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Computer-Mediated Communication: A Study of Language Variation on Internet Chat

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C-level essay

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Abstract

Department of Languages and Literatures: C-level essay

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The aim of this study is to discern and examine the linguistic features that are peculiar to the kind of written English used in online chatrooms using the following research question: What characterizes and distinguishes the kind of written English used in online chatrooms in relation to conventional written English? The data used in this study have been collected from an English chatroom called "The English Room". The messages sent on the chat have been observed and examined in the search of non-conventional linguistic features peculiar to this kind of written English with the hopes of answering the earlier-mentioned research question. The method used in this study is qualitative because conclusions have been drawn regarding the reasons people may have for choosing certain linguistic means to express themselves when chatting. Moreover, the findings from the chatroom have been compared to a predetermined taxonomy as to what to look for when examining the linguistic features characteristic of the kind of written English used when chatting online. It follows from the results that language is adapted to the medium and context where it is used, and that the kind of written English used in online chatrooms is no exception to this. On Internet Relay Chat (IRC), various restrictions in the form of temporal, spatial and social ones function as significant confining conditions that regulate and determine the form and size of communication in different ways. Most of the language features peculiar to IRC are used in order to save time and space. However, some features are used in order to reflect spoken language, and to demonstrate mastery of the social conventions of IRC. Besides, some language features can be used for several of these purposes.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Communication and technology, such as the Internet, have influenced our lives enormously; to the extent that even the way we communicate has become very different. More and more people from all over the world are using the Internet, allowing a faster as well as more efficient way of communicating. As most of us may have noticed, computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the form of real-time chatrooms makes us write in certain ways in which we would not ordinarily write. This, in turn, is a consequence of the limited time we have available to get our message across due to the fact that the communication takes place in real-time, and very often is almost simultaneous. In order to adapt the language to the circumstances of real-time online chatting, the language, inevitably, becomes simplified in various ways; otherwise, it would take too long for us to get our message across, and consequently our chat-mate(s) will be tired of waiting. So, the new technology brings new opportunities for the language, and, as a result, I am interested in what characterizes such a simplified language being used when chatting online.

1.2 Aim and Scope

The aim of this study is to discern and examine the (linguistic) features that are peculiar to the kind of written English used in online chatrooms. Put differently, the aim of the study is to examine the linguistic variation on *one* online chat by using the following question:

- What characterizes and distinguishes the kind of written English used in online chatrooms in relation to conventional written English?

Furthermore, the aim is to try to draw some conclusions in terms of the reasons people may have for choosing certain linguistic means to express themselves when chatting online.

1.3 Material

The data used in this study have been collected from an English chatroom called “The English Room” (the chatroom is to be found on the following Internet address: http://www.icq.com/icqchat/chatroom.php?c_id=75). The chatroom is of the so-called “ICQ” type (“ICQ” is an English acronym for “I seek you”, and thus a form of IRC; i.e. a kind of real-time Internet text

messaging (chat) or synchronous conferencing), which means that the chatroom is based on the ICQ programme – a computer programme which has been made in order to enable the sending of synchronous so-called “instant messages” online. The reason for choosing this particular chatroom is that it is one of the few chatrooms in English for which no signing-up is needed, and, what is more, the chatroom is a fairly active one as well as one being easy to maneuver. Another reason for choosing this particular chatroom is that it is a so-called “open” chatroom, meaning that people can chat about (almost) whatever they want (c.f. for example a “gaming chat” in which people are only allowed to chat about themes having to do with computer games). In this way, the intention has been to not limit the people chatting in order not to get a limited set of non-conventional linguistic features peculiar to this kind of written English as a result of limitations in the chatroom itself.

The data have been collected by means of being logged in on the chatroom mentioned above for two hours’ time. It has been considered that two hours is enough time to get a good illustration of the linguistic features characteristic of the kind of written English used when chatting online. During this period of time, the messages sent on the chat have been observed and examined in the search of non-conventional linguistic features peculiar to this kind of written English with the hopes of answering the earlier-mentioned question: What characterizes and distinguishes the kind of written English used in online chatrooms in relation to conventional written English? Moreover, the chatroom logs have been printed and examined again in order not to overlook anything.

1.4 Method

The method used in this study is qualitative because conclusions have been drawn regarding the reasons people may have for choosing certain linguistic means to express themselves when chatting. Additionally, the findings have been compared to the ones in the chapter on previous research. In my analysis of the data from the chatroom, I am using an adapted version of Ylva Hård af Segerstad’s (2002:233-234) taxonomy as to what to look for when examining the linguistic features characteristic of the kind of written English used when chatting online (see more under 2.2). In the presentation of examples from the data from the chatroom, it is a deliberate choice not to reveal the screen-names (“nicknames”) of the people chatting, this because they do not play a significant role in the study, and, what is more, because a choice to disclose the names would be unethical. Rather than disclosing the names, *NN* is inserted instead of them. Besides, all the examples are *not* reported as a result of lack of space.

1.5 Design of the Present Study

In *Chapter 1*, a brief background is provided regarding the selection of study area. Moreover, in this chapter, the aim and scope of the study is stated in more detail, and the collection of data and material is described together with the method of the study. In *Chapter 2*, a review of the theoretical basis for the study and relevant previous research is presented; thus, in this chapter, one gets to know about Internet Relay Chat as a medium for communication, its discursive properties and conditions as well as some reasons people might have for choosing certain linguistic means to express themselves when chatting on the Internet. In *Chapter 3*, the results of the analysis of the data from the chatroom are presented using direct examples from the chatroom. Finally, in *Chapter 4*, a summary and some conclusions are presented – many of them with the support of what is said in Chapter 2.

2. Previous Research

2.1 What is Internet Relay Chat (IRC)?

According to Wikipedia, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is “a form of real-time Internet text messaging (chat) or synchronous conferencing” (2010-03-08). In addition, it is made clear that IRC is “mainly designed for group communication in discussion forums, called channels, but also allows one-to-one communication via private message as well as chat” (ibid.). As Werry explains (1996:47-63), users, on IRC, take part in simultaneous multi-party interactions mediated on so-called “channels” that are upheld by means of server-networks. When users connect to a server on a specific IRC network by means of a (client) programme and “join” a channel (i.e. choose their screen-name (“nickname”) and “enter” a channel), they instantly begin to see chat messages from other IRC-users on their computer screens (1996:49f). As chat messages are written and added, the text (or page) on the computer screen rolls upward, making it possible for users to see new messages as they come.

