"U wot m8?":

Word Formations and Use of Emoticons in a

Synchronous Chatroom

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Maailma muuttuu, ja niin muuttuu kielikin. Matkapuhelinten ja varsinkin internetin myötä kirjoitettu kieli on jo kohta noin pari vuosikymmentä ollut muutosvaiheessa – jotkut saattavat jopa miettiä, onko kirjoittaminen enää lainkaan tarpeellista ihmisten välisessä viestinnässä.

Tässä David Crystalin innoittamassa kandidaatintutkielmassa keskityttiin tarkastelemaan sanojen muodostumisprosesseja sekä hymiöiden käyttöä synkronoidussa eli reaaliaikaisessa online-keskusteluhuoneessa DeviantART-sivustolla. Kirjoitetun kielen muutoksia tutkittiin englannin kielen kautta, mutta osa muutoksista (kuten sanalyhenteiden yleistyvä käyttö) näkyy jo myös muissakin internetissä käytetyissä kielissä, esimerkiksi suomen kielessä.

Tutkielmaa varten valittiin etukäteen pieni joukko esimerkkejä sananmuodostusprosesseista ja hymiöistä, jotka kirjoittaja arveli olevan yleisemmin käytössä tietyssä keskusteluhuoneessa. Sen jälkeen keskusteluhuoneeseen liityttiin satunnaisesti, ja näitä kielen muotoja seurattiin silmämääräisesti, laskien kuinka monta kertaa mikäkin muoto ilmeni huoneessa vietettynä aikana. Sanalyhenteistä ja hymiöistä muodostettiin lista, johon merkittiin ylös internetkielen tyyppi, esimerkki, sekä kuinka monta kertaa valittu esimerkki ilmeni keskusteluhuoneessa. Lisäksi tutkielmassa pohdittiin lyhyesti, mitä nämä uudet kielen muodot mahdollisesti merkitsevät kirjoitetun kielen tulevaisuudelle.

Tutkielmassa painotetaan, että tarkempia ja täsmällisempiä tutkimuksia tarvitaan pätevien päätelmien tekemiseksi kirjoitetun kielen tulevaisuudesta sekä internet-kielen leviämisestä. Tutkittavaa materiaalia on paljon, ja sitä muodostuu jatkuvasti lisää.

Asiasanat – Keywords Internet linguistics, word formation, emoticons, CMC, chatroom

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Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1 INTRODUCTION

Predictions of languages disappearing because of the internet have been made in the past, as well as suggestions of a decline in the standards of both written and spoken languages (Crystal 2011). Flusser (2011) even wrote a book titled *Does Writing Have a Future?*, and with the growing importance of multimodal forms of communication in online interaction, it is therefore important to explore the possible future of standard written English. An example of multimodal use is the rather strong presence of emoticons, static or animated (usually) small-sized images which are used to express facial expressions and gestures as well as actions.

Making predictions of the future of written language can be done through studying how new words, acronyms, and abbreviations are formed in different online situations. The changes English language (and its written varieties) is facing now are possibly similar to other languages which have any online presence, for example Finnish.

The aim of this study is to examine the word formation processes and the use of emoticons in a synchronous chatroom, and draw implications on the future of written languages, specifically that of English. The Thesis is based on my Academic Writing 2 course paper, *Netspeak and Ideograms: Contributing to Simplified Use of English*, which I wrote in 2014. In the paper, I studied the possibility of the new technologies contributing to the changes in the use of written English language, and how the recent changes could affect the future of writing in general. This study delves further into those changes and their possible effects.

As an avid reader and writer, as well as a regular member of a chatroom community, I find this topic meaningful and important, and wanted to bring more attention to the changes in language and what they could mean to our societies now and in the future. To do this, I selected instances of language usage which is considered specific to internet (abbreviations and acronyms such as 'LOL', and emoticons), then spent time in an online chatroom to see how often these phenomena showed up. I am hoping that this small-scale study will help in giving some indication of what the future of written languages could look like, yet more thorough studies are required.

