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Text-based computer mediated communication: forms, characteristics & influence on peripheral English vocabulary

B.A. Thesis

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Abstract

This B.A. Thesis introduces main forms of text-based Computer mediated communication in order to demonstrate that they differ in the level to which they motivate user's employment of new English peripheral vocabulary. General characteristics of the forms as well as results of their influence on English peripheral lexicon are discussed to provide better understanding of the issue. The work also addresses potential threats of utilization of computer mediated communication to the English language. The final conclusion is that there certainly are differences between forms of computer mediated communication in terms of employment of new specific lexicon and also that this new vocabulary does not represent a significant threat to the English language.

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce představuje hlavní formy textové počítačem zprostředkované komunikace s cílem dokázat, že každá forma motivuje uživatele používat novou periferní anglickou slovní zásobu do jiné míry. Pro lepší pochopení problematiky jsou zmíněny obecné vlastnosti forem, spolu s výsledkem jejich působení na periferní anglickou slovní zásobu. Práce rovněž pojednává o možných nebezpečích, kterým je anglický jazyk vystaven při použití počítačem zprostředkované komunikace. Závěrem je, že různé formy skutečně ovlivňují uživatele jinak, pokud jde o použití novotvarů, a že tyto nepředstavují pro anglický jazyk nebezpečí.

Key words:

Klíčová slova:

List of chapters

1 Introduction

Computers, along with the Internet, are spreading to homes, offices, schools, and workplaces. This signifies that the number of computer-literate individuals is increasing and so is the need to communicate via computer technology, which is a process known as computer mediated communication. Since it can effortlessly substitute all previously known forms of communication, growth of its popularity is not likely to stop any time soon. It also means that there exist many types of computer mediated communication yet this work will only focus on text-based ones. That is because they offer interesting characteristics in terms of practical use as they evoke an urge to create and apply new English peripheral vocabulary. What follows is a quote of Mark Warschauer that explains this connection between English and communication via computers and the Internet: "The early dominance of English on the Internet was due to several factors. First, a high percentage of early users were North Americans. Second, the computer scientists who designed personal computers and the Internet did so on the basis of the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII), which made computing in other alphabets or character sets inconvenient or impossible. Finally, at a more basic level, by bringing together users in many countries, the Internet has furthered the need for people to communicate in an international lingua franca and strengthened the position of English in that role" (Warschauer). The author of this B.A. thesis finds computer mediated communication interesting since the connection between information and communication technology and English covers his two main fields of study at the same time.

This BA Thesis starts with a brief introduction of computer mediated communication, its history, and a clarification of several key concepts. What follows is a general overview of all forms of text-based computer mediated communication, where their common advantages, disadvantages, as well as their possible use are discussed. The subsequent

chapters address individual forms, namely email, instant messaging, Internet forums, Internet relay chat, and social networks. These are characterized in two basic levels, the first is general, i.e. practical use of the given form of CMC while the second describes specifics that motivate individuals to use new English peripheral vocabulary. Chapter 3.2 is dedicated to this new vocabulary, consisting of abbreviations, acronyms, and Internet jargon that resulted from the use of computer mediated communication. There is also a contemplation on possible threats of CMC to the English language.

The aim of the work is to thoroughly present text-based computer mediated communication, to show how it influences individual's use of English with focus on peripheral vocabulary, and to introduce results of this influence. There are four key areas of interest which are: universal advantages and disadvantages of CMC, classification of forms of CMC, use of main individual forms, influence on peripheral English vocabulary. The clarification of these issues will help the reader understand text-based computer mediated communication in all mentioned aspects.

There are two hypotheses. The first states that forms of computer mediated communication differ in the level to which they make users employ CMC specific language features. The second then states that these features are not harmful to the core of the English language in any way.

Because of significant differences in basic principles of individual forms of CMC, the first hypothesis is expected to be confirmed by this work. The second hypothesis is again reckoned to be confirmed as the influence of CMC is not relevant outside of the Internet and its communication channels.

2 Theoretical part

2.1 Definition of Computer mediated communication

Computer mediated communication is a self-explanatory term used to describe communication between two or more people via information and communication technology. Less obvious definition can be found in Alexander Romiszowski's work *Computer-mediated communication*: "A working definition of CMC that, pragmatically and in light of the rapidly changing nature of communication technologies, does not specify forms, describes it as the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages. This seems to encompass both the delivery mechanisms, derived from communication theory, and the importance of the interaction of people that the technologies and processes mediate" (Romiszowski, Mason).

Just like any other means of communication, CMC requires certain equipment to be successfully employed. Necessary are computer terminals with proper software which users utilize as input and output devices. These computers must be interconnected by a network and if users want to communicate with someone who is in a distant location, the Internet is the most obvious option here. Last but not least, there must be a server that will provide necessary CMC services because all CMC forms are centrally hosted. This means that right after it is sent, a message travels to the server where it is afterwards dispatched to the desired recipient.

2.2 Key concepts

ICT – Stands for Information and communication technology. It is commonly used in relation to computer mediated communication as it provides elemental technical foundations.

PC – Personal computer. An electronic device used (among others, such as cellphones) to connect to the Internet. In case of CMC, it functions as an input and output device for user's communication.

The Internet – A network consisting of computers of two basic types. Servers that provide services and user workstations that make use of these. Steve Jones adds another important characteristic: "The Internet essentially serves as the main connecting point for many other networks. It has, in a sense, come to be a "backbone" by which networks link up with each other. A common estimate is that there are over 30,000 computer networks with over 1.5 million computers connected through the Internet, and the Internet's number of users grows by 10 percent monthly" (Jones). It certainly is the most important medium of CMC.

Synchronicity – Determines fundamental forms of CMC. "Computer Mediated Communication media is traditionally divided into two categories: synchronous media (e.g. instant messaging, chat) and asynchronous media (e.g. email, discussion board)" (Kalman, Rafaeli). Message in synchronous CMC is read and responded to immediately after it is sent. Asynchronous CMC allows for extended response time and does not require simultaneous connection of participating users.

Peripheral vocabulary – Apart from neutral and standard central vocabulary, there is a peripheral lexicon. It may be divided into two main categories, colloquial and literary. Whereas the literary group contains foreignisms, archaisms, terms, poetisms, and neologisms, computer mediated communication is certainly more connected with the colloquial group of peripheral vocabulary, as it contains argot, jargon, dialect, and vulgarisms. These are more likely to be found in communication on the Internet.

CMC-specific language features – New peripheral vocabulary and other properties, such as emoticons, that are generated by the use of CMC. These are presented in the chapter 3.2. *Influence of Computer mediated communication on peripheral English vocabulary*.

2.3 Development of Computer mediated communication

Today's computer mediated communication, as used by regular computer users, is based around the Internet. Steve Jones describes its history: "The connections in place for the most widely discussed computer network, the Internet, were formed in the 1960s and early 1970s when the U.S. Department of Defense and several research universities, via DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Program Agency) linked computers. The resulting network, Arpanet, allowed for access to each site's computers not only for communication but for research. Other computer networks grew during the 1970s, and various software and hardware protocols were developed that enabled them to connect to Arpanet, and it, in turn, morphed into the Internet" (Jones).

