

**Univerzita Karlova v Praze**

**Pedagogická fakulta**

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

**BACHELOR THESIS**

**BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE**

**The Language of Social Network Users**

**Jazyk uživatelů sociálních sítí**

Author: Kateřina Harazimová

Supervisor: PhDr. Radek Vít

**Praha 2011**

## **Prohlášení**

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V Praze dne .....

## **Poděkování**

Chtěla bych poděkovat PhDr Radku Vítovi za odborné vedení, cenné rady a pomoc při realizaci této práce.

## **Abstrakt**

Tématem této bakalářské práce je jazyk uživatelů sociálních sítí, kteří na internetu využívají různých způsobů komunikace a tudíž i různých jazykových prostředků. Práce je rozdělena do dvou částí: teoretická část se věnuje zejména jazyku používanému na internetu, sociálním sítím a jejich možnostem komunikace. Praktická část se zaměřuje na rozbor konkrétních příkladů a zkoumá i názory a postoje uživatelů.

Cílem práce je přiblížit způsob a formu komunikace na internetu, která je v dnešní době velmi rozšířená a oblíbená, a která do určité míry ovlivňuje používání anglického jazyka v běžné komunikaci.

## **Klíčové pojmy**

komunikace, internet, internetová komunikace, jazyk uživatelů počítače, sociální síť, počítačový slang

## **Abstract**

The topic of this B.A. thesis is the language of social network users. Since they use various means of communication on the internet the kind of language they employ also varies a lot. The thesis is divided into two parts: the theoretical one studies computer mediated communication, social networks as such and their means of communication. The practical part analyses particular examples of communication and also inquires into opinions and attitudes of the users.

The aim of this thesis is to make an insight into the internet communication, which is nowadays widespread and extremely popular and to certain extent influences the English language used in everyday communication.

## **Key words**

communication, internet, internet communication, language of computer users, social network, computer slang

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This thesis is primarily devoted to internet communication, which is nowadays an inherent part of everyday life and brings about various advantages and disadvantages. In a way the internet has opened a new dimension of communication; in principle it managed to connect people all over the world with just several restrictions mainly of material character (such as possession of a computer). In the cyberworld distances do not matter, users are literally just a few clicks from each other. By virtue of the internet it is possible to communicate with anyone, nearly anywhere around the world and at any time. However, internet communication varies greatly from face to face encounters and therefore it is necessary to accept the fact that most online conversations are purely textual, some can be audio-visual, nevertheless both kinds lack personal touch. For these reasons there has been a constant need for appropriate and convenient way to express one's thoughts and emotions; therefore a completely new way of communicating came into being and has been developing since. It includes mainly very specific vocabulary closely linked to the internet and computers in general and other aspects such as heavy punctuation, emoticons and acronyms to imitate spoken language with its prosodic features.

The internet provides us with numerous options of communicating with its other users and consequently the range of its means is extremely broad. For that reason, this thesis narrows it down and focuses entirely on the language of social networks, which have become exceptionally popular among internet users of almost all nationalities, age groups, races, education and beliefs.

The thesis is divided into two main parts: theoretical and practical. The former inquires computer mediated communication as such, its prominent features, advantages and disadvantages. Moreover it deals with computer slang and closely studies social networks, especially Facebook, and their particular means of communication. The latter contains two chapters: the first one studies practical examples of language that is typical of Facebook users and describes them from various points of view. The second chapter presents the results of an online questionnaire that was answered by Facebook users of

various age groups and nationalities and intended to find out more about their preferences concerning written communication on the internet.

The main aim of this thesis is to look into the way people communicate on the internet, in particular on social networks, to explore and explain what specific features these conversation bear and to find out if they are efficient, popular, useful or rather neglected and despised by the users.

I have chosen this topic for my thesis considering the internet and social networks are nowadays an inherent and important part of everyday life of many people all around the world. Both these phenomena are constantly altering, reflecting the personalities, interests and needs of their users. The language of social network users is a fascinating topic for it is changing with remarkable speed. Its development has been extraordinary and it is fairly expectable that the future of internet language will show new tendencies as well.

# **I. THEORETICAL PART**

## **1 Computer mediated communication**

With the rapid development of the World Wide Web in the recent years the language of the internet has become an inseparable part of everyday lingo of many languages around the globe. Since the Web spreads very quickly and reaches millions of people from various cultures who, to a large extent, contribute to its contents, the language is exceptionally variable.

Computer mediated communication is a specific type of social intercourse bearing neither the typical properties of spoken interactions nor those of the written style. First of all, a piece of text, for instance a book or a magazine, is static and permanent and therefore, it is always possible to get back to any desired information mentioned in that particular text. (Crystal, 2007, 156) On the other hand, web sites are updated extremely frequently, some of them even several times a day – especially those concerned with news or current affairs. As a result, when accessing the same URL repeatedly, even at different times of a day, one may not be able to find the same information there – they might have been updated, rewritten, relocated or even deleted. Social networks function on a very similar principle – their home pages, users' profiles, fan pages and other components change rather notably within very short time periods depending mainly on the time of the day and the number of active contacts of that particular user.

Even though spoken language is not going to be dealt with in this thesis, it is crucial to point out several of its aspects, for reasons suggested among others by Susan C. Herring in her article “Computer-Mediated Conversation: Introduction and Overview”:

There is much *prima facie* implicit evidence that text-based CMC is conversation-like. In casual parlance, internet users often refer to textual exchanges as conversations, using verbs such as ‘talked,’ ‘said,’ and ‘heard’ rather than ‘typed,’ ‘wrote,’ or ‘read’ to describe their CMC activities. Even published authors sometimes refer, unconsciously, it seems, to ‘speakers’ rather

than online ‘writers’, ‘talk’ rather than ‘typed exchanges’, ‘turns’ rather than ‘messages,’ and so forth, when reporting on CMC. This linguistic usage attests to the fact that users experience CMC in fundamentally similar ways to spoken conversation, despite CMC being produced and received by written means.<sup>1</sup>

According to Crystal, there are several ways of altering human speech: it is possible to vary the pitch, loudness, speed, rhythm or timbre of voice; furthermore we can enrich our narration with various amounts of silence (2007, 73-74). Written language, however, lacks all these prosodic features. It is impossible to express feelings or emotions by writing slower or quicker, there is no way to show anger by switching into a different pitch, or expressing irony or sarcasm for example by imitating another dialect or language variety. Nevertheless, to a large extent the internet users seem to focus their efforts on simulating the real world with realistic life situations and conversations that take place on the Web. Therefore there was an urgent need of new ways to imitate at least some basic features of natural spoken language. That is why the current Netspeak<sup>2</sup> abounds in rather non-traditional spelling and punctuation and the use of capital letters, special symbols and spacing for emphasis. (Crystal, 2002)

Internet users have found several ways to embrace some of the characteristics of spoken language; however, online communication is still short of many attributes that are perfectly natural for spoken interactions. Firstly, it fails to give an immediate feedback to the sender – there is no possibility for the recipient to encourage the writer with a nod, additional question or a simple “uh-uh”. Secondly, as far as emails, chatrooms, messaging or public comments on social networks are concerned, there is little or no room for spontaneity given the fact that our message is not transmitted to the other person as long as we do not wish to do so, allowing us to re-read it or double-check for mistakes. Furthermore, it is fairly risky when it comes to conveying humour, sarcasm or irony in the cyberworld. Although these are rather specific phenomena they are used quite commonly in everyday conversations. That is why it was vital to invent an equivalent also for people operating the keyboard: in 1982 Scott Fahlman proposed

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<sup>1</sup> Herring, Susan C. “Computer-Mediated Conversation: Introduction and Overview.” *Language@Internet*. <<http://www.languageatinternet.de/articles/2010/2801>>. [cit.2011-02-21].

<sup>2</sup> Computer mediated communication is often referred to as Netspeak, it is also an alternative to ‘Netlish’, ‘Weblish’, ‘Internet language’, ‘cyberspeak’, ‘electronic discourse’ or ‘interactive written discourse’ (Crystal, 2002, 17)

symbols :-) and :-( to be used to mark messages that are jokes and those that are not supposed to be funny<sup>3</sup>. These were the first and also simplest non-verbal ways of conveying humour through writing. As Lynne Truss puts it, the emoticon is “the greatest (or most desperate, depending how you look at it) advance in punctuation since the question mark in the reign of Charlemagne.” (Truss, 192) In the course of time emoticons, also known as smileys, have undergone a tremendous transformation; firstly, they have multiplied by hundreds and secondly, they became much more elaborate some of them being made up of more than just three punctuation marks. For instance, %\*@:-) (hungover), :-ozz (bored) or (@\_@) (boggle-eyed) are merely results of great creativity, however, none of these are much used in these days. David Crystal observes that “emoticons have an intriguing existence. Very few of them are ever used. Surveys of email and chatgroups suggest that only about 10 per cent of messages actually use them, and then usually just the two basic types - :) and :.” (2004, 119)

Despite all the efforts to make the language of the internet sound as natural as regular face-to-face conversation the results are rather unconvincing. David Crystal summarizes the relationship between the written and spoken language and Netspeak in his book *How language works*:

“On the whole, computer-mediated communication – often referred to as CMC, or Netspeak – is better seen as written language which has been pulled some way in the direction of speech than as spoken language which has been written down. However, expressing the question in terms of the traditional dichotomy is itself misleading. CMC is identical to neither speech nor writing, but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both. (...) Because it does things that the other medium do not do, it has to be seen as a new species of communication.” (2007, 158)

In conclusion, it appears that the language of the internet is nowadays an important part of everyday social interactions for many people almost all over the world. It is rich in international words that mostly originate in English but also other

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<sup>3</sup> “Original Bboard Thread in which :-) was proposed.” <<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~sef/Orig-Smiley.htm>>. [cit. 2011-02-28]

expressions coming from minor languages. It is particularly changeable and therefore it is not easy to take track of its usage on a global scale. However, linguists have been researching various aspects of CMC focusing mainly on the style of writing, which to a large degree resembles informal speech and also on non-verbal means of conveying information electronically, which is usually referred to as computer slang.

