

Development of Internet English: Alternative Lexis, Syntax and Morphology

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Abstract. The development of the Internet is parallel to the expansion of the Internet culture mainly mediated through the English language. Internet communication is influenced firstly by such physical limitations as the speed of typing which is lower than that of speaking, the amount of symbols, or the absence of prosodic and paralinguistic features in the language, and secondly by the Internet culture. This leads to a language bearing a specific code of symbols together with alternative lexis and rules of syntax, grammar, and morphology. Despite the relative freedom of an individual and the speakers' geographical / cultural variety, the language contains a codex of general rules, subconsciously followed by skilful users. The Internet language aims at simplification of the traditional language code, but on the other hand a language code is introduced in order to prove that one belongs to the Internet society. The principle of natural selection when seeking to attract potential interlocutors' attention leads to attempts of partial individualization of language style, and to the pun as the optimum means of one's self-expression. The above-mentioned features allow referring to the computer language as to a specific full-scale phenomenon, which is subordinate to the English language and does not constitute a fully independent language unit.

The application of computer technologies has become a universal phenomenon since the last decades of the 20th century. A new culture based on the use of the World Wide Web has been evolving parallelly. The following paper aims at defining the status of Internet English and reviewing its peculiar features; the present analysis is based on English chat conversations (27 different sites, approx. 2,200,000 words of conversations; icons not included).

A few language modes are used on the Internet, and their system as a whole is still debatable. The presently dominant attitude arising from the works of David Crystal suggests that the computer language as a comprehensive phenomenon consists of the language of short messages (SMSs), Internet chat groups, virtual worlds, Internet websites, and the technical slang (Crystal, 2002:10-17). Alternatives suggested by other authors mainly operate on identical categories. The above-mentioned situations are not mutually exclusive, and this ultimately results in the possibility of taking all the five media as a whole as well as in different media sharing similar or even identical stylistic peculiarities, including distinctive features of vocabulary and syntax.

The polemics on the relation between the Internet language and the spoken language has led to substantial differences among the attitudes of different authors. Constance Hale and Judie Scanlon call the Internet language "written speech" and suggest that one should write the way he talks (Hale and Scanlon, 1999:75). Boyd H. Davis and Jeutonne P. Brewer assert similarly that "electronic discourse is writing that is very often read as if it is spoken; that is as if the sender was writing talking" (Davis and Brewer, 1997:2). This is supported by observations that the electronic discourse undergoes little or no editing (Johansson, 1991:307; Ferrera et al, 1991:25), is typical of informal lexis (Trofimova, 2001:1), is spontaneous and elliptical (Collot, Belmore, 1993:48-52).

The analysis of electronic Lithuanian correlates with the inferences of English and Russian authors, stating that

"communication on the Internet in Lithuanian is also unofficial and informal, spontaneous and unconsidered, and abrupt phrases, self-correction, bywords, ellipsis, inversion, means of economy, etc. are typical of informal speech (Ryklienė, 2001:103). It is worth mentioning that earlier works mostly define the Internet language as an intermediate version of the spoken and written language: "electronic discourse is a *hybrid* of spoken and written languages" (Ferrera et al, 1991:25), and the latest issues see it as a genuinely "third medium, which is neither 'written speech' nor 'spoken writing'" (Crystal, 2002:48). The alteration of the tendency is supposedly caused by the fact that the evolutionary level of the Internet discourse had not been alienated from other language modes by the early 1990s, but is actually seen in up-to-date language representations.

The emergence of new form(s) of language is paralleled by the evolution of frameworks of linguistic analysis. Adams Bodomo and Carmen Lee developed an approach analyzing the distinctive features of tools and media in information and communication technologies, which allow pervasive changes in language forms and uses, "Technology-Conditioned Approach to Language Change and Use" (TeLCU) (Bodomo and Lee, 2001:10). The method emphasizes bilateral causative influence exerted by the processes, namely "New tools and media demand the creation of new forms and ways of communication, leading to changes in the way people use language in its various forms, including spoken and written forms (ibid.:12).

Bodomo and Lee have introduced the concept of *literacy*. The very use of the lexeme implies that the electronic discourse has developed to the level, where new forms of language and their associated practices emerge. Changes in language literacy produce new tools of analysis, such as the model of New Literacy Studies (NLS) by the same authors, which is a social approach to the literacy as a

whole, where it is explained in terms of different social contexts (ibid.:13).