Jones further expands and says that networks were used "as a means for researchers to share information by way of electronic mail" (Jones). From this we can see that email was the first contribution of computer networks to computer mediated communication.

A need to communicate synchronously came shortly afterwards and the Internet gained abilities to provide CMC that would fully replace all the previous communication methods. It enables its users to communicate real-time with one or more other users, make phone calls, video conferencing etc. Also the fact that computers are more and more affordable and the Internet more widespread makes the development of CMC even easier.

According to Y. Amichai-Hamburger and K.Y.A. McKenna, "the Internet has, to date, been perhaps the most successful means of facilitating and enabling contact among individuals – particularly those who otherwise would not have had the opportunity, nor perhaps the inclination, to meet" (Amichani-Hamburger, McKenna).

Apart from the accessibility of computer technology to a greater amount of people, there are other reasons for its popularity and therefore the development of CMC. These are mentioned in the chapter 3.1.2 *Advantages of CMC*.

3 Main part

3.1 Computer mediated communication

This part is going to introduce the two main modes of computer mediated communication, synchronous and asynchronous. In addition, hybrid mode of CMC will be mentioned. This category mainly encompasses social networks which enable individuals to use both synchronous and asynchronous tools for communication.

Selected forms include email, instant messaging (IM), forums, Internet relay chat (IRC) and social networks. Their list was created to cover all major types of text-based CMC, private synchronous (IM), private asynchronous (email), public synchronous (IRC) and public asynchronous (forums).

Before going into specific features of each form though, some of the common attributes will be discussed to help readers create a better picture of how variable CMC is and what the main benefits and drawbacks of its use are.

3.1.1 Use of Computer mediated communication

Computer mediated communication is nowadays popular mainly because of the Internet. There are other networks but none of them is truly world wide. As a matter of fact, its distribution in schools, homes, and offices certainly encourages to use CMC for various purposes. This chapter will name a few of them just to illustrate how varying its use may be.

Education is quite an important example of use of CMC. Communication between individual students and tutors can be performed via several means yet the most convenient is probably email. When it however comes to one-to-many communication, CMC offers one dominant solution. Virtual courses may come very handy as a tutor can communicate requirements and curriculum interactively, fast, and permanently. This form of

communication for educational purposes represents a very good example of a mutual benefit for both sides of interaction.

Commercials and government announcements executed via computer technology are also nothing else but instances of use of computer mediated communication. Companies, governments etc. are able to address very wide audience via the Internet and they certainly do so. Especially commercials are literally everywhere on the web and only a very small number of public websites is add-free. Noticing these adds and realizing they are a form of one-to-many CMC will certainly serve as a sufficient evidence of CMC's prevalence.

Languages must be mentioned as well. Both linguists and ordinary language users employ CMC. As stated earlier in this thesis, there is a wide variety of CMC language features that somehow expands vocabulary of the given language. The Internet also presents a new way of distributing literature and language knowledge through specialised websites, forums etc.

It is not necessary to describe the most obvious example here, as interpersonal communication is discussed throughout this work.

3.1.2 Advantages of Computer mediated communication

Let us take a look at all the benefits of computer mediated communication. What comes to mind in the first place is speed. In earlier days it was practically impossible to communicate with someone on the other side of the world. In fact, even a simple trip to a nearby town in order to talk with someone could have taken a considerable amount of time. In the era of the Internet, there is nothing to stop its users from chatting with friends in Sydney even if they currently are in London or New York. This situation is even more pronounced when there is a need to contact more than one person at a time. Thanks to the Internet and computer mediated communication, big companies are able to control their offices all over the globe almost simultaneously. As the previous examples suggest, the

element of place is as unimportant as the element of time with utilization of information and communication technologies for communication and one certainly does not have to be a CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of a global corporation to fully appreciate this feature.

For some people, communication can represent a great difficulty, not in terms of time shortage or place inaccessibility but in shyness or general lack of courage to actually talk to someone face to face yet sending an email or chatting on-line can ensure at least some social contact for them. Furthermore, in accordance with Massimo Bertacco and Antonella Deponte and their work *Email as a speed-facilitating device,* "it has been found that CMC may provide communicative settings in which individuals can take advantage of anonymity to voice their "true self" and free themselves from potentially negative social barriers (e.g., physical appearance and gender) associated with face-to-face interactions" (Bertacco, Deponte). Their work further adds a confirmation of the previous paragraph of this work: "CMC modes also enable individuals to interact regardless of spatiotemporal constraints, allowing new relationships to form and existing relationships to be maintained at a distance" (Bertacco, Deponte).

Another form of communication that can benefit from ICT is a simple writing of articles, short stories, blog entries, or even books. As a matter of fact, computer spell-check is a mighty tool for someone with less than optimal sense for language.

To sum up all the advantages, a short quotation of Veronica Bergschneider's article on Technology's influence on interpersonal communication: "One can see how technology when used properly, greatly enhances the communication process among people. Without telephones and computers, society would consist solely of whichever people one could reach within a day's travel, and we would lack the means to make friends across the country and around the world" (Bergschneider). This chapter should give readers an overview of the advantages that CMC brings, and should also justify its popularity.

3.1.3 Disadvantages of Computer mediated communication

With all these advantages comes a large number of drawbacks. The following opinions of certain experts clarify what exactly it is that makes computer mediated communication inadvisable as the only means of interpersonal contact.

John Petes starts his topic-related article with an idea of what we are left with in an ICT communication. "When talking on the phone, we lose the ability to see facial expressions, and body posture, making it more difficult to convey ones thoughts and feelings. When chatting on-line, that, and tone of voice, pitch and everything that the phone gives you, is lost as well, creating the same problems. Except for words" (Petes). In fact, Amanda South supplies us with additional information by a quotation of UCLS psychology professor Albert Mehrabian who has reputedly found only 7 percent of communication being derived from words. A telephone gives its user another 38 percent of meaning which comes from vocal inflection. The greatest part of communicative value however comes from facial and body language, 55 percent (South). This naturally applies to communication in all languages, not excluding the original computer language which is English.

The main problem connected with this fact is a predisposition to misunderstandings. With only 7 percent of sender's message being delivered to the recipient, it is difficult to guess the intended meaning. As South illustrates further on in her article, a simple email with criticism of an employee, although accompanied by a constructive advice can worsen office relations because the employee might infer a stronger tone than was originally intended. This also has to do with professionalism for certain messages just should be delivered face to face.

Another downside of computer mediated communication can be seen in the quantity of information people transfer to their friends, family members, or colleagues. South expands on this: "New research shows that too much information can be harmful. Too much

information degrades the importance of a message, weakening its impact" (South).

