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B a k a l á ř s k á p r á c e



Specific Aspects of the English
Language Used in Informal Online
Communication

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I would like to express my gratitude to

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Introduction

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Introduction

“Netspeak is *the* worst thing in the history of the universe.” (jesse's girl)

“You mean TyPIIn LykE tIs isn't C0oLZ11!!!11?” (sweetevil)

“When you're going all 'roflmao!!!1112jf845lawlzliekteh4wsuml337lollerphant!!!
11!exclamation4u!” then it really just makes me want to scream.” (~*dark heart*~)

“This is surely the death of the English language. I mean, as if we haven't desecrated it
enough already, now this....” (du.sang.argenté)

These are some of the responses in the thread “Do you like netspeak?” on the forums of the website DarkMark.com (a fansite of the Harry Potter series). More than half of the responding members answered “No”. They often noted that an occasional abbreviation or error is not a problem, but what really irks them are unintelligible monstrosities like in the examples.

But do people really communicate in this way on the Internet? If yes, than the often expressed concerns about the future of the language might be justified. However, in this thesis I would like to explore the informal language used on the Internet in more detail in order to eventually determine whether online communication really is just a heap of oversimplified linguistic rubbish putting human interaction in danger, or whether, as I expect to find out, there is perhaps more to it.

Spending many hours online I have been able to observe the way in which communication via the network takes place. I would like to present here some of the most common aspects of the Internet language that one may encounter in an online interaction as an ordinary user of the medium.

Due to the nature of the subject, the electronic network-based communication being a relatively new but at the same time already vast and dynamically changing matter, the phenomenon has been so far escaping scientific scrutiny in a complex, general scope. Therefore I will also to a great extent rely on various electronic sources and my own experience as a regular user of the Internet.

1. The Medium

The Internet has become a part of everyday lives of millions of people all around the world. Thanks to its origins being situated in the USA and the economic and cultural position of English-speaking countries in the world, the Internet has been dominated by the English language since its beginning in the 1950s (Gach 32) and this situation remains unchanged till today. Statistics show that English leads the list with more than 463 million Internet users, constituting 29.1% of the total number of users, followed by Chinese with 20.1%, Spanish with 8.2% and Japanese with 5.9% (“Top Ten Internet Languages”).

The English language, having spent more time “online” than any other language, has been influenced by the medium to a great degree. A notion of a new language variety arose - “a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet, (...) arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive” (Crystal, *Language and the Internet* 20). Although known by many names, e.g. “Netspeak”, “Internet language”, “electronic discourse”, “computer-mediated communication” (Crystal, *Language and the Internet* 19), the overall character is still unclear due to the difficulties that may arise when trying to determine the characteristic features of the variety. A general description is nearly impossible because of the complexity of the medium. Actually, all kinds of language can be found on the Net – from precise scientific descriptions and works of classic literature to the worst obscenities and horrible immature prose. It is therefore probably easier to divide the medium into some smaller parts or areas and deal with these separately. Linguist David Crystal distinguishes seven Internet situations with distinctive language: e-mail, synchronous and asynchronous chatgroups, virtual worlds, World Wide Web, instant messaging and blogging (Crystal, *Language and the Internet* 11 – 15). However, these areas often overlap and the boundaries become blurry, so the signs typical for one area may be found in the others as well.

Critics argue that electronic media, the Internet especially, have a negative influence on society. For example, English professor and essayist Sven Birkerts warns against losing individuality on account of connectedness and holds

the opinion that “books, reading, and society in general are endangered by the impoverishment of discourse represented by new-fangled media like the online network” (“Is Cyberspace destroying Society?”).

Communication on the Internet happens mostly in the written form, but David Crystal points out that “Netspeak is neither exactly like speech, nor like writing; it is an entirely different medium” (Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* 427), listing its properties of both written and spoken language.

This specific quality of the Internet language is reflected in some of its features, which will be dealt with in the following part.

Some well-known misspellings have become a part of common usage:

- “the” - A frequent misspelling of “the”

- “victory” and its inflected forms and derivatives - a misspelling of the verb “win” used for expressing victory, domination or proficiency (similar meaning as “to rule”); caused by the proximity of “v” and “p” keys on the keyboard.

- A certain kind of ‘misspelling’ is also the replacement of one or more punctuation marks in a longer row by the number 1 (“Nooooo!!!!!!”). It probably originates in gaming and the cause is the key for “!” and “1” being pressed inconsistently. In common communication this switch is usually only used in a mocking way for the purpose of parody, going as far as writing out the numeral: “OMG totally!!!!!!Icaneloveit!”

2.2.2. Verbal features

Since the language on the Internet is primarily in the written – visual – form (as opposed to spoken – acoustic – form), the appearance of the text plays an important role and can even bear a significant part of the message it conveys. It may signal some additional background information (conveying the mood and/or attitude of the author and even substitute some prosodic features which are normally present in spoken discourse but are difficult to express in the written form. These additional bits of information are often required due to the dynamism of electronic

2. Distinctive features of the Internet language

2.1 Orthographic features

Changes in regular spelling may appear due to various reasons. Similarly to non-electronic writing, errors may be caused by the user's not being familiar with the correct form, either in consequence of lack of knowledge or because of his or her being a non-native speaker of the language. Quite often, the reason is, however, fast typing and/or carelessness. As long as the mistake does not affect legibility, imperfections are usually tolerated, or even made fun of. If the author notices the error after posting it, he or she often corrects it.

