



THE PRAGMATICS OF COMMUNICATION IN ONLINE GAMING

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ABSTRACT

Online multiplayer games have become dynamic digital environments where players communicate and collaborate in real time to accomplish shared objectives. This study investigates the pragmatic features of player communication by analyzing text and voice interactions during gameplay. The findings reveal that players employ various communicative strategies, including giving instructions, requesting assistance, providing warnings, encouraging teammates, and expressing emotions. To support rapid decision-making, they frequently use abbreviations, gaming jargon, and concise expressions that facilitate efficient interaction. The interpretation of these expressions is highly context-dependent, influenced by gameplay situations, player relationships, and ongoing events. Despite the competitive nature of online games, politeness strategies remain evident, as players often express appreciation, apologize for mistakes, and use supportive language to maintain cooperation. Occasional disagreements also demonstrate how language is used to negotiate social relationships in virtual settings. Overall, the study shows that online multiplayer games have developed distinctive communicative practices and sociolinguistic norms shaped by continuous interaction among players from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These findings highlight that communication in online gaming extends beyond information exchange to include cooperation, identity construction, and the development of meaningful social relationships.

Keywords: *Online Gaming, Pragmatics, Computer-Mediated Communication, Digital Discourse, Politeness Strategies*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has transformed online multiplayer games from recreational activities into complex social environments where millions of players communicate, collaborate, and compete in real time (Akram et al., 2022; Ngatmini et al., 2025; Rakha, 2023). Contemporary multiplayer games, such as *Valorant*, *Counter-Strike 2*, *Delta Force*, and similar team-based games, require continuous interaction among players to coordinate strategies,

exchange information, solve problems, and make immediate decisions under time pressure. Consequently, communication has become an indispensable component of successful gameplay, extending beyond the simple transmission of information to encompass teamwork, identity construction, social relationship management, and community participation (Boldi et al., 2026; De Wilde et al., 2020). Recent studies further indicate that online gaming environments have developed distinctive communication systems

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characterized by shared terminology, abbreviations, multimodal interaction, and context-dependent meanings that differentiate them from conventional face-to-face communication.

Unlike traditional interpersonal communication, interaction in online multiplayer games occurs through multiple communication channels, including synchronous voice chat, text messaging, system-generated commands, visual signals, emojis, and in-game gestures (Saimon et al., 2023; Lombardo L et al., 2023; Shi et al., 2024). These multimodal resources enable players to coordinate rapidly while simultaneously negotiating interpersonal relationships in highly dynamic environments. Because communication frequently occurs under considerable cognitive pressure, players often employ concise utterances, specialized gaming terminology, implicit meanings, and shared contextual knowledge that facilitate efficient collaboration without requiring lengthy explanations (Jaya et al., 2025) Xu et al., 2021; Mahesti et al., 2025). Such communicative characteristics make online gaming an increasingly important context for investigating language use in digital environments (Linder & Falk-Ross, 2024; Nikou & Aavakare, 2021). Furthermore, recent research demonstrates that communication patterns differ substantially between casual players and competitive esports participants, reflecting the influence of gaming objectives and social organization on language use.

From a linguistic perspective, these communicative practices can be effectively examined through the framework of pragmatics, which investigates how meaning is constructed through context rather than solely through the literal

interpretation of linguistic forms (Sakhiyya, 2019; Grabe & Kaplan, 2014; Lo et al., 2025). Pragmatics emphasizes that successful communication depends on speakers' intentions, hearers' interpretations, shared background knowledge, and situational context. Classical pragmatic theories including Austin's theory of speech acts, Searle's classification of illocutionary acts, and Grice's Cooperative Principle provide valuable analytical frameworks for explaining how speakers perform actions through language and how interlocutors infer intended meanings beyond explicit utterances. Within online gaming environments, these theoretical perspectives become particularly relevant because players frequently communicate through indirect expressions, abbreviated utterances, strategic commands, humor, warnings, and implied meanings that require contextual interpretation to achieve effective cooperation (Israel-Fishelson & Hershkovitz, 2020; Pelangi et al., 2025; Rosyidah et al., 2023).