A less factual but more thoughtful view on the matter is then found in Petes' article. "When in a mall, we decide to rather save a couple calories by riding the escalator instead of a short trip up the stairs. Suddenly there is no journey. Just an easy ride. When you cut out the labour of achieving something, whether it be speaking or walking up stairs, the things sacrificed for convenience are scary. In this case, you lose concentration and communication skills, and you lose a chance for even the smallest amount of exercise, which adds up. You loose the basic concept of work, and along with it, the understanding of things value. If you have to track someone down to talk to him, the conversation will be a lot more fulfilling" (Petes).

Last disadvantageous aspect is mentioned in the article *Interactional coherence in CMC* by Susan Herring. In the matter of coherence in CMC, she states that "interactive exchanges in a variety of CMC modes tend to be less tightly stitched together than in face-to-face conversation: responses are often separated from the turns they are responding to, topics tend to decay quickly, and multiple, overlapping exchanges often share the same channel" (Herring).

As Herring herself mentions, all the above mentioned factors contribute to the creation of several compensatory strategies that CMC users adopt and that will be discussed later on in this work.

These examples of disadvantages are universally applicable to all forms of computer mediated communication. There are however further specifics that apply only to certain modes of CMC in regards to their synchronous or asynchronous nature.

3.1.4 Asynchronous Computer mediated communication

Asynchronous communication is characterised by long response times as a sender and a recipient are not transmitting simultaneously. As such it is quite an unusual activity for humans and therefore there are some minor conflicts when it comes to asynchronous computer mediated communication. This matter is thoroughly discussed in *Modulating Synchronicity in Computer Mediated Communication* by Kalman and Rafaeli. They state, that "the preference for short response latencies, for highly synchronous interaction, is an innate human quality, possibly because humans are biologically inclined to prefer highly synchronous interaction over delayed interaction" (Kalman, Rafaeli). By highly synchronous interaction they of course mean face-to-face interaction.

They also back up this theory by *Media Naturalness Principle* developed by Ned Kock, where he concludes that "people will innately be more accepting of media that incorporate all the elements of face-to-face interaction, since these more natural media require less individual cognitive effort. Thus, in our case, the preference for synchronous communication exist since face-to-face communication is highly synchronous, making synchronous communication more 'natural' to humans" (Kalman, Rafaeli).

Nevertheless, email, the prominent example of asynchronous CMC, always was and still is one of the most popular services on the Internet and the same goes to Internet forums, therefore there must be something that makes people use them despite their natural inclination to synchronous communication.

First of all, once a user is connected to the Internet, email or forums are free to use. It is great to be able to send a message to someone on the other side of the world or ask a question on a forum and have thousands of potential helpers and pay nothing.

Following is an ease of use. Today's services are so user-friendly that they guide even

absolute beginners step by step to successfully connect with anyone, without requiring special software.

Lastly, to send an asynchronous message, be it an email or a forum post, all that users need is an electronic address, either email or the address of the forum they want to visit. Asynchronous CMC does not require an established connection between communicating sides, unlike synchronous CMC. It is also by its nature independent of time factor, meaning its users can send a message at any time of the day without having to fear they will interrupt someone, knowing the recipient can access the message when he desires to do so.

All these factors outweigh the inborn predisposition to communicate in real-time pace with minimal response time.

3.1.4.1 Email

The first attempt of computer mediated communication was executed via electronic mail. Originally it had nothing to do with email we know today because it was more of a note that someone could leave on his computer for other users (Peter). After this rather cumbersome beginning, email gained its position within ARPAnet and in fact if it was not for the email, ARPAnet would have been shut down much earlier as Ian Peter in his article *The history of email* adds. "Email took us from Arpanet to the Internet. Here was something that ordinary people all over the world wanted to use" (Peter). As Amanda Lenhard in *Teens and technology* study from 2005 also mentions, email has been the most popular application on the Internet for many years (Lenhard).

It is possible to say that electronic mail is nowadays very useful in official matters of everyday life, for example in a job application. Work efficiency of those who are to deal with a large number of mail messages every day, such as human resources managers, can be radically improved by the use of electronic mail for it is much easier and faster to

browse them in a computer. Responding is of course also more conveniently done by a simple click on a "respond" button in a mail managing program.

Email can be just as successfully used for unofficial communication of various kinds, from a birthday congratulation to contacting of a long lost friends. There are certain issues of course, for example when it comes to a birthday congratulation, with regular mail we show more personal contact with someone whereas email can seem quite soulless in this case. This is even confirmed by M. Bertacco and A. Deponte's work *Email as s speed-facilitating device*. Their study focused on use of email as a means of communication with long lost friends yet its final conclusion can be applied quite universally. According to them, "students communicating with a friend via email wrote shorter messages and were less inclined to ground their communications in shared knowledge than students communicating by postal letter" (Bertacco, Deponte).

Days of email as an informal CMC channel may however be over. This is suggested in Lenhard's *Teens and technology,* where she presents opinions of English speaking teenagers on CMC tools: "Teens who participated in focus groups for this study said that they view email as something you use to talk to "old people," institutions, or to send complex instructions to large groups. When it comes to casual written conversation, particularly when talking with friends, on-line instant messaging is clearly the mode of choice for today's on-line teens" (Lenhard).

What is specific about email communication in terms of used language and vocabulary then? Susan Herring gives us a brilliant overview: "Some writers have observed that email language is structurally simpler than traditional forms of writing, made up of shorter, grammatically less complex sentences, and containing more sentence fragments and typographical errors" (Herring). This quite clearly labels email as something that restricts the used language. On the other hand it would be right to ask if this restriction is

unavoidable and caused purely by the form of CMC. As a matter of fact, Herring ads that "email messages posted to professional discussion list tend to be linguistically sophisticated, making use of complex grammar and containing few errors. This suggest that factors such as level of user education and purpose for communication condition language complexity in asynchronous CMC" (Herring).

To sum up, the degree to which the message is going to be formal or informal and grammatically correct or incorrect, fully depends on the sender's will and on the effort he or she is willing to put in it. An email can be prepared in advance, checked for spelling or other mistakes, and someone more cognizant can inspect it for its pertinence. In addition, practically no length limitations are applied. It is up to the user then, if he decides to use some new vocabulary specific for CMC, for example abbreviations, to leave typos and grammatical mistakes uncorrected, or to use symbols to represent smiley faces. There are no technical or spatiotemporal limitations. From forms of CMC that are presented in this work, email tends to contain the smallest number of new vocabulary or other linguistic features caused by Internet communication channels.

3.1.4.2 Forums

What separates this form of computer mediated communication from email or instant messaging most, is the fact that forums are used to communicate with larger groups of people who usually share common interests while email or instant messaging are more of a private communication tool. This suggests that the question of Internet forums or boards, as they are also known as, is closely related to on-line communities, at least according to the definition which is stated in the work *Moderation, Response Rate, and Message Interactivity:* "An aggregation of individuals or business partners who interact around a shared interest, where the interaction is at least partially supported and/or mediated by technology and guided by some protocols or norms" (Wise, Hamman, Thorson). From this

point of view, forums are quite similar to blogs and other public websites.