Some accidental misspellings have become a part of common usage:

- “teh” - A frequent misspelling of “the”
- “pwn” and its inflected forms and derivatives - a misspelling of the verb “own”; used for expressing victory, domination or proficiency (similar meaning to “to rule”); caused by the proximity of “o” and “p” keys on the keyboard
- A certain kind of 'misspelling' is also the replacement of one or more exclamation marks in a longer row by the number 1 (“Nooooo!!!!1111”). It probably originates in gaming and the cause is the key for “!” and “1” being pressed inconsistently. In common communication this switch is usually only used in a mocking way for the purpose of parody, going as far as writing out the numeral: “OMG totally!!!!111!!one!!eleven!”

2.2 Graphic features

Since the language on the Internet is primarily in the written – visual – form (as opposed to spoken – acoustic – form), the appearance of the text plays an important role and can even bear a significant part of the message it conveys. It may supply some additional background information concerning the mood and/or attitude of the author and even substitute some prosodic features which are normally present in spoken discourse but are difficult to express in the written form. These additional bits of information are often required due to the dynamism of electronic

communication; the quick speed of conversation on the Net usually does not allow elaborate descriptions of the situation.

The graphic aspect includes punctuation, pictures, various other symbols and formatting of individual words.

2.21 Word-formatting

The font type, size and colour are usually set by the application in which the communication takes place (an instant messaging program, an Internet browser, etc.). The default setting may be sometimes altered if a user wishes to make a part of the text he or she wants to add to the page look different. In instant messaging applications, and e-mail clients there are usually formatting tools, similar to those in text editors. Changing the colour, size and other attributes of a part of text is used for adding emphasis to the highlighted text or to draw attention to it.

Concerning the usage of upper-case and lower-case letters, capitalization of the beginning of a sentence is sometimes omitted where fast communication occurs. It may be accompanied by leaving out the full stop at the end of the statement. The boundaries of a sentence are then marked by its appearance as one post; a sentence is written and immediately sent for the sake of quick conversation and another sentence follows as a new entry. Even individual clauses in a complex or compound sentence may be posted separately.

In these situations writing in lower-case letters often prevails (proper nouns, acronyms, etc.), but the usage of capitalization is usually inconsistent:

```
<user1> it's an old nickname... it's from back when lord of  
the rings was cool  
<user1> it's my real name in Elvish  
<user2> yea  
<user2> That's what makes it outlandish  
<user1> oh okay  
<user2> Have u seen the hunt for golum on youtube?
```

(•G@Índ~Çenřríł• hub mainchat)

On the other hand, in some cases capital letters occur more frequently and can be even found inside a word. David Crystal points out: “a distinctive feature of Internet graphology is the way two capitals are used – one initial, one medial –

a phenomenon variously called *bicapitalization* (*BiCaps*), *intercaps*, *incaps*, and *midcaps*", and adds some examples: "AltaVista, RetrievalWare, ScienceDirect, ..." (Crystal, *Language and the Internet* 93). Sometimes only the middle position capital is used, as in "eBay". However, this type of capitalization mostly occurs in names of websites, software, etc. and is not a common part of an electronic conversation that would bear some special meaning.

An extreme case of a varied use of upper-case and lower-case letters may be the *studlycaps*, a way of writing using both capitals and small letters alternately in one word. The Jargon File, a website dealing with various forms of computer slang, notes that "ThE oRigiN and SigNificaNce of thIs pRacTicE iS oBscuRe" ("*studlycaps*"). *Studlycaps* are usually not used in common conversation due to their unintelligibility. Users writing in *studlycaps* may be considered childish and will probably be mocked by other users. Somewhat tolerable is their usage in computer nicknames.

Writing whole sentences in upper-case is the written equivalent of shouting.

Similarly to non-electronic discourse, if a word or a phrase is written in a distinctive manner, it means it is being emphasized. Capital letters, bold type and italics are common tools for emphasis in an electronic discourse as well.

2.22 Punctuation marks and other signs

Multiple exclamation marks and question marks may be used for strengthening of meaning. However, very long rows of them are usually used only for the purpose of humorous and parodic exaggeration. As mentioned before, some of the exclamation marks may be replaced by "1".

Emoticons, or 'smileys', are a solid part of informal online conversations. Their popularity stems from the playfulness of the concept and from the important role they play – emoticons are a simple and quick way of expressing one's emotion and attitude and the nature of a statement that could be interpreted in more ways. Thus they constitute a part of the strategy of compensating for the absence of prosodic and non-verbal features of communication.

David Crystal characterizes emoticons as "combinations of keyboard characters

designed to show an emotional facial expression: they are typed in sequence on a single line, and placed after the final punctuation mark of a sentence. Almost all of them are read sideways.” (Crystal, *Language and the Internet* 39) However, the punctuation mark in question is usually not a full stop. In declarative sentences a smiley can work as a punctuation all by itself and punctuation is not necessary, then. Furthermore, when placing an emoticon immediately after the punctuation mark, a full stop might be mistaken for an actual part of the smiley face. Concerning the direction of reading smileys, it should be noted that emoticons which are vertically oriented have become popular as well.