Speech acts constitute one of the central concepts in pragmatic analysis because language in online games functions not merely to convey information but also to perform actions (Bach, 2017; Searle, 2019). Players regularly produce directive speech acts when instructing teammates, representative speech acts when reporting enemy locations, expressive speech acts when expressing appreciation or frustration, commissive speech acts when making strategic commitments, and declarative utterances generated by game systems that regulate gameplay. These communicative functions are continuously adapted to rapidly changing game situations, making online gaming a productive setting for

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investigating how pragmatic competence operates under conditions of time pressure and collaborative decision-making (Darmaliana et al., 2020). Recent investigations into gaming discourse have similarly demonstrated that directive and expressive speech acts dominate communication in multiplayer games because successful gameplay depends heavily on coordination and emotional regulation.

Beyond speech acts, conversational implicature and the Cooperative Principle also play significant roles in gaming communication. Because players frequently communicate using highly abbreviated expressions, specialized terminology, and context-dependent references, successful interpretation often relies upon shared assumptions rather than explicitly articulated meanings (Pavajeau & Montero, 2023; Ahn & Lee, 2016; Yang et al., 2024). Consequently, Grice's conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner become essential mechanisms through which players maintain efficient interaction while minimizing communicative effort. Simultaneously, online gaming environments also illustrate situations in which these maxims are intentionally violated to produce humor, sarcasm, irony, deception, or strategic ambiguity, thereby generating additional pragmatic meanings that extend beyond literal interpretation.

Politeness likewise remains an important aspect of communication within competitive gaming communities. Although online games are frequently associated with toxic behavior, insults, and verbal aggression, recent empirical evidence suggests that cooperative interactions substantially outweigh hostile communication during successful team

performance. Players regularly express appreciation, apologize for mistakes, encourage teammates, mitigate criticism, and negotiate disagreements to preserve group cohesion and maintain effective collaboration. These findings challenge the widespread assumption that online gaming communication is inherently impolite and instead suggest that players dynamically balance competitive objectives with interpersonal relationship management through sophisticated pragmatic strategies.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in digital communication, several important research gaps remain. First, previous investigations have predominantly examined toxic language, cyberbullying, or isolated speech acts, while relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how multiple pragmatic phenomena including speech acts, conversational implicature, cooperative principles, and politeness strategies operate simultaneously within authentic multiplayer interactions. Second, many existing studies analyze communication generated by game narratives or system-generated voice lines rather than naturally occurring player-to-player interactions during collaborative gameplay. Third, empirical investigations involving contemporary multiplayer games, such as *Valorant*, *Counter-Strike 2*, and *Delta Force*, remain relatively scarce despite their increasing global popularity and their reliance on intensive team communication. Finally, relatively few studies have integrated classical pragmatic theories with contemporary perspectives on digital discourse and online social interaction to explain how language functions within rapidly evolving gaming communities.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates the pragmatics of communication in online multiplayer gaming by examining authentic interactions among players during gameplay. Guided by the theoretical frameworks of Austin, Searle, and Grice, the study analyzes speech acts, conversational implicatures, cooperative principles, and communication strategies employed in real-time gaming situations. The analysis draws upon naturally occurring communication obtained from text-based chats and voice interactions, enabling a comprehensive examination of how players coordinate actions, negotiate meaning, manage interpersonal relationships, and resolve communicative challenges under competitive conditions.

The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study extends current discussions on pragmatics by demonstrating how classical pragmatic theories remain applicable within contemporary digital communication environments. Practically, the findings may provide insights for linguists, educators, game developers, and community moderators regarding effective communication strategies that promote cooperation, reduce interpersonal conflict, and foster healthier online gaming communities. As virtual interaction increasingly becomes an integral component of everyday communication, understanding the pragmatic mechanisms underlying online gaming discourse offers valuable perspectives on the continuing evolution of language in the digital era.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using a

pragmatic discourse analysis approach to examine language use in online multiplayer gaming interactions (Creswell, & Poth, 2018; Tisdell et al., 2025; Patton, 2020). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to interpret the contextual meanings of utterances, identify speech acts, and explore how players construct meaning through communication in naturally occurring gaming situations rather than measuring variables statistically (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Neuman, 2019).