## **2 Computer slang**

With the swift spread of the internet, slang quickly became extremely popular with internet users partly because it is legal to use almost any kind of language while communicating on the Net and partly because slang makes any post or message sound more natural and catchy for the reader.

Slang is a domain of social groups. Mattiello describes 31 sociological properties of slang that were derived from various slang definitions. These include for instance group-restriction, informality, time-restriction, ephemerality, debasement, freshness, playfulness, obscenity, subject-restriction, novelty, humour, unconventionality, desire to impress, secrecy, locality and culture-restriction. All in all, we may define slang as a connecting element for people of similar interests, life styles, age and experience, which is mostly considered to be a subordinate speech, a lower ranking variety of formal language. Slang continually expands language from every perspective – morphological, lexicological, semantic and syntactical. Even though its vocabulary thrives especially in taboo subjects such as sexual intercourse or male and female genitalia, vulgar words are fairly commonly used in everyday spoken and written conversation. Slang is meant to surprise, impress, shock and provoke; typically, it is humorous and playful and is often used exclusively within a particular social group or subgroup. It also varies greatly on regional basis: although the inhabitants of the USA, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland and other countries share the same language, their slang differs in lexicon, grammar and usage. Slang is generally one of the most variable parts of a language, it is always up-to-date adapting new words and phrases and attributing them new meanings; however, it is rather liable to die out

because generally, the society, its tastes, likes and interests are changing too rapidly and there is not a big chance for a language craze to endure.

Computer slang is extremely rich in variety and often also rather creative; it includes vulgarisms, abbreviations, shortenings, blendings, acronyms etc. The latter has become exceptionally popular for it is the quickest way of writing, saving its author a lot of keystrokes. Furthermore, acronyms are very productive – according to [www.internetslang.com](http://www.internetslang.com) there are already more than 6 000 acronyms and new ones are constantly being invented. The most common ones would seem to be *BTW* (By The Way), *BF / GF* (Boyfriend / Girlfriend), *THX* (Thanks), *OMG* (Oh My God) or *LOL* (Laughing Out Loud, but may also stand for Lots Of Love). As Crystal points out, all of these have become extremely popular in recent years, especially with teenagers and young adults. Nowadays, it is not an exception to overhear such expressions even in a face-to-face conversation, usually as parts of colloquial speech or slang. The usage of these expressions varies on a case to case basis: some of today's trendy ones may cease to exist in a few months whereas some may become extremely popular within a very short period of time. (Crystal, 2004)

It is necessary to point out, however, that computer slang is not represented by abbreviations only. Since the rise of the internet and the importance of computers in general meant also the beginning of brand new services offered online a whole new area of wordstock has been created to match the needs of their users. Many common words started to be used in connection with the internet and gained completely new meanings; for instance *spam* (an unwanted or unsolicited email), *firewall* (software or hardware protection against viruses and hackers) or *bookmark* (a tool for remembering URL of our favourite web sites). Moreover, words like *blog* (an online personal journal or diary) or *email* (electronic mail) entered general wordstock of many languages around the world. Another example – *Google*, is probably one of the best known expressions connected to the cyberworld. Not only has it been the most successful search engine in the USA for the last 5 years with market share usually reaching about 70%<sup>4</sup>, it is also a word that became part of everyday language both as a noun and a verb. To *google something* in today's slang is synonymous to “look up something” using Google search.

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<sup>4</sup> “Top Search Engines for 2010.” <<http://www.seoconsultants.com/search-engines/>>. [cit.2011-02-28]

The most common examples of somewhat fancy spelling may include words consisting of a combination of letters and numbers, where the numbers represent either a whole word or a cluster of letters that are normally pronounced in that particular expression. This kind of spelling is beneficial for its author in two ways: firstly, it is 'cool' and secondly, it requires fewer keystrokes and therefore saves time. Commonly used examples include: *hi5* (high five), *b4* (before), *gr8* (great), *2morrow* (tomorrow). (Crystal, 2004) Likewise, the symbol '@' started to appear in many slang expressions such as *@schl* (at school), *@hm* (at home), *cu @ 8* (see you at 8). Another possibility of making writing faster is to substitute a word with just one letter on the basis of phonological similarity, e.g. '*r u l8?*'. Looking rather cryptic, this sentence easily translates as '*Are you late?*'

There exist a few various options of emphasising emotions; for example, it is possible to overuse punctuation, for instance *What have you done??????* (expressing reproach), use one letter repeatedly as in an exclamation *Oh noooooooooo!* (when conveying extreme sadness or regret) or simply use capital letters for the whole message *WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN???*, which is within the Netspeak boundaries considered to be an equivalent to shouting. To make this question sound even more urgent, it is also possible to make spaces between all the letters: *W H E R E H A V E Y O U B E E N???* (Crystal, 2002)

This chapter inquired into the way users of the internet express themselves when they communicate with each other mainly in chatgroups, forums and via social networks. It dealt with sociological properties of slang and its particular examples, which are nowadays encountered by many users of modern electronic media.

### **3 Social networks**

#### **3.1 What is a social network**

Social networks are online based devices designed primarily to connect people – either it is possible to reconnect with one’s old friends or find new ones with similar hobbies or interests - and make online communication even easier than it is via email, instant messaging or chat rooms. Hand in hand with the increasing popularity of social networks, the number of their admirers has been growing; consequently there has been a steadfast demand for new possibilities of sharing one’s moods, interests, hobbies and life experiences. That is why there are dozens of those that not only connect people on the Web but also specialize in a certain field – for instance music (Buzznet, Last.fm), travel (CouchSurfing, Travbuddy.com), books (weRead, LibraryThing) or film (Flixster, FilmAffinity).

The development of social networks started in the mid 90s in the USA and originally, they were designed for students. These started all the phenomena we know today, including MySpace and Facebook. Nowadays, social networks have millions of members and are not students’ prerogative anymore. (Kulhánková, 2010)

#### **3.2 General social networks and their means of communication**

General social networks, i.e. those that are not focused on any specific topic, were created mainly to function as immense databases of personal contacts and information, which are easily accessible, manageable and always ready to be used. First of all, most of them are extremely user-friendly and therefore their users are able to manage their profiles rather intuitively. The more convenient and well-arranged a particular network is, the better chance it has to attract potential members from various age groups or social backgrounds. The diversity of users has a great influence not only on the shared content but to a large extent also on the way language is used. Secondly, general social networks (e.g. MySpace, Facebook, Badoo, Friendster) offer numerous basic ways of communicating with other users: messaging, online chat, personal statuses and their comments, discussions on sites of groups or events, or the possibility

to share photos, videos, music or web links and comment on them as well. Other options are non-verbal and include applications such as Superpoke, BuddyPoke or My Mood on Facebook, where one can express their mood through pictures, animations, emoticons or action they take against somebody else (eg. cyber poking, hugging, giving gifts etc.). The following subchapters are going to deal primarily with Facebook and the means of communication it offers.

### 3.3 Facebook

It cannot be denied that Facebook is one of the most popular social networks among people of all ages around the whole world. According to Facebook Factsheet<sup>5</sup> there are over 500 million active users of whom about 50% log in every day (Kulhánková, 2010) and about 200 million users currently access their accounts via their mobile devices. Being available in 68 languages this network is easily accessible for a great number of people from various countries, age groups or social backgrounds even though they are not native English speakers or are not able to use English well enough.

As well as other social groups, Facebook users have also developed their own slang. There are many words that everybody understands in general context; however, within Facebook community these gain some extra meaning. For instance, in the real world, we poke somebody to tease or annoy them, whereas the virtual *poke* is usually supposed to remind us of somebody we have not been in contact with for some time or that we even might have forgotten about or it just shows somebody is thinking about us at the moment. The word *tag* on Facebook is thoroughly connected with identifying people in photographs and posts. It is also possible to *untag* a picture – in that case, it will not appear in that user’s profile and there will be no connection with him or her through a web link. Furthermore, some expressions have literally come to existence only thanks to Facebook. If someone asks you to *Facebook them*, they simply wish to be contacted via this social network. If you *friend someone* on Facebook, it means your

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<sup>5</sup> “Facebook Factsheet.” <<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics#!/press/info.php?factsheet>>. [cit. 2011-02-19].

name will appear in the other person's Friend List and vice versa and both of you will be able to access information on each other's Profile.

### *1.3.1 Messaging*

Messaging is a private way of communicating. Nevertheless, it can transform into an asynchronous<sup>6</sup> chatroom when the sender chooses more than one recipient from their contact list and sends a message, which is not visible to anybody except the selected users. Since messaging on Facebook does not offer spell-check, it is the sender's responsibility to proof-read what they have written and because these messages are for the most part informal, targeted at friends or acquaintances, the main focus is usually on content, not on grammar. However, if the sender cares for accuracy, they have enough time to re-read their message, correct all possible mistakes and edit the text. Therefore, it could be assumed that messaging is one of the most revised means of communication.