These vertical emoticons are typical for Asian electronic communication and were brought to the Western culture as a consequence of a growing popularity of modern Asian culture. The vertical orientation of the smileys stems from the fact that this scheme provides more options for portraying the eye-elements of the emoticon. Due to the tendency of not showing one's emotions openly, Asian people rely more on the expression of eyes when recognizing other people's emotions (Yuki, Maddux and Masuda 17 - 21). Therefore the emoticons speak mainly with their “eyes”, as opposed to typical Western smileys which express the meaning mostly through the mouth-element. Some examples of vertical emoticons are as follows (Note: the brackets forming the “head” may be sometimes omitted):

(^_^)	Happiness, contentment, amusement; sometimes just as ^^	(>_<)	Anxiety, fear, cringing
(;_;	Crying, sad	d(^_^)b	“Thumbs up!”
(~_^)	A mischievous wink	(o.O)	Surprise, disbelief
		(' 3')	Pouting

The classic horizontal emoticons usually “begin” with the eyes, for example:

:~)	Amused, joking	8-O	Surprise, horror
:-(Displeasure, disappointment	:-*	A kiss
;-)	Winking	:-P	Sticking out tongue
XD	Mischievous	8-~	Drooling
>:-(Scowling, angry	:-D	Happy

In some cases the emoticon may also be situated the other way around:

D:)-:

Multiple 'mouth' intensifies the meaning:

XDDDDDDDDDD

:-((((((((

Instant messaging applications, forums, e-mail and chat services usually provide users with a set of animated smileys, which they can insert in their posts. Animated smileys sometimes serve decorative purposes more than informational.

Internet communication makes use of miscellaneous characters in many other ways. Next to typeface and other formatting of letters, certain signs can be used for emphasizing words or phrases in text. An underscore before and after an emphasized word suggest underlining of the whole word, which is usually not used for accentuating, because simple underlining signifies a hyperlink. Another option is putting an asterisk before and after the emphasized word or phrase.

For providing further information about the situation, mood and attitude of a user many other methods exist. A common practice is enclosing a particular piece of extralinguistic information in a pair of asterisks, the result being somewhat reminiscent of stage directions in a stageplay. The information usually takes the form of a noun phrase, denoting the action of the user, a verb in the third person singular form or a whole sentence with the username functioning as the subject:

<username>*gives you a cookie*

<username>*grin*

<username>*hugs*

A similar effect can be reached with round brackets or a pair of colons. Angle brackets may also serve this purpose; this practice partially derives from their usage in the HTML coding tags ("Hacker Writing Style"). HTML tags are elements used for creating web pages; they consist of format specifications enclosed by the angle brackets and are situated at the beginning and the end of the text which they are formatting. The end-tag is signified by a forward slash. False tagging may be used

in Internet discourse for example like this:

<irony>Good job!</irony>

Curly brackets imply that a user figuratively hugs the user whose name is written in the brackets:

{{{{{username}}}}}

Another affectionate sign is <3 which, similarly to emoticons, is read sideways and imitates the shape of a heart.

An asterisk is used when a user wants to correct a misspelled word in his or her previous post. It can be placed either in front of or after the word:

<username> gluttony, windows takes up more and more hdd spae
<username> *space

(Otaku Anime Public hub mainchat)

An Internet-specific phenomenon is the occurrence of a row of random, jumbled characters which lacks any meaning and may stretch over more lines. It may be caused by:

- an intense emotional reaction leading to the user's spontaneously pressing random keys on the keyboard; also known as "keysmash"
- a cat on the keyboard
- other events, e.g.

"ierfj;lolledglodelk;gvbsjmgsehlkikgp;gjsxgsigtfsikgjsdgs

12-4[r4wfo9wrfaeotr 3vrwgtfzoew3WQU_]"#i0few

rtw3q

-tfgwspe9fsr;ef

Sorry. I threw up on my keyboard and had to clean it off."

(NoOneInteresting)

While communication mostly happens by means of some kind of signs, lack thereof can bear a meaning as well. Therefore longer stretches of empty space or completely empty posts may indicate the user's speechlessness due to shock,

horror or disbelief.

2.23 Icons, image macros, LOLpics and LOLspeak

Since the visual aspect of the Internet constitutes a significant part of the medium, textual communication is sometimes accompanied by illustrative images.

In forums, chats and weblogs users who have registered for the website's services may be offered the option of choosing an "avatar" or "userpic", a small picture that will, along with a username, represent the user and will appear in the user's posts and comments. In some cases the user may choose from a number of these "user icons" when commenting, so the picture becomes directly relevant to the post.

A way of an actual communication through images has developed in forums, where the concept of 'image macros' probably originates. An image macro is usually a photograph with a phrase superimposed on it, posted by a user in order to comment on or react to another user's post, often in a sarcastic, mocking way. Perhaps the most famous image macro is the O RLY? (Oh, really?) owl. It is a sarcastic reaction to something that is, according to the user who posts the macro, painfully obvious or uninteresting. Other users may respond to the macro with YA RLY (Yes, really.), followed by NO WAI! (No way!) and other variations of the string. There are many other phrases that have become classic in 'macroing'. (For examples of image macros see Appendix 2)

Since the 'invention' of image macros they have developed into a much bigger phenomenon than the original concept. They are often made simply for fun, without the intention of a direct use in an electronic conversation, and they also brought along a wave of images with funny captions which are made purely for the purpose of amusement. The image macro/caption mania has spread into all kinds of human and inhuman activities. There are communities dedicated to collecting macros and/or captions with celebrities¹, politics², ice hockey³ and many more.