2 LANGUAGE CHANGE AND THE INTERNET

2.1. Language Change & Word Formation in the 21st Century

At a first glance, the new inventions such as text messages and the internet have changed the written language only a little: changes in language typically take decades, or even lifetimes, before they are established. However, as Crystal (2011: 57) points out, in today's world a new word can gain global attention within the manner of hours.

Another notable recent change is that many of the written language rules are no longer as relevant, such as starting each sentence with a capital letter and ending a sentence with a punctuation mark. Words may be spelled with numbers, relying on the rules of pronunciation for that number, e.g. in 'm8' to mean 'mate'. While these sorts of changes are presumably happening in any language whose speakers and writers have access to the internet, and indeed even though the internet is a multilingual platform, this paper is focusing solely on English in the Western world (Crystal 2006: 5, 26-65; 2011: 78-91).

2.1.1. Changes in the world, changes in the language

Newmeyer (2003: 21, 26) states that language change can be both formal and functional: formal referring to for example the grammatical and lexical structures of the language, functional referring to the *actual* use of language in speech and writing. Matthews (2003: 8-9) also writes that when there is a change in people's behaviour, surroundings, or needs, then a change in language is likely to emerge. He also brings up the term 'socially defined speech fashions' (2003: 9-10), which assumably refers to the term 'registers' from sociolinguistics: registers are varieties of a language used for particular purposes or in particular social settings – when the setting or the purpose changes, so does the register. Matthews (2003: 15) also discusses the notion of gradual versus instant change.

It could be said that, in today's world, technology is bringing the most prevalent of changes in people's behaviour, surroundings, and needs. Mobile phones gave us the possibility for text messaging, and internet gave us electronical email, and eventually different online platforms such as forums and chatrooms as well as the first instant messaging applications, for example Windows Live Messenger. With Messenger, the users could hold private conversations either through text or voice and video calls, as well as send each other links to websites, or send image or audio files to one another. These features were eventually moved on to Skype, which replaced Messenger, and have been implemented by other similar instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp.

These advancements in technology have made it possible for people to stay connected with each other around the clock, no matter their location in regards to one another. To ensure fast and easy communication, people have come up with new ways of using language.

Newmeyer (2003: 21) writes more on the formal and functional changes in language, mentioning Kiparsky's (1995) lexical diffusion, "an optimisation process that eliminates idiosyncratic complexity from the system", and "the desire of the speaker to maximise ease of articulation" (Newmeyer 2003: 26). With the new technologies, such as the internet, today's writing is all about optimisation: there is a need to type fast, and thus certain word-formation processes (e.g., abbreviations and compounds) can be observed to have become perhaps more commonly used than before the information era (see for example Crystal 2006, 2011).

2.1.2. Word-formation processes

Kopecka (2013: 359) remarks that morphological processes are a means of creating new lexemes and brings forth Lipka's (1994) idea that there is a close relationship between conversion and the mechanism of metaphoric and metonymic change, a link between semantic change and word-formation processes (Kopecka 2013: 356). For example, the process of conversion involves a categorical change while the form remains unaltered as in, for instance, the cases of rain {N} → rain {V}, snow {N} → snow {V}" (Kopecka 2013: 356). Kleparski (2013: 66) states that some lexical items that have been primarily related to one conceptual category {C1} can become related to another conceptual category {C2}.

Hamans and Stichting (2013: 300) discuss the different types of word-formation processes and their histories, and how their usage has changed in modern times. Interesting notions here are lateral changes and the different types of affixes, compounds, and blends (Hamans and Stichting 2013: 302-320). For an example of lateral change, I offer the noun *Google* (the search engine), which has become a verb, *to google* (to look something up via internet), and *Finglish* as an example of a blend from the words *Finnish* and *English*; both are relatively new emergents in language use. According to Hamans and Stichting (2013: 320), "there are no directional preferences for morphological changes", but Crystal (2006: 86-98) notes that abbreviations, affixations, replacing of elements (e.g., 'm8' = 'mate'), and compounds seem to be rather popular word formation methods on-line. Different platforms, however, have their own preferred method or methods for word-formation (Crystal 2006, 2011), and this paper will focus on those used in an on-line chatroom.