The sending of chat messages to the channel is such that users type the message in a so-called “buffer window” after which they hit the return key. Moreover, as Werry indicates (1996:50), IRC has sections on “netiquette” (i.e. “rules” for acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour), and, consequently, irregularities (e.g. swearing, insulting, shouting etc.) may result in bans and warnings by the “chat monitors/moderators”. As Crystal explains, “people who fail to conform to these guidelines risk sanctions, such as explicit correction by other participants/.../or, the ultimate penalty, being excluded from the group/.../or having an account cancelled by the offender’s service-provider” (2001:71). Hård af Segerstad illustrates the communicative situation of IRC as follows:

“The communicative situation could be compared to that of a cocktail party, albeit a virtual one. Users type their written contributions to the conversation, which are displayed in the chat window to everybody that is logged in. Similar to a cocktail party, one may overhear, or rather ‘oversee’, other conversations going on in the chatroom. As in a real-word situation it is difficult to take part actively in more than two conversations simultaneously” (2002:59).

2.2 Some Discursive Properties of Internet Chat

As Einarsson highlights (2004:294), chat language is very similar to spoken language, because when one is chatting he or she is simultaneous with the dialogue’s “here” and “now”. Moreover, those chatting make use of quick replies, feedback, exclamations, exhortations and ques-

tions – just like they do in spoken language. Additionally, as Adelswärd puts forward (2001: 41), chatting is more like talking on the phone than writing letters, this despite the fact that you use the keyboard and, thus, actually write. The fact that linguistic features associated with oral communication are frequent in real-time chat has been commented on by: Danet et al (1997); Crystal (2001) etc.).

Paolillo (1999) states, “if we are to understand truly how the Internet might shape our language, then it is essential that we seek to understand how different varieties of language are used on the Internet”. According to Hård af Segerstad, it is anticipated that “language use is adapted creatively and is well suited the particular modes of CMC” (2002:1) including Internet chatrooms. Furthermore, she clarifies that “three interdependent variables influence language use: synchronicity, means of expression and situation” (2002:1). Thus, Hård af Segerstad points out that language use changes in relation to these (three) variables. In view of *synchronicity*, she explains that the production and perception in web chat is distributed in space as well as time pressure (2002:57). Furthermore, regarding *means of expression*, she describes that web chat is dialogical – two-way – and interactive. What is more, on *situation*, Hård af Segerstad stresses that web chat takes place in an immediate context between people who are unknown to one another (ibid.). Additionally, Hård af Segerstad (2002:233-234) provides a taxonomy of linguistic features characteristic of CMC (see “Table 1” on the next page).

In the case of addressivity on Internet chat, Werry makes clear that “it has become entirely conventional for speakers [on Internet chat] to indicate the intended addressee by putting that person’s name at the start of an utterance” (1996:52) [e.g.: <John> Meagan: *how are u?*]; adding that “such a high degree of addressivity is imperative on IRC, since the addressee’s attention must be recaptured anew with each utterance” (ibid.). Regarding abbreviations, Werry brings to light following:

“On IRC, a combination of spatial, temporal and social constraints act as important limiting conditions that influence the size and shape of communication in roughly analogous ways. Factors such as screen size, average typing speed, minimal response times, competition for attention, channel population and the pace of channel conversation all contribute to the emergence of certain characteristic properties. Some of the most obvious of these properties involve a tendency toward brevity which manifests itself in speaking turns of very short length, various forms of abbreviations, and the use of stored linguistic formulas” (1996:53).

Table 1: Linguistic Features Characteristic of CMC, Hård af Segerstad (2002:233-234), adapted version.

Category	Feature
<p>1. Space, case, punctuation and spelling</p> <p><i>i. Space</i></p> <p><i>ii. Case</i></p> <p><i>iii. Spelling and punctuation</i></p>	<p><i>a. Omitting blank space between words</i></p> <p><i>b. Omitting punctuation</i></p> <p><i>c. Unconventional punctuation</i></p> <p><i>a. All lower-case</i></p> <p><i>b. All capitals</i></p> <p><i>c. Mix of lower-case and capitals</i></p> <p><i>a. Unconventional, spoken-like spelling</i></p> <p><i>b. Typos</i></p> <p><i>c. Repetition of letters</i></p> <p><i>d. Repetition of words</i></p> <p><i>e. Consonant writing</i></p>
<p>2. Grammatical features</p> <p><i>i. Reduced sentences</i></p> <p><i>ii. Word order</i></p>	<p><i>a. Subject pronoun</i></p> <p><i>b. Verb phrase</i></p> <p><i>c. Preposition or possessive pronoun</i></p> <p><i>d. Exchange long words for shorter</i></p> <p><i>a. Inspiration from other languages than English (word order, prepositions)</i></p>
<p>3. Logotypes</p> <p><i>i. ASCII characters</i></p>	<p><i>a. Emoticons</i></p> <p><i>b. Asterisks</i></p> <p><i>c. Symbols replacing word</i></p> <p><i>d. Addressivity marker</i></p>
<p>4. Lexical features and abbreviations</p> <p><i>i. Lexical features</i></p> <p><i>ii. Abbreviations</i></p>	<p><i>a. Colloquial lexicon (dialect, expletives)</i></p> <p><i>b. OCM features from spoken language</i></p> <p><i>a. Conventional abbreviations</i></p> <p><i>b. Unconventional abbreviations</i></p>

Moreover, Werry (1996:56-61) explains that “a complex set of orthographic strategies designed to compensate for the lack of intonation and paralinguistic cues that interactive written discourse imposes on its users” is made use of in Internet chat. For example, he clarifies that reduplicated letters are “used to represent drawn-out or expressive intonation” (ibid.) [e.g.: <John> *oh nooooo!!!!*], and that punctuation is, also, used “to create the effects of spoken delivery. Thus periods and hyphens are employed to create pauses and to indicate tempo” (ibid.) [e.g.: <John> *what an interesting idea...let's do it!!!*]. What is more, Werry continues, “the IRC community also employs a set of codes and conventions whereby words and visual images are used to symbolize gestural qualities of face-to-face communication” (1996:59). He spells out that the convention for doing this is “to precede or enclose the dramatized action in asterisks in a manner that resembles stage directions” (ibid.) [e.g.: <John> *hello Cinderella *shakes hand**].

Regarding punctuation in Internet chat, Crystal clarifies that “punctuation tends to be minimalist in most situations, and completely absent in some e-mails and chat exchanges” (2001: 89); adding that “some do not use it at all, either as a consequence of typing speed, or through not realizing that ambiguity can be one of the consequences” (ibid.). In addition, he continues, “unusual combinations of punctuation marks can occur, such as (to express pause) ellipsis dots (...) in any number, repeated hyphens (---), or the repeated use of comas (,,,)”, adding that “emphasis and attitude can result in exaggerated or random use of punctuation, such as !!!!!!! or £\$£\$%! (ibid.). Besides, Crystal makes clear that “some odd combinations of punctuation marks can appear at the end of a sentence” (ibid.).

In terms of case, Crystal puts forward that there is “a strong tendency to use lower-case everywhere” (2001:87). In consequence, “the ‘save the keystroke’ principle is widely found in e-mails, chatgroups, and virtual worlds, where whole sentences can be produced without capitals” (ibid.). Likewise, he highlights that “messages wholly in capitals are considered to be ‘shouting’, and usually avoided” (ibid.).