There are however specifics of forums in terms of their form that separate them from other on-line community websites even though they all "share the goal of generating participation from those who visit" (Wise, Hamman, Thorson). Since forums are also asynchronous, the language and vocabulary are not influenced by spatiotemporal restrictions. Instead, participation along with the topic of a forum are the two most important agents for this issue and therefore will be discussed.

The above-mentioned article states three factors influencing participation. These are moderation, response rate, and message interactivity. The work focuses on their effect on participation in on-line communities in general yet they are perfectly applicable to forums as well.

Moderation is usually represented by an administrator who sets rules of a forum (such as no off-topic posts, no insults of others etc.) and by a group of moderators who oversee observance of these rules. The experiment carried out by Wise added an aspect of review of new posts by moderators and other participants, and "editor's pick" post that will be on each page. Results confirmed the hypothesis that totally unmoderated forum is less attractive for participants (Wise, Hamman, Thorson). The second feature, response rate, describes how active the forum is. It is not hard to imagine that a forum with posts dated a few hours or better yet minutes back is more attractive than a forum with posts more than a week old, as it certainly seems more active. Interactivity is also quite important for it enables users to directly respond to previous contributions.

Participation is unfortunately slightly complicated matter in its influence on the used language because even though most modern Internet forums use these three features, only a relatively small part of subscribers actively contributes to the content while the majority passively lurks. This fact is stated in Alexander Romiszowski and Robin Mason's work

Computer-mediated communication. Therefore the overall picture of a forum is created by a few most active members and this of course involves the used vocabulary, abbreviations, and other language features specific for CMC.

Topic or focus of an on-line discussion board then indicates what will an average visitor behave like and subsequently what CMC specific language features will he use. Following are posts from two completely unrelated forums and a short analysis, demonstrating this statement on polar examples.

The first is from Anandtech.com forum, major US based computer hardware and software website:

Hi everyone!

First time building a PC, so wanted to get input from all the experts here :-D

i7 2600 (default 3.4ghz, turbo on, HT on) with stock hsf

Gigabyte GA-P67A-UD4-B3

AMD 6770 1gb graphics

12gb RAM

got all my temperatures from hwmonitor

so far my idle temp is 35-40c

running 3DMark Vantage (free version) would get somewhere around 82c.

playing WoW would get around 65c

Is that temperature normal? I have 2 exhaust 120mm and 1 intake 120mm fan. All the fans are running fine.

Any suggestions? Thanks in advance!

Here we can see a selection of CMC specific language features. Probably the most striking are abbreviations (temp - temperature) and acronyms (PC – personal computer, HT – hyper-threading, HSF – heatsink fan, WoW – World of Warcraft). Not all sentences are started by capital letters and ended by full stops. There are also quite specific product names that may be indecipherable for someone who is not interested in computers and that

would most likely be omitted in non-CMC communication. An emoticon expressing smile is used as well.

Second comes an example from usingenglish.com, website focused on proper use of the English language:

There are many posts on this forum every day. Please be patient when waiting for a response to your question. It is difficult for one person to keep up with all the questions. (Indeed!) It is difficult for several people to keep up with all the questions. You might not get an immediate response. You might have to wait a while. So please be patient.

If you do get impatient waiting for an answer to your question, try sending someone a PM (private message) asking that person to respond to your post. (You might want to send more than one (to more than one person).)

This post is quite different from the previous one. Its form is not striking in any way and it is possible to say that use of such language in face-to-face conversation would not arouse unease or indignation even when used in front of a language appraiser. The only acronym used is immediately explained (PM – private message), all sentences are started with capital letters, and punctuation is also correct.

These two short examples demonstrate how unlike may Internet forums appear to a new participant in terms of CMC-induced language features. It is understandable that the more English-oriented a forum is, the more unspoiled English is used while on the other hand the more technology and computer-oriented, the more CMC specific language features are to be found. This statement relates to the overall image of forums and deviations are of course present just as in every other subject.

3.1.5 Synchronous Computer mediated communication

Forms of synchronous computer mediated communication were invented shortly after the asynchronous ones. From the description of asynchronous forms given in the chapter 3.1.4 can be deduced that the main advantage of synchronous CMC is the fact it cooperates with the natural human inclination towards short latencies in communication.

Participation in synchronous CMC may strongly resemble face-to-face communication. As this work only deals with textual forms of CMC, there are certain limitations to this statement though, for it is considerably slower to type or read a message than it is to say or hear it. This naturally constraints some of the language properties.

Unlike asynchronous counterpart, synchronous text-based computer mediated communication is limited by the fact that conversation is real time. "In a study comparing informal spoken conversation, formal written documents, and communication in a synchronous chat system, Ko found the CMC to be simpler even than spontaneous speech in terms of range of vocabulary used and measures of word and sentence length. We may add to this the observation that chat exhibits abbreviation to a greater extent than email (or speech). Unlike users of email, chat users are under pressure to type at a conversational pace; the cost of speed of production appears to be linguistic complexity" (Herring). This is common to both forms that will be discussed bellow.

From the practical point of view, users of synchronous CMC, for example of instant messenger, are exchanging information through computers simultaneously. When one of them writes something in a dedicated instant messaging program and clicks on the send button, the message will immediately appear on his partner's screen. This description suggests a necessity of a specialised program that must be installed on user's computers as well as the inevitability of simultaneous participation of users. This is of course the main practical difference from asynchronous CMC.

3.1.5.1 Instant Messaging

What is an on-line instant messaging service, aka IM? First of all, it is crucial to understand that instant messaging is in most cases usable only for unofficial communication and usually can by no means be taken as formal. From the technical point of view, email does not need a direct connection between its users, IM does. Looking back at the example of a human resources manager, it is unthinkable for him or her to add every single client to a contact list for the first job application message. Another feature of instant messaging supporting this theory is the conversation-style of communication it was designed for. Someone with hundreds of clients cannot possibly talk with all of them in real time.

Another problem with the use of IM in a workplace is a possible interruption of workers it may cause, especially because of the informal nature of a typical IM conversation. However, there are some upsides of IM implementation in a workplace. R. Kelly Garrett and James N. Danziger published their work *IM = Interruption management: Instant Messaging and Distruption in the Workplace* where they state that face-to-face conversations and telephone calls, two main sources of distraction, can be timed by a proper use of IM. According to their article, IM provides opportunities for negotiating the timing of interactions. Senders can unobtrusively test availability of recipients without being concerned about when to contact them, "because he or she knows that the recipient can ignore or dismiss the IM notification easily or can provide an explicit indication of status quickly (e.g. 'I'm bussy rign now. Can we talk in 15 minutes?'). Although an IM pop-up is disruptive, it is not as distracting as an inopportune telephone call or an unexpected office visit" (Garrett, Danziger). Recipients on the other hand can easily signal their availability and even turn off all notifications of new messages.

As Lenhard suggests, informal chatting with friends is the main domain of IM. Users are

connected and whenever they turn their IM client on, they see everyone from their contact list who are on-line at the moment. It is free, fast, and at user's disposal only when he or she wants to. As for the numbers, to demonstrate how IM conquers the world of on-line talking between teenagers, at least the English speaking ones from the United States, here are the findings from the *Teens and technology* study: "75% of on-line teens — or about two-thirds of all teenagers — use instant messaging, compared to 42% of on-line adults" (Lenhard).