The processes of the development of new forms of language are self-inductive. Opportunities created by higher levels of technologies result in new forms of language and literacy, which consequently leads to the spreading of both the forms of the language and technology, together with the development of new strata of the technology and the mode of the language. Electronic discourse thus gains in depth as the language becomes more elaborated as well as in breadth as a new type (or a combination of types) of technology implies a new mode of the use of the electronic discourse. The present transformation is validated by general statements of language theories, e.g. by the principle that a language changes in response to the demands, which are made on it, and if the society of language users poses new challenges, the language also has to become different in order to cope (cf. Halliday, 1985:82).

Electronic discourse is usually written, and is consequently deprived of prosodic and paralinguistic elements. The following insufficiency of means of self-expression results in various attempts to increase alternative possibilities of the limited set of symbols in use. It is achieved via various shortenings, certain signs or their combinations, capital / small letters, etc. A high percentage of these symbols belongs exclusively to the electronic discourse, and namely to the Internet, but some of them may also be encountered in other linguistic environments carrying identical meaning values (Rumšienė, 2004).

Internet communication is hindered by the limited rapidity of typing. Although it usually exceeds the velocity of producing characters when writing by hand, it is still inferior to the speed of audio-communication, and presumably does not correspond to one's ability of developing ideas. The impediment results in the production and elaboration of a code of symbols, permitting to express oneself at the optimum tempo. The velocity becomes extremely important in group conversations, where every participant seeks to be the first to react.

As well as the spoken language, Internet communication is abundant in set phrases, which are often idiomatic and typical of the Internet discourse only. However, there is a substantial difference between the spoken and written discourse of English resulting from the fact that the message in the case of Internet communication is received visually and the process of perception develops basic differences due to varied cognitive functions applied (ibid.).

Given that languages tend to avoid and reject unnecessary elements and aim at fulfilling the needs of the user society, the specific features of the Internet language are to reveal the linguistic philosophy of the Internet society. The herein adopted technological perspective specifies that the Internet culture is not merely a culture of information, but complementarily develops a culture of the Internet discourse skill, in which the message contents are parallel to the message form. A question arises whether the values of the Internet discourse lead to new languages or Internet communication still operates within the area of the

standard language and just constitutes an alternative dialect.

The users of the World Wide Web can be specified as advocates of a particular culture with any ethnic, social, religious, etc. background and without any reference to their sex and age. However, this theoretical statement seemingly leads to insurmountable difficulties in practice. First of all, the social stratum of the average Internet user should be taken into consideration. It is evident that English is not the native language of many Internet chatters, and generally, users, but still it is the main language of international conversations. Consequently, many of those participating in English conversations have learnt it as a foreign language. A quality education including the apprehension of at least average English is mostly available to those belonging to the elite, upper and middle classes of the society. Besides, the Internet is usually unaffordable luxury for the socially disadvantaged people in the absolute majority of countries worldwide. Thus in most cases one has to overcome two social barriers to enter the so-called universally accessible club of the international English-spoken virtual world. Another factor of importance is the quality (speed) of one's Internet, which also partly depends on the amount of finance one can afford or is willing to invest into one's personal computer and the fee for the Internet services (Rumšienė, 2004:5). The above-mentioned conditions depict the average user of the World Wide Web as a member of a prosperous society or as an advantaged member of any society.

The established norms of the Internet society may differ from the values of traditional conversations and technical operations. First of all, the Internet has developed the hacker cult. Although the semantic value of the term "hacker" ranges from "a person who is especially proficient in programming" to "a computer user who attempts to get unauthorized access to proprietary computer systems" (Webster's Universal College Dictionary, 1997:364), the second aspect of meaning occurs more frequently.

However, the concept of hacker as understood by computer professionals acquires much more positive connotations. In the New Hacker's Dictionary it is defined as "a person, who enjoys exploring the details of programmable systems and how to stretch their systems [...], who programs enthusiastically, [...], quickly, [...] is an expert at a particular program, [...] and enjoys the intellectual challenge of creatively overcoming or circumventing limitations (New Hacker's Dictionary, 1996). When accepting this definition, though, one should take into consideration that the text was presumably devised by computer fan(s) situated on the right side of the law for those who are less familiar with the Internet culture. The authenticity of the source poses no doubt, but the potential addressee is presented with a biased definition.

The traditional society officially estimates honesty as one of the essential values. The value system of the Internet is subjected to power. The one who is able to break into protected programs and computers is respected most, and those who design computer viruses are almost compared to gods. This attitude affects the language as well. As a consequence, it has a higher percentage of lexical units

denoting the status of a person than other variants of the language (e.g. a weenie is a person with poor computer skills, almost an outsider), and members of the Internet society, despite sharing their secrets of hacking regard the Internet as a field of harsh competition or even war.