An interesting question that arises is whether it is possible for an individual to create completely new words, and what it takes for others to start using them as well. Someone,

somewhere, has had to come up with these new words and terms, and they have spread to be commonly used (or at least understood) by others (Crystal 2006, 2011). Those who are not able to absorb these new vocabularies could be left out from the online communities, or at least they struggle to be accepted members: "Language, accordingly, becomes the primary means of establishing and maintaining group membership and identity" (Crystal 2006: 156). The next subsection looks at the study of language used on-line, internet linguistics, and some of the newly emergent linguistic variants.

2.2. Internet Linguistics

Internet linguistics is the field which studies the language used in any electronic medium, such as e-mails, on-line forums, and text messages. It is still a relatively new field of study – in 2005, Crystal wrote that "[T]he emergence of a new branch of an academic discipline does not happen very often, but the arrival of the Internet has had such an impact on language that I believe the time is right to recognize and explore the scope of putative 'Internet linguistics'" (Crystal 2005: 1). In 2011, Crystal also pointed out that "[T]he name is not yet in universal use, partly because other terms have been proposed to focus on the communicative function of the Internet" (Crystal 2011: 1).

Other names for the field, and indeed for the language that has emerged in these electronic media, have been suggested: computer-mediated communication or CMC, Cyberspeak, Netspeak, Netlish, among many others. (Crystal 2011: 2) Internet users themselves have invented the term 'leet', often written as 1337, for uses of symbolic writing, deriving from the word 'elite'. (See for example Perea et al., 2008) In this paper, I will be using the term introduced by Crystal (2006), *Netspeak*, when referring to the language variant used in online situations as it is rather self-explanatory in its meaning, and *internet linguistics* for the relatively new field of study of online interactions.

As Crystal (2011: 3) points out, internet linguistics is still in its infancy, but that it has all the recognized branches of linguistics already available: syntax, morphology, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. For example, Yus (2011) has specifically studied Cyberpragmatics, an analysis of Internet-mediated communication from the perspective of cognitive pragmatics – how messages are intended to be interpreted, and how they are actually interpreted.

One of the problems with the field is the vast, ever-growing amount of data available to the researcher, and the fact that sometimes the data becomes unavailable (for example when it gets deleted by site administration or the user). Another is the wide range of stylistic variation available to the users, variation related to the chosen medium of communication: different media uses different conventions, for example text messages are different from e-mail, and e-mails are different from

chatrooms. Third issue is the speed of change, and fourth is the ethics of using the found data (Crystal 2011: 10-14).

Netspeak is often compared to spoken and written languages, as it borrows features from both: internet is, after all, "a medium almost entirely dependent on reactions to written messages", yet "[Blog] pages can also display many features typical of spoken language" (Crystal 2006: 20, 31). Perhaps due to the strong presence of writing in the online platforms, the rules associated with writing have been carried out to people's reactions to using Netspeak: some may be concerned that these new informal uses of language will affect education and literacy of people (Crystal 2005: 2; Thangaraj and Maniam 2015.) "The prophets of doom have been out in force, attributing every contemporary linguistic worry to the new technology, and predicting the disappearance of languages and a decline in spoken and written standards" (Crystal 2011: 3).

I have personally witnessed negative attitudes towards Netspeakers, from correcting their 'mistakes' to outright insults towards their very intelligence, although the attitudes have been quite different when it has been clear Netspeak was used as a means of humour. However, it is good to remember that for example spelling of words varies in different places of the world, and that different on-line platforms have their own preferred use of language over others. For example, e-mails followed the form of traditional letters for some time, and a forum has different conventions from that of a chatroom (Crystal 2006, 2011).

2.3. Chatrooms

To describe what chatrooms are, I will be borrowing Crystal's description.