1 <http://roflrazzi.com>

2 <http://community.livejournal.com/lolitics>

3 http://community.livejournal.com/hockey_macros

However, the most popular subjects for funny captions are cats. The phenomenon now widely known as lolcats (from “LOLcats”, LOL being the popular acronym for “laughing out loud”) has its origin, just like many other Internet memes (for “meme”, see Lexical features, page 19) in forums, probably either on the website SomethingAwful.com (Whitwell) or 4chan.org. In his article on lolcats, Lev Grossman quotes an e-mail sent to him by an anonymous user: “There is more than enough EXIF data scattered around the internet to prove that cat macros are ancient, by internet standards. Caturday, for example, was a meme on a 4chan.org imageboard which originated around the beginning of 2005” (Grossman), “Caturday” being a tradition of posting cat macros or captions on Saturdays. A popular lolcat source, the weblog IcanHasCheezburger.com, launched in 2007 (Whitwell), currently holds more than 4700 lolcat pictures, many more float around other places on the Net. One of the oldest lolcat pictures, possibly the very original, is the one with a grey cat, also known as happycat, Frank in real life (“Happycat”), asking “I can has cheezburger?” (see Appendix 3).

A typical lolcat has the following characteristic: it is a photograph of a cat (or more cats; plus points if some unusual or funny activities, excessive cuteness or gullible members of other species are involved), completed with a caption superimposed on it, which is either a general comment on the picture or a direct speech, usually written in a white, sans serif font. Lolcats incorporate various features of Netspeak – they may include Internet idioms as well as acronyms and emoticons. They have also coined what is now known as lolspeak.

Lolspeak has developed from the English language in the way that it defied all its rules. Here is an abridged version of a guide to lolspeak for beginners from the website SpeakLOLspeak.com:

“Step one: Think of something to say

Step two:

- Mis-decline verbs, especially misuse the verb “to be”
- Misuse gerunds
- Overuse prepositional phrases
- Blatant rearrangement of syntax
- Incorrect plurals and past-tense verbs
- Improper pronouns
- Use “younger” words (“kitty” versus “cat”, “fuzzy” versus “furry”, etc.)

Step three: Misspell everything.

- Think like a little kid / cat / dog / goldfish, and get hukd on foniks
- Extra W's and H's ("awl" instead of "all")
- Z's instead of S's are easy
- Double-letters versus single letters are always fun
- Don't be afraid to further pluralize things, including your verbs

Step four: Add exclamations and extra words.

- Use commonly accepted internet abbreviations. Misspell them if necessary.
- Imagine that you're actually in a crowd of people and you want everyone to look at this particular picture. Extra exclamations are thus necessary.
- Some common statements have been severely abbreviated into one single multi-syllabic word. These are good to use. The best example is "Okay, thank you, good-bye!" Which has been shortened to "kthxbye" (or "kthxbai")

("LOLspeak 101")

The usage of lolspeak is by no means limited to captions on images. Lolcat fans use lolspeak for example in comments on ICanHazCheesburger.com or in the discussion forum of SpeakLOLspeak.com.

Lolspeak has been likened to Internet slang (Rohling), baby-talk (Lieberman), pidgin ("used to help cats talk to humans") and creole languages (Dash), but it has rules of its own. On a single page¹ of comments at IcanHazCheesburger.com one encounters for example following features of lolspeak:

- Abbreviated common statements (as mentioned in the fourth step of the lolspeak guide): "Ifinkso" - I think so.
- Contracted forms: "hasta" – has to, "dontcha" – don't you
- Incorrect forms of irregular verbs: "roted" – wrote, "gottid" - got
- The third person singular ending -s in all persons: "ai finds" – I find
- Prefixation: "undizzi" – not dizzy
- Suffixation: "to kidnapify" – to kidnap
- Inserting "lol" into words ending with "-le": "nibblol" – nibble, "littlol" – little
- Deviant spelling. Since in the English language there is no definite, direct correspondence between phonemes and graphemes, one phoneme can be

¹ <http://icanhascheezburger.com/2009/06/08/funny-pictures-what-was-inside/#comments>

fixed in writing by a variety of graphemes and their combinations and vice versa, a grapheme can be read as various phonemes. Lolspeak uses this variation for unusual spelling while still maintaining certain intelligibility:

- /dʒ/ written as “j” in “danjur” (danger)
- /ks/ written as “cks” in “bocks” (box)
- /θ/ simplified as “f” in “fink” (think), “nuffink” (nothing)
- /aɪ/ written as “y” in “tyme” (time)
- /s/ written as “s” in “satee” (city), etc.
- Wordplay based on homophony: “lettuce sea” – let us see, “clipbored” – clipboard, “donut” (do-nut) – do not
- Omitting initial unstressed syllables: “moshunul” – emotional, “lebretees” – celebrities, “ppropriate” – appropriate

... and also some typical netspeak elements:

- *fawls awn teh flore giggloing!!* (*falls on the floor giggling*)
- {{{FluffyB}}}
- LOL!!!