The fact IM is mostly used for communication with friends or people we know personally for example, slightly encourages to use informal language. Furthermore, the conversation is real time and one user is waiting for the other one's response, which causes the typing to be quick and may result in a large number of typos that are in most cases left uncorrected.

Next commonly experienced feature is an omission of punctuation and capital letters in names or at the beginning of statements. The level to which this may extend depends on who the user is chatting with for there may be various language modifications used exclusively between the two people.

To sum up, instant messaging trades some of the language features for speed and convenience. Messages are comprehensible and mostly grammatically correct yet they would not make a very good impression on a language connoisseur. Lenhard further on mentions how important it is for teens as it represents a useful tool for making plans with friends, joking around, talking about homeworks, and so on (Lenhard).

Pure and single-purpose IM platforms, such as ICQ (I seek you), AOL or MSN Messenger are however slowly withdrawing, surrendering their place to social networks which are offering the same functionality but in one package with other features (Kelly).

3.1.5.2 Internet Relay Chat

To put the basic Internet relay chat (ICR) description as simply as possible, it is to Instant messaging what Forum is to Email. Or as John Paolillo thoroughly describes in *The Virtual Speech Community: Social Network and Language Variation on IRC*: "What sets IRC apart from other modes of CMC is that interaction is conducted almost in real-time: all participants in an interaction must be electronically present at the same time, and messages are immediately transmitted through the intermediate servers to all participants, wherever they may be. Thus, IRC is characterized by much shorter propagation delay than Usenet news and Listserv messages. In addition, IRC is multi-participant, and message length is very short (typically one or two lines) so that IRC interaction is similar to multi-participant face-to-face conversation. Using IRC, people who are located in geographically distant locales, who are of different national and linguistic backgrounds, and who might otherwise never come into contact, can engage in real-time interactions that resemble the immediacy of in-person face-to-face encounters" (Paolillo).

As for the special CMC language properties, there are those similar to instant messaging, because IRC is also real-time, therefore it requires quick responses and due to its informal nature urges the use of informal language, smiley faces etc. Susan Herring expands on these restrictions with addition of IRC specifics in her book *Computer-mediated communication*: "On IRC, a combination of spatial, temporal and social constraints act as important limiting conditions that influence the size and shape of communication. Factors such as screen size, average typing speed, minimal response times, competition for attention, channel population and the pace of channel conversation all contribute to the emergence of certain characteristic properties. Some of the most obvious of these properties involve a tendency toward brevity which manifests itself in speaking turns of very short length, various forms of abbreviation, and the use of stored linguistic formulas"

(Herring).

As a demonstration of the previous paragraphs, one of the most interesting features of IRC communication, overlap, was selected and will be briefly discussed. It is described also by Susan Herring in her work *Interactional Coherence in CMC* which focuses on this phenomenon and explains it on examples taken from Paolillo's work *Conversational Codeswitching on Usenet and Internet Relay Chat*. One of them follows below.

1. <ashna> hi jatt

2. *** Signoff: puja (EOF From client)

3. <Dave-G> kally i was only joking around

4. <Jatt> ashna: hello?

5. <kally> dave-g it was funny

6. <ashna> how are u jatt

7. <LUCKMAN> ssa all

8. <Dave-G> kally you da woman!

9. <Jatt> ashna: do we know eachother?. I'm ok how are you

10. *** LUCKMAN has left channel #PUNJAB

11. *** LUCKMAN has joined channel #punjab

12. <kally> dave-g good stuff:)

13. <Jatt> kally: so hows school life, life in geneal, love life, family life?

14. <ashna> jatt no we don't know each other, i fine

15. <Jatt> ashna: where r ya from?

There are two main conversations going on, the first between users Ashna and Jatt, the second between Dave-G and Kally. Later in the example (line 13) Jatt starts the third conversation by asking Kally.

To further demonstrate how complicated even a short IRC conversation can be in terms of overlap, here is a diagram of the previous example, taken from the aforementioned article.
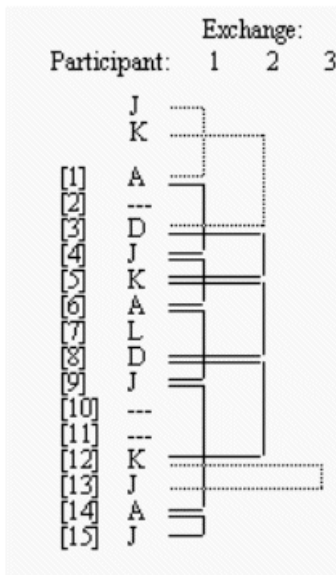
Overlap is a feature that, if nothing else, encourages users of IRC to speed up their conversation even more than they need in private instant messaging, in order to prevent coherence insufficiency in communication. It can also be stated that the higher the number of participants and the more complex their mutual connection, the more overlap situations in the conversation occur.

To sum up, Internet relay chat is probably the most demanding form of CMC when it comes to speed of typing and orientation in text. For these reasons, the number of CMC specific language properties can be expected to be the highest of all mentioned forms of CMC.

3.1.6 Hybrid Computer mediated communication

Hybrid computer mediated communication is a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous CMC. This means that hybrid tools, social networks mostly, allow their users to use both previously mentioned modes of communication. Furthermore, not only do they incorporate functionality of IM, IRC, and email, but they also allow users to share pictures, videos, friends, and much more.

What are the reasons for the growing popularity of multi-mode CMC tools? Why were they introduced in the first place? It is suggested in BBC article *Instant messaging: This conversation is terminated* by Jon Kelly, that users are simply inclined to use multi-purpose solutions, that "rather than shifting away from instant messaging, people are using the functions of instant messaging on different platforms" (Kelly). This naturally applies to all forms of CMC mentioned in this work. Another factor is that social networks (as the main hybrid CMC tools) are easily accessible from mobile platforms, users do not need special software to use them, and if they for example can not contact someone via IM, they can send an email-like asynchronous message from the same browser window, which is indeed convenient.

Let us take a look at social networking in greater detail then.

3.1.6.1 Social networks

This introduction of a CMC form is slightly different from the previous ones as it only delivers description and specifics of social networks as such with no typical CMC language features discussed. It was mentioned in the previous chapter that SNS (social network site) in fact delivers basic principles of IM, IRC, or email in one package, therefore it is not necessary to present them again. It would however be irresponsible not to acquaint readers with this modern day's phenomenon in a thesis about forms of computer

mediated communication.

Social networks are defined by Boyd and Ellison as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd, Ellison). From this we understand that mere computer mediated communication is not the main principle of SNS but it is rather one of its main instruments. Without ways to communicate through SNS it would be considerably more difficult to establish and more importantly maintain connections and it is significant that the most popular social networks, such as Facebook, offer various forms of CMC. This ability to maintain permanent connection between users and to discover their social networks is what sets SNS apart from other forms of CMC. People are also more likely to change their email address or IM identification number than to change their Facebook profile where they present pictures, videos, thoughts, opinions, and of course friends.

