

Speaking Like a Man: Linguistic Convergence of Female *Dota 2* Gamers

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ABSTRACT

Language practices adapt to the domain and culture of their users. This mixed-method research aims to investigate the role of language in a MOBA game called Dota 2, examining the speech convergence of female gamers towards male linguistic features. Three theories are used; Men's Language Framework by Mulac and Mehl and Pennebaker to categorise the male linguistic features; Women's Language Framework by Lakoff to draw distinctions; Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) by Giles to analyse motives of convergence. 2 questionnaires were given out to 10 female and 10 male participants to investigate their opinion on convergence and perception towards it respectively. Findings revealed that female players do converge towards male linguistic features, noting their positive and negative implications. Data also shows that male players perceive the convergence with a mix of familiarity and acceptance. Results suggest that convergence occurs even within the gaming community, and its culture plays a big role in dictating the language practices and perceptions. This sheds light on how sociolinguistics theories can extend into digital platforms even when the social status or hierarchy is virtual.

Keywords: linguistic convergence; male linguistic features; gendered language; female gamers; gaming community

INTRODUCTION

Language communicates beyond spoken words through tone, word choice, and nonverbal cues (Alshami, 2019). It plays a crucial role, especially in building rapport in communication that happens online without any visual cues (Taw et al., 2022). Humans use language and implication to build social relationships, a concept central to Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) by Professor Howard Giles in 1971. CAT emphasises how people converge or diverge to signal certain social cues in any situation, including the online gaming scene. More than just a platform for gaming, players interact and form life-long friendships with gamers around the world, making it a melting pot for people with differing backgrounds (Müller-Braune, 2018). As such, players have to wisely use their communication skills in order to navigate the online gaming world and achieve certain social goals. This burden is often heavier for female online gamers as it is a male-dominated scene that is no stranger to situations that reflect gender and power imbalances to the extent of misogynistic behaviours manifesting (Fu, 2019).

Alas, words hold more power than people were led to believe, and with proper execution, they can turn even the most daunting environment into a favourable one. While existing studies tend to focus on the harassment and representation that women face in gaming, little empirical attention has been given to address how they adjust their speech styles to that of the dominant

group. As such, this study intends to fill that gap by giving a more nuanced view of how female linguistic convergence unfolds in the online gaming scene, specifically *Dota 2*, which is commonly dominated by male players. Subsequently, the findings discuss how language can function as a strategic tool to balance power dynamics and acceptance in unequal gendered spaces.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Although gendered communication has been widely examined, it is also crucial to focus on how female gamers in the *Dota 2* community adapt their communication style to navigate the male-dominated scene. Based on CAT, female gamers are expected to converge towards the male speech style to accommodate their linguistic features, despite the speech style being suggestively toxic and negative. Consequently, male players would recognise familiarity in this speech style, hence assuming it to be less hostile to the female players.

In light of these issues, the study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify and analyse the adoption of male-linguistic features by female *Dota 2* gamers.
2. To explore the perception of the dominant group in the gaming community on the linguistic convergence of female *Dota 2* players.

LITERATURE REVIEW

COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY (CAT)

CAT is a framework that explains how people adjust their communication to increase or decrease social distance (Giles & Ogay, 2007). It examines the methods, intentions, and effects of this accommodation, suggesting that most of the time, human interactions are driven by our own personal identities. Sometimes, it is also influenced by the identity of a person within a social group.

The subcategories of CAT are as follows:

TABLE 1. Elements of CAT

Element	Explanation	
Convergence	Upward	Adoption of the higher standard of linguistic style that is in accordance with that of the interlocutor
	Downward	Adoption of the lower standard of linguistic style that is in accordance with that of the interlocutor
Divergence	Upward	Adoption of a hasty speech rate and a more cultured accent with someone who sounds nonstandard
	Downward	Emphasis on one's low-prestige minority heritage
Maintenance		Persistence in one's original linguistic style, regardless of the interlocutor's communication behaviour.

Among the subcategories, convergence has been the most extensively studied. One of the motives for convergence includes the desire to gain approval from one another on the premise that similarity often results in the conversational partners being more cooperative and respectful to each other. Driven by the desire for approval and cooperation, it can enhance interaction effectiveness by increasing predictability and reducing uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1995, as cited in

Giles & Ogay, 2007) of interlocutors. This theory is used to facilitate discussions in the subsequent sections on the significance of convergence among players.

Hilte et al. (2020) conducted a study on linguistic accommodation in teenagers' social media writing to examine convergence patterns in mixed-gender conversations. The participants of this study are Flemish teenagers. A large corpus of their private social messages was analysed in two conversational settings, which are same-gender and mixed-gender conversations. The researchers intended to examine whether patterns of gender-exclusive linguistic convergence emerge, with girls sounding less prototypically 'female' and boys less prototypically 'male' when interacting with a person from the opposite sex. Using the linear-mixed models, the researchers examined the frequency of features such as expressive typographic markers and 'oral', speech-like markers in both genders' writing in same-gender versus mixed-gender conversations. Findings indicate that patterns of convergence did emerge, revealing that both girls and boys tend to adopt a more identical style in mixed-gender talks. This suggests that linguistic convergence of gender-exclusive features tends to happen in a context where there is a difference in the speech styles of interlocutors. While this study solidifies this paper's working theories, a factor that remains under-researched in this particular domain would be the appearance of convergence in the context of online gaming, whereby the speech styles often take a more aggressive approach.

MEN'S LANGUAGE FRAMEWORK

The Men's Language Framework by Mulac et al. (2001), which is extended by Mehl and Pennebaker (2003), serves as a guideline in analysing the findings of this research. Notably, the men's linguistic features do not have an established framework. As such, features gathered from the two different studies mentioned were combined into a joined framework. Altogether, the framework comprises 10 features as shown in the table below:

TABLE 2. Men's Language Framework

Elements	Explanation	Example
Increased references to quantity	Using numbers instead of estimation words, such as <i>around</i> , <i>a little bit</i> .	"30 seconds before I can help you."
Increased use of judgment adjective	Using adjectives that reflect their opinion of another person's personality or quality of work	"His gameplay is disappointing."
Increased use of location words	Using propositions or words that describe a noun's position in relation to another noun	"It is on the ward-spot cliff next to the stairs, near the bottom lane."
Increased first-person pronouns used	Using <i>I</i> , <i>me</i> , <i>my</i> , <i>mine</i>	"I agree, we should defend the middle tower."
Increased references to anger	Using words or phrases that reflect aggression	"I'm going to stand at the back and hit this guy until he explodes."
Increased article use	A word that indicates that a noun is a noun without describing it	"There's <u>an</u> enemy in the jungle."
Increased use of swear words	Heightened usage of strong swear words	"Sit down, do.g" "Shut the f*ck u.p"
Use of uncommon words	Words that are infrequently used daily by the people the individual is communicating with, which involves highly specific tactical talk	"Stay in fog of war and avoid aggroing."
Commands	Giving direct commands instead of framing it as a request	"Bring my items with you before you teleport to the lane."
Brief sentences	Sentences that are short but information-packed	"20 minutes tormentor" In regard to killing the 'tormentor' that spawns at the 20-minute time mark.