> Chatgroups … typically involve several people, with message-exchanges often anonymous, continuing indefinitely, and dealing with a wide and unpredictable range of issues. … In a synchronous setting, a user enters a chat 'room' and joins an ongoing conversation in real time. Named contributions are … inserted into a permanently refreshing screen along with the contributions from other participants. (Crystal 2006: 134-135)

In other words, contributions to the conversation(s) are seen the moment the user has pressed 'Send' or other command to enter the message to the room; however, lag may occur (as in, the arrival of the message is delayed from the time it was actually sent).

There are two types of settings for chatrooms: asynchronous and synchronous. Crystal (2006: 135) defines asynchronous settings as follows:

> In an asynchronous setting, the interactions … are [then] stored in some format, and made available to members of the group only upon demand, so that people can catch up with the discussion, or add to it, at any time – even after an appreciable period has passed.

The asynchronous setting thus resembles e-mail or forums. In synchronous settings, however, contributions are usually kept short (as single sentences or sentence-fragments, reducing word-length with abbreviations) so as to be able to keep up with the conversation(s) in a real-time fashion: thus it is the synchronous setting which is more radical in its innovativeness of language use, at least according to Crystal (2006: 135).

In synchronous settings, the downside of course is that the conversations are not usually stored: they 'scroll out of the screen' (Crystal 2006: 135). Since chatrooms enable multiple conversations between multiple participants, one participant, if focused enough, can take part in for example 3 conversations at the same time – and indeed, according to my personal experience, during the busy hours it is crucial to be able to type fast.

The need to type fast can increase the willingness to use Netspeak features such abbreviations, acronyms, forms mimicking pronunciation, and combinations of letters and numbers – these are claimed to be time-efficient, as the words do not have to be spelled out or could be replaced by numbers whose pronunciation resembles that of the word's (see also Crystal 2010: 192). There is one more 'class' that I have noticed is less acceptable than the other forms: misspelling.

Misspelling is separated from typographical errors, as these errors are usually an accident (typing *jsut* instead of *just*, or hitting *å* instead of *p*, for example) and if just possible, often corrected by the one who made the error. Deliberate misspellings can refer to such forms as *there* to mean *they are* or *their*, or using possessive *their* to mean *they are*; the first pronoun *I* is sometimes written in lower-case; and *you*, *you are* and *your* can be written as *u* and *ur*. Since *ur* can have two meanings, it can lead to much confusion (something to be discussed in a later chapter).

Another way of getting one's message across quickly and with relatively little effort is to use smileys, or emoticons.

2.4. Emoticons

The age-old idiom "A picture is worth a thousand words" seems to have carried into the digital world: emoticons are often used when there are no words to express something, when the user simply has nothing else to say but they still wish to somehow contribute to any on-going conversation, or when it is simply faster to use one than type out a few words. They can also add to the undertone of messages,

bringing "some color and personality into otherwise monochrome networked spaces of text." (Stark and Crawford 2015: 1)

> As Crystal (2011: 23-24) points out,

> Internet exchanges lack the facial expressions, gestures, and conventions of body posture and distance … which are so critical in expressing personal opinions and attitudes, and in moderating social relationships.

The emoticons were created to avoid ambiguities that resulted from this lack, although arguably some of the emoticons can be used to cause ambiguity: for example, the basic smile :) can either be taken to mean happiness, or condescension. In other words, emoticons are used to express not only emotions but also gestures and attitudes (Crystal 2006: 38-39).

Of course, the lack of emoticons could be taken to mean something as well – just like a lack of facial expression or other reaction in face-to-face conversation. Stark and Crawford (2015: 1) have written more about how emoticons work and can affect messages, pointing out for example that "emoji now serve to smooth out the rough edges of digital life". Fullwood et al. (2013) have conducted a study on the differences in emoticon usage between age and gender groups, and found that while there was no major difference between age groups regarding use of emoticons, female users were more likely to use them than males, and that users without a profile picture were using 'winking' or 'flirting' emoticons more than others.

