

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE**

**Faculty of Education**

**Department of English language and literature**

**The impact of ICT on the English language**

**B.A. Thesis**

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### **Poděkování**

Tato práce vznikla díky věnování vlastního času, mnoha dobrých rad a nepochybně i nervů při opravách gramatických chyb, pana PhDr. Radka Víta, vedoucího práce, jemuž patří touto formou upřímná slova díky.

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## ***1.1 Abstract***

This B.A. Thesis is trying to present in what ways is the English language affected by information and communication technologies, as they entered our everyday lives. The focus is on communication in the English language, as it was the first language of the world of computers. The thesis explains, why is that and furthermore gives an overview of advantages and drawbacks of computer mediated communication and its impact on the English language. Conclusions are then compared with the research which confirms, that the language was rather enriched than degraded and that the new elements of the language are in now way harmful to its core.

Tato bakalářská práce se snaží popsat, kterak výpočetní a komunikační technika, po vkročení do každodenního života, ovlivnila anglický jazyk. Důraz je kladen na komunikaci v anglickém jazyce, jelikož právě tento byl prvním jazykem světa počítačů. Práce vysvětluje, proč tomu tak je a dále podává přehled výhod a nevýhod počítačem zprostředkované komunikace a její dopad na angličtinu. Závěry jsou porovnány s výzkumem, který potvrzuje, že spíše než k degradaci jazyka došlo k jeho obohacení, a že nové prvky, které do jazyka pronikly, nezasahují negativně do jeho struktury.

## ***1.2 Keywords***

ICT, computer-mediated communication, English, leet speak, acronyms

ICT, počítačem zprostředkovaná komunikace, Anglický jazyk, internetový jazyk, zkratky

### ***1.3 Introduction***

When a new field of science is explored, a necessity for a new vocabulary to name all the fresh discoveries emerges. A computer technology is a great example with all the new parts, principles and possibilities. However, computers are influencing the language in many various aspects, not only in the vocabulary. This is caused by their availability to a vast number of users and of course their ability to arrange communication between their users. Part of this work therefore focuses on communication, as it is the main way people use the language.

Not so many years ago, the question of communication was a simple one to answer. There were very limited possibilities to transport a message from one person to another. Furthermore, the time needed to put over this message was directly proportional to the distance between the sender and the recipient and the speed of a messenger and it of course might have taken days to deliver even the most simple note. It is not hard to imagine how difficult life must have been in those days. The communication process, however, evolved throughout the years and gained incredible possibilities. The greatest achievement can be seen in computer mediated communication (CMC). This marvel of modern era makes everything so much easier in most areas of everyday life, yet nothing is flawless and there are drawbacks even to CMC.

The main aim of this B.A. Thesis is a presentation of both advantages and drawbacks of the computer mediated communication and the influence of particular means of ICT (information and communication technology) communication on the English language. This work will also try to prove, that even though there are changes in the English language caused purely by ICT, they do not negatively influence the core of the language. This is backed up by a research.

The question arises, why is the English language the one of importance for this work? It is the first language of computers and the Internet and therefore of computer mediated communication. Every significant abbreviation or other IT related term on the Internet has with the utmost probability originated in the English language. Certain changes in the language that are inevitable with the use of ICT for communicating our messages, are similar in all languages, yet this work is for the above mentioned reason focused purely on English.

What makes the topic of computers influencing the English language so current is the extent to which they invaded everyday lives of both young and older people. It is possible to say that a few years ago, a computer became a prominent instrument of everyday work, brilliant source of entertainment and most importantly for this thesis, a means of communication. The author decided to select this topic for the these reasons and for his personal interest in the computer technology and its possibilities.

To begin with, a few important milestones of English and IT will be presented in the theoretical part. It will demonstrate, that the United States is a birthplace of information technology and for that reason, the connection with English is quite obvious. Along with the importance of the personal computer and the Internet goes a wide distribution of them. Another aim of this chapter is therefore a brief overview of what made it possible for computers to enter homes and offices of millions of users all around the world. After familiarization with these facts, the thesis will deal with the way information technology transformed into information and communication technology.

The following chapter will summarize how new technology influenced the way people communicate these days while mentioning a few particular examples of computer mediated means of communication.