As with other Internet memes, the origins of lolspeak are still a little blurry. Danny, a user who commented on an article on lolcats, believes that “kitty pidgin has a long and fine history” and is actually “a descendant (either direct, or rediscovered) of meowchat. Meowchat was the pidgin that cats talked to other cats on the usenet group rec.pets.cats.” (Danny). Wherever the truth about the history lies, the present looks promising for lolcats and their “language”. The LOLidea keeps spreading; 'lolrus' - a walrus who is strenuously looking for his lost bucket, lolbrarians¹, lolgays², lolnews³ and many other lolthings have appeared and lolspeak can be spotted outside lol-related communities.

¹ <http://community.livejournal.com/lolbrarians>

² <http://gawker.com/news/lolgays/lolgays-winning-in-yur-internets-254052.php>

³ <http://punditkitchen.com>

The concept does not seem to be fading like many other Internet memes have. Even the Bible is being translated to lolspeak (<http://www.lolcatbible.com/>).

2.24 133tspeak

Another area of netspeak is leetspeak, also known as “133t” or “1337”. The term is an abbreviated and misspelled form of the word “elite”. Leetspeak is usually attributed to gamers or hackers, but the origin is, again, unclear. The Jargon File, a website dedicated to hacker slang, considers leetspeak to be a product of crackers. While a proper “hacker” is a person who “enjoys exploring the details of programmable systems and how to stretch their capabilities” (“hacker”), a “cracker” “breaks security on a system” and is considered “a separate and lower form of life” by hackers (“cracker”). Crackers started gathering at bulletin boards in the 1980s and subsequently moved to the Internet, while developing “their own characteristic jargon, heavily influenced by skateboard lingo and underground-rock slang” (“Crackers, Phreaks, and Lamers”).

The basic principle of leetspeak is substituting letters by numbers (see Appendix 1). As Anne Mitchell from TheInternetPatrol.com remarks, this practice is nothing new and existed long before the Internet – on numeric pagers and, in a way, also as the joke with spelling words in numbers on calculators (Mitchell). Using numbers instead of letters of similar shapes is, however, only the “basic” version of 133t. The “ultra” or “hardcore” level is more complex in that it uses also other signs – punctuation, diacritic marks and other characters – in order to form letters. It is therefore more difficult to type and read, but it also “pwns much harder, showing that the writer is pro” (“Using 1337”). Apart from the deviant writing, there are other features which are said to be a part of leetspeak. Among others:

- “z” instead of “s” in plural endings, e.g. sitez, gamez
- “ph” instead of “f”, e.g. phreak, phear (ph33r)
- “pwn” (see “pwn” in Orthographic features)
- “n00b” (a shortened form of the word “newbie”, often derogatory)
- “d00d” - “dude”

- the “-or” ending, for example in “h4x0r” (hacker), “sux0r” (sucks)

(“Crackers, Phreaks, and Lamers”)

In common online communication l33t is usually used only for the purpose of parody and sarcasm.

2.3 Lexical features

Electronic media are a great source of new lexical items and play a significant role in the enrichment of vocabulary. New terms appear in relation to the technology and new expressions are coined while using it. Electronic networking has also a major influence on spreading the newly created words and phrases. Nowadays, due to the popularity of social networks like Facebook and MySpace, microblogging services like Twitter and instant messaging, a piece of information can spread among masses within a few days. If it is particularly interesting or amusing and is therefore continually passed on till it is 'all over the place', it becomes an 'Internet meme'.

Meme, in its basic sense “a cultural unit (an idea or value or pattern of behavior) that is passed from one person to another by non-genetic means” (“meme”), found a wide area of application on the Internet. The word is for example used in social networks as a general term for a simple task a user accomplishes (e.g. 'Answer following questions:..' or 'Draw your favourite character from the film XY') and then chooses someone else to do the same thing, so the meme is passed on. An 'Internet meme' in the sense of a classic, funny or interesting phenomenon can be spread in various forms – it can be an image, a video, a prank or simple text. It often coins, or is even based on, a catchphrase. Some popular phrases and idioms that originate on the Internet or were widely spread via this medium are for example:

- “MY HED IZ PASTEDE ON YAY” – A phrase coined by the user shinigami_co in the fandom_wank community at JournalFen.com (“Detagged, you're it!”), who used the phrase in reference to a bad photomanipulation of Dominic Monaghan made by Crystal Gamgee, a fan who claimed to be acquainted with the actor. The phrase has then been used

in reaction to something poorly-made or obviously false.

