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Nobel Prize kind of stuff. Fo' sho.

An Analysis of the English Found in Food Blogs

Jasmine Andersson

Handledare: Joe Trotta

Examinator: Jennifer Herriman

Kandidatuppsats

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Title: *Nobel Prize kind of stuff. Fo' sho.* An Analysis of Non-Standard English in Food Blogs

Author: Jasmine Andersson

Supervisor: Joe Trotta

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Abstract

This essay examines the frequency of Non-Standard English variants in six American food blogs in relation to gender and contents. The blog posts and commentaries of each blog were thoroughly analyzed to discern the frequency of Non-Standard variants. The results found that the language in the examined blogs generally follows the norms of Standard English with relatively few instances of deviating variants. There was a discrepancy between the male and the female blogs as no examples of Non-Standard variants were found in the male blogs, a result which is in contrast to what has been demonstrated in previous research on Non-Standard English. The female blog authors used the Non-Standard variants *kinda/sorta*, variation in spelling and the variation *y'all*. These Non-Standard linguistic variants seemed to be used to enhance feelings or attitudes and to maintain a friendly tone towards the readers.

Keywords: Non-Standard English, CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) Blogs, Gender, Netspeak

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.2 Aim.....	4
2. Background.....	5
2.1 Language and variation in communication.....	5
2.2 The Language in CMC and differences between speech and writing.....	6
2.3 The concept of blogs.....	8
2.4 Basic concepts and terms.....	9
3. Previous studies.....	10
3.1 Non-Standard English related to gender.....	10
3.2 Previous linguistic studies of Computer Mediated Communication.....	10
4. Method and Material.....	12
4.1 Using internet based material as corpus.....	13
4.2 Procedure.....	13
4.3 Sources of data.....	15
5. Results and discussion.....	17
5.1 Non-Standard variation of hedges <i>kind of / sort of</i>	17
5.2 Non-Standard variation in spelling.....	21
5.3 The variation <i>y'all</i>	25
6. Concluding remarks.....	26
7. List of references.....	29

1. Introduction

Recent technological innovations have enabled and continue to facilitate people to communicate their experiences, thoughts and opinions in a variety of modes, within a variety of contexts and for varying purposes. A statement, posted by any individual, can reach an innumerable ‘audience’ and receive nearly immediate responses. The ease-of-use and the directness in communication have attracted numerous people to engage in different genres of computer mediated communication such as forums, communities and blogs. The latter has become increasingly popular and blogs of various kinds can now be seen to be noted and referenced in different contexts, including the daily, non-digital, newspapers. Blogs attract people of nearly all ages and backgrounds and its casual journal-writing combined with ongoing reader commentaries make blogs relevant from a sociolinguistic point of view. As previously mentioned, blogging enables anyone to publish content and reach out and interact to an extent that was never before possible. Moreover, the personalized content of the blog, gives the blogger an opportunity to express personal identity, in which the use of language plays a key role. This possibility of self-expression and the lack of editorial process in personal journal blogs may also encourage individuals to communicate differently than they would in other computer-mediated communication modes. Yet, as blogs often take the format of a public diary, there is a contradiction between public and private. Thus, even though the content is personal, the public format may increase the awareness of language use. Nevertheless, since blog-authors possess the freedom to write in their individual manner, using language to enforce their online identity or their familiarity with the blog topic, it may be possible to find elements of Non-Standard English variants in written blog texts.

1.2 Aim

The purpose of this study is to investigate the language of blogs written in English, focusing on the frequency of Non-Standard English (NSE) variants. Engaging in Computer-Mediated Communication of some kind has become more prevalent and is now part of everyday life. As these modes of communication enable *all* literate people to express thoughts and ideas; it can be assumed that there is a possibility of finding NSE variants in written blog posts. The written language in a blog is most often characterized by rather direct and personal forms of notes where the meaning of the written words, in general, should be effortlessly understood. Furthermore, it could be assumed that the textual style often seeks to reflect the identity and interests of the blog-author. Thus, there is a possibility that the language in blogs contains elements of NSE with a

use of spoken linguistic variants. It should also be noted that the use of Non-Standard variants could be related to a number of factors yet; this study will examine the frequency in correlation to gender and contents.

2. Background

2.1 Language and variation in communication

The concept of language and human communication is just as complex as it is one of the most natural elements in our daily lives, often carried out without any further reflection. However, understanding the underlying factors of language and communication is obviously a key interest among sociolinguists. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:56), sociolinguists often refer to the organization of language as being part of a social unit known as a *speech community*. Each community shares its own set of rules for how to interact in the communicative system. The norms and use of a language may differ widely between different communities which is why speakers of the same language may have difficulty communicating if their norms on how to use the language diverge. However, neither the social context nor the language that we speak, are two stable systems that can be separated (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:52-56). Language, like everything else, undergoes changes over time. Nevertheless, Aitchison (2001:4) argues further that many intelligent people resent language change condemning linguistic alterations as results of ignorance and laziness. Yet, linguistic conventions are constructed, maintained and changed in the accumulated action of human interaction. Language has an effect on the societal context through complex set of events, such as repeated use of certain words combined with how the language has been used historically. The identities and status of the people who played a significant part in historical language changing events also influence the process (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003:53).

As pointed out by Lakoff (2004:39), 'Language uses us as much as we use language.' Since our attitudes and feelings affect how we choose to express ourselves, linguistic behavior tells us something about our objectives and feelings towards the context we live in. Lakoff's influential gender theory, of the early seventies, stated that women find themselves between two conventions of language. More specifically, the linguistic behavior expected of women collides with the male dominated language found in professional contexts. Since authoritative language is incompatible with the societal norm of femininity, women are put in a disadvantageous position. Lakoff argued further that this denies women of making strong expressions and at the same time they are encouraged to express uncertainty and engage in communication about trivial matters.

In consequence, since women are not allowed to be taken seriously due partly to linguistic behavior, they are marginalized and systematically denied access to power. According to Lakoff, women's language is displayed in the use and frequency of lexical items and they seem to possess a wider range of intonation patterns (Lakoff 2004:41-42). She stated that women tend to "*speak in italics*", using more emphatic stress and intensifiers such as *so* etc. Lakoff also identified the use of hedges such as *kind of / sort of* as a linguistic pattern which inhibit women to express power. Polite expressions function as markers of the relationship between the speaker and addressee but also indicate the identity of the speaker/writer (Lakoff 2004:179-195). As pointed out by Brown and Levinson (1987:281), the founders of the *politeness theory*, politeness serves as a social mechanism in maintaining bonds within a group.

