GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Friend or Foe?

Netspeak in English Language Teaching

Dept of Languages and Literatures/English
Author: Einar Stavfeldt, 811004
C-level paper, 15 hec
Interdisciplinary Degree Project
Teacher Education Programme, Spring 2011
Supervisor: Dr. Pia Köhlmyr

Abstract

The aim of this study is to assess the existence of written language variations deriving from texting, computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the Internet, also known as Netspeak, in modern teaching materials as well as examine its pedagogical implications. In addition to a survey of themes and exercises in textbooks intended for English language teaching, published between 2005 and 2010, a questionnaire was sent to English teachers working in upper secondary schools, aiming to assess both attitudes to Netspeak, as well as the frequency of teaching using computer-mediated communication. The questions were open-ended, the answers were analysed and used in a discussion about the incorporation of CMC and Netspeak in English language teaching. The results indicate that the subject is not being used by teachers and the textbooks contained very few elements related to CMC and the Internet. Further, there were no findings related to Netspeak in the teaching materials and none of the respondents had used it in their teaching.

Table of contents

1. Introduction

This study relates changes in communication, deriving from contemporary technological development, to ongoing educational reform in Sweden. This first section presents an overview of the setting and topic as well as the overall aim of the study.

1.1 A communicative competence

The Swedish school system is undergoing several changes in 2011. New curricula are in the making and the education for teachers has been remodelled. Although the Swedish educational system may be viewed as a continuously evolving process, mainly due to its political ties and governing, there are still milestones when major changes are made. 2011 is a year of one of those milestones. Striving to adapt to the ever-changing trends and societal demands, the government has proposed several changes and reforms, which may be viewed in the new, unfinished syllabuses and curricula. In the syllabus for English, the concept of a versatile communicative competence is found in the overall aims of the subject. Acquiring such competence should empower students so that they are able and dare to use English in different situations, and for special purposes, according to the syllabus. Further, students should be given the necessary tools to incorporate various strategies which promotes communication when their knowledge of the language is insufficient (Skolverket, 2010). Although this communicative competence is not described in detail, it involves adapting your personal intake and output of the English language, and therefore teaching ought to take the conditions of contemporary society into consideration. One thing that has had a major impact on conditions of communication during the last ten to fifteen years is the adoption of the personal computer. This development has changed the way we use language. For better or for worse, our age involves a language change, deriving from the way we use language, which spreads across all ages and levels in society, and thus becomes a topic for linguistic research, teachers and teaching and virtually anyone who is interested in communication. However, it is debatable whether this change

is something that enriches language or infests it with abominations of incorrect words.

According to Aitchison (2001:249), change in language is something natural, inevitable and continuous. She also claims that discussing change as a disintegration of language is to forget the complexity of language change. Whether you agree with this statement or not, the end of the twentieth-century was a time for a certain technological development that allowed for a new type of communication and information distribution, the Internet. With the rapid expansion of the Internet, languages received a new arena, which paved the way for new stylistic forms and new ways of communicating. It is seemingly inevitable that this will affect the everyday language. Today, many use computers and mobile phones on a daily basis and these devices have positioned themselves as the main tool at many workplaces. In some ways, it may also become an issue of age, where the younger generations have become habituated with the new technology and the older generations may struggle to keep up.

According to a study by Findahl (2010), 85% of Swedes over the age of 16 have access to the Internet at home and half of the population are members of a social network. Computers, and e-mails in particular, are slowly replacing hand written letters and mobile phones are used as cameras and global positioning devices in addition to voice communication. The Internet has become an arena for entertainment, marketing, discussion and much more. Producing a video, taking pictures, writing texts and publishing them on a website which can be accessed by people from all over the world, is something that is possible for most people, providing that we have access to a personal computer, and the necessary programs or tools. When using these multimedia tools, we may choose various types of communication for different purposes, both synchronous and asynchronous, and ranging from video conferences to instant- and private messages (IM:s and PM:s). Further, more static publications such as web sites, chat rooms, blogs and discussion forums are communicative platforms where written language is the main communicative tool, yet pictures, figures and videos may be used as well. Even though there are national web sites, English is the main and universal

language of the Internet. One would expect this development to have a positive influence on English learning and teaching; however, some people have been sceptical toward the seemingly uncontrolled influx of new words and sentence structures. There is a concern, and a scepticism towards the lack of correctness, and the lack of control. Ream is one example of a critical voice. She claims that the lack of filtering of information makes students lose their sense of critical thinking (Shaughnessy, 2008).