The data consisted of naturally occurring interactions collected from multiplayer online games, particularly *Valorant*, *Counter-Strike 2*, and *Delta Force*. Data sources included in-game text chats, voice communications, and communication transcripts generated during collaborative gameplay. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on active players who regularly engaged in multiplayer team-based games and communicated in English during gameplay. Purposive sampling enabled the selection of information-rich participants capable of providing authentic examples of pragmatic language use within digital gaming environments (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Data were collected through non-participant observation, screen recording of gameplay sessions, communication transcripts, and semi-structured interviews conducted with selected participants to clarify the contextual meanings of specific utterances (Susanto et al., 2023; Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024; Anufia, 2019). Combining multiple sources of evidence enhanced the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation (Guetterman & Perez, 2023).

The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2020). Utterances were first transcribed and categorized according to Searle (1979) classification of speech acts, including

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representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts. The data were subsequently interpreted using Grice (1975) Cooperative Principle to identify conversational implicatures and the observance or violation of conversational maxims. Contextual interpretation also considered Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts to explain how linguistic expressions functioned as social actions within collaborative gaming contexts. Finally, recurring communication patterns were interpreted to explain how pragmatic strategies facilitated teamwork, managed interpersonal relationships, and resolved communicative challenges in online multiplayer environments.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed data triangulation, peer debriefing, and repeated examination of communication transcripts. The credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings were established by comparing multiple sources of data and maintaining consistency throughout the coding and

interpretation processes, following the qualitative research criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Participant Characteristics

A total of fourteen active online gamers participated in this study. All participants regularly played multiplayer First-Person Shooter (FPS) games and actively communicated through voice chat or text chat during gameplay. Their ages ranged from 19 to over 28 years, and they reported different levels of gaming intensity. Most participants primarily played *Valorant*, while others frequently played *Counter-Strike 2*, *Delta Force*, *PUBG*, *Rainbow Six Siege*, and *Point Blank*. These characteristics ensured that participants possessed sufficient experience with collaborative communication in competitive gaming environments.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	19–21 years	3	21.4
	22–24 years	5	35.7
	25–27 years	3	21.4
	>28 years	2	14.3
	Not specified	1	7.1
Primary Game	Valorant	7	50.0
	PUBG	2	14.3
	Counter-Strike 2	1	7.1
	Delta Force	1	7.1
	Rainbow Six Siege	1	7.1
	Point Blank	1	7.1
	Other	1	7.1
Average Daily Playtime	<1 hour	1	7.1
	1–3 hours	5	35.7
	3–5 hours	5	35.7
	>5 hours	3	21.4

The participant profiles indicate that the respondents were experienced online gamers who routinely engaged in team-based communication during competitive matches. Their diverse gaming backgrounds provided rich data for

exploring pragmatic communication in online gaming.

3.2 Pragmatic Features of Online Gaming Communication

Analysis of voice-chat recordings, text-chat conversations, and interview data revealed five major pragmatic features occurring during gameplay. These features demonstrate that communication in online

multiplayer games extends beyond information exchange to include strategic coordination, emotional expression, interpersonal relationship management, and collaborative decision-making.

Table 2. Pragmatic Features Identified in Online Gaming Communication

Pragmatic Feature	Communicative Function	Representative Example
Speech Acts	Giving commands, reporting information, expressing emotions	"Watch mid!", "Nice shot!"
Deixis	Referring to location, participants, and timing	"Over there", "Push now"
Conversational Implicature	Delivering implied strategic meaning	"Their defense looks weak today."
Politeness Strategies	Maintaining cooperation and positive relationships	"Can you cover me, please?"
Cooperative Principle Violations	Communication under pressure and emotional situations	"Everyone's rushing!"

Among the identified features, speech acts appeared most frequently. Directive speech acts dominated player interactions because teammates continuously issued commands, warnings, and tactical instructions during gameplay. Expressive speech acts were also commonly observed, particularly when players praised teammates or expressed frustration after unsuccessful actions.

The analysis further revealed frequent use of deictic expressions, especially spatial and temporal deixis, enabling players to communicate efficiently by referring to shared virtual locations and synchronized actions. Conversational implicatures were likewise common because players often relied on shared gaming knowledge rather than explicitly explaining every strategy.

Although competitive gameplay occasionally produced direct criticism and emotionally charged utterances, participants generally employed politeness strategies to preserve teamwork, particularly when requesting assistance or acknowledging successful performance. Finally, several violations of Grice's Cooperative Principle were identified, primarily involving exaggerated or incomplete information resulting from stress and time pressure rather than intentional deception.