Another interesting and quite important aspect about emoticons is that they can either be *static*, unmoving, or *dynamic* as in moving, depending on the platform or application used for producing them. Then, each platform seems to have a different name for them (emote, emoji…), and many platforms have their own specific set of emoticons to use. For example, the grinning emoticon selected from Samsung keyboard looks different on Facebook and WhatsApp. The website DeviantART has its own set (see the Appendices for a link), each with their own 'command' or 'thumbcode' which is required when typing to the comment field or the chatbox, for example :hug:, which when the user presses 'Send' or 'Enter' turns into an animated hug icon. However, as Fullwood et al. (2013) point out, research on emoticons is still somewhat limited, and has focused mainly on the differences in use between genders.

2.5. Future of Writing

Flusser et al. (2011) discusses the necessity of writing, whether it could be abandoned in favour of other means of communication, and at length paint a rather grim view on the future of *alphabetical*

writing as the information revolution has seemingly decreased the value of written text. Indeed, Flusser expresses concerns that not only will we lose writing as we know it, but also our very language and culture (e.g., Flusser 2011: 42, 64, 67), and questions whether it makes sense to still write, publish, print, and read when there are more effective methods of communication (Flusser 2011: 3).

Flusser (2011: 17, 147) notes the importance of speed in writing, as in which writing method is preferable to ease the writer's task, comparing the chisel and the brush: we have reached a point where writing by hand is the new chisel. However, the author also points out that writing is always aimed at the reader to be decoded: the reader needs to know the code to start deciphering the writing (Flusser 2011: 43-44, 88-89). It is claimed that the new computer codes have made us all illiterate again and a new literate caste has arisen (Flusser 2011: 55-56), and that "only minimal texts have any prospect of surviving the informatic revolution"; however, the author continues that "[T]he shorter a text, the more difficult it is to decode" (Flusser 2011: 43-44). Furthermore, Crystal (2006: 117) quotes Angell and Heslop (1994: 83): "The time saved not checking your spelling is multiplied by the time that it takes for a reader to decipher the misspelled words. … jar your reader's concentration … also cause the reader to question your credibility."

In other words, there could be a clash between the writer's need to write at ease and the reader's need to be able to decipher the writing at ease. This brings to question the comprehensibility of such instances as LOL ('laughing out loud'), TTYL ('talk to you later'), and IMHO ('in my honest opinion'). Crystal, however, has a slightly more optimistic view on these changes than Flusser. Although Crystal mentions the fears of language deterioration (2006: 1-2), he also discusses the brighter side of the issue in chapters 8 and 9, bringing forth the thought that Netspeak is indeed enriching the range of our communicative options: "[And] the Internet is going to record this linguistic diversity more fully and accurately than was ever possible before" (Crystal 2006: 276).

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1. The aim and the research questions

The main objective of this research is to focus on how new words are currently formed through analyzing collected data from a synchronous chatroom. The study will also shortly examine the use and importance of emoticons in chatrooms.

The study questions are:

1. What are the most frequent word formation processes taking place in specific online interactions, such as a synchronous chatroom?
2. What is the role of emoticons ('ideograms') in online interactions?

3.2. The data and methods of analysis

This short study focuses on the uses of the most common instances of Netspeak and emoticons; arguably emoticons *are* a form of Netspeak, but for the purposes of clarity in data collection and presentation, I have used these terms separately. The data was collected by pre-selecting forms that were *assumed* as the most commonly used in a chatroom known as #devart (link in the Appendices), as I observed as a long-term member of the specific chatroom community. Then I joined the room randomly throughout the autumn to count how often these forms appear during one hour at a time, if at all; the number of times these forms did not occur were not counted. It should be thus noted that some instances of an occurrence may have been lost to the conductor of the study due to interruptions; more on the reliability of this study later.