Crawford (1995) identified three male speech objectives, which include asserting dominance, attracting/maintaining the audience, and self-asserting during others' turns. Men's tendency to use language factually and competitively could be to control social flow and acquire certain social goals (Pakzadian & Tootkaboni, 2018, p.2). This significant difference in gendered language could cause misunderstanding in cross-gender conversations; men speak in falling intonation to reflect the certainty of their statement, whereas women would use rising intonation to appear less assertive, maintaining social harmony. This difference could be interpreted as a show of power or incompetence, respectively. However, this framework is debated due to its generalisation, as linguistic features can cross gender lines. Men may reflect more of women's linguistic features compared to women themselves, and vice versa.

Sharif et al. (2023) conducted a study on differences in linguistic forms of men and women, specifically in terms of tag questions, preferred conversation topics, and polite linguistic forms. The study found that women use more tag questions and prefer topics that revolve around personal matters, as opposed to men, who prefer talking about current issues. The data also agrees that women are polite than men, demonstrating higher maturity and courtesy in a discourse. However, context influences speech. As such, this paper looked into instances where female gamers, defying typical facilitative communication, frequently employ male linguistic features, contributing to the discussion on gendered language. The acts of convergence by female gamers were identified using the Men's Language Framework. The motivations for the convergence were then analysed based on CAT to serve as empirical validation for the hypotheses of the framework itself.

METHODOLOGY

The *Dota 2* game was chosen as it involves constant coordination and strategy discussion, making it an ideal setting to observe the speech convergence of the female gamers. Moreover, it was also chosen due to personal familiarity, allowing for a better understanding of the mechanics, terminology, and community dynamics to interpret players' interactions more accurately. Lastly, *Dota 2* is made up of a diverse and active community that comes from different backgrounds and genders. As such, this offered a richer insight into how inclusivity, or lack thereof, may affect communication styles and gender dynamics in online gaming spaces.

This mixed-method research investigated the adoption of male linguistic features by female gamers. It utilised the Men's Language Framework (Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003; Mulac, 2001) as a guideline for analysis of transcribed speech from 10 existing YouTube or TikTok clips. To account for potential code-switching, non-English words were translated into English, maintaining linguistic diversity while focusing on the act of convergence itself. Furthermore, speech convergence theory from CAT was used to guide the analysis of motivations behind this linguistic shift. To solidify these findings and explore perceptions, two questionnaires were employed: one, adapted from McElvain (2022), gathered data on female gamers' experiences and intentions regarding convergence. The second one was adapted from Wade (2020), which collected data on the dominant group's reactions to this convergence.

The study analysed secondary data from online gaming clips featuring evident linguistic convergence by female gamers, transcribed to identify convergence aspects. Selection diversity was ensured by sourcing from various platforms and streamers of different origins. Primary data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 20 *Dota 2* players aged 18-28 with at least one year of gaming experience and prior interaction with the opposite sex online. This participant

pool comprised 10 female gamers, queried on their convergence experiences and perceptions, and 10 male gamers, whose reactions to female convergence were assessed. The participants were identified and chosen through the *Dota 2* community on Instagram and Reddit, whereby their gender was confirmed. The participants were also informed beforehand that their answers would be analysed, and consent was given for this research. However, the objectives of this study were not disclosed to avoid courtesy bias in their answers. While the speech of the participants may include code-switching, instances of convergence were still analysed. This is due to the research's focus on the act of convergence towards male linguistic styles, irrespective of the specific language used.

DATA ANALYSIS

To achieve its first objective, this research extracted and transcribed 10 clips of *Dota 2* female gamers from platforms like YouTube and TikTok. The clips were chosen based on the frequency of convergence happening ($N > 5$) throughout the video featuring female gamers playing *Dota 2*, regardless of the video's duration. The identified features were then analysed through the lens of CAT to explore the potential motivations behind this convergence and its impact on the female gamers' experiences.

Subsequently, two questionnaires were used. One for female participants, consisting of 6 binary yes/no questions to identify convergence and three open-ended questions to explore their perception and experience of using male speech style. The data were discussed based on recurring themes identified using NVIVO software. The questionnaire for male participants comprises 11 Likert scale questions that assess their perceptions and acceptance of this convergence to support the hypotheses based on CAT.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the data analysis. This first part answers the research question, "How do female gamers linguistically converge with male gamers in terms of speech style and gender-exclusive features in *Dota 2*?" The linguistic features are presented, exemplified, and discussed.

REFERENCES TO QUANTITY

References to quantity are an instrumental speaking style believed to be predominantly adopted by male speakers (Mulac, 2001). In *Dota 2*, these terms can be recognised based on the usage of a specific quantity to explain or refer to a specific term in the game.

Below are two examples of the occurrences. In datum (1), Streamer 6 used a reference to quantity to highlight her early itemisation in the game.

(1) *I seem to be quite fat at 12 minutes.*

Datum (2) illustrates a reference to quantity in another video by Streamer 4. She used reference to quantity to describe how close she was to teleporting away, but failed as she was found by the enemy team.

(2) *I was so close to TPing out! **0.1 second** or some shit.*

In regard to the gaming context, these references to quantity help to specify the number or degree of something. However, it is not the most important aspect of gameplay. If the streamer only conveys the information that she is close to teleporting away without specifying how close she was, it would still be understandable by her teammates and viewers, as the “0.1 second” is just optional information that would not have changed the overall message.

On the other hand, quantifiers would be important in speeches involving technicality. For example, buying items in *Dota 2* would help to increase the status of a hero, such as, but not limited to, their attributes, armour, and resistance. When players would like to notify their teammates about the items in the enemy's inventory or suggest items to counter the enemies, quantifiers would then be seen as a crucial part of the information.

Another situation that warrants its usage would be when players are notifying the number of enemies in the lane. In this case, it would be useful to inform other players by using a quantifier so that they are much more aware and alert of the possibility of winning or losing a team fight based on a numerical advantage or disadvantage.

REFERENCES TO ANGER

References to anger emphasise the idea that men tend to use words that are charged with anger more than women. This traditional notion stems from women being much more status-conscious and tend to use standard forms that are associated with femininity to meet the society's expectations of their behaviour (Holmes, 1992, as cited in Sampehule, 1999). Moreover, based on generalisations made about the linguistic behaviour of different genders, Ponnyton (1989, as cited in Sampehule, 1999) believes that culturally, it is much more acceptable for men to display powerful emotions, especially anger, but not for women.

Below are two examples in which the aspect was used. Example (3) shows that the streamer used the term “*kick his *ss*”, which means to hit or kill someone in the game.

(3) ***Kick** his *ss.*

Similarly, in example (4), the reference to anger includes making a remark about killing someone in the game.