2.3 Standard English as the Norm

As Thomas (in Wareing et al. 2004:174) makes clear, “Standard English (whether British English, American English, etc.) is the dialect of institutions such as government and the law; it is the dialect of literacy and education; it is the dialect taught as ‘English’ to foreign learners; and it is the dialect of the higher social classes”. Furthermore, she explains that “part of the ideology of Standard English is that it is the ‘correct’ form of the language and that other varieties

are ‘incorrect’” (ibid.); thus making clear that “some well-established English usages which don’t happen to belong to the standard, such as multiple negation and the use of ‘ain’t’ as in *I ain’t got none*, are therefore stigmatised” (ibid.). What is more, Thomas makes clear that “there are many grammar books, dictionaries and guides to English usage which describe and give advice on the Standard English that appears in writing” (in Wareing et al. 2004:180). According to Nationalencyklopedin (The Swedish National Encyclopaedia), normative grammar is defined as follows: grammar that provides the rules for the standard language, especially in those instances in which this in its written form differs from spoken language with its dialects, mundane or poorly established variants (my translation).

2.4 Language and Identity

Thornborrow highlights that “one of the most fundamental ways we have of establishing our identity, and of shaping other people’s views of who we are, is through our use of language” (in Wareing et al. 2004:158). She makes clear that when we identify ourselves as belonging to certain groups or communities, it often means “adopting the linguistic conventions of that group” (ibid.). Thus:

“How you talk, along with other kinds of social codes such as how you dress or how you behave, is an important way of displaying who you are; in other words, of indicating your social identity” (in Wareing et al. 2004:158).

Moreover, Thornborrow (in Wareing et al. 2004:165) explains that we cannot always determine our social identity on our own, and that our social identity is bound up with how others recognize us. Accordingly:

“As with other kinds of social codes which people use to display membership of a social group, like dress codes, certain kinds of linguistic behaviour also signal your identity in relation to a group, as well as your position within it. Being able to show that you can use linguistic terms appropriately according to the norms associated with a particular group helps to establish your membership of it, both to other members of the group, the ingroup, and those outside it, the outgroup. Furthermore, adhering to the linguistic norms of one group may position you very clearly as showing that you do not belong to others” (in Wareing et al. 2004: 165).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Space, Case, Punctuation and Spelling

3.1.1 Omitting Blank Space between Words

In this section, examples regarding the omission of blank space between words are illustrated and discussed. This type of omission, in turn, refers to the fact that words are written together without spaces separating them. As for words being written in this way, the following examples were found in the analysis of the chat transcripts:

- (1) <NN> *watabtmee* [= *What about me?*].
- (2) <NN> *whatthefuck* [= *What the fuck.*].
- (3) <NN> *whereufrom??* [= *Where are you from?*].
- (4) <NN> *thanksalot* [= *Thanks a lot.*].
- (5) <NN> *idontcare* [= *I don't care.*].

As explained in the chapter on previous research, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is “a form of real-time Internet text messaging (chat) or synchronous conferencing” (2010-03-08). In view of synchronicity, Hård af Segerstad makes clear that the production and perception in web chat is distributed in space as well as time pressure (2002:57). Accordingly, the omission of blank space between words is probably a consequence of the space as well as time pressure in IRC. Because IRC is fast-paced, messages must be written quickly in order not to miss to reply to a post, and in order not to annoy other participants with a long wait. Therefore, to keep up with the fast pace of IRC, the blank space between words is sometimes omitted to save time and space.

3.1.2 Omitting Punctuation

In this section, examples with reference to the omission of punctuation are illustrated and discussed. This form of omission, then, refers to the fact that punctuation in the form of full stops, commas, exclamation marks, question marks etc. is missing altogether. Regarding the lack of punctuation, the following examples were, for example, found in the chatroom:

- (1) <NN> *are u stupid [= Are you stupid?].*
- (2) <NN> *ARE U CRAZY YOU SHOULD GO TO SLEEP [= ARE YOU CRAZY? YOU SHOULD GO TO SLEEP!].*
- (3) <NN> *Does anyone know I know that I dont [= Does anyone know? I know that I don't.].*
- (4) <NN> *should i know that well i didnt [= Should I know that? Well, I didn't.].*
- (5) <NN> *do u care at all i dont think so [= Do you care at all? I don't think so.].*

As for punctuation in IRC, Crystal highlights that “punctuation tends to be minimalist in most situations, and completely absent in some e-mails and chat exchanges” (2001:89). Moreover, he adds: “some do not use it at all, either as a consequence of typing speed, or through not realizing that ambiguity can be one of the consequences” (ibid.). The omission of punctuation is in all probability a result of typing speed, and, in turn, a result of the fast-paced character of IRC. In order not to lose time, punctuation is mostly completely absent in most exchanges. However, the lack of punctuation sometimes leads to increased waiting time due to ambiguous utterances that require clarification.

3.1.3 Unconventional Punctuation

In this section, examples in terms of unconventional punctuation are illustrated and discussed. The term “unconventional punctuation” refers to the fact that punctuation marks are used in an irregular and alternative way; for example, several punctuation marks in a row as well as a mixture of punctuation marks following one another. In light of this, these examples were, for instance, found in the analysis of the chatroom conversations:

- (1) <NN> *Anyone here?????????? [= Anyone here?].*
- (2) <NN> *are u nuts???!!!! [= Are you nuts?].*
- (3) <NN> *ok,,,hmmm,,,,,can i call u back???* [= *Ok. Hmmm. Can I call you back?*].
- (4) <NN> *idonno..... [= I don't know.].*
- (5) <NN> *he should come here,,,,tomorrow* [= *He should come here; tomorrow.*].

Regarding this type of irregular punctuation, Crystal puts forward that “unusual combinations of punctuation marks can occur, such as (to express pause) ellipsis dots (...) in any number, repeated hyphens (---), or the repeated use of comas (,,,)”; explaining that “emphasis and attitude can result in exaggerated or random use of punctuation, such as !!!!! or £\$\$%!” (2001:89). What is more, Crystal makes clear that “some odd combinations of punctuation marks can appear at the end of a sentence” (ibid.). In (1) above, there is an example of an exaggerated use of punctuation as to indicate emphasis (i.e. *Is there anyone here?*). In (2), the mixture of several question marks and exclamation marks also signifies emphasis the same way as in (1). In (3), (4) and (5), the repeated use of commas and full stops respectively expresses a pause as in spoken interaction. As Werry explains, punctuation is used “to create the effects of spoken delivery. Thus periods and hyphens are employed to create pauses and to indicate tempo” (1996: 56-61).