For this study, the following forms were selected:

- *Netspeak*
    o Pronouns: i (I), u (you), ur (you are / your)
    o Numbers instead of letters: m8 (mate), every1 (everyone)
    o Abbreviations: ilu (I love you), bbl (be back later), lol (laughing out loud), idk (I don't know)
    o Other: hai (hi), wot (what)
- *Emoticons*
    o Facial expressions / Emotions: :la: :stare: :)
    o Gestures: :hug: :poke: :wave:
    o Actions: :faint: :brb:

Because of the synchronous nature of the room (the conversations 'roll out of the screen' as more lines appear), and due to certain issues of privacy (as users often share sensitive information about themselves during conversations), it was possible to *actually* record the conversations to show 100%

reliable data. While not entirely reliable, the data should still give a good inclination of the occurring phenomenon.

Due to issues of privacy, I can not include usernames or any other specific information of the users, for example their age and location (some users may even have false information on their profiles to protect their identities). This is because the focus of the present study is to be on the *frequency* of the chosen examples – so that the context in which they appear is currently irrelevant, yet it would be interesting in the future to explore the different contexts in which these forms are used (for example, when these forms are used solely for purposes of humour).

Since I have been a member of the site since the end of 2005, and an active user of #devart since early 2006, I have accumulated some 'inside knowledge' related to context. For example, normally people would perceive the smiling face :) as something happy and positive, but when some #devart regulars use that smiley, their message is usually to be read as something sarcastic, possibly even as something condescending. I have also noticed that emoticons are often used when the user may feel they lack adequate words, for example when someone shares a loss in the family, and others may enter the sad face :(as their only response. The same goes for certain forms of Netspeak: LOL ('laughing out loud') is generally used when merely wanting to acknowledge a funny story someone shared.

3.3 Results

The results are to be presented in the following tables: Table 1 shows instances of uses of Netspeak, while Table 2 shows the same for use of emoticons. The first column in both tables shows the type of used form, the second column the actual used form, and the third column shows the number of occurrences of the form.

Table 1: Forms of Netspeak and their number of occurrence

Type	Form	Occurrence
Pronouns	i	97
	u	19
	ur	23
Numbers instead of letters	m8	0
	every1	5
Abbreviations	ilu	46

	bbl	103
	lol	150
	idk	145
Other	hai	59
	wot	11

Table 2: Emoticons and their number of occurrence

Type	Emoticon	Occurrence
Facial expressions / Emotions	:la: (dynamic)	247
	:stare: (static)	260
	:) (static)	50
Gestures / Actions	:hug: (dynamic)	289
	:lmao: (dynamic)	164
	:wave: (dynamic)	40
Other	:faint: (dynamic)	57
	:brb: (dynamic)	15

4 DISCUSSION ON RESULTS

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, some forms of Netspeak and emoticons were more often used than others. For example, the pronoun *I* spelled as 'i' and the abbreviations were in more popular use among the other pre-selected forms. With emoticons, showing excitement (:la:) and possible disapproval or being unimpressed (:stare:) as well as showing friendship and compassion (:hug:) occurred more often than for example stating 'be right back' (:brb:) by using an emoticon.

4.1 Netspeak results

In the case of the pronoun 'I' being spelled as 'i' the simple implication could be that, in their haste to respond to someone's message, people are willing to skip pressing on the shift key. This seems rather acceptable to do as well, and forms such as 'ill' is used to mean *I will*, instead of the conventional way to save the sender's time in responding. Yet more often than not, users would spell the pronoun as *I*. However, the form 'u' was often used in other abbreviations such as 'ilu', *I love you*, rather than on its own, and those using 'u' were either making a joke – or if they were not assumed to be joking, they were told to spell correctly.

'L33T' speech, or replacing letters with numbers which resemble either the pronunciation or the shape of both the number and the letter(s), occurred a lot less than any other forms of Netspeak while this short study was being conducted. One new user kept writing 'everyone' as 'everyone1' until taking their leave, and never returning as no one else reacted to what they were saying. Letter abbreviations for phrases, such as 'be back later' ('bbl') and its variants ('brb' = 'be right back'), were used much more commonly. This is possibly due to the nature of the synchronous chatroom setting, the fast pace of conversations, and that it is indeed faster and easier to type a few letters in a combination to express full sentences instead of typing out those full sentences. For example, if user A asks user B a question and user B does not know the answer (or does not want to reply), they seem to rather opt for typing 'IDK' than 'I don't know'.