A number of studies of sex-based variability have demonstrated that women have an advantage over men in terms of their sociolinguistic competence and verbal ability in several sociolinguistic circumstances. Though slight, the discrepancy is well documented and involves a variety of linguistic features such as a larger repertoire of variants and styles (Chambers 2009:145-147,151).

Naturally, many of these and other theories have been applied to traditional conceptions of interaction, typically face-to-face conversations. However, as new communication possibilities have taken form, the nature of this interaction is now sometimes unlike any that has previously been studied. Yet, it is possible to assume that preceding theories will still be manifested also in the most recent forms of communication. The new medium as a field of research may offer further understanding of the complexities of human communication and linguistic variation.

2.2 The language in CMC and differences between speech and writing

Crystal (2001:67) argues that (CMC) demonstrates how quickly and creatively users adapt their use of language to suit different purposes. As a result, Crystal mentions that the language of CMC often contains Non-standard variants deviating from language norms. It tends to be playful and tolerant of spelling and constantly introduces new words. CMC creates new varieties of communication such as a specific use of language with its own lexicon of abbreviations, also known as *Netspeak*. According to Crystal, the language used in Internet-settings has been referred to as "*written speech*" (2001:27) yet it is not easily compared to the speech of face-to face interactions. Crystal claims that though it shares many similar properties, CMC is nevertheless significantly different from speaking and writing and should rather be regarded as "a third medium" of interaction. More specifically Crystal points out that language use in CMC

is different from spoken language since it lacks voice cues such as pitch, volume and rhythm and differs from written language due to its immediacy and changeability.

According to Biber (1988:5-6) during the twentieth century, linguists considered writing to be a secondary form of language deriving from speech. Hence, speech was regarded as primary and the only language structure significant to linguistic analysis. Outside linguistics, the dominant perception has been and continues to be that written literary language is primary to that of speech. Biber (1988:5-6) states further that several linguistic studies of speech and writing have been carried out, yet there is some disagreement as to what constitutes their main characteristics. The widespread view has been that written language tends to be complex, more elaborated in structure, formal and abstract, while spoken language is characterized by being concrete, simple in structure and context dependent. However, some studies found almost no linguistic differences at all between the two modes, whereas others have found speech to be more complex and elaborated than written language (Biber 1988:5, Gumperz, Kaltman & O'Connor 1984:3-20).

A distinction between speech and writing has been outlined by Crystal (2003:291) stating that the two mediums function independently as two different modes of communication. The most significant differences involve several aspects. According to Crystal (2003:291) speech is time-bound, involving two or more present participants whereas writing is space-bound, fixed in a situation where the writing most often is carried out in absence of the reader. Speech is spontaneous and since the participants are required to think while talking, a looser construction in language is promoted. Writing on the other hand, always involves a time-lag and the writer has the ability of analysis, which promotes careful development of the written language. Speech is traditionally characterized by being face-to-face, involving extra linguistic elements such as gestures and facial expressions. In traditional writing situations, there is typically a lack of such clues or immediate feedback, which is why the written language tends to be clear and less ambiguous. Speech is looser in its structure and contains contracted forms of words and elements of nonsense vocabulary or slang. In contrast, writing is more elaborated in structure and contains complex sentences and words never spoken. Naturally, speech is well-suited for social interactions and due to its various nuances it can communicate and reinforce relationships and attitudes. Writing is instead the more suitable medium in communicating complex ideas and recording facts. Speech involves the opportunity to rethink an utterance but once an error is made it cannot be withdrawn and the participant has to face the consequences. In writing however, errors are easily eliminated prior to the final product being read by the recipient.

Finally, speech is rich in prosody and the unique elements of rhythm, intonation and loudness is not easily reproduced in writing. Yet, writing is graphically rich where capitalization, organization and punctuation among several aspects constitute significant characteristics (Crystal 2003:291). Concerning speech and writing in CMC, Crystal (2010:235) argues that the language found in CMC is identically comparable to neither speech nor writing but involves traits of both. It is rather a combination of the two and yet language of CMC contains linguistic features that are not found in either of the mediums. Crystal (2010:235) argues further that CMC most accurately can be regarded as written language with speech features rather than spoken language in writing.

2.3 The Concept of Blogs

Blogs can be characterized as websites with a frequently updated text-based content typically concerning a specific theme or topic. Other distinctive features that differentiate blogs from other web material include the fact that entries are displayed in reverse chronological sequence, that is, the most recent posts are presented first. Further, blogs contain links to other blogs and websites. The concept of blogs can be traced back to the late 1990s, although then initially referred to as *weblogs*. The phenomenon then began its breakthrough following the development of software tools which made blogging further accessible and user-friendly to the average Internet consumer (Myers 2010:16-17, Baron 2008:108). Thus, the revolution began and the ‘blogosphere’ has been rapidly evolving ever since. Blogging has, in fact, proven to be quite a profitable activity for a lucky few, for whom the blog functions as the sole income and a number of blog-authors even manage to create a ‘persona’ generating publicity and fame. According to Herring (2005:1) the elite blogs are sometimes referred to as ‘A-list blogs’ as these blogs are the most widely read, cited by mass media and linked to by others. Furthermore, bloggers in general, but successful bloggers in particular, are considered highly influential in the aspects of which the content of their particular blog is concerned. In consequence; blogging has grown into a position of being regarded as a reasonable livelihood. Blogs are now written by widely diverse groups of literate people covering just as diverse topics. Baron (2008:109) argues that blogging serves a platform for speakers to ‘speak their minds’ and compares it to pre-digital existing forums such as Speakers Corner, sending letters to newspapers and Talk Radio. Herring (2005:2) recognizes three main categories of blogs; *personal journal blogs*, which are personally oriented, *filter blogs* typically being news based or politically oriented and *knowledge blogs* which serve as places for sharing expertise in a particular subject. This study will focus mainly on the language found in the genre category of *personal journal blogs*.