That the language of teenagers becomes corrupted from exposure to fast and unedited text communication is a standpoint that some may have, and it is in this debate terms such as *Netspeak*, or *Netslang*, have emerged (Crystal, 2001:17). These terms stand for a somewhat free, fast-paced language, or corrupted form of written, speech-like synchronous text, depending on your standpoint. Abbreviations and short forms such as *lol, omg,* and *evry1* are incorporated as well as new words related to the medium, e.g *e-mail* and *e-books.* The debate of formal versus informal language may never be settled, but, even so, the Internet offers something different than earlier mediums of language distribution, for example printing and television. The Internet is at par with newspapers, television, flyers, billboards as a channel of information, and excels in the sense that it is accessible world-wide. Being an immense resource of information, communication and language exposure, it becomes a topic for teachers and contemporary teaching, and something that everyone must relate to in one way or another. In the field of English language teaching, ELT, educators are debating and probing the computer medium to see in what ways it may be used in classrooms, and for language learning in general. The term *CMC, computer mediated communication*, has become a well-known term for researchers and teachers, yet the implementation of these activities in schools may vary.

This study is the product of an interest in language discourses, and above all the communicative tools that the Internet offers. Further, this interest is enhanced by the fact that this development of language and communication is in all aspects contemporary. The development has yet to reach an endpoint and I reckon we will encounter more new words and new ways of using

language in the years to come. As a teacher trainee, I see English usage on the Internet as a topical pedagogical issue that needs to be taken into account when conducting lessons and projects. However one feels about the language development, teachers ought to take the appropriate measures to ensure that students develop the awareness necessary to adapt to online environments, as well as academic and other formal environments where written communication is used.

I am somewhat biased in the sense that I think of Netspeak as a resource that should be used in teaching, if only to relate to the students' everyday use of English. I also think that Netspeak is a contemporary language revolution that may enable a hybrid between spoken and written language. Even so, I do not think that this is a topic that should be taken lightly. In my opinion, students need to learn how to distinguish different discourses when using English, whatever those discourses may be. Even though I name my current opinions as biases, I think that they are of a positive nature, since I have a personal interest in the outcome of this study.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The overall aim of this study is to assess the readiness and standpoints of teachers in relation to the development of the Internet, its communication devices, and the possible impact on language use and form. A survey of recently published teaching materials in a addition to a questionnaire sent to active teachers aim to give an indication of how the front line of English language teaching deal with the contemporary language situation.

2. Background

This section explains the main terminology used. A more in-depth explanation of the terms Netspeak and CMC is presented, as well as previous research and related pedagogical viewpoints.

2.1 Terminology

Even though this study's main focus is on language structures used on the Internet, it is important to make distinctions between the language variations and the different areas, and types, of Internet interactions. Computer mediated communication, or CMC, is the term for different types of communication using a computer, or a mobile phone, involving two or more participants. The popular forms are, e-mail, chat (video, audio, text), bulletin boards and discussion forums. These forms may be synchronous or asynchronous, or both at the same time with different participants, depending on the chosen medium. Despite having the option of being synchronous, the written CMC can not reach the same directness that face-to-face speech has, and even video conferences have a slight delay due to signal transportation, something that needs to be taken into account when assessing CMC and comparing it to traditional communication, mainly the spoken variant (Crystal, 2001:129). Baron (2001:11-12) makes a distinction between the different types of CMC, sorting them into processes and products. The processes tend to be more synchronous and have the function of a dialogue. They include sms, e-mail and IM:s, even though these types may include more than one recipient. According to Baron, the products are completed works, such as business reports and academic papers and also websites. Having multiple, or undefined recipients, these types have the monologue function.

The term *Netspeak* (Crystal, 2001:17) will be used in this study when referring to linguistic features, and also the unconventional variations of English on the Internet. Since Netspeak is currently evolving, one might include newly formed words in this as well, with the danger of having the attitude that "anything goes". However, since communication in general incorporates the notion that both sender and receiver need to understand the omitted message, newly formed words may be seen as a product of the ongoing language change. Since Netspeak has been referred to as "writing the way people talk", it would seem that it may vary immensely. It has also been named as the language of teenagers, and some state that it is a way of alienating the adult by creating various

5

language discourses (Crystal, 2001:8). Even so, there are conventions in Netspeak that have been formed during the past years and created a style of writing which may be deconstructed into primary, commonly occurring, elements. The first inflow of new words was related to the technological tools, computers and mobile phones, such as company and product names. The second stage occurred at the development of technological subgroups. Here, we find search engines and various softwares used by the hardware platforms. These called for many new words related to activities and tasks. To google something, "I am googling", is today something that most people understand, and the words even exists in dictionaries.

Further, the use of abbreviations might be the most visually apparent variation of Netspeak. While many abbreviations allow for a fast paced written conversation, many have evolved in line with the style of Netspeak. Some have more than one meaning, expressing emotion, agreement, disagreement and statements (Denis & Tagliamonte, 2008:12).

Examples:

haha (laughing)
lol 'laugh out loud'
hehe (laughing)
omg 'oh my God'
hmm (thinking)
brb 'be right back'
ttyl 'talk to you later'
btw 'by the way'
wtf 'what the fuck'
arg (frustration)
hwk 'homework'
nvm 'nevermind'
gtg 'got to go'
np 'no problem'
lmao 'laugh my ass off'
nm 'not much'

The unconventional use of small and large letters may be seen as a minor aspect of Netspeak. Though these variations pose a more aesthetic function, they are still an important indicator, as they might be seen as a product of the technological tools used. The first stages of texting and online chatting paved the way for an increased tolerance for lower case letters at the beginning of sentences. Today, this is at par with the use of capital letters in conventional writing, and in some cases even excels in usage (Crystal, 2001:24). Using upper case letters in order to enhance the importance of a word is also common. When trying to get your point across in an aggressive way, the use of upper case letters in a whole sentence imitates shouting. Below are two examples of sentence structures of Netspeak in CMC, taken from a study by Denis and Tagliamonte (2008:4-5). Here, the different aspects of Netspeak are shown as two seventeen-year-olds converse via instant messages, IM:s.