- “DO NOT WANT” - This sentence originates in poorly made English subtitles of an illegal Chinese release of *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*. In the scene where Darth Vader cries “Nooo!”, the subtitles read “Do not want”. The phrase became popular on 4chan.com as an expression of dislike and since then has appeared in many image macros (“DO NOT WANT!”).
- “All your base are belong to us” - A bad English translation that originates in the introduction sequence of a Japanese computer game called Zero Wing. It became immensely popular in 2000 and appeared in plenty of forms and wordings. However, it seems that this meme has been slowly dying out. (Dubs, “All Your Base”)
- “Leave Britney alone!” - Can be used in response to any kind of criticism and teasing. It started with a video made by Chris Crocker (“LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!”), by now an Internet celebrity, in which he emotionally defends Britney Spears.
- “Im in ur base killing ur d00ds” - This phrase is “believed to have originated on the SomethingAwful forums in 2003 when a screenshot of a game of Starcraft was posted on the Games forum by user 1337h4x. Transcript of in-game chat: dude, where are you? - im in ur base, killing ur d00ds” (SpyHunter29). The words “base”, “d00ds” (dudes) and the participle can be changed in order to adapt the phrase to various situations.
- “Serious business” - Often abbreviated to “srs bsns” or similar. Used in a sarcastic way, often as “The Internet is serious business”, although anything else can be serious business, too; GoogleSearch yields results ranging from osmosis to the World of Warcraft online game.

Online communication makes a great use of many abbreviated forms. The fast pace of synchronous conversation requires brevity, a more or less informal nature of many communicative situations allows for a less elaborate discourse, typing is demanding, the vast amount of information and possibilities available on the Internet will not let anyone linger in one place longer than necessary.

Therefore the less text there is to write the better.

Although the term 'acronyms' is often used as a general term for all types of abbreviations found in online communication, in a strict sense the word denotes only "initialisms, which are pronounced as single words" (Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* 120). However, the acronyms used on the Internet are rarely spoken aloud, so it is difficult to tell which would fall into this category. So far only the two popular abbreviations ROFL and LOL are known to be spoken occasionally, perhaps also because they contain a vowel and are therefore easier to pronounce than abbreviations consisting only of consonants.

- ROFL or ROTFL means "rolling on the floor laughing". It can be extended by merging with another abbreviation – LMAO, meaning "laughing my ass off". The pronunciation of ROFL would be "rawfl" (Ulaby)
- LOL means "laugh(ing) out loud" and is one of the most frequently used abbreviations on the Internet. During its existence it has been gaining on the character of a word. It may be intensified by extension – LOLLLLL – or repetition - LOLOLOL, which goes against the sense of the original meaning (laughing out loud out loud out loud). It has also morphed into forms such as "I lol'd" (I laughed out loud), "lulz", which is a plural form used for example in the phrase "to do something for the lulz", "lulzy" and "lulzworthy".

Whichever abbreviation related to laughing is used in online communication, it is usually an exaggeration not meant in the literal sense. Judging by the instances and the frequency of use and the occasional additional IRL ("I lol'd IRL" - I laughed out loud in real life), people only rarely mean the true sense of the acronym LOL, let alone ROFL or LMAO.

Initialisms, "items which are spoken as individual letters" (Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* 120), are very popular on the Internet, not only for using in conversation, but also as a source of amusement when inventing new ones. However, using abbreviations in common communication (where all parties actually want to understand one another) requires the knowledge of the abbreviation to be shared by everyone. Therefore only a relatively small number of these

acronyms is commonly used.

Frequently used abbreviations of conversational phrases:

- afk - “away from keyboard”
- afaik - “as far as I know”
- asap - “as soon as possible”
- brb - “be right back”
- btw - “by the way”
- fyi - “for your information”
- iawtc - “I agree with this comment”
- imho - “in my humble opinion”
- irl - “in real life”
- nsfw, nws - “not safe for work”, “not work-safe”; used as a warning about content that may not be appropriate for viewing at work or in other public places
- omg - “oh my god”
- OP - “original poster”, usually the user who started a thread
- OT - “off topic”
- tl;dr - “too long; didn't read”; a proof of the requirement for brevity in online communication
- wtf - “what the fuck”; can be converted into a noun by adding “ery” - WTFery, pronounced as “whatthefuckery”
- WTFBBQ (also OMGWTFBBQ!!!) - an expression of extreme shock, used also for mocking purposes; derived from previous plus BBQ (barbecue)

There are also abbreviations made of individual words, not phrases, for example: ppl - “people”, thx - “thanks”.

Acronyms are often written in lower case, again as a consequence of simplification and quickening of the typing process. Capitals are used for adding

emphasis and for most two-letter abbreviations, since those are easier recognizable as acronyms if written in upper case and will not be confused with a misspelled word.

There are also many abbreviations which are specific for certain groups and communities. Many fandoms, for which the Internet is the most important meeting point, have their own slang.

For example:

Online gaming:

- OOC - "out of character"; a player uses this acronym to let others know that he or she is speaking for himself or herself, not as the character he or she is using in the game; e.g. "OOC: Crapola, guys, the cat just barfed on my mouse – brb."
- BAF - "brings/brought a friend"; a warning that the enemy does not come alone, e.g. "watch out, it BAFs"
- DC - "disconnected from server"; when a glitch in the connection prevents a player from participating in the game, so he or she can no longer control his or her character

(Ballast)

The Harry Potter fandom:

- AK - "Avada Kedavra"; a killing curse, also used as a verb - "to AK somebody"
- HBP - "Half-Blood Prince"; refers to the character in the series and the sixth book and film - "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince"
- MoM - "Ministry/Minister of Magic"

(DorisTLC)

Fanfiction:

- AU - "alternative universe"; marks a story which takes place in a setting completely different from the original one

- OTP - “one/only true pairing”; a fanfiction writer's or reader's favourite couple
 (“Fanfic 101”)