The most common Netspeak type in this study turned out to be 'lol', 'laughing out loud'. In #devart, 'lol' is often used when the user finds something funny, is mildly amused, wants to express sarcasm or even disinterest, or just does not know how else to contribute but wishes to let another user know what was said has been acknowledged. 'Wot', by what I have noticed, seems to be in use by one of the older regular members, and thus it did not appear all that often.

Despite the apparent online trend to use abbreviated words and even sentences, Netspeak in #devart has at least one instance in which a letter is *added* instead of removed or reduced

when typing. This happens with 'hai', the spelling of the greeting 'hi' which resembles the pronunciation of the word. It is an intriguing form as it differs from the other word formation processes examined in this study; it could be possible that other similar forms exist somewhere online.

4.2 Emoticons results

In the case of the emoticons, far more of them were actually used that were not on the pre-selected list, including different versions of :la:, :stare: and :hug:. The smiling face :) was relatively rarely used despite its supposed general positive connotation, which – to a regular user of the chatroom – further suggests that the smiling face :) is really reserved for sarcastic situations in the chatroom community in question. However, it is important to point out that more reliable data gathering and analysis is required to make any further assumptions.

Unlike for example on Facebook Messenger, a visitor to #devart is usually required to type in a 'code' before pressing enter to use an emoticon; on Facebook Messenger, emoticons or emojis can be clicked on from a list. On DeviantArt, codes are 'opened' and 'closed' between two colons as in the compassionate emoticon, :hug: → 🫂 (animated on the website), and they are typically short so they can be typed in quickly despite having to use the colons. Many of them are also self-explanatory both in the code and in their appearance. (See the link in the Appendices for the emoticons.)

As mentioned before, the emoticon for 'brb' ('be right back') was far less used than the abbreviation 'bbl' ('be back later') to convey the same meaning – the user was going to be 'AFK', 'away from keyboard'. The smiling face :) was not used often, at least not in expected contexts, and :wave: was less slightly used than 'hai' as a greeting. :faint: was typically used to convey that the user is feeling overwhelmed, and :lmao: (from the words 'laughing my ass off'; also frequently used without colons, as in not as an emoticon) implied the user finds something in the conversation quite hilarious. As stated in the beginning of this section, :la: normally showed excitement and :stare: disapproval.

However, due to the nature of this short study and because of my own involvement in the chatroom community, making such statements of implied meanings of the uses of Netspeak forms and emoticons is not completely objective. Someone else could easily discover different results, as well as come to different conclusions of the meanings of these instances; because I do not have evidence of contexts, I did my best to avoid getting into the meanings of the pre-selected examples. Yet I also feel that something about the meanings should be mentioned, and again, I would like to

suggest more thorough studies to be conducted to examine the phenomenona of Internet language even further.

Still, even from a short, small-scale study I think it is safe to say that *something* is indeed happening to the language, specifically in an online environment such as a synchronous chatroom. Forms of Netspeak could be used to ease the user's pressure to reply at a quick pace to everyone else, and emoticons are used to convey expressions and gestures which online interactions would otherwise lack. For example, I personally feel that, if I am not allowed to use emoticons, my ability to express myself is somehow restricted.

In this study, I also did not thoroughly discuss people's opinions on Netspeak, but they vary. Some users may be completely against it, others may accept it in certain contexts (such as when making a joke), and the rest embrace the new, faster ways of communication with other users. Forums are good sources to look for opinions on Netspeak, for example on little-details LiveJournal, a user asked others for (negative) opinions about Netspeak: one stated that 'it looks lazy, not to mention illiterate.' (See the Appendices for the link.) Indeed, I remember in one conversation how a regular member of #devart typed that they cannot wait for the 'new English illiterates' to start spelling 'lawyer' as 'loyer'. (For an image on the attitudes towards Netspeak, see the Appendices.) It could be, however, quite interesting to delve further into the opinions and reactions of people on the Netspeak-related phenomena.