2.4 Basic concepts and terms

As the name implies, *Non-Standard English* (NSE) is the English that diverges from what is considered *Standard English* (SE). However, in understanding what characterizes Non-Standard English, a definition of Standard English is relevant. Even though the notion of SE is widely used and referred to, there is no clear definition of the term. Due to the complexity of its meaning; distinguishing the phrase has been the subject of disagreement. Yet, some linguists have attempted to approach a definition of its characteristics. In his *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, David Crystal states five fundamental characteristics. Namely, that Standard English is a variety of language but has no local base. Its linguistic features involve grammar, punctuation, spelling and vocabulary but not pronunciation. SE is the variety that is regarded as the most prestigious within a country. Furthermore, the prestige connected to the use of SE is generally set by the adult community and is used as the norm by leading institutions in the given country. Only a few people use SE in everyday conversations and it is most often found in printed texts (Crystal 2003:110). In addition, according to Wolfram and Shilling-Estes (2006:9-17) the following aspects are significant in distinguishing what should be regarded as Standard English, i.e. that it is primarily found in written language and formal speech contexts as well as in official printed communication. Its existence is continued via formal institutions such as schools, imposed by those responsible for language education. The grammar is uniform and is codified and prescribed in usage books and dictionaries. That is, by documenting the use of language a certain variety is reinforced and accepted which in turn minimizes variation in form. Finally and hardly surprisingly, Standard English is typically conventional and resistant to language changes (Wolfram and Shilling-Estes 2006:9-17). Thus, Non-Standard English may basically be generally defined as language that deviates from the aspects mentioned above. On the other hand, in *Standard English: The widening debate* (1999:23-42) James Milroy points out that what is identified as SE does not account for the English language as a whole since that is much more variable and unstable in form. He argues that classifying whether a conversational text is Standard or Non-Standard may in some cases be pointless if not realizing that it is the standardization as a process that is relevant. Therefore, in any description of SE the people who use it and their reasons for doing so have to be taken into account (1999:7)

Another concept worth clarifying is CMC or Computer Mediated Communication. Susan C. Herring (1996:1) has defined CMC as human communication where messages are transmitted between people by using computers. Either people send written messages that are read instantly, known as *synchronous* CMC or messages that are read at a later point in time which is referred to as *asynchronous* CMC. However, new technological devices are constantly developing and in

the view of the emergence of cellular phones, Crystal (2010:229) argues in agreement with Baron (2008:11-12) that the defined term of CMC has become too narrow, suggesting the use of the term *Digitally Mediated Communication*. Nevertheless, Computer Mediated Communication and the short form CMC will be used interchangeably throughout this essay.

3. Previous studies

3.1 Non-Standard English related to Gender

Previous studies of the frequency of non-standard English variants are innumerable, normally based on oral face-to-face conversations or the use of NSE in writing, then often in the writing of students in educational contexts. Correlating aspects have often included social class, age, gender and ethnicity. Noted sociolinguist William Labov has conducted a number of renowned studies of language variation. In *The social stratification of English in New York City* from 1966 Labov examined the New York City non-Standard variant of rhotic ‘r’ by studying the speech of sales assistants at three department stores. The correlation between linguistic variation and social class was clearly demonstrated. Hence, people higher up in socioeconomic class were inclined to express less regional variation since the traditional New York City dialect is non-rhotic (Chambers 2009:23-25, Aitchinson 2001:43-45). The Norwich study by Peter Trudgill in 1974 found social class to be a dominant determiner of the use of NSE as he studied the stable variable of the variation between the alveolar and velar nasal in the pronunciation of words ending with –*ing*. In careful Standard English, the pronunciation of words such as *running* is velar nasal with the suffix –*ing*, whereas in casual speech the ending is most often pronounced –*in*. There was a correlation to gender as women of all social classes were more likely to use Standard English whereas men even tended to overuse Non-Standard variants. The conclusion that women use fewer Non- standard variants and appear sensitive to prestige patterns has been stated in almost all previous sociolinguistic studies where a sample of males and females are included (Chambers, 2009:120-123). NSE has been the subject of numerous studies of oral communication. There are several non-standard variants of English and studies of language use in oral communication have indicated a correlation in the use of NSE and gender. According to Chambers, women tend to use more standard variants than men (Chambers, 2009:115).

3.1 Previous linguistic studies of Computer Mediated Communication

In recent decades a number of linguistic studies have examined different genres of computer-mediated communication from various perspectives. CMC may come across as a rather new

encounter in linguistic research and that is a proper assumption to some extent. However, as early as in 1984 linguist Naomi Baron published her article “*Computer-mediated communication as a force in language change*” in which she discusses the possible effects of this new way of communicating. A few years later, in 1991 following the publication of Ferrara, Brunner and Whitemore, “*Interactive Written Discourse as an Emergent Genre*” linguists truly became aware of the new field of research (Herring 2003:1-2). Susan C. Herring has and continues to contribute with several publications studying language within various genres of CMC. It should be noted that Herring (2003:1) distinguishes such studies as studies in CMD (Computer Mediated Discourse), i.e. interdisciplinary studies specializing on language and language use within the study of Computer Mediated Communication. Ylva Hård af Segerstad (2002:5-7, 260-263,267) studied how written language is being used and adapted to correspond with the settings of four different modes of computer-mediated communication. More exactly, Segerstad examined the adaptation of Swedish language in email, web chat, Instant Messaging and SMS and found that a number of Non-standard variants were being used.

Since this essay examines language use in blogs, former studies of this particular genre are therefore of utmost interest. A 2004 study carried out by Herring et al (2004), recognized a correlation between the gender of the blog author and blog category. That is, women were more highly represented as authors of *personal journal blogs* whereas men typically wrote *filter blogs*. Similar results were also indicated by Nowson, Oberlander and Gill (2005:1668-1670) as they studied individual differences on the formality of written personal blogs, concluding gender and agreeability to be the most significant predictors. The writing in blogs written by women was found to be less formal than texts in blogs written by men. In her CMC study from 2000, Herring found that women were more likely to give thanks, apologies and appreciation as well as react stronger towards violation of linguistic politeness. Women also tended to enforce strict posting rules in order to ensure and maintain civility. Men on the other hand, seemed to be less concerned with politeness and maintaining social conduct (Herring, 2000 online).