Example 1.

[2] when i drink tea
[006] ew u do!?
[006] hahahha
[2] yes b/c it tastes good
[2] with milk tea
[2] so it's sugary
[2] actually i drink tea with chocolate powder
[2] it's the best thing ever
[006] i'll try it next time...
[2] YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Example 2.

[025] lol y dont i believe u
[3] its trueeee :P well fine then
[3] what have YOU been doing
[025] i dont kno nothing really

Another aesthetic feature of Netspeak is the use of signs and emoticons, also known as

smileys. This can be seen as another effect of the visual medium of computers and the Internet. Smileys may be used to enhance or "colour" a written message, and sometimes by themselves, expressing the state or mood of the person writing. Possible to use in text messages, sms, and chat, they present the option of clarifying what you are trying to say. Below are some examples showing the more common emoticons.

:-)   Classic smile with nose
:'-)   Happy crying
:-(Classic sad with nose
|-O   Yawn
:)   Smile without nose
:-D   Laughter
>:)   Evil grin
%-(Confused
B-)   Batman/ or smiley with glasses
:-#   With braces
:-@   Scream
:(Sad without nose
:-<   Super sad
:-0   Yell/ or surprised
;-)   Winking smile with nose
`:-)   One eyebrow raised
8)   Cool
:P   Tongue sticking out (silly)
:S   Confused Smile
:-&   Tongue tied

Other visual tools that Netspeak offers are the different signs available on a computer keyboard. The sign marking the address for a virtual mail box, @ (=at), is an example of this. The sentence, I'm @ school, for instance. Though only replacing two letters with one sign, it does create a more visual and, in some aspects, a more minimized language.

The Netspeak discourse often includes the elements described in the passages above. When

referring to the term *discourse*, this study uses the term in the sense of norms and structures, meaning words and phrases that are considered appropriate for different contexts. Depending on the area and topic of discussion, more or less of the previous Netspeak elements may be included, yet they might be found in one way or the other. With this said, the delimiting area is that there is some sort of occurring discussion, a process (Baron, 2001:23). In more formal publications and statements online, traditional language discourses tend to occur, yet there are exceptions even here, for instance websites dedicated to computer games. The intended recipient is an important aspect here, and for the game-related and similar websites, the short and slang like language elements may be considered a way of creating a group-related discourse.

2.2 Previous research

Hård af Segerstad (2002) claims that language use in CMC activities is an adaptation, and a variation, which demands a linguistic awareness. Further, the author debates that the norms for e-mail are still being established, and senders may switch between spoken and written conventions. Hård af Segerstad also challenges the claims that CMC is a genuinely new medium, and that it cannot be treated as a single medium, referring to the claim made by Crystal (2001). Instead, she states that the features found in her study points to adaptation rather than innovation. A study conducted by Sundqvist (2009), indicates that the acquisition of English through the use of Internet activities is more common among boys than girls. The author claims that this is due to the fact that boys spend more time on activities which rely on productivity and use of language skill, for example video games. Sundqvist further claims that the productive activities, such as writing e-mails, chatting and playing computer games, were more effective in terms of improving vocabulary and oral proficiency. A study by Denis and Tagliamonte (2008) implies that the occurrence of Netspeak in youth CMC is rather small, and the authors claim that the estimation of high frequency usage is exaggerated. Moreover, the authors claim that teenagers may outgrow the stylized form of

Netspeak when reaching college level. Their classification is somewhat different than that of Crystal's, in terms of Netspeak and IM. Therefore, these claims may only be valid to some extent and only in part applicable to the definition of Netspeak used in the present study. Still, their findings indicate that something is influencing the way teenagers write at a certain age, and this might be the language they are forced to use in college, and similar levels of higher education.

The thing that is striking when browsing through research on Netspeak and CMC is that most studies suggest that this development has a positive influence on literacy, such as the studies presented above. However, some still claim that the extensive use of computers has lowered the reading ability of students. Rosén (2006) conducted a comparative study in which she examined the changes in reading ability for children in the fourth grade between 1991 and 2001. The results indicates that reading comprehension and speed had decreased, whereas the ability to read material which is non-continuous has improved. She speculates that the use of computers is a major contributing factor to the results, while she also mentions that some preliminary findings indicate that a diminished reading ability may have started earlier than 1991, especially when boys are concerned. She does not elaborate further as to what may be the actual cause of this.