(4) *Go **kill** them.*

Making references to anger in gaming does not necessarily facilitate smoother gameplay. It was more likely employed as a way to release their frustration, especially towards the enemy team, which made the gameplay harder for them. Although there are studies that indicate females expressing more self-anger compared to males (Sadeh et al., 2011, as cited in Suman, 2016), this may not be the case in the context of online gaming. Based on the data collected, it is prevalent that the female streamers were making references to anger towards their enemies. Despite expression of anger often being associated with masculinity, it is a common emotional response in gaming, especially during high-pressure situations. As such, female players might adapt to these norms and express anger similarly.

Another possible reason that this aspect was employed is due to the norm of 'tilting' within the gaming community. Tilting refers to destructive or toxic behaviours in the form of verbal harassment or behavioural misconduct that disrupt another person's gaming experience (Donner, 2024). This behaviour is often done to provoke another player into feeling angry or frustrated about the game. As such, reference to anger is one of the most commonly used aspects by players regardless of their gender; this is also coupled with the nature of the game, which involves a lot of fighting, killing, and destroying.

JUDGMENT ADJECTIVES

Judgment adjectives are adjectives that express a judgment or evaluation about a subject matter and are believed to be employed by men more than women (Yousef, 2018). Some examples include words such as “*terrible*”, “*dumb*”, or “*stupid*”.

Below are the examples based on the data collected. Datum (5) illustrates the streamer's usage of the judgment adjective ‘*noob*’ to describe and criticise another player's gaming ability.

(5) *This Pudge (is) very **noob**.*

Datum (6) demonstrates the usage of the judgment adjective “*dumb*”, repeated twice by the streamer to describe and emphasise the poor quality of another player's gaming skills.

(6) *Better than the last game that I had with a **dumb dumb** support.*

Employing judgmental adjectives to describe other players' abilities could be their attempt to establish hierarchy or signal their superiority in the game. Sometimes, players used it to compliment themselves indirectly. For example, the streamer in datum (5) managed to dodge an attack by the enemy team hero called ‘Pudge’ and called him a noob for being highly predictive. Before that particular sentence, the streamer was also raving about her solo kill in the lane. Thus, by calling the enemy hero a “*noob*”, she was highlighting her ability to play the game better than the other person.

SWEAR WORDS

Swear words are also known to be words that contain taboo or offensive expressions and are perceived as negative. However, the social function of swear words is not limited to expressing anger, as they can also reflect happiness and even solidarity (Setiawan & Fatimatuzzahroh, 2018). Swear words often range from mild ones that are frequently used by females, such as “*fudge*” or “*darnit*”, to more extreme ones, such as “*bi*ch*” or “*f*ck*”, and are commonly used within the gaming culture. Setiawan and Fatimatuzzahroh (2018) also found that men generally curse more frequently in the presence of a group consisting of their own gender, such as the gaming community.

In this study, swear words were the most frequently used aspect. Two examples are illustrated below.

Example (7) shows the most generic swear word used across the platform. The word “*f*ck*” is versatile in its function in the sense that it could be used to mean a lot of different things and emotions, such as joy, anger, and frustration.

(7) *What the f*ck?*

In example (8), the streamer used the swear word “*bi*ch*” as a noun to refer to a player in the enemy team. It was meant as a degradation, as they were fighting for different sides, and she intended to kill the enemy.

(8) *Come here, bi*ch!*

Swearing reflects players' emotions and gaming culture norms, often serving as a release for frustration in the competitive environment. It is also important to note that in the modern age, the usage of strong swear words is not limited only to the gaming community, as it is increasingly common across genders (Love et al., 2017) and contexts.

Swear words are also used as an intensifier and to strategically communicate emotion; people may use swear words in reported speech to make others appear less reliable (McEnery et al., 2023), and such is the case in datum (9).

(9) *I don't know why this guy wants to fight so f*cking badly. F*cking Archon bi*ch.*

The speaker used swear words in her reported speech about another gamer who wanted to kill a player from the enemy team despite not having the ability to do so. By using swear words in her speech, she is emphasising her doubt about the other player's decision-making, thus making them seem unreliable.

LOCATION WORDS

Location words or locatives are characterised as an informational linguistic feature and are frequently used by males (Koppel et al., 2002, as cited in S. Ningrum & Crosthwaite, 2020). Locative is usually employed to provide specific whereabouts to relay instructions that can be important in ensuring a smooth gameplay experience and even securing a win. Without its usage, information can be vague, especially if it pertains to the map of the game, since there are many similar locations at different parts of the map, such as the jungle, triangle, and camps.

Below are two examples of location words being used by streamers. Example (10) illustrates the usage of location words when the streamer was directing her teammate to move to a specific location in order to assist her in initiating a team fight.

(10) *Stay behind me.*

There are three lanes in the *Dota 2* map, which are top, middle, and bottom. Each lane consists of 3 tiers of towers. In example (11), the streamer was specifying which one of the enemy's towers she was referring to.

(11) *The enemy's top tower had to go.*

In datum (10), the streamer helped her teammate to secure a kill using locatives to coordinate their positioning. Through her sharp game analysis, she anticipated the enemy's movements and confidently guided her teammate to bait the enemy team so that they could secure a kill. Without locatives, their coordination could have been misinterpreted, and they might have lost their chance to kill the enemy. By strategically using location words, it not only enhanced the players' spatial awareness but also trained their decision-making skills, especially when they had to carefully direct their teammates to the best position.

Given multiple similar map locations, specificity is highly crucial. Combining them, as in datum (11), provides necessary precision. Specific location words are core for mutual understanding that significantly improves team coordination and enables effective execution of complex strategies based on precise enemy positions or objectives.

COMMANDS

Commands refer to the tendency to give direct instructions instead of framing them as a question. It is also considered a report talk, which is a style that is focused on exchanging information with little emotional impact to achieve a higher status in a conversation (Michel, 1994). In the gaming context, commands are employed to ease the flow of the game as it focuses on getting actions done, and players do not usually care about promoting social affiliation or forming an emotional connection.

Below are two instances. In example (12), the streamer was the main carry of the game who would be dealing the most damage to the enemy team. She knew that they needed the Black King Bar (BKB) in order to win the team fight, and she told her teammates to wait until she acquired it before initiating the fight.

(12) ***Let's wait for my BKB.***

In example (13), the streamer told another teammate to stop blocking her way when she was trying to move on the map.

(13) ***Don't block me.***

Commands in gaming are concise for rapid information exchange and crucial for instant decisions in this strategic activity. Prioritising rapport talk can disrupt objective-focused gameplay, which negates its purpose. The usage of commands helps to minimise interaction time by focusing on the objectives for rapid exchange of information. For example, in datum (12), the streamer told her teammates to wait until she had acquired the item before engaging in a team fight. This helped to minimise the interaction time, as commands often do not require responses for clarity. The situation would have been different had the streamer used mitigated directive speech, such as "*If you guys don't mind, can we wait for my BKB?*" This would have taken more time, and it would require an answer from her teammates to ensure that they agree to it.