3.3 Functions of Communication in Online Gaming

The findings further demonstrate that pragmatic communication serves multiple functions essential for successful multiplayer gameplay.

Table 3. Functions of Communication in Online Multiplayer Games

Function	Description	Example
Coordination	Organizing teamwork and tactical movements	"Two enemies pushing left."
Information Sharing	Reporting enemy positions and environmental conditions	"Sniper on the roof."
Social Interaction	Building relationships and	"Good job, team!"

	maintaining team cohesion	
Emotional Expression	Expressing excitement, frustration, appreciation, or disappointment	"That was so close!"
Strategic Influence	Directing teammates and influencing opponents	Tactical instructions and trash talk

The coordination function emerged as the most prominent aspect of communication. Participants consistently emphasized that successful gameplay depended on rapid information exchange and effective strategic coordination. Communication enabled team members to synchronize their movements, anticipate opponents' actions, and respond efficiently to changing game situations.

Another important function involved information sharing, where players continuously exchanged information regarding enemy positions, potential threats, and environmental conditions. This collaborative exchange compensated for the limited visual perspective available to individual players.

Communication also fulfilled an important social function by strengthening interpersonal relationships among teammates. Participants frequently used humor, encouragement, and supportive comments to maintain team morale and promote cooperation. Furthermore, communication served as a medium for emotional expression, allowing players to share excitement, disappointment, or frustration throughout competitive matches.

Finally, the findings revealed a strategic influence function, whereby experienced players assumed leadership roles by directing teammates and making tactical decisions. In some instances, communication was also used to influence opponents psychologically through provocative comments or "trash talk," illustrating that language in online gaming serves not only informational purposes but also broader social and psychological functions.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that pragmatics plays a central role in facilitating communication within online multiplayer games, particularly in competitive First-Person Shooter (FPS) environments. The dynamic and high-pressure nature of FPS gameplay requires players to exchange information rapidly while coordinating strategies and responding to continuously changing situations. Consequently, communication tends to be concise, direct, and highly contextualized, relying on shared gaming knowledge rather than elaborate explanations. This pattern reflects the characteristics of digital discourse, where efficiency and immediacy become essential for successful interaction (Tagg, 2022). Moreover, the findings support the view that online gaming has evolved into a unique communicative environment in which language functions not only as a medium for information exchange but also as a tool for collaboration, social interaction, and strategic decision-making (Linder & Falk-Ross, 2024).

Among the pragmatic features identified, directive speech acts emerged as the most dominant form of communication. Players frequently employed commands, requests, warnings, and tactical instructions to coordinate team movements and respond effectively to rapidly changing game conditions. According to Searle (1979), directive speech acts are intended to influence the behavior of the hearer by encouraging or requiring specific actions. Expressions such as "*Rush B*," "*Watch behind*," and "*Cover me*" illustrate how language

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performs immediate social actions rather than merely conveying information. The predominance of directive speech acts observed in this study is also consistent with Austin's (1962) speech act theory, which argues that utterances function as performative actions within particular social contexts. In competitive gaming, these directives contribute directly to team coordination and often determine the success of collaborative gameplay.

The findings also reveal the significant role of deixis in supporting efficient communication among players. Spatial and temporal deictic expressions such as "*there*," "*behind you*," and "*push now*" occurred frequently because players shared the same virtual environment and possessed common situational awareness. Levinson (1983) argues that the interpretation of deictic expressions depends entirely on contextual information available to both speakers and listeners. Within multiplayer games, the virtual map provides a shared frame of reference that enables players to understand highly abbreviated utterances without ambiguity. Similar findings have been reported in recent studies of digital communication, which indicate that online interaction increasingly depends on shared multimodal contexts and contextual inference rather than explicit linguistic explanations (Nikou & Aavakare, 2021).

Conversational implicature was another prominent feature identified in the analysis. Rather than expressing intentions explicitly, players frequently relied on implied meanings that could be inferred from shared gaming experience. For instance, an utterance such as "*Their defense is weak*" was commonly interpreted as an implicit recommendation to initiate an attack despite the absence of a direct command. This finding strongly supports Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which proposes that successful communication relies upon interlocutors' ability to infer intended meanings beyond literal expressions. In online multiplayer

games, conversational implicatures allow players to communicate efficiently while minimizing cognitive load and preserving valuable response time during high-pressure situations. The findings therefore indicate that pragmatic competence enables experienced players to interpret indirect meanings rapidly and accurately.