2.3 CMC and Netspeak in the classroom?

In order to delimit Netspeak in regards to English language teaching, some distinctions need to be made. I will discuss Netspeak in terms of form and function, level of interaction, and audience awareness. Form and function concerns the actual language awareness and overview of common elements, when and why they are used. Interaction concerns the peer to peer notion in CMC activities, which in themselves might be considered dialogical (Dysthe, 2003:295-299). Lastly the value of audience awareness when discussing Netspeak's implementation in teaching, refers to the teaching about target audience in combination with tasks. Moreover, the value of learner motivation is also a valid aspect to consider. If Netspeak is something partly deriving from a youth culture

practice, does it not become even more justified to deal with one way or the other?

In her book *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*, Hedge (2001:364) puts emphasis on the importance of teacher and material flexibility when conducting lessons. She points to the individual differences and their important role in language learning motivation. Teachers have to adapt the lesson content and maintain a balance between focused and form-focused activities as well as taking individual differences into account, according to Hedge. The term focused is referring to the activities that aim at accuracy, and form-focused activities involve the negotiation of meaning and the development of fluency. In addition to this, the teacher has to understand what motivates learners and also identify the problems which learners may experience. Furthermore, Hedge claims that in the development of a communicative competence, the learner must take part in the determination of lesson content and learn to maintain the motivation necessary in order to continue to develop the proficiency and competence. Previous statements need to be taken into account when validating material and content in lessons. Should Netspeak be included as a way of creating motivation for students, or should it have a purely linguistic, form-related role? In relation to multimedia production in schools, Brodow (2001:125) states that we have entered a new era of communication, in which writing becomes incorporated into new genres and constellations. It would be safe to assume that one way or the other, Netspeak is included in these new genres. However, is it something to teach, to encourage, or to counteract? Should Netspeak be considered part of the communicative competence, and how should an English language teacher approach CMC activities? Brodow further claims that an understanding of the subjective and arbitrary nature of language, would enable students to enrich the encounters on the Internet with people from different countries. Today, it would seem as though English teachers have the opportunity to enrich the students experience of language on the Internet as well as using this as an incentive for some learners. In a hypothetical situation, a student may get significantly empowered and motivated when a teacher highlights the amount of words that the student has acquired from playing computer

games or browsed the Internet, or perhaps communicated in English without having the pressure of producing a correct language. I am ending this section with the words of Tomita (2009:189-190), "Educators need to understand that literacy is not only limited to typographic literacies, but includes digital literacies as well. Both require different skills, each specific to its intended audience. Beyond mastering traditional writing skills, students will also need to understand and master tools like Twitter and IM.".

3. Aim, methods and materials

This section presents the main research questions, the methods used as well as the teaching materials examined.

3.1 Aim and scope

This study has the following aims.

- To examine how active teachers view Netspeak in relation to English language teaching.

- To examine the existence of Netspeak, and exercises related to computer mediated communication, in modern teaching materials.

- To discuss Netspeak from a pedagogical view-point in relation to the results of this study, the syllabuses, and previous findings.

The relevance of this study lies in the sense that it seeks to produce an up-to-date image about whether or not teaching materials and active teachers view Netspeak as a pedagogical tool, or asset. Since the Swedish school system is in the middle of an ongoing change, it becomes even more topical to assess what type of language development we want for our students, and what may be inferred from the new governing documents. In the present government proposal for curricula and

syllabuses, there are some passages that need to be taken into consideration. These are the passages dealing with students' flexible communicative proficiency and competence, the increased English language proficiency as an opportunity for participation in a globalized study situation and working life (Skolverket, 2010). Here, it would be appropriate to include online communication as a field of English language use, since it is, as stated before, an arena for expressing opinions as well as distributing information. So, it would seem that online communication is something that ought to be addressed by teachers as well as becoming incorporated into teaching materials used in schools today. This study is an assessment, rather than an examination of cause and effect, and therefore the demographic variables of age and gender were excluded. However, they might add different dimensions and could be the subject of further research.

3.2 Methods and materials

The methods used in this study aim to collect qualitative data. Analyses were made in two parts, yet with similar goals. First, a link to an online questionnaire was sent via e-mail to active teachers of English in the upper secondary school, attempting to capture their attitudes towards Netspeak in teaching and also to find out whether they used CMC activities. For the second part, five textbooks for English language teaching in the upper secondary school were analysed. In this part, the main focus was the occurrence of CMC activities and possible Netspeak influences in texts, vocabulary and exercises.