How does this work in practice? When an individual decides to join an SNS, he must fill out forms that contain a series of questions. His profile is created on bases of his answers, providing other users with basic information about his age, location, interests etc. He can then search for his real-life / offline friends, perhaps recognise a few friends of his friends and add them to his contact list as well, and then start communicating.

The first social network that was used on a mass scale was with accordance to *Social Newtork Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship* MySpace. What it was that had set MySpace apart from other networks? Mainly its feature-update system based on users' demand, non-restricted profile page, allowing users to freely modify their profiles, and a close cooperation with indie (independent) musicians. It comes as no surprise that young music bands are attractive for young internet users and it is also not surprising that these

are prone to use new services allowing them to be in touch with friends and favourite bands.

In 2009 however, MySpace was taken over by Facebook and closely followed by Twitter in terms of visits (Kazeniac). Nowadays (Q4 2011), Facebook is still on the first place, followed by Twitter, with MySpace on the fourth place. Climbing up the ladder is also Google+, a new service provided by the search giant Google. By these changes in popularity, users demonstrate their unabated interest in social networks.

In conclusion, SNS are the most complex form of CMC as they encompass all other forms as well as additional functions. With this fact taken into account, along with their popularity, a great amount of computer mediated communication's influence on peripheral English vocabulary is coming from the realm of SNS these days.

3.2 Influence of Computer mediated communication on peripheral English vocabulary

The previous chapters characterized major forms of computer mediated communication. Their aim was to introduce a form of CMC and then specify the reasons why its users employ some of the new English peripheral vocabulary or other features created by communicating via computers, such as emoticons. The following chapters will focus on particular CMC specific language features. The last part will then discuss whether these new words and other language elements are in any way harmful to the English language.

As stated at the beginning of this BA Thesis, English is closely connected to CMC. It was Mark Warschauer in his *Language, identity, and the Internet* who mentioned the fact that in 1996, 82 percent of the webpages in the world ware in English and "most of the early nationally-oriented Internet newsgroups conducted their discussions in English as well" (Warschauer). That means that after more than a decade since Internet's creation, only 18 percent of web pages were created in other languages than English. It is no wonder than, that most of the computer mediated communication language specifics are somehow bound to the English language. Terminology, abbreviations, acronyms, it all originated in times when the Internet was predominantly English, therefore this thesis focuses on the native language of CMC.

It is also worth mentioning that computer mediated communication is by its nature bound to computers, it requires them for its existence. Moreover, this work focuses on an average PC user who is not expected to communicate more via computer than via personal interaction. Presented language features are for the majority of the population therefore only peripheral (although they might not be for some hardcore PC users of course).

What follows are the most common CMC specific language features. These are not sorted or connected to certain forms of CMC. Susan Herring explains this by stating that "there is

no evidence from Internet research that CMC is stylistically homogeneous. On the contrary, a great deal of linguistic variation exist, even within a single mode such as e-mail" (Herring). She does not turn down the possibility of "monolithic chat or email style" with reference to the growing number of email style guides, yet "given that users send email for a variety of purposes, it seems likely that stylistic variety will continue to exist" (Herring). This makes assigning of CMC specific language features to individual forms of text-based CMC almost impossible.

3.2.1 New vocabulary

From the very beginning, CMC is closely connected with information and communication technology (ICT) and one can find more than a few examples of new words there.

Before the period of the Internet, computers were connected only locally. This means CMC was a concern of a very small number of computer savvy individuals which implies a probable use of ICT terminology. The word computer itself can be taken as an example as it was actually used in much earlier days for the people who calculated and since 1897 for computing machines (Harper). The creation of new parts and technologies, such as microprocessors, invoked a need for new words. As a matter of fact, some parts were named using already existing words from the central lexicon, for example "mouse", "keyboard", or "case", and it only took a little time for such new expressions to get into public cognizance.

In the ICT hardware terminology, however, names are usually compositions of letters which are commonly used to name a part of a computer. Following is a table with a few instances.

Acronym	Meaning
CPU	Central processing unit
GPU	Graphics processing unit
HDD	Hard disk drive
MoBo	Motherboard
RAM	Random access memory
PSU	Power supply unit
HSF	Heat sink fan

The real change came with the wide area connection between computers. At the beginning of the Internet communication, in a pioneering era of a green text on a black shaky screen, everything seemed more private on the web since user's computers were almost directly connected. At least this is what Earl S. Wynn writes in his article *Internet, Computers and the English Language*. The introduction of the Internet started the real impact on words used during CMC. Because of all the specifics of text-based CMC, new words were created from the old ones by changing their orthography. The main reason for such step is indeed an increase in speed of typing. What follows is an illustration:

Do **wot** I did (what)

luv ya (love you)

I **dunno wots gonna** happen (do not know what is going to)

In these examples we can observe informal or rather phonetic spelling. The following example shows a combination of informal spelling with letter omission:

Thx 4 yr txt (thank you for your text message)

The third instance of orthographical change in CMC is omission of capital letters, even in the case of pronoun I:

i'll call you soon.take care.

Apart from orthography, text-based CMC is undoubtedly prone to the use of informal

vocabulary due to its mostly casual nature, as demonstrated here:

I want to spend my summer hols down under.

It will be even goodier than your last trip.

To further simulate a face-to-face interaction, users of text-based CMC tend to use interjections:

It's behind us, phew.

I'm all alone, boo hoo.

Yeah yeah, you're right, blah blah blah.

These are the main changes to commonly used vocabulary that CMC may cause. As mentioned before, all these are meant to speed up the typing or increase the feeling of face-to-face conversation. Some of these also utilize other CMC specific language features, mostly abbreviations. The succeeding chapter provides a closer look at those.

3.2.2 Abbreviations and acronyms

When looking for a list of abbreviations and acronyms, one will find a page with more than 19, 200 computer technology-related elements (the portal is all-acronyms.com). It would not make any sense to enumerate all of them here, and an analysis of a few common examples will suffice. What follows is a table with those that are, according to John Brandon, mostly present on Internet boards and chat forums.

Acronym	Meaning
BTW	By the way
FWIW	For what it's worth
JK	Just kidding
ROFL	Rolling on the floor laughing
LOL	Laughing out loud
RTFM	Read the f...ing manual
AFAIK	As far as I know

Acronym	Meaning
KK	Okey
TTYL	Talk to you later
BRB	Be right back
G2G	Got to go
GG	Good game

He provides us with their further analysis especially in terms of the first dated use. It may come as a surprise that some of these idioms can be traced back to the early 1980's such as BTW (1981), RTFM (1983) or TTYL (1985). Even those acronyms nowadays favoured by young individuals like LOL or ROFL are quite old as they are dated back to 1989 and 1990 respectively (Brandon).