Chapter 3.3 then aims to sum up what changes in the English language have taken place

after people started to massively use new ways of communication. With the discovery of the Internet, people could start meeting on-line and this new communication space certainly inspired them to use new communication patterns. There exist some particularities of these patterns such as changes of the writing style during the time or unusual words incomprehensible to the outsiders which will be discussed. Acronyms and abbreviations commonly used on the Internet will be mentioned as well.

These also work as a list of idioms for the questionnaire of the research part where a few respondents were asked about their use of computer based communication and their opinion on its effect on the English language. Since this topic is vast and there are certain geographical complications and limitations, the research will only focus on how common the previously discussed language properties are amongst non-native English users in Czech Republic. It is expected to prove that even they already know and use some of the computer communication's specifics. More on the research at the beginning of its own chapter.

## 2. Theoretical part

### *2.1 History of the English language, IT and the Internet*

The English language is being influenced since its creation and the novelties brought by computer mediated communication are simply 21<sup>st</sup> century's contribution to the language. Let us take a brief look at the previous influences to get a slightly better overview of the situation.

According to Albert C. Baugh and his publication *A history of the English language*, the Roman period of Britain which started in the summer of 55 B.C. by Julius Caesar's invasion of England, ended in the year 449. "In that year, as traditionally stated, began the invasion of Britain by certain Germanic tribes, the founders of the English nation...Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, completed in 731, tells us the Germanic tribes that conquered England were the Jutes, Saxons, and Angles" (Baugh 45). During the following years after the invasion, the language was influenced by various nations, namely the Celts, the Romans and the Scandinavians. All this showed for example in names of places, personal names, and in the case of the Latin language, in spirituality and in the vocabulary that is connected with it (Crystal 24).

It is understandable that when a new science emerges, it inevitably brings a need for new vocabulary and there are few better examples than the Renaissance, when it comes to new discoveries. The printing press influenced the way people saw the English language, which is quite similar to the situation with computers. "Once printing made books available, people thirsted for knowledge like never before in history. Printed books gave people the chance to learn, explore new ideas, and share knowledge quickly" (Rees 91). As mentioned further on in this thesis, this invention also invoked in linguists a reaction not very different from the one present after the widespread of

computers and the Internet.

The final milestone of English development is of course its spread to the world and especially to America. Significance of this for the connection of English and the world of computers is presented on the following lines.

### **History of IT and the Internet**

Today's computers are characterized by four main attributes that distinguish them from simple calculators from previous eras. Jaroslav Zelený says they have to be binary, electronic, universal and based on Von Neumann's architecture. In accordance with the article *A brief history of computing* by Jack Copeland, the first computer to fit all the above mentioned requirements was not a widely recognized Z-model by Konrad Zuse but a British replacement for mechanical deciphering machine known as Colossus. This makes Great Britain birthplace of both the English language and the computers.

After twenty years of improving the basic concept of the first computers a big and long awaited change came; the creation of an integrated circuit that allowed engineers to implement more than one hundred times more parts into their new computers, which meant a radical increase of output power and allowed the development of minicomputers (White). As Zelený mentions, the integrated circuit lowered manufacturing costs of computers significantly. With this kind of development it was only natural that computers were getting more and more attention and the number of IT companies grown. Finally the invention that brought computers into homes was a microprocessor.

The history of microprocessors can be found in White's *Brief history of computing*, where he mentions that the first microprocessor is a result of research carried out by USA based Intel corporation and it was first introduced in 1971.

The last fifteen years were dedicated to constant improvement and it is expectable that multimedia competence, raw computing power, ease of use, and most importantly connectivity are factors that will keep getting better every year even from now on. All this will be delivered at lower costs because the market is still growing and needs to be satisfied, therefore making computers affordable for more people.

When it comes to computers and communication the first thing that probably springs to mind is the Internet. Rapidity of its onset is again best formulated in *Historie výpočetní techniky (History of computing hardware)* on page 129: “Radio needed 38 years to reach 50 millions users. Personal computers needed sixteen years and television thirteen. The internet managed to get to this point in four years” (Zelený 129).