If a message is replied to, both the original message and the new one are organized into a thread, in which the conversation continues. It allows all the participants to read all contributions listed in chronological order and owing to this also follow the development of the main topic. This system of messaging resembles the way chat-rooms are created. Although the information exchange of this kind is usually much slower than one in a synchronous<sup>7</sup> chatgroups, certain similarities may be traced in both. When commenting on synchronous chatgroups David Crystal points out that 'the members accommodate to each other' (2002, 147). It would seem that joining the same chatgroup or taking part at a particular message thread might cause a language shift; for example, it is very common for the contributors to assimilate with the new language environment by switching to an appropriate language variety. Moreover, they often repeat words and expressions from previous comments, including slang, abbreviations, neologisms etc. and thereby they help creating a completely new language environment,

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<sup>6</sup> For communicating through an asynchronous chatgroup one does not need to be online when there is a discussion going on. It is possible to join it at any time later because all the interactions are preserved and available to the users at request. (Crystal, 2002)

<sup>7</sup> 'In a synchronous situation, a user enters a chat room and joins an ongoing conversation in real time, sending named contributions which are inserted into a permanently scrolling screen along with the contributions from other participants.' (Crystal, 2002, 11)

which is a rather distinct feature of that respective group. In terms of social networks, language shifts may also appear when pictures, photos or video sequences are commented on, in statuses and their comments, on fan pages etc.

### *1.3.2 Chat*

Facebook chat is, unlike regular online chatgroups, a private means of communication that uses a little window at the bottom of the page and is designed for two users only, both of whom have to be online at that particular moment. There is no 'room' where multiple users could join and therefore the two users are free to use any language variety or vocabulary they wish to. Furthermore, since language of the online chat is probably a form of written language that most resembles the natural spoken language and moreover, Facebook does not offer an automatic grammar correction device, users tend to just simply type anything they would normally say in a face-to-face conversation, usually without much hesitation or attempts at double-checking their messages before sending them. That is also the main reason why chat messages often contain numbers of grammatical mistakes, misspelled words, missing letters etc. Many abbreviations, often the ones that look more like a code than a real word and also may stand for an expression that only the two people involved know about, are used to make the conversation faster and more fluent. The arguments presented above would suggest that written conversations sent through chat are the ones that most resemble everyday spoken language.

### *1.3.3 The Wall*

The Wall, also called Profile, is a rather specific tool of communication within Facebook, probably the one in which the most people can take part. It is sort of a collection of recent activities of its holder and their contacts which allows users to not only exchange messages with others, but also share their instantaneous thoughts through statuses, pictures, photographs, videos, or links to external web sites that they find interesting or useful. Whenever the user joins a group, comments on somebody else's post, become friends with a new person, updates the profile picture or just decides to share a thought, one can see it on the user's Wall.

Regarding the way Abram puts it, the Wall might seem to be a great place for public praise: 'Have you ever thought someone was so great that you wanted to look at him and say, 'You are so great,' and then turn to the world and say, 'World, isn't he so great?' That's the spirit of the Wall.' (158) Nevertheless, the Wall may also become a good way of spreading a libel. Therefore each user is offered to customize their privacy options and depending on these particular settings it is much easier to manage the Wall in terms of which posts are public, which are visible to selected friends only and who can post on the Wall without restrictions. (Kelsey, 2010)

The facts mentioned above suggest that the Wall represents the respective user as such, their Profile being accessible to all their Facebook friends at any time and their posts appearing directly in their friends' News Feed<sup>8</sup>. Since it is possible for everybody to intervene in the contents of one's Wall, the user is granted the right to choose whether to keep their friends' posts there or not. For example, if somebody leaves a harmful or abusive comment, or uses inappropriate language, the person in charge of the Profile can immediately remove such a post, report it as abuse or if necessary prevent the originator from re-posting it by blocking them or deleting them completely from the Friend List.

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<sup>8</sup> News Feed is a stream of the user's friends' posts, which appears on the home page. The more active contacts one has, the more diverse the News Feed is. (Kelsey, 2010)

## II. PRACTICAL PART

### 4 Commentary analysis

Computer-Mediated Communication displays many specific features, rules and means that distinguish it from all spoken interactions; primarily, it is implemented by users who are absolutely dependent on their keyboards and seldom know exactly who their reader is. Moreover, it is an undeniable fact that internet is predominantly a medium of informal communication especially if we focus on the discourse of social networks.

The main aim of the practical part of this thesis is to inquire into the way all the previously mentioned phenomena are used in real life. The following chapters are based on my analysis of 43 real public contributions published on Facebook by native English speakers in 2010 and 2011. These are supposed to express the writer's current mood, emotions, desires, opinions and thoughts. Statuses, posts and comments are all meant to be informal for they are targeted at friends and acquaintances of a particular user; therefore we can observe rather specific phenomena concerning mostly the vocabulary, but also grammar and syntax because although communication via Facebook Wall and comments has only the written form it demonstrates many characteristics of spoken, mostly slang language.

#### 4.1 The use of capital letters

- 4.1.1 OMGGGGG **HOW WAS I NOT AWARE?!?! CONGRATSSSSSS\***
- 4.1.2 it ain't gonna **HAPPEN!!!**
- 4.1.3 let's talk **NOW!**
- 4.1.4 **MmMmMm...** Organic Veggie Lasagna
- 4.1.5 I really, **REALLY** hope I'm feeling better in time for this.

Unlike printed literature, newspapers and serious websites on the internet, computer slang does not follow the rules of using capital and lower case letters. More to the contrary, it is fairly common to start an utterance with the latter and to use capitals in the middle of sentence or a single word either randomly or with the intention to make a certain expression prominent. If one wants to indicate shouting or other strong emotions, it is also possible to write the whole sentence in capitals, as it is shown in 4.1.1.

On the other hand, one can sometimes observe a curious feature of a comment or post written in this way for no apparent reason. This can be explained if we think in technical terms rather than linguistic ones: when typing quickly, one can accidentally hit the Caps Lock key that automatically switches all letters into capitals; retyping may seem to be overly time consuming and since the style of writing does not seem to be a major concern for most Facebook users it is with no doubt easier to post what has been written without any alterations.

## 4.2 Emphasis of quantity

4.2.1 not having fun **anymoreeeeeeeeeee**

4.2.2 sasha! happy beerthday! **yeeeeeeaaaah!**

4.2.3 wow madhu... i am **sooo** impressed..... wht picss woman... ur better than most professional photographers..

4.2.4 **Cuuuuuuuuute!!**

4.2.5 **Happppppppy birthdayyy leee!!!! lamagakha!!!**

The appearance of the same letter used several times in a row can be interpreted similarly to the use of capitals. In most cases both of these phenomena are used to emphasise a particular expression. Mostly, multiplying concerns vowels, because that is also how spoken language works; however, as 4.2.5 shows, in computer slang even consonants can be used repeatedly even though it would be impossible to pronounce

such a word. For this style of writing expresses mostly emotions and states of mind it is usually interjections that get altered.

### 4.3 Incorrect spelling and grammar

4.3.1 get yourself to the **buttafly** bar, find yourself a big **LAAADAYYY**

4.3.2 your **adress** is?

4.3.3 **melissa!** really?! **ill** be back this **friday!**

4.3.4 **Fo sho**, Meg.

4.3.5 **Workin** Splash at Harbour Front, **tis** sick

One cannot deny that the most valued features of computer-mediated communication are its speed and efficiency. If technical conditions, such as the kind of computer and internet connection we have, are omitted in order to communicate quickly, one should be a good typist. Since correctness is in the cyberworld not valued as much as alacrity and style of writing, users managed to find ways to spend as little time as possible on writing by creating a specific slang. It often ignores both spelling and grammatical rules so as to save characters, especially those that require more effort - for instance, to write an apostrophe one needs to use two keystrokes what definitely slows down the process of writing. The omission of apostrophe is noticeable in example 4.3.3 and is generally very common. Unless one uses Caps Lock key, the same difficulties apply for capital letters, which should be used at the beginning of a sentence or in personal names, as illustrated in 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 4.3.3.

Nevertheless, spelling mistakes often appear in chat conversations or wall posts, simply because the authors usually hurry the writing and do not check for mistakes, what is probably the case of 4.3.2. A non-standard or incorrect spelling, however, may also be used to attract more attention or look 'cool' such as the word *buttafly* in 4.3.1. An utter disregard for grammar is striking in 4.3.5 where the user wrote *tis sick* instead of *this is sick*.

#### 4.4 Slang words and vulgarisms

- 4.4.1 ohhh **wtf** cristoffff.. how **ya** doin man long time no talk was good nowadays
- 4.4.2 Marry **Fucking** Christmas!! and don't take it too literally....:-)
- 4.4.3 A: I miss you, **fuckface**. B: I miss you too, **shitstain**.
- 4.4.4 **Bitches** can't talk about my fugal prowess.
- 4.4.5 While cleaning his **bullshit**, I find his **weed** stash.

With the swift spread of the internet, slang quickly became extremely popular with internet users partly because it is legal to use almost any kind of language while communicating on the Net and partly because slang makes any narration sound more natural and catchy for the reader. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines slang as 'unconventional words or phrases that express either something new or something old in a new way. It is flippant, irreverent, indecorous; it may be indecent or obscene.' In fact, the more eccentric, playful and suggestive it is, the more popular it usually becomes.

Considering the fact that Facebook, as well as any other social network, is a very informal means of communication, it is hardly surprising that the majority of wall posts abounds in slang expressions. Most users simply type the same words they would normally utter in that particular situation, regardless of what kind of vocabulary is considered appropriate for written style.