3.1.4 All Lower-Case

In this section, examples with reference to the use of all lower-case letters are illustrated and discussed. The use of non-capitalized letters only, accordingly, refers to the fact that uppercase is missing completely. In terms of this usage, the next examples were, for example, found in the analysis of the chatroom conversations:

- (1) <NN> *sure,,why not where are u from im from italy [= Sure. Why not? Where are you from? I'm from Italy.].*
- (2) <NN> *i think we've met here before or??? [= I think we've met here before, or?].*
- (3) <NN> *i would but i didnt know [= I would, but I didn't know.].*
- (4) <NN> *are u from here?? [= Are you from here?].*
- (5) <NN> *hi meagan ☺ [= Hi Meagan ☺].*

When it comes to case, Crystal clarifies that there is “a strong tendency to use lower-case everywhere” (2001:87). As a result, “the ‘save the keystroke’ principle is widely found in e-mails, chatgroups, and virtual worlds, where whole sentences can be produced without capitals” (ibid.). The frequent use of lower-case in IRC is most likely a consequence of the fast-paced character of IRC. By avoiding capital letters the “save the keystroke” principle is in use,

resulting in increased time saving. Unlike the lack of punctuation, the use of only lower-case letters rarely causes ambiguity.

3.1.5 All Capitals

In this section, examples having to do with the use of all capitals are illustrated and discussed. The use of uppercase only, subsequently, refers to the fact that lower-case is missing. With regard to this usage, the following examples were found in the chatroom conversations:

- (1) <NN> *AND YOUR MOTHER TOO!*
- (2) <NN> *HELLLOOO!* [= *HELLO!*].
- (3) <NN> *IM BARBIEEEE!!!!* [= *I'M BARBIE!*].
- (4) <NN> *I AM HERE NOW!!!* [= *I AM HERE NOW!*].
- (5) <NN> *OKKKKKK* [= *OK.*].

With reference to the use of upper-case letters only, Crystal underscores that “messages wholly in capitals are considered to be ‘shouting’, and usually avoided” (2001:87). Werry (1996:50) explains that IRC has sections on “netiquette” (i.e. “rules” for acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour), and, consequently, irregularities (e.g. swearing, insulting, shouting etc.) may result in bans and warnings by the “chat monitors/moderators”. As noticed in the chatroom, messages written in all capitals are considered to be shouting. Furthermore, the use of all capitals is sanctioned in various ways; e.g. by means of warnings and/or cancelled accounts.

3.1.6 Mix of Lower-Case and Capitals

In this section, examples in connection with the mixing of lower-case and capitals are illustrated and discussed. The mixing of these two types, in turn, refers to the fact that lower-case and capitals can co-occur in an unconventional as well as irregular way. In consideration of this way of mixing, these examples were found in the analysis of the chatroom transcripts:

- (1) <NN> *I like MeAgAn a lot!!!!* [= *I like Meagan a lot!*].
- (2) <NN> *HelloOoOoOoOo* [= *Hello.*].
- (3) <NN> *anyone from GrEeEeEeCe????!!!!* [= *Anyone from Greece?*].
- (4) <NN> ****HI EveryBody**** [= *Hi everybody.*].
- (5) <NN> *i am so CoOoOooL* [= *I am so cool.*].

Thornborrow makes clear that “one of the most fundamental ways we have of establishing our identity, and of shaping other people’s views of who we are, is through our use of language” (2004:158). Moreover, she (2004:165) explains that we cannot always determine our social identity on our own, and that our social identity is bound up with how others recognize us. So, by being innovative and “play around” with language as in the examples above, one helps to establish his or her social and linguistic identity and thus status. Thus showing that you are able to attract audiences to your utterances by means of being skilled to “play around” with language illustrates mastery of the medium in question, which, in turn, helps to establish your social as well as linguistic identity, indicating your membership of the “in-group” (i.e. the other members of the group in question; in this particular case: people who chat online) and your relation to the ones outside it (i.e. the “out-group”).

3.1.7 Unconventional, Spoken-Like Spelling

In this section, examples connected to unconventional and spoken-like spelling are illustrated and discussed. The notion of “unconventional and spoken-like spelling” refers to the fact that words are written in an alternative way that reflects the way we talk. As for this type of spelling, these examples were found:

- (1) <NN> *whos tired???? Im not ☺* [= *Who’s tired? I’m not ☺*].
- (2) <NN> *wanna see me live???????* [= *Want to see me live?*].
- (3) <NN> *gotta go now byeeee* [= *Got to go now. Bye.*].
- (4) <NN> *I ain’t been here before how does this shit work??* [= *I have not been here before. How does this shit work?*].
- (5) <NN> [ø] *donno* [= *I don’t know.*].

With reference to spelling that reflects the way we talk, Einarsson (2004:294) puts forward that chat language is very similar to spoken language; because when one is chatting he or she is simultaneous with the dialogue's "here" and "now". What is more, Adelswärd (2001:41) highlights that chatting is more like talking on the phone than writing letters, this despite the fact that you use the keyboard and, thus, actually write. The reasons why people, when chatting online, write in a way that reflects spoken language and speech may be many. Firstly, writing the way we talk is sometimes timesaving. For example, in (1), (2), (3) and (5) above, it is easier and more timesaving to write: *whos tired?* than *who is tired?*; *wanna see me live?* than *do you want to see me live?*; *gotta go now* than *got to go now* and, finally, *donno* than *I don't know*. Secondly, as in (4) above, writing the way we talk can sometimes detect our membership of certain social groups, our ethnicity as well as our level of education. Accordingly there is a difference between: *I ain't been here before how does this shit work?* and *I have not been here before. How does this thing work?*

3.1.8 Typos

In this section, examples of supposed typos are illustrated and discussed. The concept of "typos" refers to the fact that some words have been misspelled as a consequence of accidental keystrokes. In relation to this, the following examples were, for example, found in the conversations in the chatroom:

- (1) <NN> are u gping to the concert on friday???? [= *Are you going to the concert on Friday?*].
- (2) <NN> u look like brutney spears ;) [= *You look like Britney Spears ;)*].
- (3) <NN> how ar eyou???? [= *How are you?*].
- (4) <NN> where do u libe the states?? [= *Where do you live? The States?*].
- (5) <NN> I dobt knooooow hahaha ☺ [= *I don't know, hahaha ☺*].

In respect of accidental keystrokes resulting in typos, they are most likely a consequence of the rapid pace on IRC. In order not to miss to reply to a post messages are written fast and often with no concern regarding spelling. Additionally, given that many people do not know each other on the chat, they do not seem to care about the spelling of words because they do not

have to feel ashamed since they know for themselves that the risk is low for them to encounter any of the other participants in real life.