However, having said that, Herring and Paolillo (2006:6, 14-17) examined the connection between author gender and blog sub-genre. They decided to elect specific male and female features to investigate. The female features were different personal pronouns such as *me, my, mine* and *we, us, our* etc and the male features included demonstrative numbers and the determiners *the* and *a/an*. It was noticed that regardless of the gender of the blog author, the *diary blog* entries contained more stylistic features of female character than *filter blogs* which instead contained more male features, thus complicating the assumption of gendered stylistic features. Correspondingly, Huffaker and Calvert (2005 online) performed a quantitative study on

online identity and the use of language in male and female teenage bloggers. Although, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) found that male and female blogs are relatively alike, they also observed that male teenagers used emoticons more than females and a language characterized by activity and resolution. Equally, they could not find any support for the notion that female language use tends to be more passive or cooperative.¹

Myers (2010:111) argues that blogs often contain several communicative discourse devices such as non-words relating to speech, e.g. *Yesss, Umm, Sooo*. Such words tend to be most frequent in comments to previous posts as conversational responses. These devices function as enhancing interactional factors implicating how the blogger is interacting with the readers. Myers argues further that such words need to be analyzed in its specific meaning in context.

4. Method and Material

Due to the virtually infinite number of blogs available and the purpose and limitations of this essay, a carefully narrowed selection obviously needed to be made. Since the focus of this essay is to investigate the frequency of informal, Non-Standard language use, the blogs were chosen based on contents that evidently could be regarded as self-journal, personally-oriented and maintained by one single blog author. However, all blogs examined in this essay are frequently quoted by other bloggers and clearly expect to be read by a wide audience. To distinguish the samples without bias the selection was made using the blog ranking site *Technorati* (technorati.com online).

It should also be noted that due to the modest goals and scope of this essay, the identities of the blog-authors were not validated. Thus, there is a possibility that the given age and gender of the blog author could be manipulated. The study is based on the online persona presented in the selected blogs. Blogs typically contain a page titled “About me” where readers can read a presentation of the blog author. The textual contents have been analyzed to examine the frequency of NSE variants. The results are later discussed in relation to gender and contents.

As mentioned earlier, Herring (2003:1) claims that Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) can be distinguished as an interdisciplinary specialization within the field of CMC due to its use of Discourse Analysis methods to address its focus on language and language use. According to Chapman & Routledge (2009:58) *Discourse Analysis* can be defined as a collective term for a wide range of approaches to language focusing on linguistic characteristics, communicative functions and organizational patterns in the context of written or spoken text. Even though this

¹ Cooperative in this context refers to the *cooperative principle* – the agreement between speakers to follow the same conventions (*conversational maxims*) when communicating (Crystal 2003: 460).

essay falls under the category of CMC as it studies the language use in blogs, it is dubious whether the method of Discourse Analysis strictly constitutes the approach here. Since this study revolves around the variation of language as it examines the use of Non-Standard variables, the sociolinguistic approach of LVC (Language Variation and Change) might be argued as more accurate in defining the method used in this study. The journal entitled *Language Variation and Change* defines it as studies that;

“...concentrates on the details of linguistic structure in actual speech production and processing (or writing), including contemporary or historical sources.” (Cambridge Journal Online)

In addition, in analyzing the variables, the possible underlying purposes behind the language variations are discussed.

4.1 Using internet-based material as corpus

Internet has resulted in a new (or relatively new) field of linguistic research offering a massive and wide variety of linguistic corpora. As such, it is also significantly different from other corpora and some aspects should be considered when studying Internet material. Crystal (2011 online) points out that due to the continuous developments and changes of the medium, Internet texts are more problematic. In a number of texts such as blog posts, the material can be edited after being published and can therefore not be considered as final products. Crystal (2011) argues further that internet texts also differ from traditional texts in the sense that the author often remains more or less anonymous. Hence, in analyzing internet texts, the additional sociolinguistic information about the author such as gender, social class and occupation may be left out. These variables are often taken into account in order to compare or distinguish a result from others. As Crystal points out, internet authors such as blog writers are often anonymous, hiding their identity under a false persona which may make them inclined to use different linguistic repertoires than they would in real life. Consequently, in using Internet based material, linguists risk ending up with an uninterpretable corpus of data.

4.2 Procedure

With the purpose of this essay being the study of NSE variations in personal journal blogs, blogs were selected from various decisive factors. Today's blogs come in a variety of shapes and forms and the blogs selected had to be distinguished as “single writer blogs”. That is, blogs in which blog posts and the activity of the blog is operated by a single person and not a group of editors or

an organization. Furthermore, in order to ensure that the blog contents could be characterized as personal journal blogs, single written blogs by renowned authors or other influential persons were not qualified, since such blogs may serve as a promoting purpose of the blog author but first and foremost because these blog posts typically lacked the characteristics of a self journal. However, the blogs selected could not be randomly singled out. To avoid bias the selection of blogs was based on popularity and influential ranking. The site *Technorati* constituted an accommodating tool in collecting a sample. *Technorati* is a leading blog search engine and directory, indexing more than a million blogs. The site ranks blogs based on authority and influence tracking the most popular blogs in the blogosphere. The authority of a blog is calculated based on linking behavior and categorization over a short period of time. Depending on the current discussion in the blogosphere and how often a blog produces content that becomes referenced by other sites, a blog's authority may rapidly change. *Technorati* measures authority on a scale of 0-1000 where 1000 constitutes the highest authority. *Technorati* also ranks blogs *topical authority* within its subject category, such as *Living*, *Entertainment*, *Arts*, etc. It is also possible for blogs to have authority in several subject categories. *Technorati* ranks all blogs in a blog directory and in a top 100 list where 1 is the highest rank (technorati.com [online]).