The online questionnaire was composed of six questions concerning teachers' attitude towards Netspeak and whether or not they used it in their teaching. The link to the questionnaire was sent via e-mail to 13 teachers, currently working at four Swedish upper secondary schools. The reason for the seemingly small number of participants was the lack of responses from the eight schools that were asked to take part in the study. The questionnaire included questions regarding the participants use of online tools, CMC and Netspeak. Further, questions about the participants view of Netspeak

in relation to the general development of the English language, as well as the language development of students, were added to get a broader view of the teachers' attitudes in relation to these subjects. The matter of CMC usage in teaching was examined by the question, "Have you ever used any platform of discussion, blogs or other online tools in your teaching?" and the follow-up question, "If so, did you find any trace of Netspeak in the language of the students?". The participants attitudes towards Netspeak was examined by the open-ended questions, "What is your opinion about Netspeak in relation to students' language development, both written and spoken?" and, "What is your opinion about Netspeak in relation to the general development of the English language?" These questions aimed to capture the general attitude and possible concerns regarding Netspeak. They also made it possible for respondents to give their personal and professional opinion on the matter, should they wish to do so. To examine whether the respondents had used Netspeak in their teaching, the questions "Have you ever used Netspeak in your teaching? If so, how did you use it?" were added. For this study, this question was of great importance, since it measures the actual frequency of Netspeak in teaching. Lastly, the open-ended question, "Are there any additional signs of Internet language that you have observed?" was added, in order to give the respondents the opportunity to report surrounding phenomena.

In addition to the questionnaire, five textbooks designed for ELT in Swedish upper secondary schools were examined. It was imperative that the textbooks were recently published, and so the criteria for selection was that they were published between 2005-2010. When examining the teaching materials, the main focus was on the existence of elements and themes related to Netspeak and CMC in texts and exercises. The following textbooks were examined in this study.

- *Core 1.* Gustafsson, Hjorth & Kinrade. (2008).

- *Professional, the book.* Amnéus. (2007).

- *Progress Gold C.* Hedencrona, Smed-Gerdin & Watcyn-Jones. (2009).

- *Quest B.* Ljungberg, Wallberg & Ward. (2009).

- *Toolbox.* Tyllered, Johansson. (2009).

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the results from the questionnaire as well as the analysis of the textbooks. The books will be presented in alphabetical order according to title. They will be described and discussed individually, followed by a summary and overall impressions. The final subsection includes the discussion of pedagogical implications.

4.1 Questionnaire

Out of the total of 13 respondents, only 9 completed the questionnaire. One respondent failed to respond to two of the questions. However, his or her answers were used in the analysis as well, since the absence of answers may be considered a statement, giving a total of 10 respondents. Since the questions this respondent did not answer were the questions concerning attitude towards Netspeak in relation to language development, it is interesting to include this in the results. The responses to the questionnaire were quite unanimous. None of the 10 respondents had used Netspeak in their teaching. Two had tried to conduct CMC exercises, which according to them had not worked that well. According to one respondent, the students had considered the exercise, which involved using a blog as a project diary, to be time consuming and unnecessary. Further, the same respondent reported that he or she thought that the lack of interest from students derived from the fact that students use computers and the Internet to a great extent outside school. This is an interesting observation, which to some extent may be a valid one. It does, however, thread into the discussion about whether education should be an integrated part of society, or a more secluded sphere. The same respondent reported having a blog of his or her own, where he or she wrote about the English language. He or she had tried to use CMC activities, but had not incorporated Netspeak.

15

However, on the question if there were traces of Netspeak in the students' language, the respondent stated that there were short forms, smileys and some abbreviations. In response to the questions regarding attitude towards Netspeak in relation to language development, five of the ten respondents thought that it was something positive, but that it had to be put into the "appropriate context".

One of the respondents asked if Netspeak really was a development of the English language, which indicates that he or she does not agree that it is. Seven of the ten respondents reported that students used abbreviations and, what two respondents referred to as sms-language in their writing to a greater extent than earlier. However, they did not comment or disclose their opinion on this, nor if they adapted their teaching. Furthermore, one respondent wrote that their students always have had difficulties to distinguish written from spoken language, and thus write the way they speak. The same respondent reported that they had conducted an exchange program with a school in Italy, and in preparation for the trip there, students had used chat and e-mails to communicate. The teachers had not taken part in this, however. This was the only reported use of CMC that said respondent made. On the question regarding general observations, one respondent wrote that he or she had heard students use the abbreviation "lol" in spoken language, and was very surprised about this. The respondent did not elaborate as to why he or she was surprised by this event.

4.2 Teaching materials

Name : Core 1

Year of publication: 2008

Authors: Jörgen Gustafsson, Monica Hjorth, Eric Kinrade

Publishing company: Bonnier Utbildning

Intended level: Upper secondary school, A-course (Step 5)

Core 1 has a cover with a modern feel and looks like a modern book for the twenty first century. The most common topics in the book are fictional and non-fictional contemporary events, travelling and societal phenomena. On page 100, there is an exercise about spoken slang, yet there is no mention of Netspeak. On page 107, the iPod is mentioned and on page 116, there is a debate exercise where students are asked to debate the usage of said device and also the downloading of music from "the Net", which the authors call it. Further, on page 192, e-mails are mentioned as a way of improving reading skills. E-mail as a form is presented on page 226 with a related exercise where students are going to write an informal e-mail to a friend using the template and form presented in the exercise. This form, however, is without any occurrence of Netspeak and is quite formal in the way it is written.