Another situation that reflects the effectiveness of using commands in games can be seen in the situation in datum (13), where the streamer asked her teammate not to block her way. Using commands in this scenario not only helped the streamer to get her point across concisely, but also helped her teammate to realise their mistake, as players are always multitasking in the game. As such, the usage of commands is not an aspect that is considered demanding in gaming, but rather,

is expected to help players stay focused on the objectives and capture all the information exchanged.

To conclude, the results demonstrated that most of the male linguistic features appeared in the speech of all the female streamers. More specifically, there seemed to be a high tendency of convergence towards the speech styles of male gamers by female players of *Dota 2*. The subsequent discussion seeks to answer the research question, “How does the dominant group perceive the linguistic convergence of female *Dota2* players?” and includes the analysis of Questionnaire 1, which consists of three open-ended questions. Each question will be discussed based on the recurring themes in the data collected.

QUESTION 1

Question 1 investigated the perception of female players about the usage of male linguistic features in their speech during games.

THE ASPECTS ARE HELPFUL

Most respondents highlighted that the convergence towards the male linguistic features is helpful. Certain aspects have a positive impact on their in-game interaction, especially strategic ones such as references to quantity, direct commands, and location words. These features are crucial in order to coordinate an effective strategy in achieving the objectives within a fast-paced and high-pressure environment of *Dota 2*.

A respondent remarked that the quantity references and location words are essential for strategy, especially when they need to be calculative of every decision or move in the game. One example given is when they could not teleport to another lane due to the lack of mana; they could use quantity reference and location words, such as “*I don't have much mana to help mid,*” to clarify why they could not assist the middle lane hero while simultaneously notifying other players who might not realise that the middle lane needs assistance. Hence, this would help them to alert other players to the current situation in the game and also avoid any misunderstandings regarding the lack of assistance.

Other than that, another respondent also noted that the usage of judgmental adjectives and direct commands can be helpful if used respectfully. Although judgmental adjectives might have negative connotations, they can also be used as a layer of evaluation to provide valuable insights, regardless of whether they are used towards one's own teammates or the enemy's team. For example, a player might use judgment adjectives coupled with direct commands to say to their teammate, “*You are so poor, go farm a bit,*” to alert the player that they are falling behind in terms of their itemisation at that point of the game and guide the player towards making optimal decisions. Another instance would be when initiating a team fight, where a player might say, “*he is stupid, kill him*” in regard to an enemy who made the wrong move, which resulted in their vulnerability to be attacked. This sends a message to the other players that the enemy is not a good player, leading them to feel confident that they have a high chance of securing a kill. As such, the usage of the male linguistic features was helpful as players preferred to have communicative teammates regardless of the way the messages were conveyed.

THE ASPECTS ARE HARMFUL

While many of the features can be beneficial, others might have a detrimental impact on their gaming experience. Strong language, aggressive tone, and direct commands can create a hostile or unwelcoming environment, especially for female players, due to the sexism in online gaming spaces. For example, a respondent noted that when some of the aspects are abused, it does not help the game process and tends to disturb the nerves of other players. They might become more aware or self-conscious of their gameplay, resulting in frustration whenever they make a mistake, as they might get scrutinised harshly; their gaming experience would be negatively affected, possibly resulting in them cutting off communication with their teammates by muting them in the game. Hence, a butterfly effect could happen due to the lack of communication, making them lose the game.

Another respondent also stated that the usage of those aspects was not meant to be used verbally as a female player for fear of being discriminated against. The lack of cooperation by the teammates could also be due to their refusal to take orders from a woman, especially in a male-dominated sphere. For example, the camps in the game could be stacked for the hero to farm faster by killing more creeps. By asking other players to help with stacking it, they might instead take the farm or block the camp so that no new creeps could respawn. Other players might deliberately make questionable decisions, so that the player could not build their items, resulting in a big net worth disparity between the player and the enemy team. This would negatively affect the player's morale as they did not have a good team dynamic, consequently making the game unplayable and unwinnable.

QUESTION 2

Question 2 looked into the respondents' opinions on the positive effects of using the aspects of male linguistic features.

CLEARER COMMUNICATION

Several respondents directly pointed to improved communication as one of the positive effects of using some aspects of male linguistic features in their speech. The aspects that they were highly likely to refer to are references to quantity, location words, commands, and, to an extent, judgment adjectives.

Clear communication was considered to be the most crucial part of a team game, as information was conveyed rapidly following the fast decision-making needs. When players were able to communicate briefly and precisely, it directly translated to better teamwork, more coordinated strategies, and a higher chance of winning the game. In regard to giving commands, several respondents stated that *"being direct and forward with your team can be very helpful if your assessments are correct"* because it *"is a good way to communicate and lead the game to victory"* due to *"clearer communication, better teamwork, and effective strategy development"*. For example, instead of saying *"The enemy in the middle is missing, I believe that they might be ganking the bottom lane"*, a player can succinctly say *"care, mid is missing, probably going bot"*. As such, by utilising concise instructions, players were able to convey detailed and accurate information efficiently, allowing their teammates to quickly comprehend the situation and react accordingly to achieve the strategic objectives of the game.

ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT

The convergence towards said features could also enhance player engagement and make the gaming experience more enjoyable. As mentioned before, online players rarely communicate with each other, especially if they are not friends. Team coordination is always done based on assumptions about each other's moves, and more frequently than not, it results in an unfavourable outcome of the game.

One respondent emphasised that *"it makes the gaming process easier and more fun because my friends can easily understand what I'm thinking, and you get to just be yourself when you're playing"*. When players were able to express themselves freely and communicate strategically with each other, their teamwork would be much more synchronised because they could understand the expectations of one another. For example, instead of passively waiting for help, a player could use a more direct approach by saying *"someone tp and help mid"* to notify other players of their need for immediate assistance. Their teammates would then be able to engage with their call for help and make decisions accordingly.

Assumptions in a team game go both ways; a player might assume that their teammates would know when to help other lanes, while the teammates would assume that they can survive the lane. Hence, using those aspects during gameplay can enhance the engagement received by and from team members to better coordinate and strategise their moves.

QUESTION 3

Question 3 delved into the opinion of the respondents on the negative effects of the convergence.

DISTRACTING

One significant negative effect of employing male linguistic features in *Dota 2* is their potential to be highly distracting and disruptive to the gameplay experience of other players when used excessively, even when they are meant to be helpful.

People can get overwhelmed and even anxious during the match, hindering their ability to make optimal decisions and execute proper strategy, resulting in a less enjoyable gaming experience. For example, a player who is trying a new hero might get a constant barrage of commands or instructions from other players, making it harder to process the mechanics of that particular hero. This would lead to a poor performance during the game, possibly causing the person to be insulted due to their inability to perform basic expectations of the hero because of the constant verbal distraction and profanities thrown at them.

A respondent also reported experiencing physical manifestations of anxiety, whereby her hands started to shake. This indicated a significant level of stress induced by the constant communication that could be borderline scrutinising.

FOSTERS TOXIC GAMING ENVIRONMENT

The most concerning negative effect is the contribution of male linguistic features, such as references to anger, direct commands, and strong swear words, to a toxic and unwelcoming gaming environment. This is particularly true for female players who are always at risk of being harassed.