Fashion:

- BtSSB - “Baby, the Stars Shine Bright”; a Japanese fashion company specializing in Lolita fashion
- EGA - “Elegant Gothic Aristocrat”; a fashion style
- RHS - “Rocking horse shoes”; a type of shoes first designed by Vivienne Westwood (La Carmina)

Another method of abbreviation is clipping, when only a part of the original word is used. For example:

- “shopped” - From “photoshopped” - modified with a graphic program such as Adobe Photoshop
 “That image has been shopped beyond recognition.”
- “fic” - From “fiction” in the sense of 'fanfiction', used as a countable noun meaning a particular work of fanfiction.
 “She posted a new fic yesterday.”
- “nick” - From “nickname”, in the sense of 'username'.
 “Add [ABC] to your nick to get registered.”

Adopting words from other languages to the English language may happen online. The Internet acts in this case most of all as a catalyst of the process. Its cosmopolitan character allows people from various parts of the world to meet and talk to each other. However, borrowing foreign words does not occur as much as it may be presumed from the global character of the medium. The reason might be the dominant position of the language on the Internet. Non-native English speakers often opt for the English language so they can communicate with other people on the Internet. Therefore, it is more likely that English will spread into other languages than the other way around. In some countries strong feelings of the national language being threatened by an increasing usage of English

expressions exist, for example in France, where “a fight against the 'linguistic hegemony' of English” is being led by many campaigners (“French fury”).

A few examples of Internet-related words of English origin in other languages:
in German – surfen, der Account, chatten, downloaden, online
in Czech – skrollovat, chatovat, browser, download, upgrade, banner, smajlík (smiley)

Foreign borrowings in the English language appear as a part of community slang rather than in general usage. From German the prefix “über-” has been adopted. Meaning “above”, “over”, figuratively “superior”, it is used as an intensifier and in various compounds. The online user-submitted slang dictionary UrbanDictionary.com lists over four hundred expressions beginning with “über” or “uber”.

In communities based on an interest in a particular nation, country or some aspects of its culture, expressions taken from the nation's language may appear in online communication. For example in communities gathering around popular Japanese cultural phenomena, such as anime, manga, Japanese music, Japanese street fashion, para para dancing etc., some Japanese words in their romanized forms are used, for example:

- “kawaii” - cute
- “otaku” - a fan, an enthusiast; the original word has a pejorative tone in Japan, but in usage outside of Japan the meaning has partially shifted to a more neutral level
- “guro” - the very origin of the word is in the English language in the word “grotesque”, which was in the Japanese language transformed into “guro” and is now used in English in the sense of “macabre”, “disturbing”, “explicit”, often in relation to pornography (“guro”), but not limited to it;

Some words have undergone a shift of meaning in the online world. Frequent are:

- “troll” - Although an Internet troll is not a very likable matter, the word originally does not have anything to do with any legendary creature, but

derives from the meaning to “try to catch fish by pulling a baited line through the water behind a boat” (“troll”). To troll an Internet discussion means to deliberately post something provocative that will elicit angry responses and lead to a heated argument. If a user realizes the thread has been “trolled”, he or she may post the acronym “YHTB” (you have been trolled) as a response or advise the others with “Do not feed the troll”, meaning “Ignore it”.

A real-life example: the humoristic website EncyclopediaDramatica.com refers to the Czech artist David Černý, author of the controversial artwork Entropa, as a troll: “David Černý is a sculptor and an IRL troll from the Czech Republic. After years of having severely pwned his own country on too many occasions to count, Cerny grew bored of trolling the same place all the time and decided to troll all of Europe” (“David Cerny”).

- “flame” - To flame somebody means to post an aggressive, insulting comment directed at the person(s). It may serve the purpose of “teaching someone something (usually in overstated language) or stopping them from doing something (like offending other people)”, but “flame messages often use more brute force than is strictly necessary, but that's half the fun” (“flame”).
- “spam” - The origins of the online use lie in “a 1970 Monty Python sketch in which a cafe waitress describes the available dishes to two customers, and culinary variation is introduced by an increasing reliance on spam” (Crystal, *Language and the Internet* 57). At first spamming referred to sending one message to many people, later also the opposite – accumulation of unsolicited messages at one recipient (Crystal, *Language and the Internet* 57). Spamming now refers to any kind of excessive or unwanted posts, but it may also be used in a positive sense; a 'picspam' means posting a lot of pictures related to a topic usually without any malicious intention.
- “lurk” - Not very far from the basic meaning, lurking is watching discussions in chatrooms and forums without participating in them. A person who lurks is called a 'lurker'. Lurking can be sometimes advisable, for example before entering a community a user may want to spend some time

just lurking around in order to get acquainted with the community and avoid being 'flamed'.

Expanding the vocabulary by compounding also takes place on the Internet.