Mattiello claims that slang is created by standard processes of word formation including compounding, affixation and conversion. (2008) Probably the most productive word in the English language is the vulgarism *fuck*, which appears as an adjective in 4.4.2 (*Fucking* Christmas), as a compound in 4.4.3 (*fuckface*) and as a part of an acronym in 4.4.1 (*wtf*). WTF is a multivocal acronym, usually used with a question mark (*WTF?*) and in most cases standing for *what the fuck?*; however, the 'W' may also represent any of the 'wh' interrogative pronouns, i.e. *what, where, which, why*

and *when* creating questions such as *where the fuck?* or *when the fuck?* and giving the WTF acronym a very wide range of usage.

Non-vulgar examples of slang expressions are represented by the words *weed* in 4.4.5 and *ya* in 4.4.1, the latter mentioned being a very common version of the pronoun *you*. Especially in the USA *weed* is a commonly used expression for marijuana.

#### 4.5 Acronyms and initialisms

4.5.1 **OMG** to the max!

4.5.2 trying to set up my house **ASAP** so I can start inviting people over

4.5.3 Just **FYI**, I sent you a message about my Prague travel plans.

4.5.4 **LOL** ur all "filler up!" :D

4.5.5 Sorry I disappeared. I ran to work and didn't log off. **Ttyl**

Despite the fact that in recent years acronyms have pervaded the spoken, mostly colloquial language, they still remain a domain of the written style. To be efficient, they need to be easy to use and understand. For that reason, most of the commonly used acronyms are kept as short as possible consisting of three or four letters. Longer ones do exist, nevertheless, they may be easily misinterpreted unless they are agreed on and used by a specific group of people.

All examples 4.5.1 – 4.5.5 illustrate very common acronyms that are generally read as *oh my God*, *as soon as possible*, *for your information*, *laugh/laughing out loud* or *lots of love* and *talk to you later*, respectively. (Crystal, 2004) The quote in 4.5.5 shows that the use of either lower case letters or capitals is unsubstantial for understanding acronyms. On the other hand, combining both is rather unconventional; the standard form would be *TTYL*, but *ttyl* is also acceptable.

## 4.6 Emoticons

- 4.6.1 Congrats!! Looks amazing... :o)
- 4.6.2 Hey there little fella :3
- 4.6.3 I really haven't! :( I'm a cheater, I used google translate ;P
- 4.6.4 It's hard to brush a dog's teeth :/
- 4.6.5 Mary Smith is a vegetarian. Except for an occasional steak ;-D

For CMC is depleted of prosodic features that in oral interactions help to convey the meaning as intended by the speaker, internet users have to rely on other means that their keyboard offers. Emoticons were created primarily in order to substitute intonation and facial expressions.

As well as acronyms and initialisms, the number of emoticons increases virtually every minute, that is why it is almost impossible to keep track of all of them and that the most profound ones are paradoxically the least understandable. This is partly the reason why most internet users tend to use just the simplest ones as demonstrated in examples 4.6.1- 4.6.5.

The emoticon in 4.6.1 shows the most common way of expressing that something is funny, the author is happy or smiling. There exist many variations of this particular smiley: for instance :), :-) or (-: . A kiss is usually indicated by :3 as in 4.6.2, :( in 4.6.3 depicts a sad face, the author of ;P is winking and sticking their tongue out at the same time. The emoticon in 4.6.4 is usually interpreted as lack of interest, boredom or sarcasm and the example in 4.6.5 combines laughing and winking.

## 4.7 Expressions directly connected to Facebook

- 4.7.1 tried to **fb you** and right when I wrote "Jimmmy" and clicked send...
- 4.7.2 Hey forgot to **tag you** in my **post**, ...
- 4.7.3 Nice **profile pic** mate. Haha

#### 4.7.4 dude, check out his **status**.fucking hilarious

Since Facebook is one of the most popular social networks in the world, its users have already managed to develop their own specific lingo; some brand new words appeared and many others gained new meanings exclusively in connection with Facebook.

One of the best examples is the word *facebook* itself. Up to now it has become so famous that even when it refers to the name of the network it is often spelled with a lower case 'f'. This word has also undergone a process of conversion; it is no longer used solely as a noun but also quite frequently as a verb. We can observe this phenomenon in 4.7.1: this sentence refers to an attempt for a chat conversation, which requires both potential participants to be online at the same time. It illustrates both the use of acronyms and conversion, where *fb* stands for Facebook and in this case it was used as a verb meaning that the sender tried to contact the addressee via Facebook chat.

The verb *to tag* in 4.7.2 could be roughly 'translated' as *to label* or *to mark* and is closely connected with the functions of public photo albums and video sharing. It means to identify a person in a photograph or a video sequence and place a name tag in it with a click of the mouse; when it is done, a direct link between this object and that particular person's profile is established making the given picture or video accessible from their private photo album. The reverse action to *tagging* is called *untagging* and is based on erasing the identity of a *tagged* user from a picture.

*Post* is one of the words that gained some extra meaning thanks to social networking. It can be used as two different word classes: the verb *to post* describes the act of publishing a comment, a link, a picture or another piece of information on either their own or somebody else's Wall. The product of this action, that is the information itself, is then called *a post*.

Every single Facebook user is primarily represented by their Profile, which is dominated by their *profile picture*. Since it is the main visual representation of that particular user, publishing a photograph is a preferred option; however, it is allowed to

display any picture or none at all. Since people are apt to change their profile pictures quite often, the comment in 4.7.3 might refer to such action.

#### 4.8 Clippings

- 4.8.1 Come home and see your fake **sis** act like an idiot, its quite a show.
- 4.8.2 ...especially since youve met the whole **fam** now.
- 4.8.3 Don't make me go all American on you and threaten a lawsuit..'cause I will
- 4.8.4 Nice profile **pic** mate. Haha
- 4.8.5 happy **bday** mate have a good 1!

“Clippings are shortened words, where a part is used for the whole.” (Crystal, 2007) They are extremely popular among internet users for two main reasons: they are short and therefore easier to write and they look “cool”.

*Sis* in 4.8.1 stands for *sister*, *fam* in 4.8.2 for *family*. Very common clipping that is normally used even in spoken language is the example in 4.8.3 '*cause*'; it is often written without the apostrophe or just spelled *cos* or *coz*. *Pic* in 4.8.4 is a shortened version of *picture* and *bday* in 4.8.5, which may be also spelled with a hyphen *b-day* or *B-day*, signifies birthday and is one of the most frequent shortenings appearing on Facebook Walls.

#### 4.9 The use of numbers and other symbols

- 4.9.1 wats crackin **2nite** my nigga?
- 4.9.2 do I have **2** fly over and wrastle u?
- 4.9.3 hey girl! how come i didn't see you @ the show last night! Boooooo
- 4.9.4 ...could rob the pantz off these m\*f#@%ers if he so chuzes

4.9.5 be on monday mornin! Ill be there lav! :) mmmwahhh♥

Facebook is a considerably creative environment, where originality, practicality and speed are appreciated most. Often it is the main aim of a user to attract attention and get as many other users as possible to see his or her new post, picture, status or another kind of update. On the other hand, numbers used within words may also save several keystrokes as it is demonstrated in examples 11.1. and 11.2, where *2nite* means tonight and 2 was used instead of the preposition to.

As Crystal points out the @ is nowadays used primarily in email addresses, nevertheless, it has been adopted for instance by many companies (@llgood, @ttractions) or even in book titles (*Business @ the speed of thought*) (2002). This seems to be a trendsetting tendency for most internet users who often replace the letters 'at' with the *at symbol*. For it does not seem to be faster or easier to write @ rather than the two letters these substitutions may be considered just a matter of fashion.

Even though slang is a norm for many websites and especially for communication via social networks, vulgarisms are still not that popular for public messages. Inappropriate language can be thus omitted by using either one non-standard symbol or their combination. This phenomenon is represented in 11.4; a vital part of a vulgarism has been substituted by random symbols \*#©% leaving the word understandable at least for English speakers who are familiar with this kind of vocabulary.

Unlike all the previous symbols, the heart used in the last comment cannot be found on the keyboard; therefore it needs to be copied either from another comment or a text editor. In spite of the fact that using this symbol makes typing rather complicated it is still popular and wide-spread. It can be seen in statuses that express love, affection, praise or appreciation or that are simply intended to stand out for a certain reason.

## **Results summary**

As it was shown in commentary analyses, Facebook English differs from the standard written language in many aspects. The most obvious difference that was demonstrated for instance in subchapter number 3 is probably the lack of proper grammar and syntax. The reason statuses and comments abound in mistakes is however, not necessary pure ignorance or insufficient education. Misspelled words are often just a result of quick writing without proofreading or they may be even written incorrectly so as to look more interesting and attract attention of potential readers.

In order to convey emotions and feelings that are not expressed by words to a desired extent the majority of the posts that were studied contained some of the means typical of online communication. The most popular seem to be writing only in capital letters, overpunctuation, using emoticons and slang words. All these phenomena can substitute features of spoken language such as intonation, pausing and loudness and also emotions that people normally exhibit through body language or facial expression, for example anger, happiness, excitement or disappointment.

Furthemore, this research has proved that Facebook users are very creative in their writing; it is only thanks to their efforts to express themselves as precisely as possible and sometimes even to avoid inappropriate words in their public posts that 'words' like \*f#©% exist. Moreover, computer slang has been enriched by many words that originated on Facebook, and are used exclusively in connection with this social network.