Another important finding concerns the use of politeness strategies during gameplay. Although online gaming communities are frequently associated with toxic behavior and verbal aggression, the present study demonstrates that supportive communication remains an essential component of successful teamwork. Players regularly expressed appreciation, encouragement, and constructive feedback to maintain group cohesion and sustain team motivation. These findings are consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which emphasizes that speakers employ linguistic strategies to preserve both their own and others' social face. Nevertheless, the analysis also revealed that politeness strategies tended to decline during stressful gameplay situations, where direct criticism, emotional expressions, and face-threatening acts became more frequent. The competitive nature of FPS games, combined with relative anonymity in online environments, appears to encourage more direct communication styles, particularly when players experience frustration or perceive strategic errors made by teammates. Similar patterns have been documented in recent studies on online gaming discourse, which report that cooperative communication and interpersonal conflict often coexist within competitive digital communities (Ragab et al., 2025).

The findings regarding violations of Grice's Cooperative Principle further illustrate how cognitive pressure influences pragmatic communication. Participants occasionally produced exaggerated, incomplete, or imprecise utterances while responding to unexpected events during

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gameplay. For example, expressions such as *"Everyone's rushing!"* frequently overstated the actual situation and therefore violated the maxim of quantity. However, interview data indicated that these violations were not intended to deceive teammates but instead reflected the psychological demands associated with fast-paced decision-making. Under conditions of heightened stress, players prioritized immediate reactions and team survival over precise linguistic accuracy. These findings support recent perspectives suggesting that pragmatic competence in digital environments is highly adaptive and context-sensitive, allowing interlocutors to tolerate communicative inaccuracies when rapid action is required (Tagg, 2022; Linder & Falk-Ross, 2024).

Overall, the present findings demonstrate that communication in online multiplayer games extends far beyond simple information exchange. Pragmatic features including speech acts, deixis, conversational implicature, politeness strategies, and cooperative principle violations collectively facilitate strategic coordination, interpersonal relationship management, emotional expression, and collaborative problem-solving. The study therefore contributes to the growing literature on digital pragmatics by demonstrating that classical pragmatic theories proposed by Austin (1962), Searle (1979), Grice (1975), Brown and Levinson (1987), and Levinson (1983) remain highly applicable for explaining communication in contemporary virtual environments. As online gaming continues to develop as an important form of digital social interaction, understanding its pragmatic characteristics provides valuable insights into how language adapts to increasingly complex technology-mediated communication settings.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the pragmatic characteristics of communication in online

multiplayer games by examining players' interactions during competitive gameplay. The findings demonstrate that communication in online gaming extends beyond the exchange of information, functioning as a mechanism for coordinating strategies, managing interpersonal relationships, expressing emotions, and supporting collaborative decision-making. Among the pragmatic features identified, directive speech acts emerged as the most dominant because players frequently relied on commands, warnings, and tactical instructions to facilitate effective teamwork. The study also revealed that deictic expressions, conversational implicatures, politeness strategies, and occasional violations of Grice's Cooperative Principle were integral components of gaming communication, enabling players to communicate efficiently within fast-paced and context-dependent virtual environments.

The findings further indicate that the effectiveness of communication in online multiplayer games is strongly influenced by shared contextual knowledge and players' pragmatic competence. Although competitive situations sometimes resulted in direct criticism or exaggerated expressions, participants generally adapted their communication according to gameplay demands while maintaining cooperation with teammates. These results confirm that classical pragmatic theories, including Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle, Deixis, and Politeness Theory, remain highly relevant for explaining language use in contemporary digital communication settings.

This study contributes to the growing field of digital pragmatics by providing empirical evidence that online gaming constitutes a distinctive discourse community with its own communicative conventions and sociolinguistic norms. The findings also offer practical implications for game developers, educators, and gaming communities by emphasizing the

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importance of effective communication strategies in promoting teamwork, minimizing interpersonal conflict, and fostering positive interaction in virtual environments. Future research is recommended to investigate a broader range of game genres, include participants from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and employ multimodal discourse analysis to examine the interaction between verbal communication, visual cues, and non-verbal in-game behaviors.

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