Due to the narrow scope of this essay the number of blogs analyzed had to be restricted. As mentioned, *Technorati* ranks blogs within different subject categories. To distinguish self journal blogs, some subject categories were not taken into consideration such as *politics* or *business* since blogs within such categories typically were formal or covered non-personal contents. In order to locate blogs with personal-journal contents the broader category *Living* was distinguished which covers blogs within nine different subcategories related to *living*, namely; *Family*, *Home*, *Travel*, *Food*, *Fashion*, *Religion*, *Health*, *Arts* and *Pets*. To narrow it further, the category of 'food' was chosen. The reason for this was that the subcategory of *Food* enabled the best balance between male and female blog authors. Obviously, some of the other subcategories could also be assumed to be gender balanced. However, within the subcategory of *Food*, single written blogs with personal journal contents tended to be relatively high in rank compared to the other subcategories. The blogs were then selected on the basis of previously mentioned criterions and rank within the category.

It is worth mentioning that even though blogs were picked based on their rank, only blogs active in posting material during this period of time could become part of the selected data. That is, and this concerns the male blogs only, there are male blogs written by single writers that are better ranked than those presented here. Nevertheless, the following six blogs were selected:

<u>Name of blog</u>	<u>Gender of blog author</u>
- <i>Joanne Eats Well With Others</i>	f
- <i>Shutterbean</i>	f
- <i>crazy for crust</i>	f
- <i>Eating RULES</i>	m
- <i>Nibble Me This</i>	m
- <i>Eat like No One else</i>	m

The blogs were then thoroughly examined for the duration of the particular time period March 30- April 13 during which all blog posts as well as reader commentaries were analyzed to discern the frequency of Non-Standard variants in the language used at the blog. The spelling mistakes or loss of letters which were found in blog posts of *Eat Like No One Else* have not been taken into account as these variations most definitely could be presumed to be unintentional. The number of words of the total amount of blog posts of each blog is presented in the result. In doing so, only the text written in personal journal style was calculated, thus, the added recipe was excluded in those posts where there was one. In examining the blogs a few instances of dropping of *g* in words ending with *-ing* could be detected. However, due to the meager findings of this variation it has been left out in the result.

Since the presentation of the blog author at the ‘About me’- page not only offers information about age, gender and location but also to some extent, defines the narrative and linguistic style of the blog it constitutes a significant part in the whole analysis of the language use. Contents on the ‘About me’- page of such significance are therefore presented in the description of sources of data whereas examples of linguistic interest are found in the result.

4.3 Sources of Data

According to the blog author presentation found on the ‘About me’- page, *Joanne Eats Well With Others* is maintained by a twenty-three year old medical student named Joanne Bruno based in New York City. The blog was created in 2009 initially as a documenting tool of the blog author’s own eating habits. This high ranked food blog is characterized by blog posts and photographs of recipes made and cooked by the blog author combined with anecdotes of her everyday life.

The second blog *Shutterbean* is the name of the blog written by Tracy Benjamin and covers recipes as well as notes and photographs of the everyday life of this blog author’s domestic family life in Northern California. More specifically, the blog author claims her residence to be

in the Bay Area which refers to the metropolitan region known as the San Francisco Bay Area. In the presentation it is mentioned that the blog author is in her thirties and the first part mainly features her comments on her longtime and passionate interest in domestic activities.

The third female blog, *crazy for crust*, is kept by Dorothy, who according to her presentation is a wife, mother, blogger and reader. Neither surname nor actual age is given, although after further readings of older posts in the blog post archive, it can be established that she has at least turned thirty-four. An exact geographical position of the resident of the blog author is not presented either, however, after thorough acquaintance with previous posts it could be read that she is based somewhere around the surrounding areas of Sacramento, California. The blog is dedicated to baking, posting own and linking to others recipes along with comments on current subject matters of the blog author's daily life.

Andrew Wilder is the name of man behind the blog *Eating RULES* created to keep the blog author himself committed to a healthy lifestyle as well as helping others to do the same. The presentation includes a rather thorough statement on the blog author's interest in food and his endeavors towards a more healthy life in terms of eating and exercise. Age and location are not presented here, though in a recent post the blog author comments on turning thirty-six. Furthermore, the posts contain references to Los Angeles and the popular vacation destination Big Bear, which suggest that the blog author is situated somewhere in the state of California. The posts primarily concern sharing recipes or the latest products from the food industry.

Nibble Me This is devoted to the art of barbeque and is created and maintained by Chris G in Knoxville, Tennessee. In the presentation, the blog author shares his passion for and experiences with barbeque but reveals no additional personal information. In describing his journey from his first encounter with the subject matter to his current achievements in the field of barbeque, the age of thirty-five is easily calculated. The posts generally feature the blog author trying out new recipes commenting both accomplishments as well as failures.

The blog *Eat Like No One Else* belongs to Eric in Saline, Michigan who writes about anything related to food that he encounters in his life. According to the presentation, the blog was founded in 2009 to share his experiences in cooking from scratch. It is further stated that he wishes to encourage people to grow their own food, hence the name to *Eat Like No One Else*. No surname or age is presented although the family photo posted features a man in his late thirties or early forties.

5 Results and discussion

In examining the language used in the blogs, three varieties of Non-Standard variations could be distinguished; Non-Standard variations of the hedges *kind of / sort of*, Non-Standard variation in spelling and the variation *y'all*. The frequency and the examples of each of the three varieties will be presented. Since the aim of this essay has been to examine the frequency and use of NSE variants in food blogs in relation to gender and contents, the main content of the post or comment in which the example was found is mentioned and some examples will also be followed by brief discussions.

Interestingly and in contrast to the findings by Trudgill (Chambers, 2009:120-123), no examples of variants of Non-Standard could be found in the male blogs. Due to the fact that the aim of this study has been to examine the frequency of Non-Standard and no such examples were found in the male blogs, no examples or numbers representing the male blogs will be presented here.

5.1 Non-Standard variations of hedges *kind of / sort of*

In analyzing the posted material found on the blogs from March 30 - April 16 the Non-Standard variants of the words *kind of* and *sort of* could be distinguished. In table 1 the frequency of this variation is presented, followed by the analyzed examples from the blogs in which the variants were featured.