Nevertheless, it is more important for the peripheral English vocabulary that the majority of these is still used by users of various age. As stated before, English is the native language of CMC, therefore these abbreviations and acronyms are used in various other languages, and it does not surprise anyone to find "LOL" on Czech or German Internet forum for example. As Brandon also mentions, some teenagers even use them in real life communication. Since the main benefit of this language feature is a shorter response time in text-based CMC, it is not hard to imagine it is convenient to shorten our utterance but the question arises whether it is necessary to do so in real life.

John Paolillo furthermore discusses other possible abbreviations. Unlike the previous examples, these are unusable in real life. This time a single letter substitutes for a whole word. He conducted a research on IRC (Internet relay chat) groups and one part focused on the use of letters "r" and "u" instead of words "are" and "you" respectively. He concludes that these language variables are widespread throughout IRC and also marks his studied subjects as regular IRC users on basis of their use of these abbreviations. It must also be stated that Paolillo himself believes his results are applicable to any other form of "CMC in

which people send and receive messages" (Paolillo).

Following is the issue of emoticons which is hard to categorize. This work will consider them abbreviations for they are used to express certain emotion that could be described by words yet it is faster to just use an emoticon. Presented bellow is a list of basic emoticons that are common on the Internet.

Emoticon	Meaning
:) or :-)	Happiness, sarcasm, or joke
:(or :-(	Unhappines
:] or :-]	Jovial happiness
:[or :-[	Despondent unhappiness
:D or :-D	Jovial happiness
:I or :-I	Indifference
:-/ or :-\	Undecided, confused, or sceptical
:Q or :-Q	Confusion
:S or :-S	Incoherence or loss of words
:@ or :-@	Shock or screaming
:O or :-O	Surprise, yelling or realization of an error

This list was published on Colorado State University's website *writing.colostate.edu* as a part of an article about email communication. With a bit of imagination, we can see resemblance of symbols to faces with emotions they represent. What is clearly stated in the article though, is that neither smiley faces (emoticons) nor abbreviations are considered appropriate for professional communication (Kiefer, Kowalsi).

Nevertheless, abbreviations and acronyms are commonly present in all forms of CMC. Almost every Internet forum, not only English, may serve as an example, the same goes for IRC groups, private IM, and email. What connects them though, is the fact they can appropriately be used only for an informal interaction. Additionally, the level to which CMC influences face-to-face communication varies from feature to feature. What can

however be concluded from studies on this topic is that abbreviations such as "LOL" or "BTW" are highly prone to the real-life use. They are also the most distinctive text-based CMC language feature.

3.2.3 Leet speak

The issue of a computer mediated communication jargon is quite delicate and not as simple as it may seem. In Wynn's article there is an example of the usual message on the web from two different time periods. "Consider a typical 90's sentence roaring through cyberspace with all the blunt elegance of "Sup d00dz!1! 1337 lol! I juz haxx0rd teh p0wer c0! lolz0rz!" or the more contemporary (and grammatically speaking, far more stable) equivalent: "Heyo lol i totaly just like downloded taht new harbl movie lol" (Wynn).

This demonstrates that even computer mediated communication changes during the time. Apart from abbreviations, these examples present an extreme shape of CMC known as Leet speak. Let us take a closer look at those numbers representing letters and specific words such as "1337".

1337 5p34k or "leet speak" is a very special form of language that emerged during the outbreak of the Internet. Unlike other CMC specific language features, leet speak does not function as a time saver, it does not minimize response time. Rather than that it can be understood as an intergroup way to communicate. Reason for its incorporation to this work, that primarily focuses on an average computer user, is to show how extreme CMC may look and how creative computer users may be when it comes to utilization of the English language used on the Internet.

Its origins can be traced back to the 1980's and Katherine Blashki states in her *Game Geek's Goss: Linguistic Creativity In Young Males Within An Online University Forum* study on this topic: "A group of hackers originally used 1337 speak to confuse authorities

in what they were going to attempt hacking into an organization or company. Once the authorities realized that this was a form of language used by a hacking group they employed interpreters to find out and decipher what was going on. As with almost everything, this language was leaked onto the Internet" (Blashki). It is important to mention that the first leet words were based on English ones for the beginnings of the Internet were quite noticeably influenced by its American roots.

As stated before, leet speak uses numbers and even symbols as substitutes for letters contained in words. Katherine Blashki introduces a table of possible interpretations of 1337 5p34k in her study. She furthermore adds that leet speak is volatile in both form and function and can and most likely will change during the time.

A = /\ or 4	J = _|	S=5
B = |3 or I3 or 8	K = |<	T = 7 or +
C = (or [	L = |_	U = |_|
D= |) or |>	M = /\/\	V = \/
E=3	N= ||	W = |/\\|
F = |=	O=0	X = ><
G=6	P=9	Y =\-/
H = |-|	Q = (,)	Z=2
I=|	R = |2	

Looking at the table one can notice how symbols and numbers are in fact quite reminiscent of the original letters they substitute. Deciphering a whole sentence can get troublesome and annoying though, with tangles of symbols like: "1337 5p34k (4\|\| +\|2\|_\|\|_\\-/ I33 \|-\|4\|2\|) +0 /\/\45+3\|2" (which translates as "Leet speak can truly be hard to master".) Nonetheless, this short example does not demonstrate all of the possible language modifications achievable by the use of leet speak. Along with the character substitutions, a special vocabulary was developed. In the article *Relax, we understand j00* James Andrew Rome

asserts that "the l33t vocabulary is derived from abbreviations, acronyms, misspelled approximations, and borrowed words. Abbreviations from other forms of CMC are used, but are encoded into the l33t dialect. Words are borrowed from a variety of sources that serve to partially characterize those who speak l33t. In the C++ computer programming language, "||" means "OR" in a Boolean logic statement, and is now sometimes used in l33t as well. Other words are borrowed from computer game jargon, such as "fragging". Others are from technical computer terms, and still others come from verbal slang, such as "yo" is turned into "jo". Profanity is very common. Words with a "ck" sound are changed, the most common being "hack", "f*ck", "rock" and "suck". "Suck" is changed to "suxxor", and can then be manipulated as a normal English word adding endings or changing tense. "L33t" itself is a very common adjective meaning elite, good, cool, or pertaining to the dialect" (Rome).

Another common feature of 1337 (or l33t) speak is the number of typos or other grammatical mistakes that can be made (mostly caused by the speed of typing) and left uncorrected and what is more important, even deliberately repeated. The most prominent examples are "teh" or "pwned" typos which are very often seen on almost every Internet board or IRC group.

Leet speak certainly does not represent mainstream computer mediated communication, and its features are not likely to ever reach face-to-face communication. It does, however, employ a significant amount of originality and creativity, and its omission would deprive this thesis of an interesting example of computer mediated communication.

