speak other languages.

And do you use Hungarian to talk with Hungarians, or do you also write in Hungarian to those who don't speak the language?

Sometimes I write to those in Hungarian who start to speak in some random Hindu language, so, if I don't understand them, they shouldn't understand me either. And one time, I told players, who don't speak Hungarian, that their mother is a w***e in Hungarian, or that they should shut the f**k up. But I don't know why, they don't understand it. It is funny, so I wrote it to them. But this doesn't happen often. This is, don't kno', 1 in 100 games when I tell them that their mother is a w***e in Hungarian.

And how do you react when someone verbally abuses you or insults you.

Well, it depends. Don't kno'. As I said, I usually mute them, if they are really annoying. And if I take it personally, then for sure [I mute them]. But if they talk so much, let's say there is a given situation, the mid laner is in 1/10, but the others are performing good in the enemy, and [the enemy mid laner] starts to talk about how s***ty [our] jungler is, then I explain it to him that "bro, you solo lost your lane." Or let's say [my lane opponents] are flaming their jungler, then I tell them, that they solo lost their lane, their jungler didn't even gank, and don't kno', [if] they have no impact on the game, then I tell them that they are delusional. Don't kno' what was the question originally, if I even answered it correctly, feel free to ask the question again, if my answer was s**t.

Well, how do you react when someone verbally abuses you, but [...]

Oh, I don't give a s**t.

[...] Yes, you basically answered the question. The last question is: do you scold your teammates if they are underperforming, or if they are doing something you consider "stupid"?

I don't scold them, 'cause it is... the s***ty communication plays a role in this, so it would take a lot of time to explain it to them. I start to feel satisfied with the question mark. I spam it in his face and I type a question mark in chat too. Or I tell them that they should go AFK, it would be better for everyone involved. But in the recent past, I had a Yasuo [player], I couldn't even believe that stuff like this exists, he lost his lane, like the kid was 1/6, and he says: "sorry guys, I f***ed this up, don't be mad, if you want, I can go f***ing AFK." And I told him that I won bot lane, just farm, and don't engage alone, we can work it out, and we did f***ing work it out. I couldn't even believe that stuff like this exists, especially with a Yasuo [player], but we did it. He was normal, he offered a completely correct possibility, and that's it.

So, you don't usually scold them, just taunt them with questions marks. Is it, too, so they would know you are better than them?

Well, umm, I don't know. [So, they would know] that I am trying during the whole game. I want to perform, I came here to win. If somebody comes in the game, and dies in the second minute that's... I don't know, I can't even imagine how that is possible that somebody dies in 2 minutes- dies 5 times in 10 minutes. I think this is physically impossible, because if he is losing his lane, or if he is so s***ty, or he was counter picked, then tell [the jungler]: "bro, I can't do anything, come gank me." So, they shouldn't do these basic stuffs and then, don't kno', I would have a different attitude towards them. 'Cause if he tells us that his match-up is really f***ing bad, and he is getting f***ing babysat, and then he ints, then obviously we would have a different attitude towards him. Then it's not like "oh f***ing hell, get the f**k out of here," but rather we'll try to help him, you know. But this is due to miscommunication, I think, that you can't communicate the way you want. And yea, I am better, if he is in 1/10, and I am 13/2 then obviously I am better.

That's all basically, thank you for answering my questions.

Anytime.