The Internet is a sort of a by-product of many other activities that The US government started after the launch of the first artificial satellite Sputnik by Soviet Russia. A research agency called ARPA had to beat the communists and “establish US lead in science and technology applicable to the military” (Zakon). The main problem of this newly spreading technology was incompatibility between computers, which was solved by an uniform protocol known as TCP/IP. It is still being used as a main Internet protocol today and it made spreading of the Internet possible. Copying the progress of computers, the Internet has gained vast multimedia capability over the last years.

What is probably most important to realize at the end of this theoretical part is that all the inventions connected in any way with either the inter-computer communication or the spread of computers came either from Great Britain or the United States, both English-speaking countries, so the IT terminology is naturally affected by that just as the beginnings of the Internet talk, which is therefore based on the English language.

### **3. Main part**

#### ***3.1 Gradual rise of ICT***

This short chapter will quickly introduce factors that upgraded a simple term IT to nowadays more commonly used ICT.

As one might imagine the first attempt of computer mediated communication was via electronic mail. What is less predictable is that originally it had nothing to do with e-mail 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, the 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).

In fact, instant messaging is closely related to email. Whereas with email one can prepare his message in advance and conversely can read the answer after it has been sent and received, in instant messaging users must firstly establish a connection and then they exchange messages directly and in real time which reminds of a written version of a cell phone so to say. Speaking of cell phones, it would be irresponsible not to mention their contribution to the ICT world.

Social networks are a newcomer to the public attention. Especially in the last few years it has been quite widely discussed that they are growing and gaining more and more users.

These are the main factors of conversion of IT into ICT, most prominent means of computer mediated communication. The following chapter will look into each one of them and describe the way they influence everyday communication.

### ***3.2 Impact of ICT on communication***

What are the benefits of using computer technology for communication with our friends, family members or co-workers? Are there any drawbacks to this and if so, do they outweigh the benefits? This topic is frequently discussed and there appears to be no definitive conclusion. The following pages will however try to enumerate those benefits, drawbacks and influences on the manner we communicate, with the primary Internet language, English, in mind. At first, common properties are to be discussed. Later on the focus will be on characteristic features of each instrument of e-communication mentioned in the previous chapter.

#### **3.2.1 Overview**

Let us start optimistically with all the benefits computer technology grants us in matters of 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 communication, big companies are able to control their offices all over the globe in no time. As the previous examples suggest, the element of place is as unimportant as the element of time with ICT utilization 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. Sending an email or chatting on-line can ensure at least

some social contact for them, no matter how unhealthy this may seem.

Another form of communication that can benefit from ICT is a simple writing of articles, short stories 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: "Thus, 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).

With all these advantages comes a large number of drawbacks though. From articles written on this topic, two were chosen to point out what exactly it is that makes a computer technology assisted 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, as mentioned above.

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 intended meaning. As South illustrates further on in her article, a simple email with criticism of an employee, although accompanied by 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 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 labor 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 lose 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).

All this should create a picture of what ICT brings in and what it takes away from communication. This alienation of the two sides of a conversation, can create a great change in perception of a message. What is important for this work is the way this

affects the language itself and since computers originated in the English-speaking countries, all the examples given from now on are again related to the English language. This language transformation is of course caused by its users, therefore the following pages will discuss particular methods of the computer-mediated communication and its effects on the users of the English language.

### **3.2.2 Email**

Let us begin with e-mail. As Amanda Lenhard in her *Teens and technology* study from 2005 mentions, email has been the most popular application on the Internet for many years (Lenhard). So what is specific about e-mail communication? To put this matter as simply as possible, it is just like a regular mail only much faster as for both its form and utilization. Nowadays email is widely accepted as a means of communication and its formality can vary significantly. It is acceptable to send an email as an application for a new job, as a birthday congratulation or as an invitation to a party. 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 before sending for its pertinence. In addition, practically no length limitations are applied. How about its use in various situations though?

It is possible to say that electronic mail is nowadays very useful in official matters of everyday life, for example the above mentioned 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 using electronic mail for it is much easier and faster to browse them in computer. Responding is of course also more conveniently done by a simple click on a "respond" button in mail manager and the client can read the answer immediately.