3.1.9 Repetition of Letters

In this section, examples with reference to the repetition of letters are illustrated and discussed. The reduplication of letters, noticeably, refers to the fact that letters are repeated, sometimes in long strings. In light of this, the examples that follow were, for instance, found in the analysis of the conversation transcripts:

- (1) <NN> *noooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!* [= *No!*].
- (2) <NN> *im from the usaaaaaaaaa* [= *I'm from the USA.*].
- (3) <NN> *bye bye be happyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy* [= *Bye-bye. Be happy.*].
- (4) <NN> *lollllllll* [= *LOL/LoL*].
- (5) <NN> *I love britneey speeeears yeeeah!!!!* [= *I love Britney Spears, yeah!*].

In terms of one and the same letter being repeated several times in a row, Werry (1996:56-61) explains that “a complex set of orthographic strategies designed to compensate for the lack of intonation and paralinguistic cues that interactive written discourse imposes on its users” is made use of in Internet chat. For instance, he makes clear that reduplicated letters are “used to represent drawn-out or expressive intonation” (ibid.). As seen in examples (1), (2), (3) and (5) above, reduplicated letters are used to reflect the intonation of spoken language. However, in (4) the repetition of letters is used to indicate emphasis; i.e. that something is extremely funny in this particular case. In spite of the fact that examples (1), (2), (3) and (5) above also indicate emphasis, this becomes particularly evident in (4).

3.1.10 Repetition of Words

In this section, examples regarding the repetition of words are illustrated and discussed. The reduplication of words, simply put, refers to the fact that words are repeated, sometimes directly after each other. Considering this form of repetition, the following examples were found in the analysis of the chatroom conversations:

- (1) <NN> *I love you you you you you.....* [= *I love you (!)*].
- (2) <NN> *justin timberlake justin timberlake justin timberlake* [= *Justin Timberlake.*].
- (3) <NN>>> NN *wow wow wow wow ure hoootttt ☺* [= *Wow! You're hot ☺*].
- (4) <NN> *yes yes yes i woooooon!!!! hahahaha* [= *Yes! I won! Haha.*].
- (5) <NN> *no no no plzzzz* [= *No. Please.*].

With reference to the one and the same word being repeated several times in a row, word repetition, like the repetition of letters, helps to highlight emphasis. Consequently, in all the examples above the repetition of words is used in order to put emphasis on something. Using this way of emphasizing something is also quite common in spoken language, e.g. when one, for example, says: *Well, well, well, would you look at that?* For example, in view of the above examples, *yes yes yes i woooooon!!!!* is more accentuated than *Yes, I won!*, and, in turn, *no no no plzzzz* is more accentuated than *No, please!*

3.1.11 Consonant Writing

In this section, examples with reference to consonant writing are illustrated and discussed. The term “consonant writing” refers to the fact that some words are written by means of using consonants only; i.e. the vowels are left out. When it comes to the use of consonants only, these examples were found in the conversations in the chatroom:

- (1) <NN>>> NN *you can sck my dck* [= *You can suck my dick.*].
- (2) <NN> *fck your momma evrbd!!!!!!!!* [= *Fuck your mother everybody.*].
- (3) <NN> *dont be a C-SCKER* [= *Don't be a cocksucker.*].
- (4) <NN> *im a badass mthrfckr* [= *I'm a badass motherfucker.*].
- (5) <NN> *wheres that btch??* [= *Where's that bitch?*].

As mentioned before, Werry (1996:50) makes clear that IRC has sections on “netiquette” (i.e. “rules” for acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour), and, consequently, irregularities (e.g. swearing, insulting, shouting etc.) may result in bans and warnings by the “chat monitors/moderators”. Furthermore, Crystal puts forward the following: “People who fail to con-

form to these guidelines risk sanctions, such as explicit correction by other participants/.../or, the ultimate penalty, being excluded from the group/.../or having an account cancelled by the offender's service-provider" (2001:71). In light of this, consonant writing, for the most part, is a consequence of the fact that people avoid being accused of non-acceptable behaviour such as swearing, insulting etc. by means of attempts to make such behaviour difficult to notice. For example, in the examples above all negatively charged words are written without vowels. This, in all likelihood, is an attempt to get away with insults and suchlike without risking sanctions. However, the omission of vowels can sometimes contribute to saving time as in (2) above, where the word *everybody* is written as *evrbd*.

3.2 Grammatical Features

3.2.1 Subject Pronoun

In this section, examples having to do with reduced sentences in terms of subject/pronoun are illustrated and discussed. A sentence that is reduced in this way, subsequently, refers to the fact that either the subject or a pronoun is omitted in the sentence. In light of sentences that are reduced in this way, these examples were, for example, found in the analysis of the chatroom transcripts:

- (1) <NN> [∅] *must go now,,, [∅] tired* [= *I must go now; I'm tired.*].
- (2) <NN> *sorry im slow... [∅] not feeling good today* [= *Sorry I'm slow; I'm not feeling good today.*].
- (3) <NN> [∅] *havent made up my mund yet* [= *I haven't made up my mind yet.*].
- (4) <NN> [∅] *donno* [= *I don't know.*].
- (5) <NN> [∅] *never ever heard of it!* [= *I have never ever heard of it.*].

According to Hård af Segerstad, it is anticipated that "language use is adapted creatively and is well suited the particular modes of CMC" (2002:1) including Internet chatrooms. Accordingly, reduced sentences in terms of the subject/pronoun are most probably a result of the fast tempo of IRC. By not including the subject/pronoun in sentences a lot of time is saved, and, what is more, the reduced sentences seem to be equally understandable as those that are *not* reduced in terms of the subject/pronoun.

3.2.2 Verb Phrase

In this section, examples in connection with reduced sentences in terms of verb phrases are illustrated and discussed. A sentence that is reduced in this way, in turn, refers to the fact that the verb phrase (i.e. a phrase headed by a verb) is omitted in the sentence. With reference to sentences that are reduced in this way, the following examples were, for example, found in the chatroom conversations:

- (1) <NN> ***[\emptyset] *anyone* [\emptyset]????*** [= *Does anyone want to chat?*].
- (2) <NN> [\emptyset] *date?* ;) [= *Would you like to go on a date?* ;)].
- (3) <NN> [\emptyset] *IRL*??? [= *Does anyone want to meet in real life?*].
- (4) <NN> [\emptyset] *wanna chat*????? [= *Do you want to chat?*].
- (5) <NN> [\emptyset] *weirdo* :P [= *You are a weirdo.*].

Regarding reduced sentences in terms of verb phrases, the omission of verb phrases, like the omission of subject/pronoun, is most likely a consequence of the fast-paced character of IRC. Thus by leaving out verb phrases, the “save the keystroke” principle is put into use, and consequently, lots of time is saved. As with reduced sentences in terms of the subject/pronoun, reduced sentences in terms of verb phrases are evenly understandable as those that are *not* reduced in this way.