## 5 Questionnaire: Content analysis

### 5.1 Questionnaire

This chapter deals with the results of a questionnaire that I made up to inquire into the language that is actually used on Facebook. It was an online questionnaire, published on the website [www.vyplnto.cz](http://www.vyplnto.cz), whose link was spread via Facebook, emails and Instant Messaging programs. It was available for 95 hours, from 17<sup>th</sup> March to 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2011 and it was completed by 50 respondents - 29 (58%) women and 21 (42%) men. The dominating age category is 20-29 years of age, which represents 54% of all respondents. The exact numbers of respondents from each category are presented in Table 1.

The questionnaire consists of 30 questions; four of them are segmentational, exploring the nationality, education, age and sex of the respondents. Furthermore, there are four polytomous questions that do not offer an alternative answer and one dichotomous (yes/no) question. Altogether there are 18 open-ended questions, 13 of them targeted at the familiarity of internet users with the meanings of acronyms and emoticons, the rest asking the respondents for their opinions on various aspects of internet communication. Three questions are semi-closed and the respondent is provided the option of an alternative answer. The average time the respondents spent on completing the questionnaire was 11 minutes and 2 seconds. The questionnaire as it was published with the answer options is listed in the supplement. The analysis of individual questions is preceded by a hypothesis that concerns the major topics of the questionnaire.

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>19 and less</b>	<b>20 - 29</b>	<b>30 - 39</b>	<b>40 - 49</b>	<b>50 - 59</b>	<b>60 - 69</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Male</b>	3	12	3	1	1	1	21
<b>Female</b>	3	15	9	2	0	0	29
<b>Total</b>	6	27	12	3	1	1	<b>50</b>

**Table 1: The structure of respondents by their age and sex**

## 5.2 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Most respondents use Facebook for activities that are visible for other users, such as writing statuses or commenting on them.

Hypothesis 2: Emoticons are very popular among Facebook users because they are useful.

Hypothesis 3: The most commonly used emoticons are the simplest ones, especially :-) (happiness) and :-( (sadness).

Hypothesis 4: Not many users are familiar with elaborate smileys that express other than the most essential emotions or states of mind or those that are excessively creative.

Hypothesis 5: The majority of Facebook users do not check their messages and posts for mistakes before they publish them.

Hypothesis 6: Most users are not bothered by posts and messages that ignore rules of grammar and punctuation or are written in capital letters only.

Hypothesis 7: Readability of acronyms often depends on their length. The most common ones that are easily understandable are the shortest ones.

Hypothesis 8: Acronyms are a wide-spread phenomenon, understood and very often used by most Facebook users.

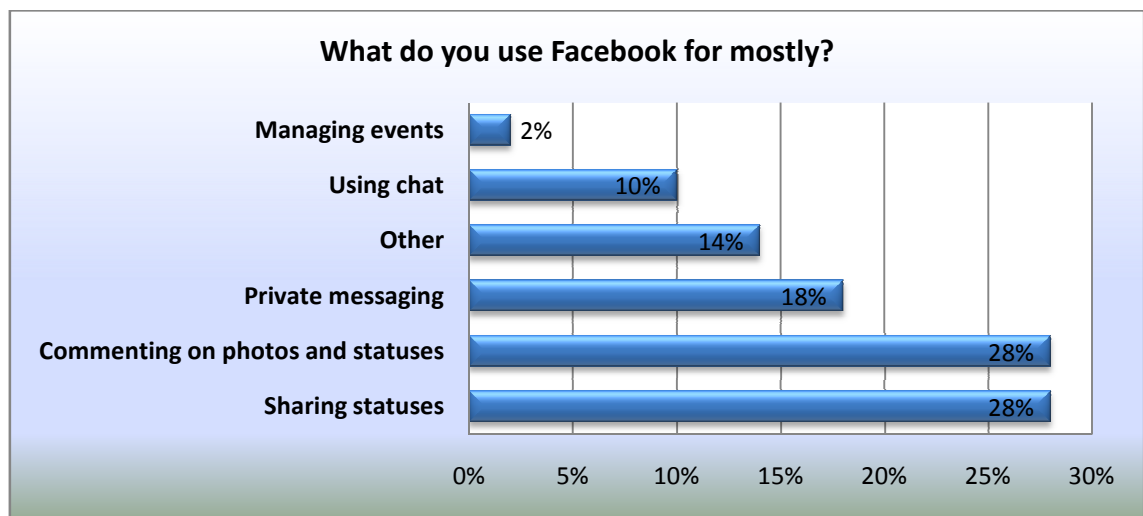
Hypothesis 9: People who use acronyms do it for it is efficient, convenient and time-saving.

### 5.3 Content analysis of individual questions

#### Question 1

##### What do you use Facebook for mostly?

This is a closed polytomous question that offers 6 answer options but does not provide any room for alternative responses.



Graph 1: What do you use Facebook for mostly?

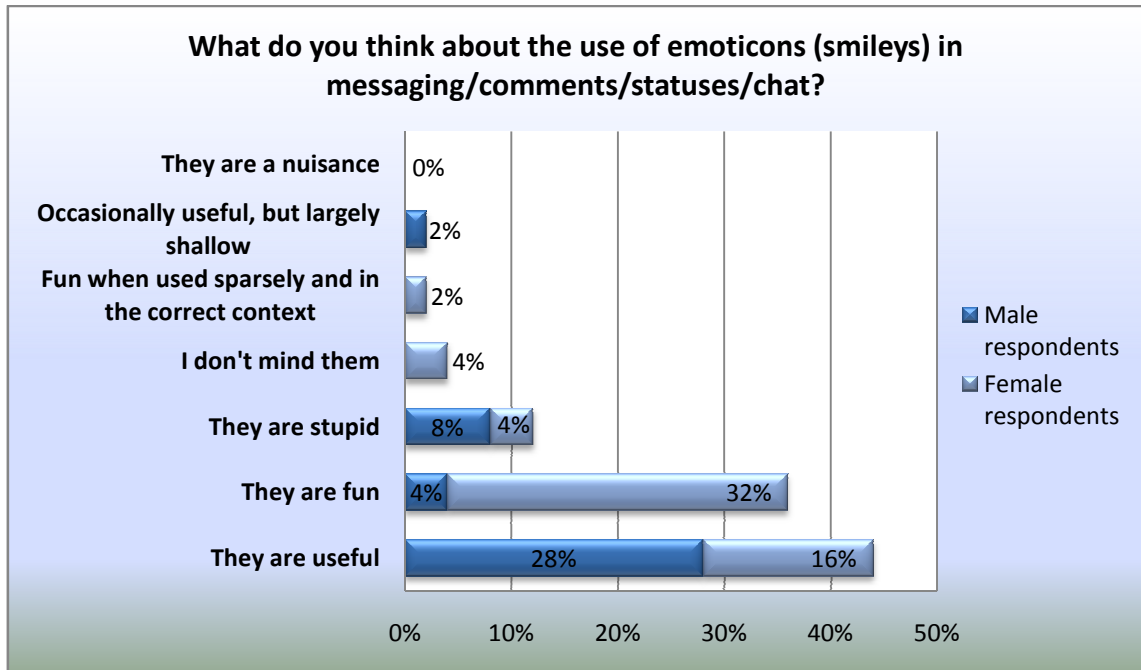
The facts that Facebook is a social network and a modern means of communication imply that its users want to share information with others. Therefore it is not overly surprising that the research proved the first hypothesis correct. Graph 1 shows that 56% of respondents claim that they use Facebook for commenting on photos and statuses and sharing statuses, which are both activities primarily meant to be public in contrast to just 28% of respondents who prefer to communicate in private through the medium of chat or messaging.

Since the answer options contain basic ways of verbal interactions, the respondents who said they use Facebook chiefly for other purposes presumably spend most of their time on this social network playing various games available there and which, in fact, may also be considered a means of communication, although it is non-verbal.

### Question 3

**What do you think about the use of emoticons (smileys) in messaging/comments/statuses/chat?**

This question is of the semi-closed type; it contains four response options, but also offers the possibility of an alternative answer.



**Graph 2: The opinions on using emoticons**

According to the questionnaire, the overall opinion of emoticons seems to be rather positive. As the Graph 2 evinces, the hypothesis number 2 was to a large extent confirmed by 44% of all respondents who believe emoticons are useful. 36% consider them fun to use and only 12% think they are stupid. 4% of the respondents do not mind them at all.

Taking into account the differences in results based on the sex of the respondents we can observe an interesting disproportionality between perceiving emoticons as useful or fun to use. Compared to 62% of male respondents (28% of all participants) only about 28% of female users (16% of the total number of respondents) find smileys useful. The ratio reverses when the users are asked if emoticons are fun; while more

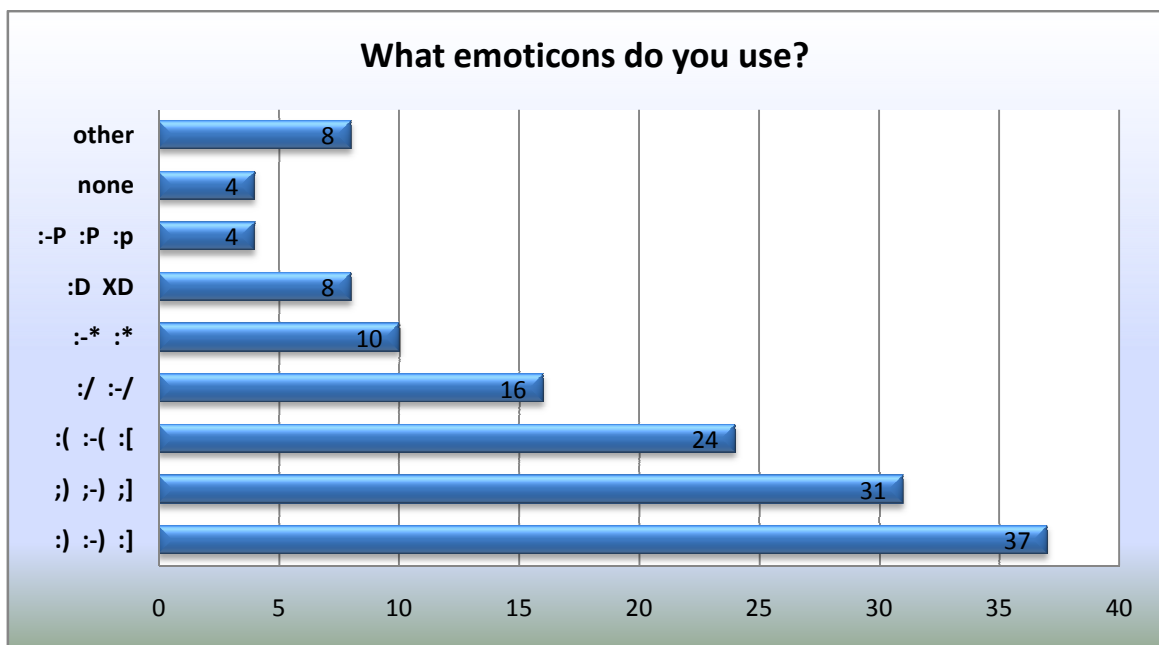
than 50% of female respondents think so, the same opinion is shared only by 9% of male respondents.