3.2.4 Threats of Computer mediated communication to the English language

It is impossible to precisely specify when the influence of computer mediated communication on the English language started to render some linguists uneasy. Nevertheless, Earl S. Wynn is most likely correct when he states that the early beginnings of the Internet "were the days that first left us questioning the effect that computers (and later the Internet) have had and will have on the common man's use and understanding of the English language, and the question hasn't really gone away" (Wynn). This is probably based on the reasons presented in the chapter 3.1.3 *Disadvantages of CMC,* for example on the lack of non-verbal clues in computer mediated communication. Facial expressions, intonation, and voice quality are the characteristics which are missing in text-based communication, despite their importance for the message meaning. The fact that there are no restriction or corrections of the English language in the Internet communication also supports the idea of computer mediated communication's possible negative effect on English. The question arises whether this, along with the use of language properties mentioned in this work, is actually harmful to the English language and its peripheral lexicon. What follows are several opinions of linguists on this topic that are trying to clarify the matter.

In 2005, Baron carried out a research of instant messaging use among American college students. She focused on them because "college-aged cohorts generally have several years of IM experience from high school and often anecdotally report having 'outgrown' the stylized language patterns characteristic of many younger users. Moreover, college students typically spend many hours each day working on networked computers, with their machines anchoring both social and academic activities" (Baron). The results were quite surprising and college students did not "fit popular stereotypes". Their IM conversations

were not overfilled with abbreviations, acronyms, nor emoticons. As for spelling, it was labelled as "reasonably good", while grammar and vocabulary were marked "reasonably sophisticated" (Baron). This manifests that even young users are not overly inclined towards CMC specific language features.

Geoffrey K. Pullum asserts there is no reason to worry about the English language and its peripheral vocabulary at all. According to him, even if some of the above-mentioned phrases came into real life conversation and became common in speech, not only among teenagers as it is today, it would not mean anything. One interjection added to a sentence represents an utterly trivial feature and has no effect on the language. To quote Pullum's take on interjections: "they are so unimportant to the fabric of the language that they are almost completely ignored in grammars. They have no syntactic properties at all – you pop one in when the spirit moves you" (Pullum).

Another linguist dealing with the issue of CMC is David Crystal. In his paper *The scope of Internet linguistics* he claims that an expressive range at the informal end of the spectrum was increased by new stylistic varieties that were brought by the Internet. This area, however, attracts most attention as people are perceptive to informality in language use. According to Crystal, most of them think it may cause deterioration. Nevertheless, he states that such opinions emerge every time there is a new technology that has the power to influence languages, be it printing, the telephone, broadcasting, or the Internet. Even though these technologies altered several of the features of standard English, Crystal believes that "all that has happened, in fact, is that the language's resources for the expression of informality in writing have hugely increased – something which has not been seen in English since the Middle Ages, and which was largely lost when Standard English came to be established in the 18th century. Rather than condemning it, therefore, we should be exulting in the fact that the Internet is allowing us to once more explore the power of the

written language in a creative way" (Crystal). This adequately demonstrates his enthusiasm about new possibilities that CMC presents to the English language. He also admits that a few years ago, he would not believe that it was possible to disregard the standard conversational conventions and still have a successful interaction yet contemporary situation on the Internet is a clear evidence of the exact opposite (Crystal).

Upon seeing computer mediated communication for the first time, one would think that simplification and degradation of the English language are the only effects it brings. The previous paragraphs point out why it would not be right to condemn it so hastily though. As a matter of fact, there are also reasons to consider computer mediated communication harmless or even beneficial to the use of the English language on the Internet.

James Andrew Rome expands on the purpose of CMC specific language features. He states that users try to reproduce real-life conversation with the use of special symbols and signs in a textual conversation held on-line. A need for an explicit and written language to express emotions or physical actions is satisfied by the above-mentioned range of leet speak terms, abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons. These language tools were created to fully fit the textual nature of the computer-mediated communication and unlike the standard English grammar they do not baffle the composition time or spontaneity of conversation (Rome). One of the oldest acronyms for laughing, the famous "LOL", can be taken as an example. When used nowadays in a chat room or on an Internet forum, there will probably be no one who would not understand. Apparently it is much easier to write those three letters than to explain how much one is amused by someone's reply or joke. The same situation is with emoticons which are widely accepted and understood nowadays, a simple ":-)" or ":-(" can change the mood of an on-line conversation dramatically.

Susan Herring confirms this opinion, when she states that "social meanings appear to be

conveyed effectively through CMC. Users achieve this in part through creative uses of language, such as spellings, repeated punctuation, and ASCII graphics designed to convey attitude, nonspeech sounds, and facial expressions. This is especially common in synchronous chat, despite the fact that expressive language often requires extra keystrokes, and thereby goes against the principle of economy of effort that otherwise conditions chat language" (Herring).

To sum up this chapter, even though some linguists might be slightly frightened by several features of the Internet English, it is important to understand that leet speak, abbreviations, and acronyms were created purely for communication. They improve the way people can communicate on-line by addition of emotions, moods, and speed. As other linguists also point out, CMC features may serve as a demonstration of the creativity people employ while communicating on the Internet. Last but not least, this second group of linguists is not afraid that peripheral English vocabulary, or the English language itself, is or ever will be damaged by the use of CMC. Languages, and English is no exception, are created by their users and from this it can be concluded that computers had only brought new possibilities and people made use of them.

4 Conclusion

This work introduced characteristics of individual forms of text-based computer mediated communication both in terms of practical use and in specifics that force users to modify their use of English. All basic modes of CMC, namely private asynchronous, private synchronous, public asynchronous, and public synchronous, were examined.

As far as email is concerned, there are no spacial or response-time related limitations and so its effect on a user is minimal. One can utilize all features of computer mediated communication English, yet there is nothing that would render doing so necessary.

Nevertheless, instant messaging is quite different, since it employs real-time communication with one user waiting for the other one's response. This, of course, speeds up typing and somehow motivates to abbreviate a few words, especially when the informal nature of IM is taken into account.

In the matter of CMC specific language features, Internet forums are highly dependant on their main topic and participating users as well as their writing style. One can find a forum with perfect English which would probably inspire the use of rather formal and CMC features-free English. On the other hand, a forum about computers, for instance, that is riddled with abbreviations, leet speak and new CMC vocabulary, will most likely not encourage for extensive spell check or avoidance of the aforementioned language features.

Internet relay chat combines characteristics of instant messaging with a factor of group interaction. This brings about a need to speed the typing up slightly more to ensure communication coherence. With large IRC groups, overlap occurs, so brevity and speed are the two main countermeasures. Such environment urges a use of a high number of CMC specific language features, especially time savers (e.g. acronyms, abbreviations, emoticons).

It is evident that each form of CMC produces different settings for communication, which naturally induces varying levels of peripheral English vocabulary changes. The first hypothesis is therefore confirmed.

As for the second hypothesis of this work, chapter 3.2.4 presented opinions on possible threats of CMC to the English language. Several linguists seems to agree on the fact that the new language properties, such as abbreviations, acronyms, or informal vocabulary, do not represent a threat to the English language. This is based on several factors: minor use of these by even younger computer users; their insignificance to the core of the language from the position of interjections; the simple fact that CMC specific language features were primarily created by users to ease communication and enrich it with emotions and moods. There are even claims that the Internet allows users to creatively employ the written language. The second hypothesis can thus also be labelled as confirmed.

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