3.2.3 Preposition or Possessive Pronoun

In this section, examples of reduced sentences in terms of prepositions or possessive pronouns are illustrated and discussed. A sentence that is reduced in this way, thus, refers to the fact that the preposition or the possessive pronoun is omitted in the sentence. In relation to this, the examples that follow were found in the analysis of the chatroom conversations:

- (1) <NN> [\emptyset] *california* [= *I live in California.*].
- (2) <NN> [\emptyset] *lakers game*??? [= *Do you want to go to the Lakers game?*].
- (3) <NN> [\emptyset] *Chicago with my dad* [= *I live in Chicago with my dad.*].

When it comes to sentences that are reduced in this way, it seems to be the case that prepositions and/or possessive pronouns are missed out, also, in order to save keystrokes and thus time for the same reasons as mentioned earlier.

3.2.4 Exchange Long Words for Shorter

In this section, examples on the exchange of long words for shorter are illustrated and discussed. This exchange, simply put, refers to the fact that a short word with the same meaning as a longer word is written instead of the longer word. In the case of exchanging words in this way, these examples were found in the analysis of the chatroom transcripts:

- (1) <NN> *Ive quit smoking ☺* [= *I've abandoned/given up smoking ☺*].
- (2) <NN> *im so glad =)* [= *I'm so delighted/pleased/thankful...*].
- (3) <NN> *u are nuts* [= *You are foolish/cracked...*].
- (4) <NN> *so thats why he aint coming back???* [= *Hence/thus that's why he is not coming back?*].
- (5) <NN> *thats too stupid* [= *That's extremely/overly... stupid.*].

In terms of using short words rather than long ones the choice seems to be one of preference. The short words that are used instead of longer ones are *not* that much shorter than their longer equivalents, and thus do *not* take much less time to write, which precludes that the intention is to save time. Moreover, the short words that are used are more colloquial, which, as a whole, is more consistent with the nature of IRC.

3.2.5 Inspiration from Other Languages than English (Word Order, Prepositions)

In this section, examples regarding inspiration from other languages than English are illustrated and discussed. Inspiration from other languages than English in terms of word order or prepositions, then, refers to the assumption that a person's choice to use a certain word order or preposition is influenced by other languages than English. In light of this, these examples were found in the chatroom:

- (1) <NN> *we arrived to london at 2 oclock* [= *We arrived in London at two o'clock.*].
- (2) <NN> *that this actually works has been proven in sweden* [= *It has been proven in Sweden that this actually works.*].
- (3) <NN> *after that has it never been worse* [= *After that, it has never been worse.*].

When it comes to gaining inspiration from other languages than English on IRC, it becomes evident by looking at the examples above that IRC is an attractive medium for communication that catches the attention of people from most parts of the world. The three examples above could, for instance, be examples of inspiration from Swedish word order as well as prepositions.

3.3 Logotypes

3.3.1 Emoticons

In this section, examples in terms of the use of emoticons are illustrated and discussed. The use of emoticons, in turn, refers to the usage of textual expressions that correspond to the writer's frame of mind or facial expression. When it comes to the use of textual expressions on Internet chat, the following examples were, for example, found in the analysis of the chatroom logs:

- (1) <NN> *take care everybody ---{--@* [= *Take care everybody ---{--@* |rose|].
- (2) <NN> *ure hottt ;-)* [= *You're hot ;-)* |wink|].
- (3) <NN> *booring T_T* [= *Boring T_T* |bored/annoyed/concerned|].
- (4) <NN> *hahaha u dont know where i live :L* [= *hahaha, you don't know where I live :L* |tongue out|].
- (5) <NN> *any girls with big (◎) (◎)* [= *Any girls with big (◎) (◎)* |breasts|].
- (6) <NN> *good job broh o/\o* [= *Good job my brother o/\o* |high five|].
- (7) <NN> *u are sooo hot :)~* [= *You are so hot :)~* |slob|].
- (8) <NN> *hellloooo (` -')>* [= *Hello (` -')>* |cheers|].
- (9) <NN> *u wanna get a x_O O_x* [= *Do you want to get a x_O O_x* |knocked out|].

With reference to the use of emoticons, or so-called textual expressions, Werry explains that the IRC community “employs a set of codes and conventions whereby words and visual images are used to symbolize gestural qualities of face-to-face communication” (1996:59). Since it is impossible to see each other’s facial expressions when chatting on IRC (unless one is chatting with a webcam plugged in), various strategies are made use of in order to overcome the problem; one of them being the usage of textual expressions corresponding to the writer’s frame of mind or facial expression. For example in (2) above, the textual expression [;-)] indicates a wink corresponding to what the writer is thinking, or his facial expression. In (3) above, the textual expression [T_T] signals that the writer is bored or annoyed, whereas in (4) the textual expression [:L], illustrating an outstretched tongue, indicates that the writer is exasperating. By adding such textual expressions, it becomes easier for the recipient of an utterance to understand how the utterance in question is meant to be interpreted.

However, not all textual expressions are used in order to indicate the writer’s frame of mind or facial expression. For example in (1) above, the textual expression [---{--@], illustrating a rose, is used as a replacement for the word “rose”. The usage of textual expressions in this way helps to establish one’s social and linguistic identity and thus status. Accordingly, showing that you are able to attract audiences to your utterances by means of being skilled to think up innovative textual expressions illustrates mastery of the medium in question, which, in turn, helps to establish your social as well as linguistic identity, indicating your membership of the “in-group” (i.e. the other members of the group in question; in this particular case: people who chat online) and your relation to the ones outside it (i.e. the “out-group”). Moreover, the usage of textual expressions as in (9) above – i.e. [x_O O_x] – is a way to threaten another person and get away with it. Since the chat monitors/moderators do not always know the meaning of all the textual expressions used on the chat, writing [x_O O_x] rather than *Do you want to get knocked out?* minimizes the risk of getting caught.

3.3.2 Asterisks

In this section, examples with regard to the use of asterisks are illustrated and discussed. The use of so-called asterisks, accordingly, refers to the usage of (*) to inclose a word or an utterance. In relation to this, these examples were found in the conversations in the chatroom:

- (1) <NN> *alo *takes a look at everyone** [= *Hello *takes a look at everyone**].
- (2) <NN>>> NN *how are u beautiful lady *kisses hand** [= *How are you my beautiful lady? *kisses hand**].
- (3) <NN> *i dont give a fuck *pissed** [= *I don't give a fuck *pissed**].
- (4) <NN> *all boys at my place tonight *flirting** [= *All boys at my place tonight *flirting**].
- (5) <NN> *wanna feel you *ahhhh** [= *I want to feel you *ahhhh**].

As for the use of (*) to inclose a word or an utterance, Werry clarifies that one way to symbolize gestural qualities of face-to-face communication is “to precede or enclose the dramatized action in asterisks in a manner that resembles stage directions” (1996:59). When we look at the examples above we see that in examples (1), (2) and (4) above, the asterisks are used in order to indicate gestural qualities of face-to-face communication. On the other hand, not all asterisks are used for this reason. In examples (3) and (5) above, the asterisks reproduce an emotion and a speech sound respectively.