Nevertheless, when it comes to a birthday congratulation for instance, with regular mail we show more personal contact with someone and that we had taken the time to buy a card, write down something nice and then went to send it. An email can seem quite soulless in this case yet it is always up to the user.

Also in *Teens and technology* study carried out by Amanda Lenhard and her team we can find what English speaking teenagers think about on-line communication 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).

### **3.2.3 IM**

What is on-line instant messaging, aka IM then? Whereas there is almost nothing that would limit user's expressions or the choice of words in email, there exist certain limitations and peculiarities in instant messaging.

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 human resources manager, it is unthinkable for him to add every single client to his 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.

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 is on-line at the moment. It is free, fast and at your disposal only when you want to.

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

Next features commonly experienced are omissions of punctuation and capital letters in names or at the beginnings 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.

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).

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 exactly 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). IM platform's spread to mobile phones in the last few years introduces another very significant communication instrument.

### **3.2.4 Cellphones**

Cellphones are the last but certainly not the least technology to be mentioned, even though they are not directly related to computers or the Internet, they are still considered a part of the world of CMC. To quote Wenbin Nah from his article on Technology's influence on interpersonal communication, "mobile phone technology has made it possible for people to check and send messages on the go, thus allowing us to be connected 24-7" (Nah). No other ICT tool provides its users with such independence on place or time, as cellphone. What is of consequence for this thesis is not the phone function itself though but short text messages. This is explained by results of the above mentioned study, which claims that all teenagers are likely to admit they mostly use phones to communicate with friends while teens with cellphones are more likely to say that they communicate with friends by short text messages rather than the phone (Lenhard).

Limitation to 160 characters is a special feature of the short message system. This of course means that something must be left out of the message except for cases of very short ones like confirmations or questions. This shortening can be done by two instruments, first of them being omission of words and the second one abbreviation. Other than that, short messages can really improve connection between people for prices lower than phone ones, which is indeed a big advantage for young people.

### **3.2.5 Conclusion**

To sum up this chapter, teenagers even with great affection for technology still spend more time in physical contact with their friends than they spend on-line chatting via instant messaging, email or even telephone. The difference is about 3 hours a week in favor of the physical contact.

Nevertheless, the study also claims that this number has slightly dropped since last

research in 2000 and it can be expected that nowadays even more time is spent behind the computer screen, especially with the introduction of social networks. In fact, their complexity simply combines the already mentioned features of instant messaging, email and the only new feature introduced is a wall where one can share anything he likes with others.

These are the three (four with social networks) best known computer-mediated means of communication people use. Each of them somehow bends the natural way one would use the English language and upon seeing the computer communication for the first time, one would think that the only effects it brings are simplification and degradation of the English language. It would not be right to condemn it so hastily though as after all it is the way Internet and computer users want it to be. Languages, and English is no exception, are created by their users and from this it can be concluded that computers only brought new possibilities and people made use of them.

Now it is time to look at properties of the English language that were influenced most by the use of the computer mediated communication.

### ***3.3 Impact of ICT on the English language***

This chapter describes several features of the English language that were influenced by computers and the Internet cyberspace.

Why is English so widespread in the world of ICT? The theoretical part of this thesis states that almost every important discovery in the field of computer technology came either from Great Britain or from the United States, like the Internet. Both are of course English-speaking countries and hence the influence. This fact even shows in the statistics of the languages used on the Internet that can be found on the [internetworldstats.com](http://internetworldstats.com) website, which is the source of the following table.

<b>Top five languages on the Internet</b>	<b>Internet users by language</b>	<b>Internet penetration by language</b>	<b>Growth in Internet (2000-2010)</b>	<b>Internet Users % of Total</b>	<b>World population for the language</b>
English	536,564,837	42.00%	281.20%	27.30%	1,277,528,133
Chinese	444,948,013	32.60%	1277.40%	22.60%	1,365,524,982
Spanish	153,309,074	36.50%	743.20%	7.80%	420,469,703
Japanese	99,143,700	78.20%	110.60%	5.00%	126,804,433
Portuguese	82,548,200	33.00%	989.60%	4.20%	205,372,925

It is time to look at the influence of the ICT on English. Before the period of the Internet, computers enriched the English language only by new vocabulary. 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, for example “mouse” and it only took a little time for these new expressions to get into the public cognizance. In the ICT hardware terminology however, names are usually compositions of letters which are commonly used to name a part of the computer. This

includes HDD (hard disk drive), MoBo (motherboard) or RAM (random access memory).