While the toxic environment might affect the general demographic of players due to the constant scrutiny and profanities, harassment towards female players can manifest in various forms, such as sexist comments and even threats. The fear of facing such harassment deters female players from communicating openly and freely, hindering them from participating fully in the game, especially if they are novice players.

One respondent emphasised that players would flirt with her if she plays well, but otherwise they would start harassing and saying misogynistic things. Both situations were highly sexist towards the female player, as she felt that her value had been reduced to her gameplay ability. Furthermore, the constant exposure to toxic behaviour can have a significant mental toll on female players, leading to anxiety, frustration, and even a reluctance to continue playing the game. Not only would this harm the individual player, but it would also contribute to a broader culture of toxicity within the *Dota 2* community, discouraging female participation and creating an unwelcoming environment for all players in general.

To conclude this subsection, findings revealed that the usage of male linguistic features was prevalent in the speech of female gamers. Although there seemed to be many benefits in employing the features in terms of strategic communication and release of frustration, there were also notable downsides that could take a toll on players emotionally and mentally.

DISCUSSION ON RESEARCH QUESTION 3

The reaction of the dominant group towards the linguistic convergence of female players was analysed based on Questionnaire 2, which was prepared for the male participants. The data were presented in the form of pie charts for each question.

1. The speaker sounded like a man.

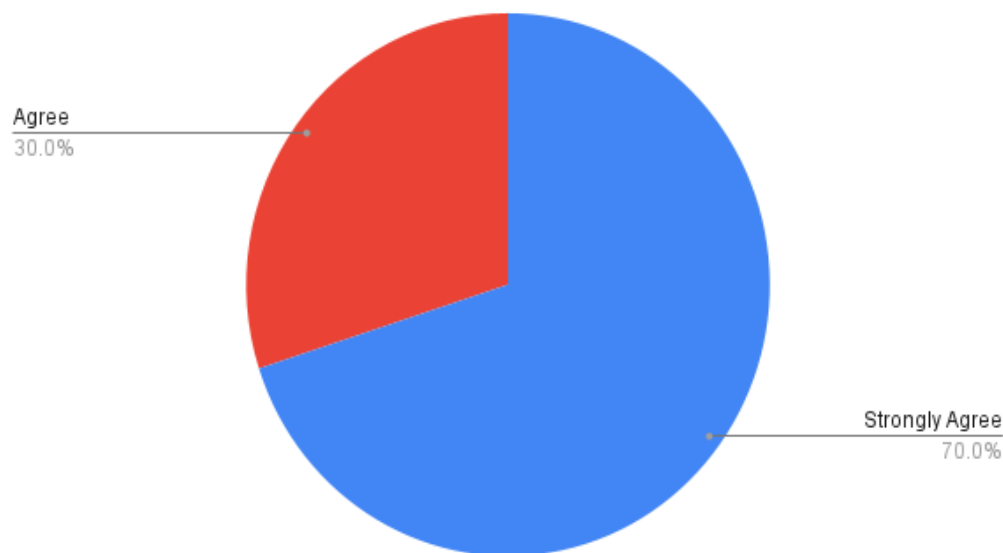


CHART 1. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded like a man

Chart 1 illustrates that the dominant group believed that the speaker was a man. The reason for this perception could be the usage of typically masculine linguistic features such as strong words or assertive language. Terms such as “*f*cking d*ck*” and “*b*tch*” are normally employed by men, as women are often expected to avoid using strong swear words.

Moreover, the female speech styles also assume the role of a rapport talk and unassertive, neither of which is reflected in her speech. This confirms the idea that men and women have distinct ways of speaking. Even in a community where the usage of male linguistic features is a norm, even for female players, employing them would automatically direct people to believe that the speech was said by a man. This is also confirmed by the data presented in Chart 9.

2. The speaker sounded like a woman.

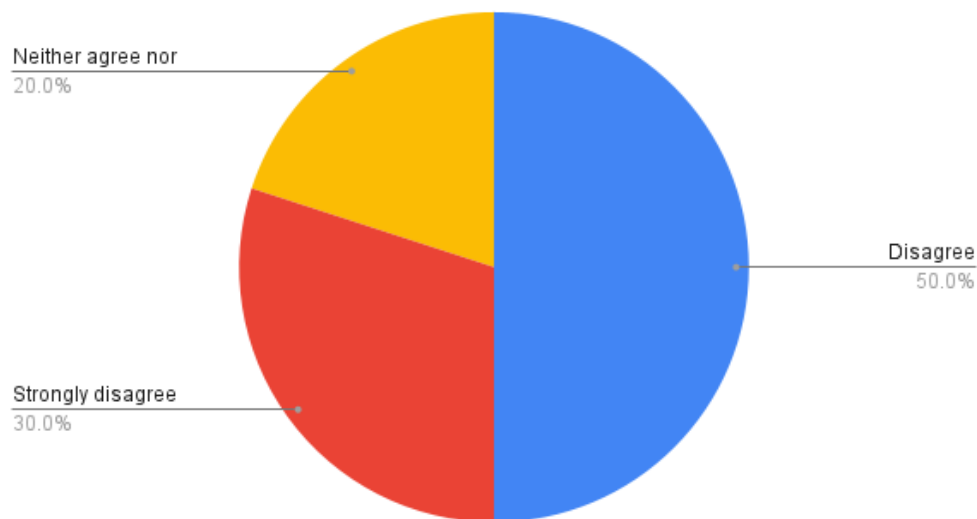


CHART 2: Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded like a woman

As illustrated in Chart 2, the majority of the male players disagreed that the speaker sounded like a woman. This perception stemmed from her choice of words as well as the high usage of tactical talk in the game.

For example, the speaker said, “*Bro, stop bro, karma is fucking real, and it's gonna hit you in your f*cking buttcheeks.*” There are two things to note here: the word ‘bro’ is frequently used by males as a term of endearment towards their friends, although there are instances where it is also employed by women. Secondly, the term “*hit you in your f*cking buttcheeks*” involves the usage of reference to anger as well as strong swear words, both of which are male-coded features.

However, there was a small percentage of them who neither agreed nor disagreed, which suggested the belief that the speaker could be either a man or a woman.