Table 1: Frequency of variation of *kind of / sort of*

Name of Blog	Gender	Total number of words posted in posts/comments including the 'about me' page	Frequency of variation of <i>kind of / kinda</i>	Frequency of variation of <i>sort of / sorta</i>
<i>Joanne Eats Well With Others</i>	Female	4223	7/2	0/1
<i>Shutterbean</i>	Female	6317	2/5	0/0
<i>Crazy for Crust</i>	Female	4782	2/6	0/0

As seen in this table the posts by *crazy for crust* contained the largest amount of the variation of *kind of*. The only variation found of *sort of* was featured in *Joanne Eats Well With Others* and two examples of *kind of* could be noted in the posts and comments by *Shutterbean* and *crazy for crust*. The blog author Joanne at *Joanne Eats Well With Others* uses the Standard *kind of* more than the Non-Standard variant whereas the opposite is found in the other two blogs. Note that the

Standard form *kind of* is used by the male blog authors but never spelled *kinda* and is therefore not of relevance here.

The content of the April, 2 post featured in the blog *Joanne - Eats Well With Others* is highly personally oriented as the blog author talks about her weekend, impersonating a real life girl gossip encounter. As she chitchats about a new found romance, the following example of this Non-Standard variant can be noted;

(1) "...” And I think he kinda sorta likes me too. Big smiles.” (<http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/>

The example shows a variation of the hedges *kind of* and *sort of* here typed '*kinda sorta*'. The use of hedges in this context could be argued as indicators of linguistic politeness as she humbly reflects upon the responded feelings of her new romantic acquaintance.

Additionally, the post of April 9, contains this example;

(2) “I do kinda believe this dish has potential.”

(<http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/2012/04/recipe-tofu-braised-in-rhubarb-sauce.html>)

In the same post just two sentences prior to the latter example, the Standard variant is spotted;

(3) “It's more of an "eh, it happened" kind of situation.

(<http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/2012/04/recipe-tofu-braised-in-rhubarb-sauce.html>)

The reason for displaying both these examples is to demonstrate their difference in context. The full context of the post is not described here however, it is clear that the first example with the Non-Standard variation refers to the recipe posted. Thus, the blog author may be inclined to display a sense of modesty towards her achievement in coming up with a recipe. In contrast, the statement in example (3) is different in meaning and *kind of* does not here function as an adverbial hedge but rather as a noun indicating a particular sort of thing. Thus, naturally this meaning does not to the same extent, require linguistic politeness.

In the *Shutterbean* post of March 31, the Non-Standard hedge of *kind of* is noted;

(4) “I bought the wrong kinda beans for our espresso machine.”

(<http://www.shutterbean.com/everyday-life-week-13/#more-12084>)

In this example the variation *kinda* also derivates from the noun indicating the particular kind of beans and does not necessarily function as an indicator of politeness but rather an indication of the blog author's fondness of linguistic playfulness e.g. notice the rhyming in this sentence. The standard *kind of* might not have been as suitable in this sentence if creating a rhyming pattern was the purpose.

In the post of April 5, as she lists trying out the work-out method 'Zumba' as one of her favorite things, another example is noticed. This time using a variation of the adverbial hedge *kind of*,

(5) "it actually looked kinda fun!" (<http://www.shutterbean.com/2012/5-favorite/#more-12513>)

In another example, where the blog author of *Shutterbean* on April 10, comments on a reader's comment to the post of April 7, the following use of the hedge *kinda* can be distinguished;

(6) "... my kinda gal!! "

<http://www.shutterbean.com/2012/everyday-life-week-14/#more-12555>

Here, *kinda* functions as a noun, yet, the utterance is made to show likeness with the reader which may indicate that it is used as a marker of politeness.

The *crazy for crust* post of March 30, features another use of *kinda*;

(7) "So it's kinda perfect." (www.crazyforcrust.com/)

The context in example (7) revolves around the blog author Dorothy discussing that she has posted an interview with herself to answer frequently asked questions which she finds ideal since she mentions that she enjoys talking about herself. This rather self-centered context may suggest that the use of *kinda* therefore is a marker of politeness. Yet, interestingly, the standard form *kind of* is used just a sentence later;

(8) "I kind of combined the lists of questions, lest you get bored."

(<http://www.crazyforcrust.com/>)

In commenting the *crazy for crust* post of April 3, the following adverbial hedge is found;

- (9) “It’s kinda like you’ve all had a vacation too, no?” (www.crazyforcrust.com)

Similarly in the post of April 4, in which the blog author discusses the preferred texture of a perfect brownie, this example is found;

- (10) “Do you like your brownies kinda fudgy?” (www.crazyforcrust.com)

In the post of April 6, where the blog author reflects upon coming home from her recent vacation, this use of *kinda* was recognized;

- (11) “I’m actually kinda sad it’s Friday...because that means Spring Break is almost over.”
(www.crazyforcrust.com)

In the April 10, the blog author discusses a TV-show called *Million Dollar Rooms*;

- (12) “Now, I can kinda understand spending that much on, say, a pool area...”
(http://www.crazyforcrust.com/2012_04_01_archive.html)

The *Shutterbean* post of April 12, in which a healthier snack recipe constitutes the subject matter, another example of the noun *kind of* is found;

- (13) “...cranberries balance things out in a trailmix kinda way.”
(<http://www.shutterbean.com/2012/dry-roasted-edamame-w-cranberries/#more-13014>)

Later in responding to reader commentaries to the same post, an additional example is recognized;

- (14) “Edamame taste like..a dried garbanzo bean kinda.”
(<http://www.shutterbean.com/2012/dry-roasted-edamame-w-cranberries/#more-13014>)

A final example is found in the commentaries to the *crazy for crust* post on April 13, where the blog author uses another example of *kinda*;

- (15) “..today kinda person.” (http://www.crazyforcrust.com/2012/04/whatever-friday_13.html)

5.2 Non-Standard variation in spelling

The use of Non-Standard spelling constituted another linguistic element found in the material of the female blogs. The recognized examples differed in style and seemed to be used for various purposes, although a majority of them appeared to have the function of a linguistic device to indicate the attitudes or feelings of the blog author. The frequency of use and the examples are presented and discussed below;

Table 2: Frequency of variations concerning spelling

Name of blog	Gender	Total number of words posted in posts/comments including the 'about me' page	Frequency of variations concerning spelling
Joanne Eats Well With Others	Female	4223	5
Shutterbean	Female	6317	10
crazy for crust	Female	4782	3

As noted in Table 2, even if both *crazy for crust* and *Joanne Eats Well With Others* had fewer examples distributed on smaller amount of words, the blog *Shutterbean* contained the highest frequency of spelling variation.