The real change came with the 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*. He further adds that “those 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).

The question of the Internet communication jargon is quite delicate and not as simple as it may seem. In Wynn's article there is an example which deals with the usual form of a message on the web throughout the time. “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 totally just like downlodod taht new harbl movie lol" (Wynn).

This demonstrates that informal conversation of two or more IT enthusiasts changes during the time. From the example we can also see how numbers substituting letters slowly disappear for instance and that certain acronyms are timeless. Let us first take a closer look at those numbers representing letters and specific words such as “1337” and then at acronyms.

1337 5p34k or “leet speak” is a very special form of language that emerged during the outbreak of the Internet. Its origins can be traced back to the 1980's and Katherine Blashki quotes Jeff Carooso 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 and was quickly embraced by gamers around the world" (Blashki).

Important to mention is that the first leet words were based on English ones, as the beginnings of the Internet were quite noticeably influenced by its American roots.

As mentioned before, it uses numbers and even symbols as substitutes for the 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 = v
E=3	N=	W =  ^
F =  =	O=0	X = ><
G=6	P=9	Y =\-/
H =  -	Q = (,)	Z=2
I=	R =  2	

When looking at the leet speak 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 a bit 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 computer-geek's leet speak. Along with the character substitutions a special vocabulary was developed.

In the article *Relax, we understand j00* James Andrew Rome's states that "the l33t vocabulary is derived from abbreviations, acronyms, misspelled approximations and borrowed words. Abbreviations from other forms of CMC (computer-mediated communication) 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", "fuck", "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 the l337 (or l33t) speak is a 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 the "teh" or "pwned" typos which are very often seen on almost every Internet board. Whereas the l337 5p34k is usually used by gamers or other hard core Internet users, and it should not go unmentioned, that these originally English words are recognized all around the world, what about those frequently mentioned abbreviations and acronyms? What are they, who uses them and how do they contribute to the English language?

When looking for a list of them, 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 the Internet boards and chat forums.

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
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
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 favored by young computer players like LOL or ROFL are quite old as they are dated back to 1989 and 1990 respectively. As mentioned further on in the research part of this work though, for Czech users, these might be even too old to be recognized nowadays. Nevertheless, for the English language is more important that majority of these is still used by a large number of users of various age. As Brandon also mentions, some teenagers even use them in real life communication. It is not hard to imagine that in a typed talk it is convenient to shorten our utterance but the question arises whether it is necessary to do so in real life.

Is this something to be feared? Is there any possibility of these elements being a threat to the English language? Kristen Philipkoski writes that “traditional linguists fear the Internet damages our ability to articulate properly, infusing language with LOLs, dorky emoticons and the gauche sharing of personal information on blogs” (Philipkoski). As she further expands on this in her article *The web not the death of language* however, there are those who say there is nothing to fear of. One of them is David Crystal and his quote is mentioned further in the article: “The prophets of doom emerge every time a new technology influences language, of course -- they gathered when printing was introduced in the 15th century,' Crystal said” (Philipkoski). Other Crystal's opinions supporting the Internet talk can be found in Neda Ulaby's *OMG:IM slang is invading everyday English*. His quotation states that the richness of the language is increased just as its expressiveness and the range of the language. A brand new variety of language has been created within five years by young people (Ulaby). Furthermore, Geoffrey K. Pullum expresses there is no reason to worry about the English language at all. According to his short article on Language log website, 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). To complete this commendation of the computer mediated language, let us concentrate on the reason why it even exists.

James Andrew Rome expands on the purpose of the leet speak. 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 board, 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.

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 adding of emotions and moods. Also as Katherine Blashki writes, “the transformation of leet speak, from a hacker language used to avoid detection to the on-line communication mechanism of today, testifies to the ubiquity of available technology for communication for the youth of the 21st century. Widespread access to the Internet has resulted in a dilution of the ‘geekiness’ attributed to frequent users” (Blashki).