3. The speaker sounded kind.

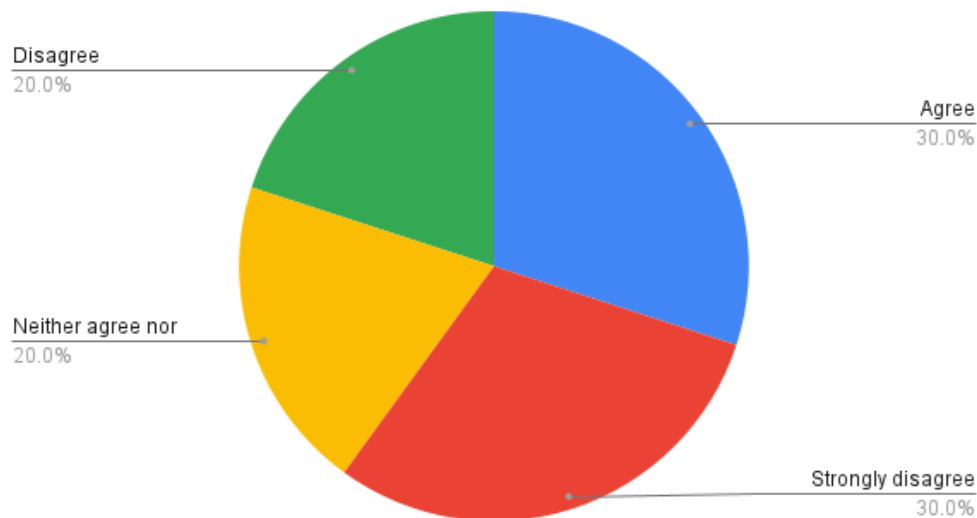


CHART 3. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded kind

The data presented in Chart 3 shows that the majority of the participants disagreed that the speaker sounded kind. The male linguistic features are often characterised as assertive, certain, direct, and authoritative, which do not emphasise building social affiliations with the interlocutors. Due to the high-pressure and competitive nature of the game, the speech of gamers is usually charged with emotional frustration, especially when the match-up is intense. As such, despite the occasional assistance, advice, or humour said by the speaker, participants were highly likely to have a negative perception of the player based on their tone and strong language used.

4. The speaker sounded friendly.

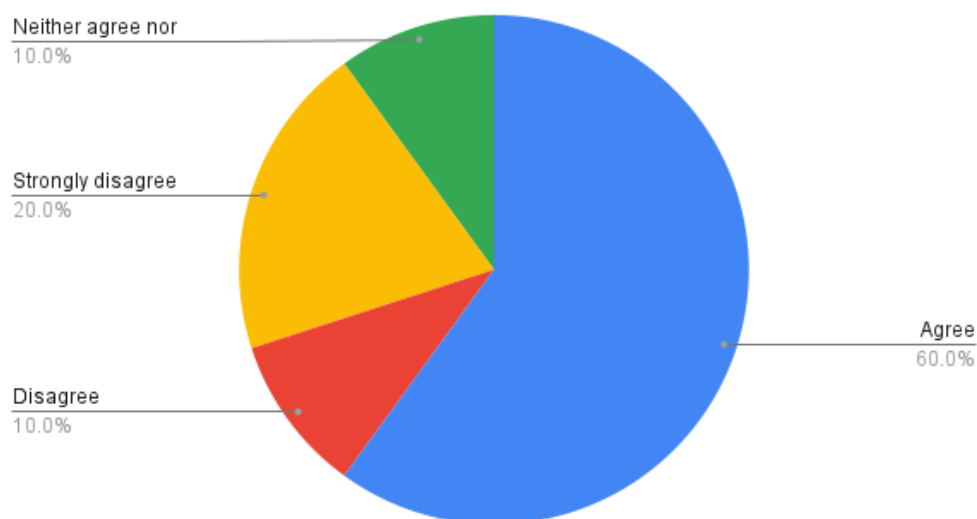


CHART 4. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded friendly

The majority of male participants agreed that the speaker sounded friendly. Although this data might contradict the data in Chart 3 to an extent, speakers can be friendly but not kind. The possible reasoning as to why the speaker is deemed as friendly could be because of how talkative she was. In *Dota 2*, verbal interaction is not really common; when someone is really talkative, this could be seen as an act of friendliness due to it being out of the norm. Moreover, this perception towards the speaker could also stem from her occasional effort to help her teammates by giving them advice.

5. The speaker sounded intelligent.

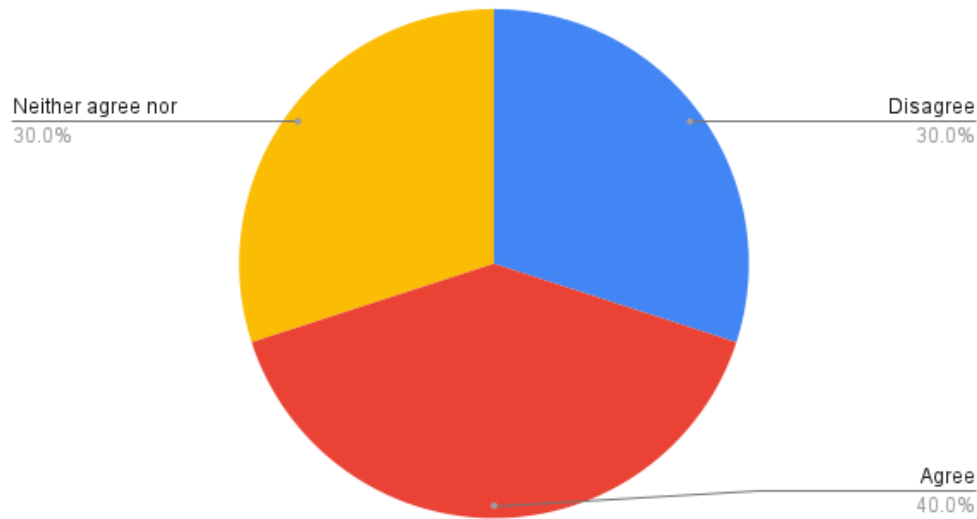


CHART 5. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded intelligent

Chart 5 shows that only a small percentage of participants disagreed that the speaker sounded intelligent, while the rest either agreed or did not think her speech was an indication of her intellectual capabilities. This suggests the idea that the usage of strong words or profanities such as "f*ck" or "b*tch" is not a reflection of a person's intellect and does not necessarily equate to a lower intelligence.

On the other hand, this also points to the possibility that employing male linguistic features might not reflect a sense of competence. Moreover, the ability to make better strategic decisions also translates to having higher cognitive ability (Benito-Ostolaza et al., 2016), which is reflected in the speaker's speech.

6. The speaker sounded like a professional gamer.

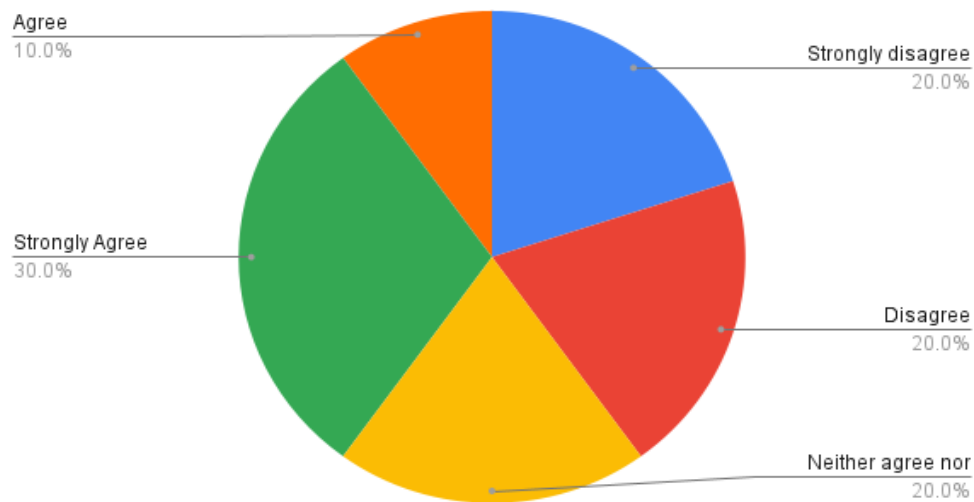


CHART 6. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded like a professional gamer

In Chart 6, it can be observed that there is an equal percentage of participants who agreed and disagreed with the statement. The possible reasoning for this is due to the employment of tactical talk that could also be a double-edged sword if judged based on her speech alone, without being able to observe her gameplay.

