

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 dllrh+an@uvm.edu.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

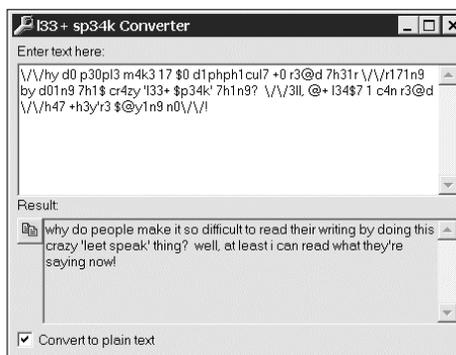
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By James Stanlaw

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 *leet*.” After seeing the look on my face when he got up and wrote on the board *3 I337 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 transposition 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, *3I337* is “eleet” (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 letter. For example, *ph* is often used for the *f*-sound in any word, and many words can be leet-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 something like this: the ampersand (&) is of course pronounced “and,” and the number 7 and character & share the same key on the keyboard. Thus, “b” plus “and” make “banned.”

More significantly, interesting spelling and semantic shifts appear. Spelling “the” as *teh* or “own” as *pwn* is now often intentional (taking some ubiquitous typing errors and making them compulsory). And both these words shift in meaning or function. For example, *this is teh suck* might be translated as “This really sucks” or “This sucks the most.” The word *pwned* actually means victory, domination, or to defeat someone or something (as in *pwned j00*, *n00b*; “owned/beat



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

you, newbie!”). In both these cases, the new spelling does not yield a new pronunciation.

Some morphological innovation also occurs. The suffix *-x0r* (or *-x0rz*)—usually pronounced as “-[k]sore” or “-zor”—can represent a way of encoding the final “-er” sounds of normally-spelled words. But it can be added to some nouns or verbs to denote emphasis or intensity. Popular is *r0x0rz*, meaning various things: that someone or something “rocks,” to dominate something, or express approval.

There are at least two loanwords that are common in leet-speak. *Ub3r-* or *uber-* (from the German *über*) is a prefix that can attach to both nouns and adjectives to mean such things as mega-, super-, hyper- or over- (for example, *uber-large* or *uber-hacked*). Japanese has contributed *b4k4* (from the native term *baka*) to the vocabulary, meaning dumb or stupid (as it does in the original language).

There are likely at least two reasons why leet-speak 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 tried 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 *k00l* 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 petersm2@muohio.edu.

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 Lifetime Achievement Award has been awarded to George M Foster (UC Berkeley) for his foundational work in establishing the field of



SMA Lifetime Achievement Award Winner George M Foster

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 Practicing Medical Anthropology Award went to Merrill Singer, who was recognized for his pioneering work in critical medical anthropology, his many publications, and his work with the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford, CT, on issues of drug use among Latino populations.

The Anthropology Graduate Student Mentor Award, created two years ago to recognize excellence in graduate student mentorship and acknowledge the important contributions of medical anthropologists who have provided exceptional guidance and outstanding support to graduate students, goes to Mark Nichter (U Arizona).

The Eileen Basker Memorial Prize, for excellence in research on gender and health, goes to João Biehl (Princeton U) for his book *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*, published by the University of California Press in 2005.

The Steven Polgar Professional 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.

The Charles Hughes Graduate Student Paper Prize goes to Jennifer Liu (UCSF/UCB) for her essay entitled “Governing Adherence: Medications, HIV and Power.” Jennifer Liu's advisor for the paper was Philippe Bourgois. Honourable mentions go to three others: Pierre Minn (McGill U), for “Medical Humanitarianism and Health as Human Right”; Aaron Denham (U Alberta), for “Reconceptualizing Historical Trauma”; and Michael Westerhaus (Har-