Besides, the philosophy of individual freedom dominates the Internet. Every user may devise special symbols, which naturally leads to the situation that the amount of neologisms both suggested by users and accepted by the Internet language during a definite period of time substantially exceeds the number of lexical units introduced into any “live” language.

The existence of conventional symbols, which are not used in other variants of English, not only marks the aim of an interlocutor to express his idea with the optimum precision, but also denotes certain xenophobia(s). It has been suggested that the community on the Internet is created through symbolic strategies and collective beliefs. The culture of the Internet rejects state boundaries, restricting itself to the existence of a shared language among the participants of the conversation. It also stresses the self-isolation of definite cultural groups. Thus the general aim of the symbolic code is twofold: first, to prove one’s belonging to a certain subgroup of the society, and second, to conceal (at least partly) the information from the outsiders, namely from those who are not “initiated” into the subgroup without any consideration to whether the textual information contains any secretive value.

On the other hand, the inappropriate use of any elements of the Internet culture is considered to be the distinguishing mark of one’s belonging to the lowest ranks of the Internet stratification. Though writing in capital letters (which means shouting) is considered to be just a kind of rudeness / impoliteness, cases of unsuitable (inappropriate) use of any conventional signs usually lead to contempt towards the ignoramus.

Internet communication based on written texts allows for the use of symbols external to the regular code of written language. As a consequence, the substance of the text cannot be exactly transmitted orally. There are many examples of abbreviations consisting of traditional symbols, which may be further divided into:

- a) *lexical units composed of the initial letters of the words in a phrase* (the same way as acronyms are produced): *tttt* thus means *to tell the truth*, *lol* corresponds to *laugh out loud*, and *imho* stands for *in my humble opinion*;
- b) *symbols representing words in cases when the pronounced name of a symbol completely or approximately corresponds to the articulation of another lexical unit* (such pairs might be regarded as artificial homophones): the cardinal number “4” is pronounced the same way as the preposition “for”, “2” may substitute both “to” and “too”, and the letter “c” stands for “see” (it is of interest that “c” never reproduces the noun “sea” although “to see” and “the sea” are homophones);
- c) *inclusion of homophonic units as parts of longer lexemes or set phrases*: “l8r” means “later”, “1derful” / “1deful” stand for “wonderful, and “cul” is correspondent to “see you later”.

Alternative rules of spelling are designed as well, including omission of letters, which are not pronounced (*government* → *goverment*, *Finn* → *Fin*, *Scotch* → *Scoch*, *excellent* → *exellent*, *excel* → *xcel*). Sometimes alternative spelling sequences employing fewer symbols are used and the general rules of reading in English are not violated (*tonight* → *tonite*, *love* → *luv*, *because* → ‘cause → *coz*, etc.). The case of *xcel* may also be related to the principle of inclusion of homophonic units as parts of longer lexemes.

A user of a “traditional” language is expected to operate within the thesaurus and the established grammatical syntactical regulations. New lexical units usually develop only in the case of an unfamiliar phenomenon or a fashionable foreign / international lexeme, thus partly allowing (in the first case) for some contribution of an individual language user whereas the alteration of spelling or punctuation systems is restricted to theoreticians (one may recall the recent alteration concerning *ss* and β in German). The trend in the case of the Internet language is diametrically different, namely, every user is expected to feel free when using grammatical forms to devise alternative ways of spelling and punctuation as well as to introduce neologisms, abbreviations and icons.

Another factor, which should be taken into consideration when discussing the specificities of the electronic discourse, is the mistake. Participants of English chat conversations are either native speakers of English or those speakers of English as a foreign language, whose financial and other resources have allowed for acquisition of the language and the equipment. This suggests that when mistakes are made, usually both the addresser and the addressee are fully familiar with the correct version. An experiment by Ferrera (Ferrera, 1991) showed that participants of an electronic conference, who were filmed, were overlooking the text they were sending, but made very few changes. Nevertheless, about 2.6% of all words contained spelling mistakes. Ferrera concluded that the participants did not aim at an ideally presented text, which is typical of written (especially formal) communication, but only sought to make sure that the message would be perceived by the addressee correctly (ibid.:25). This may be explained by the factor of the desired maximum speed of message production as well as by a lower level of responsibility for the form of the message.

It may also be that the mistake is subconsciously regarded as a way of development of the Internet English, and thus as a kind of the creative process. When a text is typed at a very high speed and one’s consciousness concentrates upon the message value, the sub consciousness may reproduce the standard variant, and thus such forms as “looser” and “elite” for “loser” and “delight” may have been devised (confer: “sooner” and “polite”), and consequently spread after the law of language simplification.