3.3.3 Symbol Replacing Word

In this section, examples having to do with the use of symbols as a replacement for words are illustrated and discussed. The use of symbols rather than words simply refers to cases in which a symbol is used instead of a word in a manner where either of them could have been used. With reference to symbols replacing words, the following examples were found in the analysis of the conversations:

- (1) <NN> *me & u forever and ever!!!!* [= *Me and you forever and ever!*].
- (2) <NN> *do u have 2 or 3 siblings* [= *Do you have two or three siblings?*].
- (3) <NN> *the € sucks BIGTIME!!!!* [= *The Euro sucks, bigtime!*].
- (4) <NN> *u are such a X hahahaha :P* [= *You are such a X [?] hahahaha.*].
- (5) <NN> *wanna sck on my X and play with my Y* [= *Do you want to suck on my [penis?] and play with my [genitals?]*].

As mentioned earlier, Hård af Segerstad explains that the production and perception in web chat is distributed in space as well as time pressure (2002:57). Therefore the use of symbols as a replacement for words is most probably a result of the space and time pressure in IRC, and thus the fast-paced character of the medium. In order to save time and keystrokes, symbols are sometimes used instead of letters and thus words. For example in (1), (2) and (3) above, it takes slightly less time to write *&* than *and*; *2 or 3* than *two or three* and, finally, *€* than *Euro*. However, the use of symbols rather than words does not always serve a timesaving intention. In (4) and (5) above, symbols are used instead of words in order not to get caught for using inappropriate language on the chat, and consequently risk sanctions, such as explicit correction by other participants/.../or, the ultimate penalty, being excluded from the group/.../or having an account cancelled by the offender's service-provider" (2001:71). By writing *X* and *Y* rather than bad words, the risk of getting caught is low.

3.3.4 Addressivity Marker

In this section, examples of so-called addressivity markers are illustrated and discussed. The concept of "addressivity markers" refers to the way in which the sender clarifies the recipient of the message by means of writing that person's name (here written as *NN*) prior to the message. Considering the use of these markers, these examples were, for example, found in the chatroom conversations:

- (1) <NN>>> NN *dont be stupid its a guy haha* [= *Don't be stupid; it's a guy haha.*].
- (2) <NN>>> NN *youre so fckin hot i could lick you so haaard* [= *You're so fucking hot that I could lick you so hard.*].
- (3) <NN>>> NN *wanna go on a date?????* [= *Do you want to go on a date?*].
- (4) <NN>>> NN *fck off!!!* [= *Fuck off!*].
- (5) <NN>>> NN *dont be a pssy!!!* [= *Don't be a pussy!*].

In the case of addressivity on IRC, Werry explains that "it has become entirely conventional for speakers to indicate the intended addressee by putting that person's name at the start of an utterance" (1996:52). Moreover, he clarifies that "such a high degree of addressivity is imperative on IRC, since the addressee's attention must be recaptured anew with each utterance"

(ibid.). As seen in the examples above, as in most other examples from the chatroom, addressivity markers are frequently made use of when turning to someone on the so-called “open channel” (i.e. the opposite to the “private room”). Since IRC is fast-paced, quite interactive and thus involves multi-party interactions, it may sometimes be difficult to see to whom an utterance is dedicated. For this reason it becomes important, for example by using addressivity markers, to clearly highlight at whom a message is intended. Because the messages on the screen scroll off so quickly, even with addressivity markers it is sometimes complicated to see – on time – to whom a message is dedicated.

3.4 Lexical Features and Abbreviations

3.4.1 Colloquial Lexicon (Dialect, Expletives)

In this section, examples regarding the use of colloquial lexicon in terms of dialect and expletives are illustrated and discussed. The use of colloquial lexicon, then, refers to the usage of everyday, dialectal expressions as well as various “fillers”. In light of this, these examples were found in the analysis:

- (1) <NN> *aint you* [= *Are you not?*].
- (2) <NN> *the most stupidest thing i've ever seen!!!* [= *The most stupid/stupidest thing I've ever seen!*].
- (3) <NN> *i [ø] been waiting for hours where are u* [= *I have been waiting for hours! Where are you?*].
- (4) <NN> *i dont got time for this shit* [= *I don't have time for this shit.*].
- (5) <NN> *it dont seem like a holiday to me* [= *It doesn't seem like a holiday to me.*].

As put forward by Adelswärd (2001:41), chatting is more like talking on the phone than writing letters, this despite the fact that you use the keyboard and, thus, actually write. By means of looking at the examples above, it becomes apparent that the language used in IRC is very often similar to that used in everyday conversation. With reference to the examples above, *ain't*, *most stupidest*, *I been waiting*, *I don't got time* and *it don't seem* are all rather colloquial expressions. The use of a colloquial lexicon is probably a consequence of the laid-back nature as well as conversational style on IRC. In addition, some colloquial expressions – such as *ain't*

you, I been waiting, I don't got time and it don't seem – might indicate the writers' membership of certain social groups, ethnicity as well as educational level. Such colloquial expressions, then, help establishing our identity, and of determining other people's views of who we are.

3.4.2 OCM Features from Spoken Language

In this section, examples regarding OCM features from spoken language are illustrated and discussed. The concept of “OCM features from spoken language” refers to features that are peculiar to spoken language (e.g. long pronunciation, “fillers” whilst we think, pauses etc.). In relation to this, the following examples were found in the analysis of the chatroom conversations:

- (1) <NN> *kentucky *errr* never been there* [= *Kentucky, I have never been there.*].
- (2) <NN> *eeeeeeeeehhmm allright????* [= *Allright?*].

The examples above further show that the language used in IRC makes efforts to resemble spoken language. In (1) above, a so-called “filler” in the form of an *errr* signals that the writer is thinking, just like in spoken language. In (2) above, in turn, the drawn-out or expressive spelling of *eeeeeeeeehhmm* resembles the intonation that could have been the case in speech.

3.4.3 Conventional Abbreviations

In this section, examples in terms of conventional abbreviations are illustrated and discussed. Conventional abbreviations refer to abbreviations that are agreed, or generally accepted, in Standard English. When it comes to the use of these abbreviations, the following examples were found in the analysis of the conversations:

- (1) <NN> *almost like u were born B.C.* [= Before Christ] [= *Almost like you were born B.C.*].
- (2) <NN> *i understand everything exc.* [= except] *the last part* [= *I understand everything exc. the last part.*].
- (3) <NN> *thats Gt.* [= great] [= *That's Gt.*].

(4) <NN> *Im mod.* [= modern] *hahaha* [= *I'm mod. hahaha.*].

(5) <NN> *very occas.* [= occasionally] [= *I do it very occas.*].