Four respondents expressed their own opinion for the answer of their choice was not listed. Two of them feel quite indifferent about using smileys, one person considers them fun but only if used scarcely and appropriately, another one regards them mostly superficial. On the other hand, the option 'emoticons are a nuisance' was not chosen by anybody.

#### Question 4

##### What emoticons do you use?

This is a semi-closed question which offers five response options represented by the most common emoticons. It was allowed to choose more than one option and moreover, respondents were encouraged to write down other variants of emoticons they use themselves.



Graph 3: What emoticons do you use?

Based on the results of question number 4, each person chose or wrote on average 3 emoticons they normally use. Four respondents claimed they never use any, the others answered by the minimum of one and maximum of eleven emoticons.

The hypothesis number three was proved partly correct due to 37 respondents (74%) who use the emoticon :-) and its variants. On the other hand, the sad face did not match the popularity of the graphic representation of happiness and got only 24 votes (48%) and despite the expectations the second most used emoticon according to this poll is ;-), (a winking face) and its variants chosen by 31 respondents (62%).

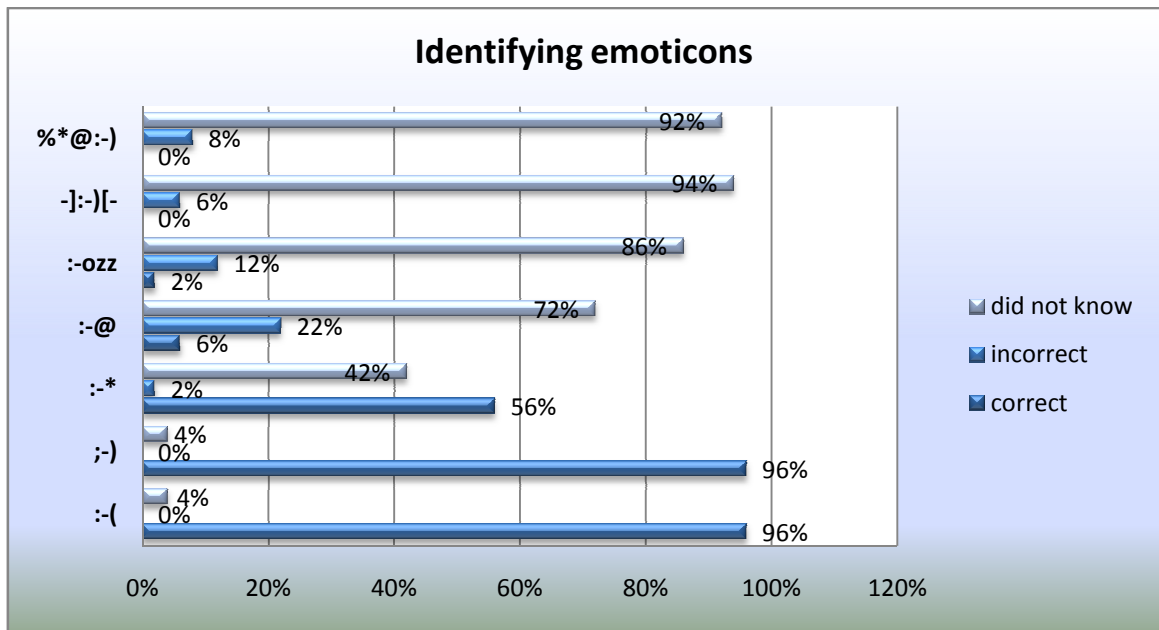
Besides the emoticons that were given as response options (i.e. :-), :-(, :-\*, :-/) the answers revealed several other ones that are apparently fairly popular; these include :-D, which symbolizes laughing and was mentioned by 8 respondents, :-P implying that the user is sticking their tongue out were chosen by 4 people. Other smileys suggested by the respondents themselves included: <3, :S, :O, >:(, >\_>, 8-)), O\_O, --, >D, D<, ;P, xD, 8).

Nevertheless, from the fact that none of the emoticons that appeared in the results consists of more than three symbols we can draw an obvious conclusion: generally speaking Facebook users prefer to use simple smileys that are easy to write and read.

## **Questions 5 – 11**

**Identifying emoticons: Can you write in words what the following emoticons mean?**

Questions 5 to 11 are open-ended. The respondents were asked to define the meaning of 7 emoticons, which were all taken from Crystal's *A glossary of netspeak and textspeak*. The aim of these questions was to find out which emoticons are well-known and which may be considered even unidentifiable.



Graph 4: Can you write in words what the following emoticons mean?

As it is shown in Graph 4, most users (96% in both cases) were able to identify :- (sad, sadness, regret) and ;- (winking). :-\* (a kiss) was recognized by 56% of the respondents and quite surprisingly 42% did not know this emoticon at all.

The ratio between correct and incorrect or no answers changes dramatically with the emoticon :-@ (screaming, shouting); only 6% of the respondents were able to recognize it, 72% claimed they did not know it; 22% attempted a guess and therefore this emoticon was also described as ‘tongue-twisted’, ‘sick’, ‘ouch’ or ‘tongue-tied’.

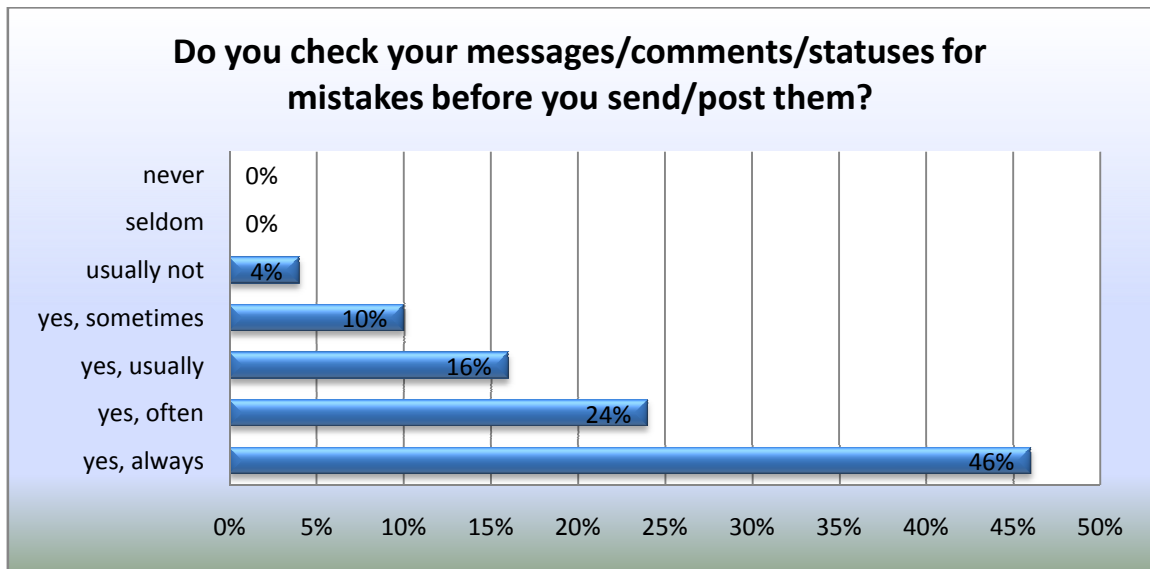
Unlike the previous emoticons, :-oZZ (bored) consists of four symbols and apparently is not one of the well-known ones. It was identified correctly only by 2% of the respondents, however, 8% thought it represents sleeping or being sleepy, which might be semantically very similar. 86% are not familiar with this emoticon at all.

The emoticons -]:-):- (impressed) and %\*@:-) (hungover) were not identified by any of the respondents. The unfamiliarity with the last two smileys confirms hypothesis number 4. It is rather obvious that complicated emoticons that are difficult to write and interpret are not very popular and many users do not even know their meaning.

## Question 12

**Do you check your messages/comments/statuses for mistakes before you send/post them?**

This is a polytomous question offering 7 response options ordered according to the frequency mentioned in the answer. There is no possibility for an alternative response.