In the 'About me'—page by *Joanne Eats Well With Others* the blog author starts out in a jokingly tone using a conversational speech related linguistic pattern and one example of a Non-Standard variant;

(16) "Given the amount of online dating profiles I've written in my life. (Let's not count, k?) "

[\(http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/\)](http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/)

In "(Let's not count, k?)" the single letter *k* is used instead of the original 'ok' or 'okay'. This variant of spelling is a shortened form often occurring in various informal forms of CMC, such as emails or text messaging.

The blog post of March 30, contains several examples of Non-Standard variants as the blog author shares her thoughts on family gatherings and how to make them more endurable with rum-filled banana foster bread;

(17) (18)

“...Puh-leeze.

I mean...just look at this groundbreaking work I've been doing! A light and healthy banana bread that doesn't taste light and healthy at all in the slightest...and that will make your Easter brunch infinitely more palatable. Nobel Prize kind of stuff. Fo' sho.” (<http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/>)

Here the blog author deliberately uses a variation of spelling to the word *please* by adding and changing letters. This is also known as prosodic spelling where the stress and intonation of the word has been displayed to reflect the attitude or feeling of the blog author. Further down the quotation a similar non-standard variation is used in the statement “*Fo' sho*” instead of the standard form *for sure*. It can be debatable whether this may be an example of a local linguistic trait indicating the regional variation of the blog author.

In the post of April 9, a Non-Standard variation is used as part of an idiom;

(19) “You can't win 'em all.”

(<http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/>)

Even though the Standard form of *them* has been exchanged to an apostrophe in ‘*em*, the well-known idiom is often pronounced as written above with the *th* sound not spoken. Thus, it is arguable whether the example truly functions as a fair case of Non-Standard language use by the blog author. The content of the April,2 post by *Joanne Eats Well With Others*, features an interesting example as she remarks on the featured recipe of a casserole, another variant is distinguished;

(20) “...”(duck confit? goose fat? yuck and yuck-ER) “ (<http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/>)

Here, the blog author intensifies the word yuck by using a personal variant of “yuck-ER”, adding capital letters as to distinguish and intensify this word from the existing form of the word ‘yucker’. Note that the typical adjective would be yuckier but here the blog author may have chosen the spelling variation to emphasize a sense of linguistic style.

March 31, *Shutterbean* puts out a post which covers thoughts and pictures of the blog author’s recent daily life, several examples in language use relating to NSE could be detected. At the top of the post the following variants of spelling of the words *why* and *so* can be distinguished;

(21) “I was in a *WHHHHHY ME?* kind of mood” ”...”

(22) “This smoothie was SOOO green until I added the frozen berries.”

<http://www.shutterbean.com/everyday-life-week-13/#more-12084>)

The deviation in spelling of both *why* and *so* have here deliberately been reinforced in meaning by the adding of letters as well as being written in capitals. Both could be regarded as examples of prosodic spelling where the rhythm, stress and intonation of the words are demonstrated, thus, reflecting the emotional state of the blog author at the time being. This speech related use of conversational devices is, as previously mentioned, frequently found in the language used in blogs in order to enhance a feeling or experience. Even though it could be questioned whether this could be argued as an example of Non-Standard, it is nevertheless a variant not regarded as standard in formal writing.

Similar examples of spelling deviation are found in the commentaries to her post of April 3, as well as when she responds to reader commentaries on her April 9, post;

(23) “whaaaaaaaaaat!!” (<http://www.shutterbean.com/2012/house-tour-living-room/#more-12477>)

(24) “...If so I LOOOOOOOOOOOVED that blanket”

<http://www.shutterbean.com/2012/black-white-angel-food-cake/#comments>)

As shown, the blog author Tracy at *Shutterbean* has a tendency to use variation in spelling to communicate her feelings. In the post of April 13, an additional example of this is found;

(25) “Aaaaaaaand I think I might be done with my kitchen organizing project.”

<http://www.shutterbean.com/page/3/>)

The blog author is a frequent responder to reader commentaries and in answering the comments to the post of March 31, the following examples of use of NSE is detected;

(26) “It totes does the trick.”

<http://www.shutterbean.com/everyday-life-week-13/#more-12084>)

The word *totes* a variant of the original word *totally* is used by adding a last suffix -s and further down another similar example features;

(27) “ for reals!” (<http://www.shutterbean.com/everyday-life-week-13/#more-12084>)

Similarly, the blog author uses a variant of *for real* by adding the last suffix -s to it.

Further down in the comments another variation is found;

(28) “I loooove it!” (<http://www.shutterbean.com/everyday-life-week-13/#more-12084>)

This is an additional example of the use of speech related devices where the blog author uses prosodic spelling to communicate and enhance a feeling. In this case, commenting on a reader’s compliment on her new H&M blazer.

In the post of April 4, not many variants of NSE could be detected in the posting or in the commentaries. However, this Non-Standard slang variant of *I don’t know* was distinguished;

(29) “I dunno.” <http://www.shutterbean.com/angel-hair-pasta-arugula-lemon/#more-12497>

The post of April 12, by *Shutterbean* contains the same slang variant;

(30) “I dunno. I did it and I survived...until dinner.”

(<http://www.shutterbean.com/2012/dry-roasted-edamame-w-cranberries/>)

In the *crazy for crust* post of April 6, a number of linguistic variants were recognized;

(31) “Anyhoo...here's what happened this week...” (<http://www.crazyforcrust.com>)

The example features a variation of the word *Anyhow* which seen in this setting may indicate a slight hesitation in the statement. However, intentionally pronounced as written in the example it could be used to express irony in a statement.

Later in the same post of April 6, a variation of *you* is found;

(32) “....Have a wonderful Easter and I'll see ya' next week.” (www.crazyforcrust.com)

Friday April 13, *crazy for crust* starts out her post using spelling variation to enhance her outlook on the chosen topic;

(33) “Friday...it's finally Friday. Why is it that short weeks often feel so loooong?” (<http://www.crazyforcrust.com>)

5.4 The variation *y'all*

Noted in the following posts by *crazy for crust* is the lexical item of *y'all*, a pronoun variation of *you-all* and generally regarded as a linguistic marker of Southern American English, African American vernacular English and Appalachian English. According to Montgomery (1989:273) *y'all* often functions as a communicative device to express politeness and hospitality in conversations. Whether the blog author descends from any of the geographical regions remains unknown. However, the pronoun of *y'all* has spread and is now being used in various parts and contexts in the United States (Montgomery 1989:274).