The ultimate aim of this chapter was not only to enumerate some of the language features that are modified or better to say ruined by CMC, but also a demonstration of the creativeness people employ while communicating on the Internet, accompanied by a few opinions of linguists that usually support this kind of enrichment of English.

### ***3.4 Research***

Supplement to the main part is the research that was aimed at the non-native English language users in the Czech Republic. It is expected to prove that even outside of the English speaking countries the novelties brought about by the computer mediated communication are already established. What it also tries is to present user's opinions on these and to reflect on the facts mentioned in the chapter 3.2 regarding the means of computer mediated communication. There were four main parts of the research, all carried out in a form of an interview that was accompanied by a short questionnaire for the first part.

The first sections of the interview dealt with new vocabulary and commonly used abbreviations that probably would not ever be created if it was not for the ICT. Their list was created on the basis of John Brandon's enumeration presented in the previous chapter. In the following part, respondents were asked to think of other abbreviations they know. The third section focused on the influence of ICT on communication. Respondents were to enlist various English language properties they commonly use and are somehow conditioned by computer mediated communication and also in which situations they use them. These were expected to vary from “omission of capital letter at the beginning of a sentence” to “deliberate creation of typos” for example. The last part of the research was a question asking respondents whether they think ICT has effected use of English in a negative way and they were also encouraged to substantiate their opinion. Several interesting examples will be put forth and compared with the findings presented in the main part of this thesis. The expectation is that the majority of the respondents will not find computer mediated communication harmful to the core of the language and therefore will confirm the conclusion of the previous chapter.

The interview method was chosen especially because of this last question as it enables

the asked users of the English language on the Internet to express their opinions as well as their reasons for them.

As for the respondents themselves, the chief part of them were university students (age 22-25). This group was selected because it can be expected that they use both computers and the Internet on daily basis. They were selected so that their skill levels of both computer use and English would cover the widest possible range. What came as a surprise is that none of this influenced the knowledge of listed abbreviations.

An IT specialist with a long career in the IT business was also interviewed. This should provide a comparison in two different areas. The first one being his experience from the world of computers, which might affect positively his knowledge of additional abbreviations, and the second his age, that should prove to be an advantage in recognizing abbreviations for the first part of the interview. These are quite old and they might be even too old for the younger respondents to recognize.

What follows is a list of abbreviations and acronyms with the percentage of respondents who were aware of their meaning.

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Percent of users (%)</b>
BTW	100
FWIW	10
JK	20
ROFL	100
LOL	100
RTFM	40
AFAIK	10
KK	50
TTYL	10
BRB	70
G2G	60
GG	30

Here is a list of five mostly mentioned abbreviations respondents knew that are not present on the previous list. The average number of abbreviations per respondent was 4.

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Percent of users (%)</b>
WTF (What the f..k)	100
OMG (Oh my God)	100
GL (Good luck)	30
AFK (Away from keyboard)	30
TLDR (Too long, didn't read)	20

The third part of the interview is again demonstrated by the following table. Five mostly mentioned features used in CMC were enlisted along with a percentage of users.

<b>Language features of on-line communication</b>	<b>Percent of users (%)</b>
Smiley faces (emoticons)	100
Omission of capital letters	90
No punctuation	70
Acronyms and abbreviations	30
Typos (uncorrected, unintentional)	30

Let us first take a look at the IT specialist. His results confirmed the expectations. It is not apparent from these tables, yet he came up with the largest number of abbreviations for the section 2 of the interview and also showed much greater knowledge of the presented abbreviations from the first part of the interview. Quite surprising is small number of ICT specific language features he incorporates into his computer mediated communication in English.

As for the students' results, the greatest surprise was that the list of abbreviation proved to be impassable as none of the respondents knew all the examples. The best result is 11 out of 12, surpassed only by the IT professional. As evident from the tables, some of the

abbreviations, namely FWIW, AFAIK, TTYL and JK are really unpopular in Czech Republic which may be caused either by the mentioned age of those abbreviations or by a local anomaly as suggested by the following part.