5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine how words are formed in an online setting such as a synchronous chatroom, and to look at the role of emoticons in online communication. The pre-selected instances of Netspeak and emoticons in Chapter 3 were assumed to be the most frequent ones in the chatroom, yet even among the studied forms, it was noticeable that some instances showed more frequently than the others during conversations. With Netspeak forms, abbreviations seemed to be the most used, and emoticons were often used in showing excitement, compassion and disapproval or being unimpressed.

Here I would like to remind the reader that the World Wide Web and its different platforms have plenty of material to be studied. There is in fact so much data, both already in existence and more being created every day, that anyone conducting a study on online uses of language should be careful in what kind of data they wish to focus on, and how. For example, the forms and emoticons in Tables 1 and 2 were slightly changed during revision processes as I realized the forms I had chosen were far less used than I had originally predicted. Another problem is that the data easily becomes either unavailable (website or its content may get removed, partly or altogether) or horribly outdated (a Netspeak feature is no longer used by the 'mainstream' population of the Internet).

Yet a study like this could be a start in better recognizing the existence of the phenomenon called Netspeak, a term coined by Crystal (2001). Something *is* happening to the language, specifically to its written form, with the emergence of instances mentioned throughout this paper such as 'LOL' and 'BRB'. While these forms are still informal, there are those who worry Netspeak might enter formal writing as well. Spoken language is also changing: some Netspeak features have found their way in people's real-world speech, such as gasping 'O-M-G' for 'oh my God'.

It is also relatively difficult to predict what happens to the online language in the future: "…the difficulty in predicting Internet language is the existence of so many conflicting trends and pressures" (Crystal, 2006: 273). Yet for example Crystal (2006: 275–276) suggests that we might be, in the future, communicating more via computer mediation than direct interaction, and that Netspeak and indeed all computer-mediated communication (CMC) is merely enriching the linguistic options we have available for ourselves. We are quickly adapting to the new usages of language.

Still, Netspeak may carry unpredicted ambiguity with it, and misunderstandings of what an emoticon is used to mean resembles the guessing game of face-to-face interactions as we try our best to decipher cues to add to the meaning of what is being said; even what is being said is easy to misinterpret. Gaps may occur in understanding between different groups of people. The young, growing up among the gadgets which have ready Internet access, are more likely to comprehend as

well as have the interest and energy to keep up with the new linguistic trends; those who are older, or lack interest in an active presence in the online world, are less likely to understand Netspeak.

Hence, I think it is safe to say that such features are not *completely* replacing fully formed words and sentences – at least not just yet. As the world grows more hectic, however, the need to faster communication may keep on increasing, and forms of Netspeak or CMC could become much more common than they are now. Moreover, they could be completely replaced by voicemails and conference calls, making written language irrelevant.

As discussed before, further studies are required to better analyse these changes, the forms they take and people's attitudes towards them. Language is our way of interacting with other people, one of the pillars of our societies, and writing has played a rather important role in the development of Internet as well; Internet which is now changing our language. Therefore, Internet linguistics and further studies are necessary to examine any changes, to help us understand why such trends such as 'lol' exist, and whether they really are going to contribute to the disappearance of written languages altogether.

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APPENDICES

#devart (chatroom; requires activated site account for login)
http://chat.deviantart.com/chat/devart
Emoticons on DeviantART
http://comments.deviantart.com/emoticons
Emojis on Facebook (for comparison)
http://www.symbols-n-emoticons.com/p/facebook-emoticons-list.html
little-details LiveJournal on attitudes towards Netspeak
http://little-details.livejournal.com/168938.html
Depiction of attitudes towards Netspeak forms
http://media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/0b/cb/b5/0bcbb5e7df564e94fe15b8d882168b06.jpg