**Graph 5: Do you check your messages/comments/statuses for mistakes before you send/post them?**

Considering the comment analysis dealt with in the previous chapter Facebook users do not seem to be very studious of grammar and syntax rules; nevertheless, the results suggest that 46% of the respondents always proofread what they have written before posting it and 24% do it often. On the other hand, there are only 4% who professed they usually do not check their writing and the option of revising their posts seldom or never did not appeal to anybody. On account of these facts, hypothesis number 5 is to be rejected completely. Even though Facebook users may seem to be prone to making mistakes, it does not seem to be a result of indifference or lack of effort.

### Question 13

**Does it bother you when people overuse punctuation (What have you done?????????) or when they write in capitals only (HOW ARE YOU)? Why/why not?**

Question number 13 is open-ended and asks the respondents to express their opinion on punctuation and writing in capital letters. It was answered by all of them.

All in all, the responses may be divided into two categories based on users' attitudes towards both these phenomena: negative and neutral. None of the respondents considers overpunctuation or writing in capitals merely positive; however, 28% claim they are usually not bothered by such posts and say it mostly depends on the situation and their mood. Only one person admitted they normally use these methods of emphasis.

'It bothers me only when it is used very excessively not only because it is annoying, but also because it devalues the emphasis value of exclamation points and capitalization.'

'No, It doesn't bother me - if my friends overuse punctuation, it's to the point.'

'the overuse of punctuation does not really disturb me, because it may help to understand the expressive of a phrase; 'what have you done?'(today) in a chat could be completely different from 'what have you done????'

The majority of respondents consider both phenomena rather negative features of internet communication. Many described them as annoying, disturbing, unnecessary, pointless, childish and stupid.

'Yes, it really bothers me. The American education system (especially in California) is terrible, and most people do not understand proper punctuation, grammar, etc. Even many college graduates are ignorant of proper English. When people use bad English in social networking, they tend to use it in all of their communications, e.g. school essays, work emails, job applications, etc.'

‘Excessive punctuation does not bother me. It can strengthen a feeling. However, writing in all caps is quite a nuisance, because it disrupts the flow of reading. People read all caps more slowly...’

‘Again, this can be effective when used in moderation and within appropriate contexts. It can be a way to appropriately express an emotion that might generally be expressed through intonation or facial expression through text... but the power is lost through overuse.’

‘Yes, it does. The English (or other) languages is and are already strong enough to convey information.’

‘Capitals is annoying, it's as if you're screaming. It's only ok if it's for laughing or a single word to make a point. Excessive punctuation is ok, but annoying when used often.’

With 72% of respondents claiming they are often bothered by the overuse of punctuation and capital letters, it appears that hypothesis number 6 was proved wrong. Furthermore, there seems to be a very small number of users who actually write in this way.

Regarding public writing in general, the outcome of the questionnaire revealed another interesting opinion:

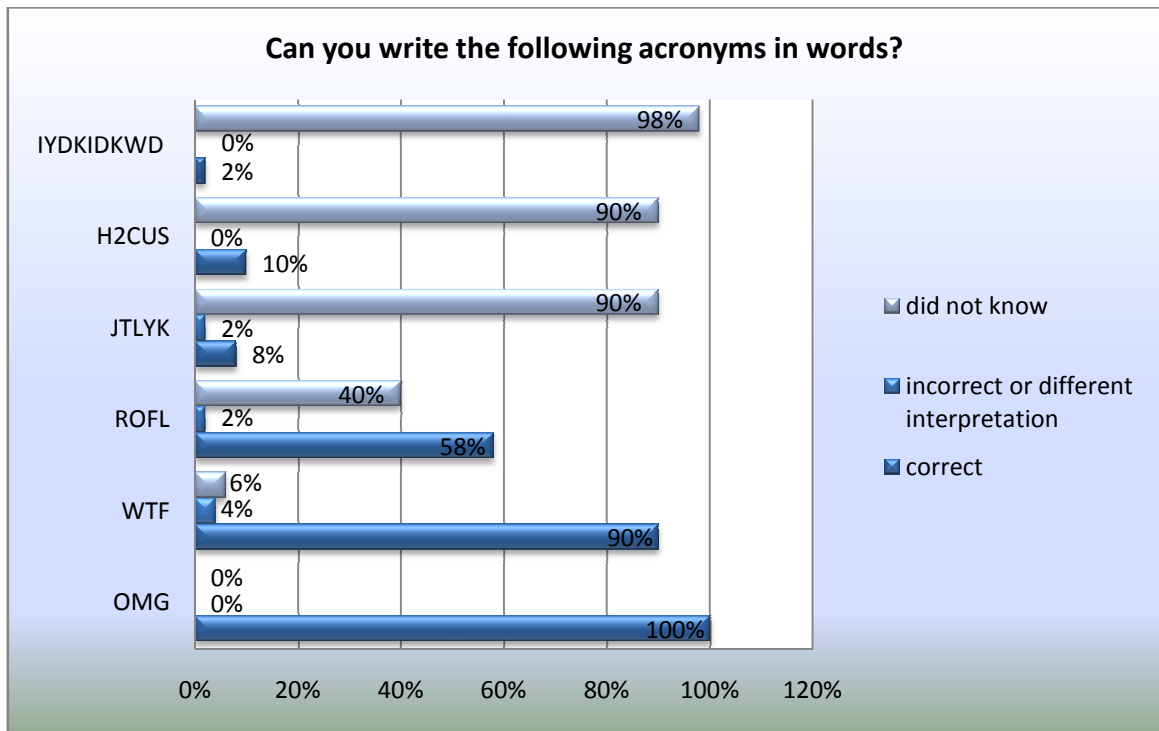
‘I personally try to keep my posts "appropriate," just because I have a large variety of potential readers - including people of my parent's generation, and my friend's kids. Anything you send into cyberspace can be used against you.’

The author of this commentary seems to be well-aware of the fact that whatever information is posted on the internet is made public and can be easily abused. Especially on Facebook and other social networks users should be extremely careful about what they post on their Walls for this is always the information that represents them in the first place. Moreover, it is useful to consider who will be able to see the post after it is published and formulate it accordingly.

## Questions 14 – 19

### Identifying acronyms: Can you write the following acronyms in words?

Questions 14 to 19 are open-ended. The respondents are asked to define the meaning of 7 acronyms, which were all taken from Crystal's *A glossary of netspeak and textspeak*. The aim of these questions is to find out which acronyms are to most users familiar and which of them may seem confusing.



Graph 6: Identifying acronyms

To a large extent, the results of this series of questions resemble the ones concerning emoticons marked in graph number 4. The shortest acronyms are no doubt well-known; OMG (oh my god) was identified by all the respondents and WTF (what the fuck) although its meaning is vulgar by 90%. ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing) seems to be an understandable acronym with 58% correct answers. One user reads this acronym 'run out for lunch', the others (40%) do not know.

With longer acronyms, the ratio between correct and incorrect answers worsened considerably. Both JTLYK (just to let you know) and H2CUS (hope to see you soon)

are not understood by 90% of the respondents, 8% know the correct meaning of JTLYK and 10% of H2CUS. The most complicated and obviously the least understandable was the acronym IYDKIDKWD (if you don't know I don't know who does), which was identified only by one single user.

Graph 6 proves hypothesis number 7 correct; it shows that there is a certain relation between the length and intelligibility of acronyms; the short ones, mostly consisting of only three letters seem to be much more popular and readable than the ones that were created artificially, sometimes only as a joke or wordplay.

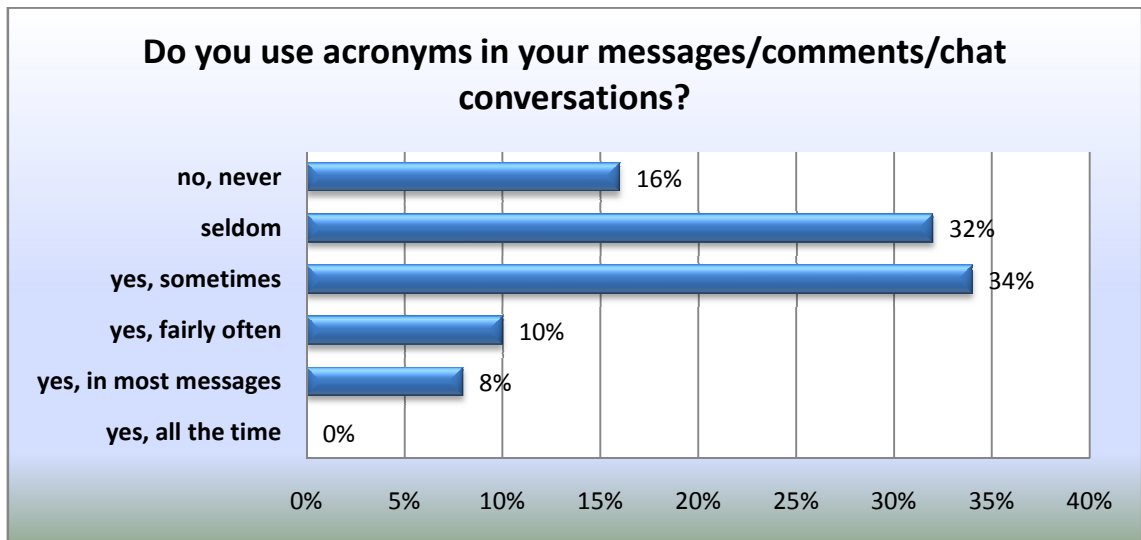
### Question 20

**Do you use acronyms in your messages/comments/chat conversations?**

### Question 21

**Why do you use them?**

Question number 20 is polytomous with 6 response options ordered according to the frequency mentioned in the answer. Question number 21 is open-ended, asking the respondents to express their opinions on using acronyms.