The second section of the interview showed the Czech users of the English language simply prefer different abbreviations. Among their favorites were WTF and OMG, both well known to all respondents and mentioned in the first place. It can only be speculated on why these specific ones. It is also possible, that if John Brandon was creating his list now, they would be on it as one can find them often while on the Internet.

Examining results of the third part, respondents agreed, that they are much more careful when writing an email than they are when using an on-line instant messaging. It is of course caused by the specifics of each means of ICT communication, for instance the speed of IM is not suitable for an extensive spell check. Moreover, its informality encourages the use of emoticons and in some cases even abbreviations in spite of the fact that the number of their users is quite low among the asked university students. They have also unanimously agreed that when writing an email, most of these features are omitted to grant higher formality, unless the sender and the recipient are friends or the situation permits it.

It is now time to take a look at the final part of the research, uncovering the opinions on the computer mediated communication and its impact on the English language.

Following is a summary of ten university student's views, that can be sorted into three main categories which are: a) “affects English negatively”, b) “affects English positively, but...” and c) “affects English positively only”. Each category is supplemented by an overview of thoughts respondents provided.

Affects English negatively – this opinion was supported by two out of ten respondents.

One of them did not expand on the question in terms of reasons yet the high speed of his

negative reply and no decision time might suggest he is an language purist for whom the changes are unacceptable in any form. The second did provide an explanation. From the respondent's own experience, there are people who find the use of emoticons, for example, inappropriate as they might suggest the recipient of the message is not smart enough to understand that the sender is happy or sad from the context alone. The respondent found this theory logical and therefore endorsed it.

Affects English positively, but... – this group consisted of four out of ten respondents. Three answers were based on the same logic, expressing that the use of abbreviations or emoticons for example is absolutely normal in situations such as instant messaging, writing of an informal email or on Facebook posts. If the use of these, however, exceeds a certain and hardly definable boundary, it becomes annoying and tasteless. One of these three opinions also adds that abbreviations and especially their creation may increase creativity of English users. The last participant of this group put forth the idea that these features can negatively effect those who are still learning the English language and also their use on specialized Internet boards, where people go to search for facts, should be limited. Overall though, the respondent agrees with certain level of creativity that needs to be put into creation of new language features and does not find them harmful.

Affects English positively only – the last and most optimistic group of respondents did not find anything injurious about ICT's influence on both communication and the English language. All four mentioned the benefits to English in terms of vocabulary and diversity. Although there was a note about possible misunderstandings arising from these new forms, it did not affect the final positive decision.

Here are conclusions of the research. Even though the respondents were not native English speakers, their knowledge of the computer mediated communication's specifics

is certainly considerable. There are some variations of the popular abbreviations but overall it can be said they know a significant number of them. When it comes to the properties of the English language that are usually changed by their broadcast over the Internet, the research proved the facts mentioned in chapter 3.2 regarding the email being more formal and less predisposed to these changes than IM. Furthermore, Czech users of the computer mediated communication of the English language do not overall consider these features harmful in conformity with the conclusion of the previous chapter.

#### **4. Expected progress in near future, conclusion**

This thesis presented a short look into the history of two very interesting sciences to introduce what preceded their merger and influence of one on the other. Later on the computers effect on the way we communicate ergo the English language itself was discussed and it was proved by the research, that even non-native English users are aware of this influence. The question arises, what can be expected in the near future? No one can tell precisely but here are some thoughts.

From what we see all around us, there is no way computers are going to vanish from our lives, they are rooted too deeply in our society for that. With them, certain particularities of the computer mediated communication are here to stay. Some of the grammatical features may be omitted, some words misspelled, yet nobody seems to mind when a portion of communication convenience and speed is offered in exchange. In this matter, it would appear best to expect a linear progress forwards, both in terms of speed of CMC and its availability to people. For instance, in the last few years, a boom of smartphones occurred. These devices provide their users with all the common Internet-based communication means in a cellphone-sized package, meaning their use of the English language can be influenced almost everywhere. Market for these devices is most likely to grow very fast.

On the other hand, as mentioned in the main part of this thesis and as suggested by the research, no matter how fast the development and how frequent the use of, for instance, unnecessary abbreviations in real life, we should not be afraid of these slight changes English may experience, as they only influence minor language classes and properties and are not considered harmful both by linguists and users.

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