and when we act out our lives in ways that reflect what we feel deeply inside, as who we are, then straight or queer, that “acting” helps to redefine normal. At particular moments in so many daily lives, normal becomes something else. The sky did not fall when Sarah Stich took her female date to the senior prom. It did not fall when Connor McFadden told his family and friends he was gay. There were no school shootings; no one was hurt. The gap between unquestioned acceptance and hostile assault has narrowed, not disappeared. But “normal,” it would seem, may be changing.

Please send any comments, suggestions, ideas for new columns or other material to David Houston at dth@umass.edu.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

I337 Sp33k: 4n 31337 I3550n for 4n O1d F4r7

By James Stanlaw

Last months’ column on Japanese “girls’ letters” by Laura Miller generated one of the most enthusiastic conversations of the semester in my undergraduate Japanese language and culture class—but not for the reasons I expected. Halfway through the class someone yelled, “This is just like 31337.” After seeing the look on my face when he got up and wrote on the board 3I337 sp34k—a so-called explanation—he said, “You’re a newbie—a newb—aren’t you?” while writing n00b in big letters. It dawned on me from my secret agent days that this was some kind of transmission cipher where numbers were replacing letters: 0 for o, 3 for e, 7 for t, 1 for l, 4 for a, 5 for s, and so on. Thus, 31337 is “elite” (or “elite,” in standard spelling, often shortened to just I337, or “leet”).

But things are not as simple as just pairing up a numeral and a letter. For example, ph is often used for the f-sound in any word, and many words can beleet-speaked in several ways (for example, phear, ph33r, or ph34r). Puns on sounds or word shapes also abound, though often these are not transparent to the uninitiated. Unless told, one might not know that b7 means “banned.” The explanation, such as it is, goes to someone who should be interested in establishing and reinforcing group boundaries based on gaming or computer abilities, or the possession of rather esoteric knowledge. When online gaming became popular, typing in this cool or elite way also became fashionable. The unusual orthography found in Japanese comics and animation seems to have left a mark in leet-speak.

There are likely at least two reasons why leetspeak began. In the early days of slow computer modems, some proto-leet forms started as writing shortcuts. Also, spelling terms in odd ways avoided database filters which tired to block or delete material of questionable morality or legality. When online gaming became popular, typing in this cool or elite way also became fashionable. The unusual orthography found in Japanese comics and animation seems to have left a mark in leet as well.

Leet-speakers are quick to point out that they are not just using emoticons or the usual email abbreviations (such as BTW). Elite speakers seem to be interested in establishing and reinforcing group boundaries based on gaming or computer abilities, or the possession of rather esoteric knowledge. Some however reject this, saying that leet-speakers are merely snobs, geeks or gamers who should get a life. But seeing how I misspell so many things without even trying anyway, I really think I am already k001 enough to join.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA contributing editors Jim Stanlaw at stanlaw@ilstu.edu or Mark Peterson at peterson@umich.edu.

The leet-speak converter, for use in the event that one isn’t in the know. Image courtesy of Virtu-Software.

Society for Medical Anthropology

JANELLE S TAYLOR, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

We are very pleased to announce the winners of the 2005 prize competitions held by the SMA and its interest groups, the Critical Anthropology of Health Caucus and the Council on Anthropology and Reproduction. Congratulations!

SMA Awards

The Practicing Medical Anthropology Award went to Merrill Singer, who was recognized for his pioneering work in critical medical anthropology, his creation of the joint medical anthropology program at UC Berkeley and UCSF, and his voluminous writings including classic works on field methods, peasant economics, economic development, applied anthropology, folklore, medicine and public health, and social structure and symbolic systems.

The Charles Hughes Graduate Student Paper Prize for the best paper published in the SMA’s journal Medical Anthropology Quarterly during the most recent complete volume year, has been awarded to Michele Rivkin-Fish (U Kentucky), for her article “Change Yourself and the Whole World Will Become Kinder: Russian Activists for Reproductive Health and the Limits of Claims Making for Women,” MAQ 18(3): 281–304.

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