Graph 7: Do you use acronyms in your messages/comments/chat conversations?

As it is shown in Graph 7 the majority of Facebook users does not seem to be using acronyms very often; 34% of respondents claim they use them sometimes, 32% seldom and 16% do not use acronyms at all. Nonetheless, 10% have chosen the option 'I use acronyms fairly often' and 8% 'I use acronyms in most messages'. Allegedly none of the respondents uses them all the time.

'I only use the ones that are widely recognized, I think it's unnecessary to use acronyms that no one will understand and are not well known.'

'Sometimes I abbreviate, especially when I'm in a hurry. But most times I use them ironically.'

'I use them because they have been absorbed into the way that the current generation communicates. The use of acronyms is widely accepted and understood. They are useful for people to code switch between a social networking writing platform and a business email. Their use is similar to emoticons.'

'I don't. I consider it to be lazy and also very high-context.'

'In instant messaging, they are simply more efficient to type. I do not use them in official messages for school or work, but I will occasionally use 'LOL' when writing on a friend's Facebook wall.'

'I prefer to write the entire words, I associate the use of acronyms to the younger people.'

'To express emotions that normally don't get written down. For example 'lol' really has no other written form.'

'Either they are a short way of saying a longer sentence (saying 'wtf' is easier than typing out 'what the fuck' for example) or they are a good way of indicating different levels of amusement that would normally be indicated by laughter in an in-person conversation ('lol' for example)'

Hypothesis number 9 was confirmed by the answers to question 21. Users appreciate acronyms mostly for their time efficiency and practicality. 46% of the

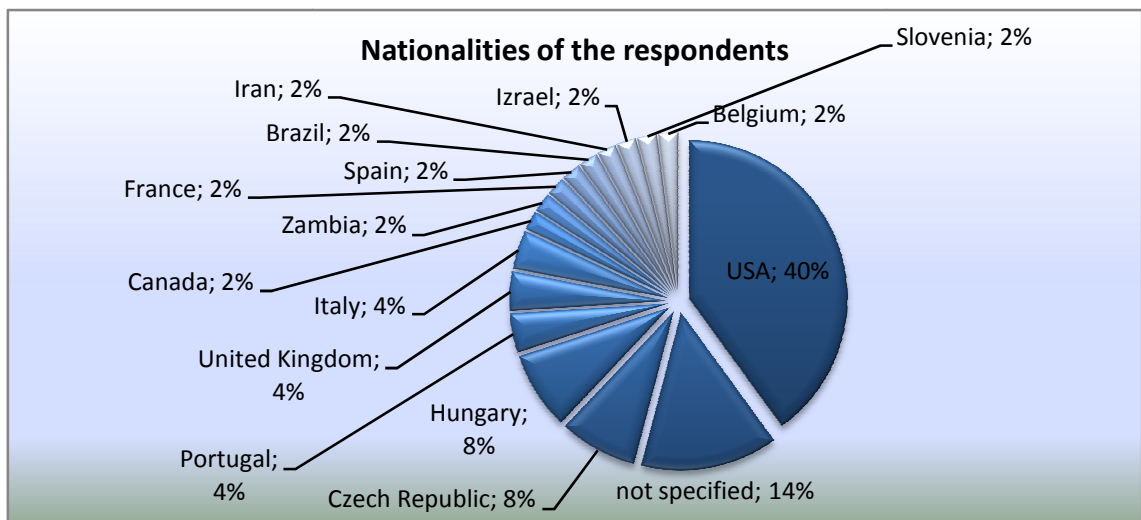
respondents said that writing in acronyms saves a lot of time others claim it is easier, convenient and it saves space. Some users think it looks 'cool', it can easily convey irony and everybody understands. On the other hand, one respondent disproves this statement; she claims 'I don't know the meaning of most of them'.

## Results summary

The results of this questionnaire have proved that Facebook no longer belongs only to teenagers; it has spread among masses of other people of various ages. The major age group that has answered the questions were users of 20 to 29 years of age and moreover, as it is shown in Graph 8 the structure of nationalities is not equable and therefore the results are not representative of the whole population.

The questionnaire has proved that Facebook is primarily a place for socialising, the main purpose being sharing one's life via statuses, comments and other posts. To make internet communication as efficient as possible, most users adopted special ways of writing such as using emoticons, acronyms and too much punctuation. However, although it may seem that these means of expressing feelings and emotions would be easy to overuse, in reality most users claim they do not do so. In fact, it appears that for instance acronyms are not that sought-after and except the basic ones people often have difficulties understanding them as it is shown in Graphs 6, 7 and 8. In addition, overusing punctuation is mostly considered stupid and annoying.

On the other hand, emoticons seem to be rather popular with Facebook users who took part in this research. The majority of respondents consider them a positive aspect of internet communication finding them useful and fun. Nevertheless, the graphs 3 and 4 show that only the simplest emoticons are commonly used and understood.



Graph 8: Nationalities of the respondents

## **Conclusion**

The main aim of this B.A. thesis was to introduce the modern means of communication available on the internet and the language that is typical of their users. Not only is it important for communicating quickly and efficiently on the internet and especially on social networks and in chatrooms, it also influences the way people interact in everyday face-to-face encounters.

The theoretical part of this thesis focused on computer-mediated communication as such and specific features of computer slang, which is its inseparable part. It pointed out words and expressions that due to the popularity of the Web pervaded both written and spoken English; however it also explored some characteristics typical for mostly informal face-to-face encounters that are often used in cyberworld to make all typed conversations sound more natural. These include particularly excessive punctuation, use of acronyms and emoticons, unnatural use of capital letters or spacing; all of the above mentioned are supposed to substitute prosodic features of speech and help convey moods and emotions of the writer. Moreover, this part studies online based social networks, especially Facebook, for they have become very popular with many internet users and they offer several means of communication such as messaging, chat or sharing statuses, pictures, videos or web links.

The practical part was designed to explore the kind of language that is natural for users of social networks. The first research was based on posts published on Facebook by native English speakers. It proved that their language bears qualities of both spoken and written discourse. It is highly informal in grammar and vocabulary; moreover, it makes use of specific phenomena such as acronyms, emoticons and excessive punctuation that help to express states of mind, emotions and feelings. The second research was supposed to examine a set of hypotheses connected to the language used on Facebook. It was performed through a questionnaire that was sent to 50 Facebook users of various ages and nationalities. The results have shown among others the opinions on specific features of communication that take place on this particular social network.

For the internet is a dynamic, constantly developing medium, it is expectable that it will become even more popular and spread into other parts of the world in the near future. Therefore a great variety of users of miscellaneous nationalities, social backgrounds and education will be able to influence the language of the internet. It will probably undergo many changes in vocabulary, grammar and spelling.

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## Supplement

### Questionnaire

#### 1. What do you use Facebook for mostly?

- Sharing statuses
- Using chat
- Private messaging
- Commenting on photos and statuses
- Managing events
- Other

#### 2. How often do you post on your Facebook wall?

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- Once every few days
- Once a week
- Once in two weeks
- Once a month
- Less than once a month

#### 3. What do you think about the use of emoticons (smileys) in messaging/comments/statuses/chat?

- They are useful
- They are fun
- They are stupid
- They are a nuisance
- Other; please specify \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Do you use them yourself? Which ones?

- :-(
- :-)
- ;-)
- :-\*
- :-/
- Other; please specify \_\_\_\_\_

5. Can you write in words what the following emoticon mean? :-(

6. Can you write in words what the following emoticon mean? ;-)

7. Can you write in words what the following emoticon mean? :-\*

8. Can you write in words what the following emoticon mean? :-@

9. Can you write in words what the following emoticon mean? :-ozz

10. Can you write in words what the following emoticon mean? -]:-)[-

- 11. Can you write in words what the following emoticon mean?%\*@:-)**  
**12. Does it bother you when people overuse punctuation (What have you done?????????) or when they write in capitals only (HOW ARE YOU?)? Why/why not?**  
**13. Do you check your messages/comments/statuses for mistakes before you send/post them?**

- Yes, always
- Yes, often
- Yes, usually
- Yes, sometimes
- Usually not
- Seldom
- never

- 14. Can you write in words the following acronym: OMG**  
**15. Can you write in words the following acronym: WTF**  
**16. Can you write in words the following acronym: ROFL**  
**17. Can you write in words the following acronym: JTLYK**  
**18. Can you write in words the following acronym: H2CUS**  
**19. Can you write in words the following acronym: IYDKIDKWD**  
**20. Do you use acronyms in your messages/comments/chat conversations?**

- Yes, all the time
- Yes, in most messages
- Yes, fairly often
- Yes, sometimes
- Seldom
- No, never

- 21. Why do you use them?**  
**22. If you use acronyms, which ones?**

- LOL
- OMG
- THX
- WTF
- BTW
- TTYL
- ROFL
- FYI
- ASAP
- Other; please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**23. Do you think it is appropriate to use vulgarisms in wall posts?**

- Yes
- no

**24. Which vulgarisms or slang expressions do you use most?**

**25. What does it mean when people write in capital letters only (I'M SO BORED!)? Do you do it yourself? Why/why not?**

**26. Sex**

- Male
- female

**27. Age**

- 19 and less
- 20 – 29
- 30 – 39
- 40 – 49
- 50 – 59
- 60 – 69
- Over 70

**28. Where are you from? (If your country isn't listed write your answer in "Jiná odpověď")**

- USA
- Canada
- The United Kingdom
- Ireland
- Australia
- New Zealand
- Other; please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**29. Education**

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school
- Community college
- University

**30. Do you have any other comments concerning given topic? (optional)**