Some “traditional” languages allow for a phenomenon, which is presumably identical to electronic acronyms, e.g., Russian “*вуз*” stands for “*в(ысшее) у(чебное) з(аведение)*” (an institution of higher education), English “*radar*” and “*laser*” abbreviate “*ra(dio) d(ection) a(nd) r(anging)*” and “*l(ightwave) a(mplication by) s(timulated) e(mission of) r(adiation)*” respectively, and French “*TGV*” reproduces

“t(train) g(rande) v(itesse)” (a high velocity train). Although the phenomenon is common in many Indo-European languages, in no case is it as common as in the electronic discourse.

The Internet English language uses a number of specific lexical units, which may either substitute words signifying previously existing concepts or defining new ones. “To geek out” came into existence about a decade ago although there was no obstacle to put it “to discuss technical matters” or otherwise. The Internet cliché “error 404” meaning that a website is unavailable due to technical reasons as it is no more in service led to the formation of a noun / verb pair a 404 / to 404 with no changes in the semantic value in comparison to the initial term. “To tron”, which stands for “to become inaccessible except via email” was formed after the name of a movie. The examples show that in most cases of word building when a given root produces a derivative in a part of speech containing no previous variants of the root, no affixes are added. In the case of “geek”, dictionaries refer to “a strange or eccentric person” or “a special type of carnival performer” (Webster’s Universal College Dictionary, 1997:336) or “a stupid and weak person” (Collins Cobuild English Dictionary, 1997:700), presenting “geek” as a noun only and in both cases indicating it as a slang word. The primary version of “error 404” employs “404” as an adjective in comparison to “a technical error”, “a typical error”, etc.; the name of the film should thus presumably be regarded as a noun. According to the same principle, the electronic discourse has developed the verb “to sorry”, which has been indicated in the *New Hacker’s Dictionary* since 1996.

The pre-existence of a lexeme in the traditional language code may lead to the development of alternative forms via the process of suffixation. For example, the opposition of

generous: generosity
curious: curiosity

leads to

dubious: dubiosity
obvious: obviosity

ignoring the traditional forms “dubiet” and “obviousness”. The general scheme may be defined (scheme 1):

Scheme 1

$\text{ROOT}[-\text{OUS}]_{\text{ADJ}} + \text{-NESS} \rightarrow \text{ROOT}[-\text{OUS+NESS}]_{\text{NOUN(ABSTRACT)}}$
 $\text{ROOT}[-\text{OUS}]_{\text{ADJ}} + \text{-OTHER} \rightarrow \text{ROOT}[-\text{OTHER}]_{\text{NOUN(ABSTRACT)}}$

Is Substituted By (Scheme 2):

Scheme 2

$\text{ROOT}[-\text{OUS}]_{\text{ADJ}} + \text{-ITY} \rightarrow \text{ROOT}[-\text{OS-ITY}]_{\text{NOUN(ABSTRACT)}}$

An important remark to be made is that alternative word building rules may be used, and whereas the noun affix “-os-ity” is not productive in the standard language, it is productive in the Internet discourse nevertheless.

The absence of prosodic and paralinguistic elements does not hinder Internet users to express their emotions. The most common way is a reiteration of vowels or even consonants. A passionate negative reply may sound “nooo”

or even “nnnnooooooooo”, which is simply achieved by pressing a button for a longer span of time. Emotions of surprise, joy, disappointment and others may be expressed similarly.

Another way of one’s emotional expression is violation of the traditional rules of punctuation. Online users specifically apply fewer punctuation marks than users of formal or even informal written English, often omitting full stops, commas, dashes, semicolons, etc., and similarly to the case of letter reiteration, a group of marks reflects the strength of an emotion, e.g., “yyyyyyssssss!!!!!!” is much stronger than “yess!!”.

In case of an omitted symbol / word / idea, the amount of dots, asterisks, x’s or spaces usually corresponds to the length of the excluded information, a typical example being “f**king” or “bull***t”. Similarly, in “the X-quality boss”, the wider the gap between the definite article and the noun, the more negative the expression and the richer the emotions are expected to be reproduced.

Ellipsis is much more common in the Internet language than in standard English. A 1000-symbol length span of a text may contain up to thirty episodes of ellipsis. This pervasive use is due to the fact that ellipsis has alternative functions (mostly expressed by groups of dots), for example, it may mark the end of any sentence (e.g., it ain’t fun...i’ve faced it myself...). These dots are not necessarily used in standard triple-dot groups; their number is unconventional and one decides upon it spontaneously. On the whole, ellipsis is expected to enliven the language.