Name : Professional, the book

Year of publication: 2007

Author: Christer Amnéus

Publishing company: Bonnier Utbildning

Intended level: Upper secondary school, A-course (Step 5)

This book contains nine chapters with related exercises. Main themes and topics are contemporary, fictional events, travelling and adventure and crime and law enforcement. There are eight findings related to CMC and the Internet in this book. On page 36 there is an exercise about chat and e-mail, where the student is going to write to a friend in California. The exercise refers to a written dialogue on the previous page to use as a model. On page 70, 103 and 187 there are exercises involving the writing of e-mails, the first one being optional. Further, there are references to e-mails and the Internet on page 101, 122 and 144. One of the chapters main texts, page 125, is about computer fraud, and this is perhaps the most apparent find. Despite these exercises about writing e-mails,

there is nothing concerning Netspeak or different language varieties. The models used for the exercises are either written dialogue or formal letters. It is also notable that the e-mail exercises, despite being a CMC activity, is no different from a traditional pen and paper exercise. Moreover, there is no discussion about form and function of e-mails in relation to traditional letters and dialogues.

Name: Progress Gold C

Year of publication: 2009, 2nd Ed.

Authors: Eva Hedencrona, Karin Smed-Gerdin, Peter Watcyn-Jones

Publishing company: Studentlitteratur

Intended level: Upper secondary school, C-course (Step 7)

The book contains eight chapters with a few follow-up exercises to the various texts. The main topics are contemporary, fictional events and culture. The book aims to present texts with appropriate difficulty level, hence the focus is on slightly more elaborate and formal language than in the other books analysed. The only occurrence of CMC or Netspeak related features is on page 123, where there are references to websites. Surprisingly, there was nothing mentioned of e-mails in the exercise on writing letters. Moreover, the exercise book that is included in the package does not contain anything related to the Internet. Lastly, the web based material that is accessed through the website of the publishing company, does not have any exercises related to Netspeak, something that I found particularly surprising. The exercises are traditional spelling and listening exercises and, although they are functional, no inventive elements have been added. Furthermore, many of the links on related reading provided throughout the web-based material are out of date, removed or not in use. This indicates that they have been uploaded some time ago, perhaps at the first printing of the book. I find this disappointing, since I had hoped to find more CMC and Netspeak related

features in this section.

Name : Quest B

Year of publication: 2009

Authors: Kjell Ljungberg, Helena Wallberg and Matthew Ward

Publishing company: Natur och Kultur

Intended level: Upper secondary school, B-course (Step 6)

The book contains 53 events all marked individually, meaning no chapters or sections. It comes with an exercise book and the marketing profile is that of inspirational, authentic texts for learning English. The most common topics are contemporary events, both fictional and non-fictional, travelling and adventure and history. The exercises in the textbook are questions about texts as well as related tasks. There are also a number of assorted tasks, such as questions for discussion related to pictures. The only finding related to CMC, Netspeak or the Internet is on page 105. It is an exercise about the video site Youtube, which involves two pictures of videos with related comments. This is followed by questions about who might have posted which comments and what the reader thinks about privacy on the Internet. In the supplemental exercise book containing assorted exercises and ten main exercises related to different skills, two exercises related to CMC are found. On page 29 there is a task to write a blog about Sweden and on page 33 there are questions and instructions about the evaluation of sources on the Internet. For a book aspiring to have inspirational, authentic texts, the themes and exercises related to CMC or the Internet are surprisingly few. The exercise involving Youtube and the one regarding the evaluation of sources are good, but they could use some elaboration.

Name: Toolbox, Main book

Year of publication: 2009, 2nd Ed.

Authors: Malin Tyllered and Christer Johansson

Publishing company: Gleerups

Intended level: Upper secondary school, vocational programs.

Toolbox contains 25 chapters with related exercises and grammar. The main topics are contemporary, fictional events, crime and law enforcement and animals. The findings related to CMC, Netspeak and the Internet consist of a reference to a search engine on page 27, a text where e-mail plays a small part in a story, and questions for discussion on page 173. The latter amount to seven questions about habits and opinions about e-mails, chat rooms and possible dangers of the Internet. These questions are followed by a writing task, where one may choose one of three topics, all related to Internet activities. Although I find the questions quite good, they are a bit shallow. Furthermore, one exercise and no topics related to the Internet is not that much. Although there is nothing related to Netspeak, there is an exercise about phonetics on page 37. The exercise involves pairing words with their phonetic counterpart. I found this interesting, since it was out of context and not elaborated. Comparing phonetics and Netspeak might have been possible in relation to this exercise.

To sum up, there were surprisingly few findings of Netspeak-related topics and exercises in the teaching materials. Although there were references to CMC, the variation of form and function was not discussed. However, there are some things to take into consideration. Firstly, textbooks are designed to be used in all types of learning situations, and although most learners today would have access to a computer and the Internet, it may be delimiting to have exercises that can not be completed without it. Secondly, the previous might be the cause of an ambition to treat all learners as equals, despite socioeconomic background. With this in hindsight, excluding computer related

exercises may be justified in some cases, yet including the option of doing the exercises on a computer would in my opinion form a more varied material and a more flexible learning situation. It is also a matter of presenting authentic material that appeal to students, and practically excluding CMC from the topics might create an alienating discourse. Students may feel that the textbooks deal with topics that are too far from their everyday situations and thus their language intake will become harder to adapt and link to the world outside school. Lastly, the teaching of form and function in relation to all written and spoken communication is where teaching materials, and of course the teacher, has an important assignment. This is where language in the classroom links with the language used in society, and the above results indicate that there are very few links to the present day communication.