Since the examples of this variation were few and solely found in the material posted by *crazy for crust*, a table seemed superfluous. The four featured examples were distributed on 1435 words from the total amount of 4782 words posted by *crazy for crust* during the time period.

In the Friday post of March 30, the blog author starts out the post by using *y'all*;

(34) "Did y'all have a good week? "...” (www.crazyforcrust.com)

Using *y'all* in the opening of the post to address the reader may serve as a linguistic feature of hospitality and politeness.

On April 3, the blog author introduces a guest author from another blog and in this short, introductory post, the following example is noted;

(35) "we've become BFF's and I've become a stalker. So, new job description for me: baker and blogger stalker.
Y'all should try it out sometimes"
(www.crazyforcrust.com)

In the post of April 6, another use of *you all* is featured;

(36) "Happy Friday y'all!" (<http://www.crazyforcrust.com>)

This example constitutes the first sentence in the post, clearly setting the tone in communicating with her addressees.

Similarly, in the post of April 13, which covers a wide range of topics, the opening contained the following example;

(37) “Did y'all have a fun week?” (http://www.crazyforcrust.com/2012_04_01_archive.html)

Similarly to examples (34) and (36), since this is found in the opening of the post it can be assumed that the blog author wishes to establish a friendly tone in addressing her readers. According to Montgomery (1989:273-274) there are several variations in spelling, such as, *y'all*, *ya'll* and sometimes even *yall* leaving out the apostrophe. The second person plural pronoun has been the subject of contentious debate whether *y'all* also could be used as singular. Further dispute has concerned whether this pronoun is a contraction or not since this contraction differs from many others as it contracts a stressed form to the unstressed. Contrary to contractions such as *he'll* where an unstressed *will* is contracted to the stressed *he*. Montgomery (1989:274) states further that the derivation from *you all* is unclear to many speakers, arguing that a real contraction of *you* and *all* would be spelled and pronounced *you'll*.

6. Concluding remarks

Taking part in Internet communication in one way or the other is becoming more and more of a necessity. The new medium offers a wide range of communicative tools all of which serve diverse purposes. Not all of us engage in blogs; however, the phenomenon has expanded widely and can now be found in various contexts such as the local newspaper, making it more or less unavoidable for the general public. Since blogs offer everyone the opportunity to speak their mind, the language in blogs differs from that normally found in written communication. In examining the blog posts some elements of Non-Standard English could be distinguished. However, the frequency is by no means astonishing and overall all blogs observed in this essay, were found to a great extent using a language characterized by standard grammar.

In the examined posts there is no frequency of double negation or invariant forms of “*to be*” also known as subject-verb agreement. A reason for this might be that such non-standard variations are regarded as more stigmatized than those Non-Standard variants displayed in the result, which often only are looked upon as linguistic playfulness or communicative strategies. The use of the Non-Standard variant of *kind of* can be argued to relate to the theories put out by Lakoff (2004) and Levinson (1987) that its usage functions as an indicator of politeness and modesty, primarily used by women. Instances of this are particularly noticeable in example (1) and (2). Similarly, as presented in the result, the female blogs had a tendency to use variation of spelling of words such as intensifiers in order to further enhance their attitudes or feelings. This kind of spelling was demonstrated in examples (22) and (24). The female blog authors appear to

use some linguistic variants to add a friendly tone when addressing the readers. An example of this is demonstrated in the use of *y'all* as found in the blog of *Crazy for Crust* where the blog author, in three examples, uses the variant in the opening sentence. As noticed in the result, no male blog authors were found using any Non-Standard variants. This may of course be due to a number of diverse factors, yet it may be discussed whether a possible reason for this could be due to linguistic disadvantage, as presented by Chambers (2009: 145-147,151) causing the male blog authors to avoid Non-Standard variants where it would seem to be appropriate. As previously mentioned studies have found that women have a linguistic advantage over men and show a wider range of linguistic varieties (Chambers 2009:145-146,151). Apart from the apparent absence of Non-Standard in the examined male blogs, the reason why such an assumption could be suggested here is primarily based on the frequency of spelling mistakes or loss of letters found in one of the male blogs *Eat Like No One Else*. As for spelling variation is concerned, studies by for example Lakoff (2004) have indicated that intensifiers are more common in female language, thus, there is a probability of finding fewer intensifiers in male blogs and more unlikely to find them further intensified by spelling. There is also a possibility that men and women may differ in how they look upon and treat the subject matter of food and therefore show a discrepancy in their linguistic approach to it. Another factor to consider in analyzing the relatively low frequency of Non-Standard language in this essay may be that the blogs examined are all frequently read and referred to by other blogs. It could therefore be assumed that language is used more consciously than if the blogs were addressed only to the closest friends and family. Likewise the blog authors are all adults in their late twenties and early thirties. Thus, there is reason to presume that the majority of the language used can be derived to norms of adult linguistic behavior. The social classes of the blog authors remain unknown and any attempts to determine such factors would merely be speculations. Nevertheless, it is a fair assumption that neither of the blog authors belong to the fringes of society, a considerable fact and probably demonstrated in their linguistic repertoire. In a more comprehensive study, further knowledge of the blog authors would be significant in analyzing their use of language.

Lastly, even though the English found in the examined blogs generally follow the norms of Standard English with relatively few instances of deviating variants, the result still indicates some interesting linguistic behaviors. There was a discrepancy between the male and female blog authors since no examples of Non-Standard English could be detected in the male blogs. Possible reasons for this have been discussed, yet any factual causes remain unknown and are left for further study. In contrast, the female blog authors tended to use linguistic variants to enhance feelings or attitudes and to maintain a friendly and humble tone towards the readers, all

to ensure that the message could not be misinterpreted. To deepen the understanding of these diverse linguistic behaviors in blogs, a study of larger scale could more closely identify the possible underlying factors behind the linguistic repertoires.

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