Werry (1996:53) makes clear that on IRC, a mixture of various constraints such as temporal, spatial and social ones function as important restrictive conditions that control the size and form of the communication taking place there. Furthermore, he adds that this manifests itself in the form of a variety of abbreviations that are made use of on IRC (ibid.). Accordingly, like in most contexts, abbreviations are used in order to save time and space. In all of the examples above, the abbreviations take up less space, while also taking slightly less time to write than their non-abbreviated counterparts.

3.4.4 Unconventional Abbreviations

In this section, examples on unconventional abbreviations are illustrated and discussed. Unconventional abbreviations refer to abbreviations that are *not* agreed, or generally accepted, in Standard English. As for the use of these abbreviations, these examples were, for instance, found in the analysis of the conversations:

(1) <NN> *just wanna 10Q* [= thank you] [= *I just want to thank you.*].

(2) <NN> *wanna meet @TEOTD?* [= at the end of the day] [= *Do you want to meet at the end of the day?*].

(3) <NN> *i have a ?4U* [= question for you] [= *I have a question for you.*].

(4) <NN> *me and u 4EVER* [= forever] [= *Me and you forever.*].

(5) <NN> *im back 2MORO* [= tomorrow] [= *I'm back tomorrow.*].

As regards the use of unconventional abbreviations, these are used for the same reason as conventional ones. Yet, unconventional abbreviations also have another function. Unlike most conventional abbreviations, unconventional abbreviations are fairly innovative. Consequently, showing that one is able to use and think up innovative abbreviations helps to establish his or her social and linguistic identity and thus status on the chat.

4. Summary and Conclusion

The kind of written English used in online chatrooms differs from conventional written English in various ways. Language is adapted to the medium and context where it is used, and the kind of written English used in online chatrooms is no exception to this. On IRC, various restrictions in the form of temporal, spatial and social ones function as significant confining conditions that regulate and determine the form and size of communication in different ways.

As a consequence of the temporal and spatial aspect, examples are found of: (1) the omission of blank space between words; (2) the omission of punctuation; (3) the use of all lower-case letters; (4) supposed typos; (5) reduced sentences in terms of subject/pronoun; (6) reduced sentences in terms of verb phrases; (7) reduced sentences in terms of prepositions or possessive pronouns; (8) the use of symbols as a replacement for words, and (9) conventional abbreviations.

As a result of the social aspect, examples are found of: (10) unconventional punctuation; (11) the use of all capitals; (12) the mixing of lower-case and capitals; (13) unconventional and spoken-like spelling; (14) the repetition of letters; (15) the repetition of words; (16) consonant writing; (17) the exchange of long words for shorter; (18) inspiration from other languages; (19) the use of emoticons; (20) the use of asterisks; (21) so-called addressivity markers; (22) colloquial lexicon in terms of dialect and expletives; (23) OCM features from spoken language, and (24) unconventional abbreviations.

Most of the examples with reference to the temporal and spatial aspect can directly be linked to a timesaving purpose only; thus (1)-(7) and (9) above are used solely for the purpose of saving time as well as space. (8) above, on the other hand, sometimes serves a timesaving intention, but can also be used in order to cover bad words as well as face-threatening acts, and thus get away with insults and suchlike without risking sanctions.

As for the examples regarding the social aspect, on IRC there are sets of social practices that are commonly accepted and followed by the participants. In light of this remark, unconventional punctuation, the repetition of words as well as the repetition of letters are used to create emphasis. What is more, unconventional punctuation, unconventional spoken-like spelling, the repetition of letters, colloquial lexicon, OCM features of spoken language and the use of emoticons are used in order to create and reflect effects of spoken language. Furthermore, the mixing of lower-case and capitals, the use of emoticons and the use of asterisks are used to illustrate mastery of the medium in question, in this particular case IRC, while, at the same time, helping to establish the social and linguistic identity and thus status of the participants.

Additionally, unconventional punctuation is used mostly for the purpose of creating and reflecting pauses and intonation patterns as in spoken interaction. In addition, writing in all capitals is commonly considered to be shouting, which quite often results in various sanctions such as warnings by the chat moderators, reprimands by other participants, cancelled Internet accounts etc. In order to avoid sanctions by the chat moderators, consonant writing, like the use of symbols as a substitute for words, is sometimes made use of in order to cover bad words as well as face-threatening acts. Another peculiarity of IRC is the so-called addressivity marker, the purpose of which is to clarify the receiver of messages. As shown, many functions – e.g. punctuation, emoticons etc. – can fulfil several different purposes. With regard to inspiration from other languages on IRC, one can tell that IRC is an extensive and frequently used medium for communication that attracts users from many countries around the world.

To make a long story short, IRC is a medium for mass communication with its own variant of written English. This variant of written English being peculiar to IRC is a consequence of the various constraints built into the medium. Moreover, this variant of written English is a necessity for communication to be fast, simple and thus adapted to the framework and constraints of the medium in question. For example in spoken language, there are a variety of signals (e.g. intonation, facial gestures etc.) that can help us understand how an utterance should be interpreted. On IRC, however, there are not many such signals, which results in language being adapted to by other means help us understand how to interpret utterances correctly.

Appendix 1

An example of an excerpt from the chatroom (2 March 2010).

NN has joined channel #english

<NN> *whatthefuck*

<NN> *hi everybody*

<NN> *you are sharmoota*

<NN> *how sad*

NN has quit (Client exited)

<NN> *are u a girl NN???*

<NN>>> *NN dont be stupid its a guy haha*

<NN> *anyone?????*

<NN> *people are so slow here*

<NN> *i dont got time for this shit*

<NN> *where is NN??*

NN has joined channel #english

<NN> *fck your momma evrbd!!!!!!*

NN has joined channel #english

NN has quit (Client exited)

<NN> *i want girl tonight*

<NN> *hi*

<NN> *any girls with big (◎) (◎)*

NN has joined channel #english

NN has quit (Client exited)

<NN> *you man you shuold take man name*

<NN> *I'ma fck u momma*

<NN> *hehehehehehhhehehe*

<NN> *sleeping*

<NN> *wake up!!!!*

NN has left channel #english : NN

<NN> *i have a ?4U*

<NN> *me?*

<NN> *its dark here*

<NN>>> NN *SHUT YOUR BIG MOUTH OK*

<NN> *byee*

NN has joined channel #english

<NN>>> NN *u are an ass*

NN has joined channel #english

NN has quit (Connection reset by peer)

NN has quit (Connection reset by peer)

<NN> *alo *takes a look at everyone**

<NN> *who cares man??*

NN has quit (Ping timeout)

<NN> *eeeeeeeeehhmm allright????*

<NN> *take care everybody ---{--@*

<NN> *the € sucks BIGTIME!!!!*

<NN> *no*

<NN> *yeah*

<NN> *who cares???*

<NN> *like i care*

<NN> *some crazy shit for sure*

<NN> *been there once*

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