When conducting these assessments, I sometimes thought to myself if I put too much emphasis on the revolutionary aspects of Netspeak. I began to wonder if my initial personal standpoint had been the thoughts of a disillusioned student in an isolated position within the frames and discourses of the University. It is true that this position can separate an individual from the working life of active teachers, yet I maintain the belief that the Internet, with all of it's sub-categories, is a part of a contemporary, communicative revolution. Perhaps a revolution of form, rather than language change, but a revolution none the less. Whether the linguistic features are important enough to put any emphasis on may vary from person to person, but I was really surprised to find so little interest in Netspeak among the respondents.

4.3 Pedagogical and didactic implications

As stated earlier, teaching form, function and possible recipient seems to be the most important aspect of teaching language in relation to the Internet. In addition to the importance of validating sources of information, a knowledge of these aspects may aid the process of collecting information as well as improving the awareness of written productions for different purposes. However, formal

and correct language is the most occurring variation in the textbooks analysed. From the respondents' answers, it seems that they either lack the knowledge, or the desire, to incorporate Netspeak in their teaching. If the main concern for language teaching should be the conservation of language, or the development of language awareness is perhaps a topic for another study. Even so, looking back at the results presented above, it would seem that the front line of ELT has done little to change the conventional ways of teaching language. The textbooks leave the CMC tasks to the teacher, who in this study present an overall ambivalent attitude. Not all agree that it is a development, nor have many tried to conduct CMC activities. Some of the respondents seem to consider the increased usage of what they refer to as sms language, to be a threat to conventional written language. Although there is no clear statement of this, their ambiguous answers do create the need for further research with a more specified focus on attitudes. Returning to the new syllabuses and the notion of a versatile communicative competence, the assessment of various sources of information, the use of different mediums (Skolverket, 2010), it is clear that the Internet and its features should be a major factor. Yet, as this study has indicated, little seems to be done in order to enhance students' communicative awareness in this area. Furthermore, the textbooks, with their examples of e-mails written in a conventional manner, does in my opinion enforce a conservation of a formal and less versatile written language. My opinion is that various degrees of formality ought to be taken into consideration, and by doing so, the importance of recipient-dependency may be incorporated. Hedge (2001:317) comments on teachers role when supporting students using technology, where she states that teachers need skills and a positive attitude. Though she does not elaborate further on this, I think that she has a valid point. In order to face the changes in language, a positive attitude is required, or else there is a possibility that new elements become a threat to existing conventions. Although a certain amount of scepticism may be natural, assessing the nature of the elements in change and acquiring the appropriate knowledge should be the way to proceed in such cases. The results from this study give an indication that a majority of the

respondents have not explored the elements of Netspeak and online communication, but instead view it as something that teenagers mix in their writing in school. That only two of the respondents had tried using CMC activities and given up suggests an existing insecurity, perhaps related to structural elements, such as access to computers or the ability to control the work process when students are using them. Again, further research may examine exactly what teachers find difficult, and also examine the standpoints individual schools on this matter. Schools with a more elaborated IT profile would probably put a different emphasis on CMC activities, and perhaps even on Netspeak, yet this is a mere speculation.

The teaching of Netspeak might not have to include the linguistic elements themselves, but the various aspects of CMC, highlighting the various apparences of Netspeak as well as online communication. By teaching form and function, in terms of formal versus informal e-mails, chat, bulletin boards etc., and also discussing the various levels of interaction of these forms with students, a teacher may act as a catalyst for a heightened language awareness. Simply teaching the forms of formal written communication, such as they are presented in the teaching materials, does in my opinion create a secluded formal sphere and a fragmented image of what communication using the English language may be like.

5. Summary and conclusions

None of the active teachers who participated in this study had used Netspeak in their teaching. There were also no findings related to Netspeak in the teaching materials examined, and only a few related to the Internet and computer-mediated communication. I find this quite disturbing, since it is a major part of contemporary language, and used by teenagers in various ways. Not to use this as an incentive, motivational tool, or elaborate the topic, may be to ignore one of students' primarily extramural intake of the English language. I do agree that teaching context and area of use is important, and when teenagers use Netspeak in text messages and on the Internet, it would be

important to teach recipient related aspects. Since it is a highly topical subject, you could deduce that some students would be surprised to see how much English they actually know from Netspeak encountered in video games and on the Internet. In some cases, I would guess that the age of the respondents may have been a factor for not thinking that Netspeak is something to teach, and lack of knowledge may be why those respondents have not used it in their teaching. Further research may include the age variable and perhaps assess how students feel about Netspeak in school and in general. It would be interesting to see how they feel about the English language used in the classroom and the everyday English that they encounter in their spare time. Another subject of further research is the previously mentioned motivation for teachers to incorporate Netspeak. Does this lack of motivation derive from a lack of skill on the subject or from negative attitude? Further, assessing and comparing individual schools to see if they have different views on CMC and Netspeak would be interesting.