Some people would argue that the speaker is a professional gamer because, based on her speech, she seemed to have an in-depth understanding of the game. However, professional gamers usually focus more on the gameplay than commentary and explanation during games because any commands or strategic objectives are assumed to be understood by their teammates. In a situation where the speaker needs to explain to their teammates the mechanics of the game, this suggests that they are middle or lower-bracket players who do not have a solid understanding yet.

7. The speaker sounded attractive.

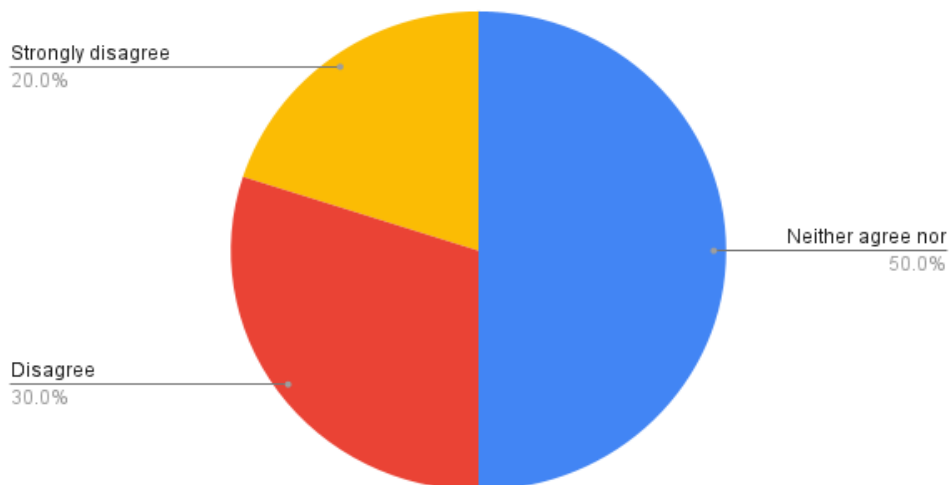


CHART 7. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded attractive

The data in Chart 7 shows that participants either disagreed or were neutral about the statement. The extreme usage of profanities has always caused others to perceive the speaker less favourably, regardless of their gender.

Another important note to consider is that preliminary findings also indicate that when the gender of the speaker is unknown, a vulgar speech is always assumed to be a man (DeFrank & Kahlbaugh, 2019). With this idea in mind, male participants were less likely to compliment or think of another male as attractive due to social factors that may regard that as unacceptable, especially within the gaming sphere.

8. The speaker is someone I would like to be friends with.

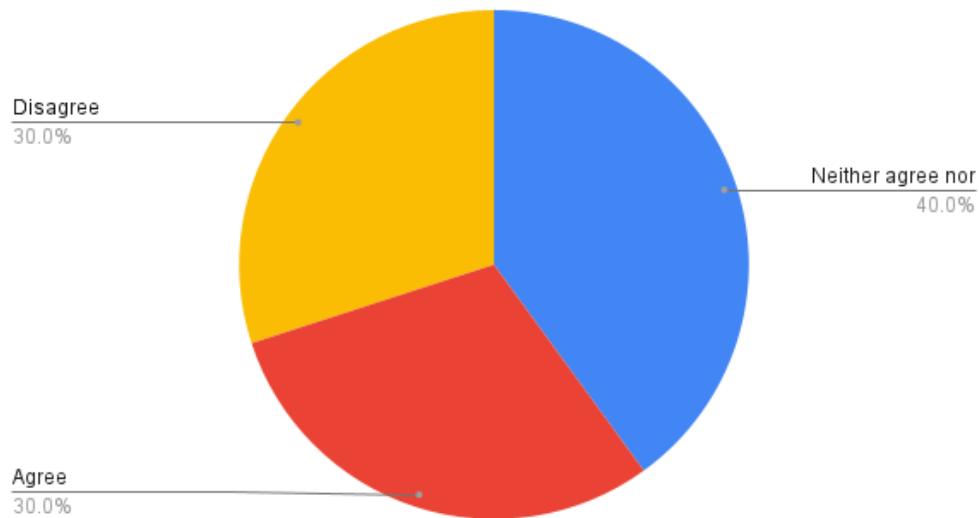


CHART 8. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker is someone they would like to be friends with

Observed in Chart 8, only a few participants would want to be friends with the speaker. Reflecting on the data, this suggests that the speaker's speech may not be the biggest factor behind their answer, but the community's norm in building friendships. Online players do not usually become friends with each other due to safety concerns, as they do not know the personality of the person beyond their virtual interaction. As such, although one would perceive another as a friendly person and agree to play the game together, they might still be against the idea of becoming friends.

Moreover, the gaming community, as the name suggests, is only interested in playing games and not building social affiliation with other players, except for their friends with whom they play.

9. The speaker sounded happy.

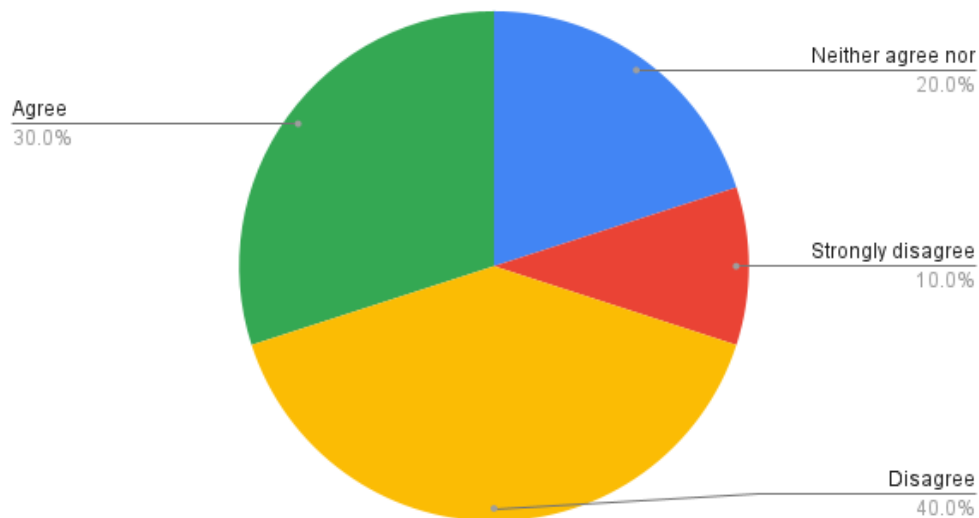


CHART 9. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded happy

Chart 9 shows that most participants disagreed that the speaker sounded happy. The speaker's speech mostly consisted of tactical talk or frustrated remarks about the game. Tactical talk does not have any emotional connotations as they are mainly used to convey information; the frustrated remarks made by the speaker are emotionally charged, especially when they are coupled with the usage of swear words. As such, participants could only assume that the speaker is not happy based on her speech alone.