Examples are:

- “friendscut” - Deleting people's accounts from one's 'friendslist' in social networking services.
- “fanfiction” - Stories inspired by various cultural phenomena and personalities (books, films, TV shows, bands, actors, etc.) written by fans and published usually on the Internet.
- “tackleglomp” - An action resembling something between tackling and glomping (see “glomp” further on) a person
- “facepalm” - dropping one's head into one's hand or smacking one's own face, usually in a gesture of utter disbelief over somebody's actions or behavior
- “headdesk” - similar to “facepalm”; letting one's head sink on the desk in despair, disbelief or remorse

Example: <user1> HeLLo EvErYoNe!!!1!!!111 ThIs ThRe4d ttly pwns lol

<user2> *facepalm*

<user3> *headdesk*

Creating new words by affixation also happens on the Internet, sometimes only for amusement. Suffixation produces words like pwnage, hackitude, clickable, killify, lulzworthy (see “LOL”, p. 21). An example of prefixation is the verb “to defriend” somebody, meaning delete a person from one's list of contacts or 'friends' in social networks.

Conversion is another productive way of creating new meanings for words in the online environment. Sometimes proper nouns become verbs, as in “to google” something or the verb “to joss”, which derives from the first name of Joss Whedon, the creator of the popular TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel and Firefly.

An episode of a series or a fanfiction story is 'jossed' when a later episode contradicts its plot ("Jossed").

To name a few examples of various other cases of word creation, the following words can be mentioned:

- "glomp" - The origin of the word is unclear; it might be a blend of the verbs "glom" and "jump" or an abbreviation of "Grab, Latch On, Maintain Pressure" ("glomp"). To 'glomp' somebody means to hug somebody energetically.
- "nom" - Derived from "om nom nom", a sound imitating eating, popular in lolcats. According to KnowYourMeme.com, it "may have its origin in the sound Cookie Monster makes on Sesame Street when eating cookies" (Dubs, "Om Nom Nom Nom"). It has developed into a verb - "to nom", and also a noun - "nom" or "noms", meaning "food".
- "slash" - A genre of fanfiction dealing with homosexual relationships. The term originates in the "/" sign, placed between the names of the characters involved in the relationship, e.g. Kirk/Spock.

3. Conclusion

The informal communication on the Internet seems to be much more complex than how it is usually perceived by its critics.

Appearing in a written form, it relies on graphic elements to a great extent, using them as a supplement for nonverbal aspects of interaction.

Although abbreviation is quite frequent, where on one side words and phrases are reduced in order to make conversation more dynamic, on the other side the loss is compensated by creating new lexical units in various ways.

Should one try to divide the network into certain domains according to the language being used there, next to the seven situational areas proposed by David Crystal, another possibility seems to be the division by shared interests of a group of users. There are linguistic specifics for gaming communities, fandoms, various discussion groups, etc.

As for concerns about losing social skills due to the 'impersonal' electronic communication, cyberworld is not likely to cause a serious decline. While it is difficult to guess the extent of the negative influence on direct, face-to-face interaction, it is probably safe to assume that social skills in written interaction may actually improve in online communication. On the Internet, people need to find exact, clear ways of putting their point across, learn to assess their communicative partners and to adapt to the situation and practise interpreting and expressing various shades of meaning. If someone fails to adjust to a communicative situation, it will not get unnoticed by others.

Online communication also offers room for linguistic creativity and wordplay, in which people might not otherwise engage.

The extreme cases of 'netspeak' as presented at the very beginning are usually not a part of common communication. Internet slang is often used for parody and in a sarcastic manner, which shows most users' awareness of the importance of effective, intelligible use of language.

Summary

The thesis deals with informal communication on the Internet, its specifics and overall quality.

The introduction states the basic hypothesis concerning the quality of online communication and describes methods and aims of the work.

The chapter The Medium gives basic information about the Internet, its language situation and structure and present an example of criticism of the medium's influence on society.

The second part deals with individual language aspects of Internet communication. The section about orthographic features focuses on variation in spelling. Graphic features include specific text-formatting methods, capitalization style, punctuation, other symbols and the use of pictorial material. Two specific Internet phenomena known as 'lolspeak' and 'l33tspeak' are introduced. The part about lexical features of online communication presents various word-formation processes and gives examples of idioms.

The conclusion present the confirmation of the hypothesis that Internet communication is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon which encourages creativity and can have a positive influence on the participants.

Resumé

Práce se zabývá neformální komunikací na internetu, jejími specifiky a celkovou kvalitou.

Úvod stanovuje základní hypotézu ohledně kvality komunikace online a popisuje cíle a metodiku práce.

Kapitola Médium podává základní informace o internetu, jeho jazykové situaci a struktuře a uvádí příklad kritiky vlivu tohoto média na společnost.

Druhá část se zabývá jednotlivými jazykovými rysy internetové komunikace. Část o ortografických rysech se zaměřuje na pravopisnou variaci. Grafické rysy zahrnují specifické metody formátování textu, psaní velkých písmen, interpunkci, ostatní symboly a využití obrazového materiálu. Jsou zde představeny dva

specifické internetové jevy známé jako 'lolspeak' a '133tspeak'. Část o lexikálních rysech internetové komunikace představuje různé procesy slovtvorby a uvádí příklady idiomů.

Závěr prezentuje potvrzení hypotézy, že internetová komunikace je komplexní, vícedimenzionální jev, který podporuje kreativitu a může mít příznivý vliv na jeho účastníky.

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In-text quotations marked as "(...) hub mainchat" come from chat services mediated by a peer-to-peer file-sharing program. Usernames were changed in order to protect the users' privacy.

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Appendices

1. The 1337phabet

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Z- 2 -/ 7_

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