In my opinion, the Internet creates new situations and new ways of communicating that demand different skills, such as writing and knowing contexts and recipients. I do not know how I would feel about Netspeak if I was an active teacher lacking the experience of online communication that I have today. Perhaps I too would think that it was of a destructive and counterproductive nature, and that the most important thing was to develop the students' individual skills. However, a communicative competence is something that may be achieved in various ways, especially considering the individual differences. Future students will probably have even more technological tools than students today, so being aware of how these affect language and communication does in my opinion enhance the teacher's ability to relate to individual students as well as aiding in the process of creating a more varied learning environment.

References

Primary sources:

10 active teachers in Swedish upper secondary schools

Amnéus, Christer. 2007. *Professional, the book.* Bonnier Utbildning.

Gustafsson, Jörgen. Hjorth, Monica. & Kinrade, Eric. 2008. *Core 1.* Bonnier Utbildning.

Hedencrona, Eva. Smed-Gerdin, Karin. & Watcyn-Jones, Peter. 2009. *Progress Gold C.* 2nd ed. Studentlitteratur.

Johansson, Christer. Tyllered, Malin. 2009. *Toolbox.* 2nd ed. Gleerups.

Ljungberg, Kjell. Wallberg, Helena. & Ward, Matthew. 2009. *Quest B.* Natur och Kultur.

Secondary sources:

Aitchinson, Jean. 2001. *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brodow, Ulla. 2001. Datorbaserad Kommunikation i Språk och Interaktivt Lärande. *Språkboken,* Skolverket.

Crystal, David. 2001. *Language and the Internet.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baron, Naomi. 2001. Language of the Internet. in Ali Farghali, ed. *The Stanford Handbook for Language Engineers*. Stanford: CSLI Publications, pp. 59-127, 2003. Retrieved, March 2011, from, http://www.american.edu/cas/faculty/nbaron.cfm

Denis, Derek. Tagliamonte, Sali. 2008. Linguistic Ruin? Lol! Instant messaging and teen language. *American Speech, Vol. 83, No. 1.*

Dysthe, Olga. 2003. *Dialog, Samspel och Lärarande.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Findahl, Olle. 2010. Swedes and the Internet. *.SE, The Internet Infrastructure Foundation*. Retrieved March 2011, from, http://worldinternetproject.net/#reports

Hedge, Tricia. 2000. *Teaching and Learning in the English Classroom.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hård af Segerstad, Ylva. 2002. Use and adaptation of written language to the conditions of computer-mediated communication. Gothenburg, 2002. Retrieved April, 2011, from, http://www.ling.gu.se/~ylva/

Rosén, Monica. 2006. Studier av läsfärdigheten i Sverige (SALS). *Resultatdialog 2006, Forskning inom Utbildningsvetenskap.* Vetenskapsrådet.

Sundqvist, Pia. 2009. Extramural English Matters: Out-of-School English and Its Impact on Swedish Ninth Graders' Oral Proficiency and Vocabulary. Karlstad: Karlstad University Press.

Shaughnessy, Michael. 2008. An Interview with Jacquie Ream: What's Happening with Writing? Retrieved March 2011, from, http://ednews.org/articles/an-interview-with-jacquie-ream-what039s-happening-with-writing.html

Skolverket. 2010. Förordning om ämnesplaner för de gymnasiegemensamma ämnena, GY2011, Skolverket.

Tomita, Dean. 2009. Text Messaging and Implications for its use in Education. Hawaii: University of Hawai'i. Retrieved March 2011, from, http://etec.hawaii.edu/proceedings/2009/

Appendix

Questionnaire:

Netspeak

Följande frågor handlar om speciella varianter av engelska på internet, även kallat internet-slang eller Netspeak. Netspeak innefattar de olika variationer av språk som förekommer på internet, även i sms, e-mail och liknande kommunitation. Alltså meningsbyggnad, förkortningar, små och stora bokstäver, olika tecken i ord och liknande.

Besvara frågorna så kort eller omfattande du önskar.

Tack för din medverkan!

Start!

Netspeak

1.

Har du använt någon diskussionsplattform, bloggar eller liknande It-verktyg i din undervisning?

2.

Om ja på föregående fråga, fanns det spår av Netspeak i elevernas språk? Ge exempel.

3.

Vad anser du om Netspeak i relation till elevers språkutveckling, talat som skrivet?

4.

Vad anser du om Netspeak i relation till engelska språkets generella utveckling, positivt eller negativt? Motivera.

5.

Har du använt dig av Netspeak i din undervisning? Om ja, hur gjorde du?

6.

Finns det några övriga nätspråksinfluenser som du observerat hos eleverna?

Lämna svar!

Tack för dina svar!