10. The speaker is someone I could relate to.

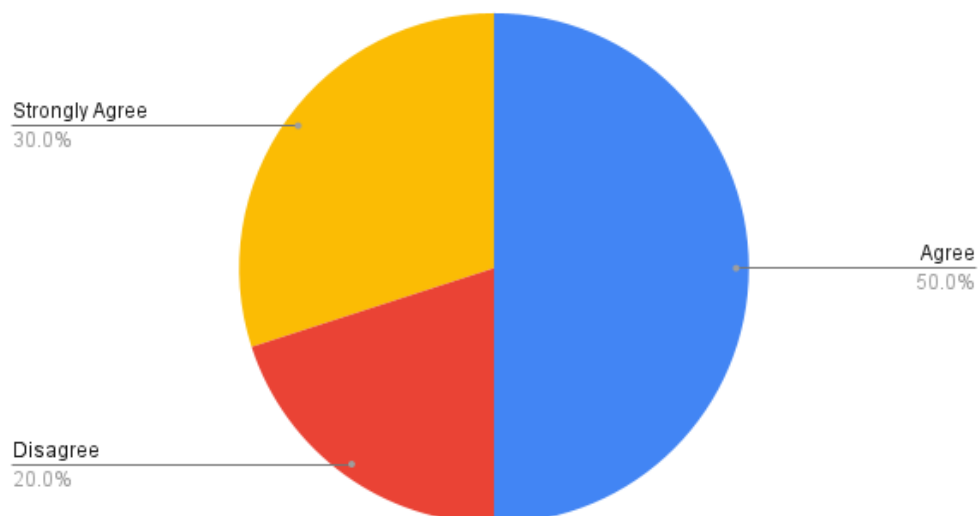


CHART 10. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker is someone they could relate to

In Chart 10, male participants confirmed that they could relate to the speaker. As all of the participants are experienced *Dota 2* players, they were able to relate to the speaker based on her speech alone, without the need for visual cues. Moreover, this suggests that the speaker's use of male-coded language created a sense of familiarity among the male participants, effectively bridging the gender gap by communicating in a speech style that they are acquainted with.

11. The speaker sounded educated about the game.

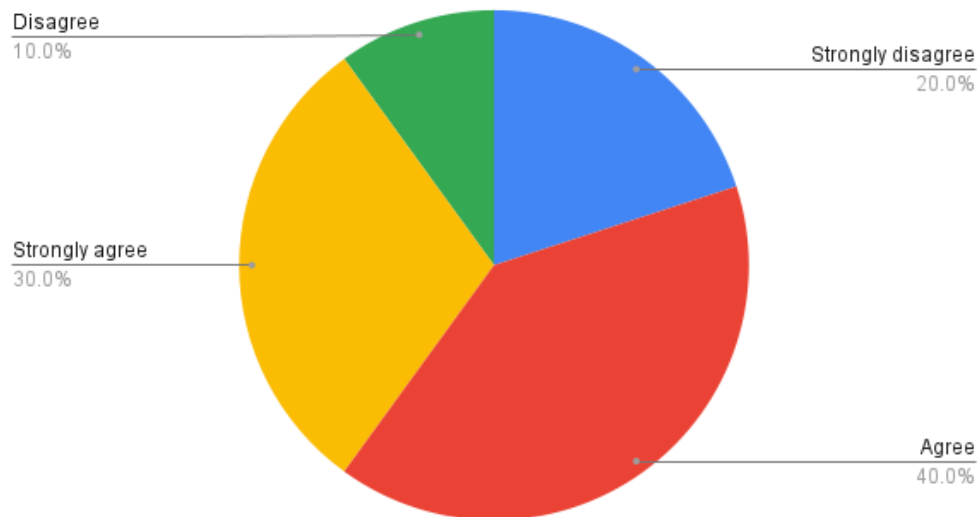


CHART 11. Count of male participants who agree that the speaker sounded educated about the game

In Chart 11, the data shows that most of the participants agreed that the speaker sounded educated about the game. The perception was likely influenced by her adoption of some linguistic features, such as strategic discourse and technical jargon. The speaker could give clear explanations that are focused on the tactical aspects of the game, which demonstrated a good command of the game's mechanics and strategies.

She also employed a number of gaming-specific terms, which showcased her familiarity with the jargon of the game. Moreover, she was able to decide the items necessary for the match and also make the right call for any strategic decisions, as can be observed from her explanation in her speech.

The male linguistic features are often characterised by the informative, assertive, and strong language used, as supported by Lakoff (1973) and indicated by the findings from I. A. F. Ningrum et al. (2023). Based on the responses collected in Questionnaire 2, it can be concluded that the dominant group does not have a highly negative perception of the convergence towards the male linguistic features within the *Dota 2* community. The usage of those features by the female player also successfully signalled familiarity with the majority group, as it is the speech style that is often employed by players both personally in their daily lives and strategically in games.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the female *Dota 2* players' speech has a high frequency of examined male linguistic features, indicating significant convergence, often used strategically or to vent frustration. Most of the features were employed in their speech as a form of strategic communication, while others were meant as a channel to vent their frustration. Out of all the aspects, strong swear words were the most frequently used ones, almost three times the amount of all the other aspects individually. Furthermore, players perceived both positive (strategic coordination via quantity/location references, direct commands) and negative (hostile environment from swear words, anger references, judgment) impacts, acknowledging it as a gaming norm. This highlights the need for a balance between effective communication and maintaining a respectful environment for all players. Moreover, it can be observed from the findings that the dominant group within the *Dota 2* community did not have an entirely negative perception of the convergence; they showed familiarity with the speech styles and attitude of the female player. Hence, it can be concluded that convergence and its social impact extend to online gaming platforms.

Some limitations in this research should be noted. Firstly, the usage of self-reported data may cause courtesy bias, and the participant pool is quite small despite being ample to deduce a paradigm. These limitations should be taken into consideration when extending this research. In addition to that, future researchers may also consider analysing the linguistic convergence of male gamers towards the speech of female gamers in female-dominated gaming scenes. Some theories that can be utilised are gender performativity and digital discourse literature. The findings provide valuable insights about the tendency of convergence by male gamers, in terms of either supporting or opposing the notion of women being facilitative speakers. They also complement the findings of this study by providing female perspectives on male linguistic convergence.

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