There are many alternative textual marks (icons), whose functions are not restricted to punctuation. They include emotional expressions (smileys), such as “:-e” (disappointment), or “:-(` (frowning), and separate words or phrases, e.g., “{X}” (hugging X), “%-X” (hangover), or “:*” (kisses). Marks denoting emotional expressions are usually gradable, and a quadruple hug is of higher intensity than the one in single brackets. Kisses might also be reinforced if asterisks are multiplied.

Undoubtedly, this part of the Internet English is the least understandable to non-users. It is of importance to mention that although entire phrases and conversations may be constructed using this kind of symbols only, they are neither abused nor overindulged, and seldom exceed some conventional percentage limit. This implies that either the use of icons is regarded as a fun game or a text abundant in icons is too unaesthetic and unpleasant to read. Besides, there are many pictures (caricatures) of various objects painted in punctuation or textual marks, but they are seen as a joke, and thus are beyond the scope of the present paper.

As it is evident from what has been stated above, the language of the Internet mostly keeps to the standards established in the spoken language. No more than four or five tenses are usually used in oral communication, which corresponds to the grammar patterns of the Internet English. In 25 sample conversations and chat discussions, only seven tenses were found: Present Simple, Present Continuous, Past Simple, Future Simple, “Going to”, Present Perfect and Future in the Past. According to the analysis of Naomi S. Baron (Baron,

2000:251), present-tense forms are typical of electronic discourse, which in some cases substitute complex verb forms in past and future tenses the same way as this is done in oral conversation, but on the whole the syntax features elements of both spoken and written variants of the English language.

In case of complex tenses, short forms are predominant: “gonna tell” instead of “I am going to tell”, or “seen that” standing for “I have seen that”. As well as in spoken language, context allowing, auxiliary verbs are omitted if they precede a participle form. In case the infinitive form is used to compose the tense where the absence of an auxiliary might cause an ambiguity, the shortened form of the auxiliary is supplied with the subject omitted whenever possible. The structure “I would like to go” (here “go” stands for any verb) is expressed in three variants (34 times mentioned in total): “d like to go” (17 times), “d like to go” (2 times), and “like to go” (15 times). Despite some irrelevance to the standard English, the absolute majority of non-standard tense form use can be understood by a person unfamiliar with the Internet culture.

The use of articles mostly accords with the above-mentioned principles of the Internet culture, namely, most articles are omitted. In the sample conversations, seven articles were used on average in a 1,000-symbol length span of a text, which is substantially less than the mean amount of the written or even spoken variants of English.

The situation with other parts of speech shows no considerable difference comparing to other variants of the language except for adverbs, which are often substituted by adjectives in the manner of conversational American English, “don’t speak so rude” being used instead of “don’t speak so rudely”.

The electronic discourse also develops specific functions of use. Verbs are reduplicated in standard English if used as an exclamation: “knock knock!”, computer English doubles usually imply an ironic or even sarcastic comment, and the structure terminates a conversation, for example, if an interlocutor suggests that one should return to what has been discussed beforehand, and the partner is not willing to develop the previous topic, the most likely reply is “flame, flame” (“a flame” in the Internet English stands for “a verbal attack in the form of electronic text. One is flamed in response to a pointless message or to a mass-mailing posting” (New Hacker’s Dictionary, 1996). The reply states that the second interlocutor finds no sense in developing the previous topic and suggests passing to a new one.

The Internet is an area of harsh competition as any user is free to create websites or to express oneself in a group conversation. As a consequence, there is an ever rising need to attract other users’ attention; therefore linguistic means are used in this case. Linguistic means applied by the printed mass media are also common on the Internet, especially the play on words. As a result, elements of foregrounding are abundant in the electronic discourse. One of the most common examples is the% sign (%), which may substitute the double “o” (c%l, b%ty). Another example is the use of the asterisk (*) instead of inverted commas (a *great* suggestion is a stupid suggestion, a *very* important point is a point of no or very little importance).

These cases are of special interest because the economy of symbols is one of the cardinal principles of the Internet culture, but the substitution of the inverted commas by two asterisks gives no improvement. The insertion of the per cent symbol may even require a few more clicks if the sign is not available on the keyboard. One may thus conclude that the principle of foregrounding may surpass the law of economy. This may be supplemented by such regularization principles as freak → phreak, frown → phrown, or skin → schin, skim → schim (after *phrase, scheme*). It is of interest to mention that in the above-mentioned cases, the principles of English transcription of words originating from Ancient Greek are reiterated (or the principles of academic language are parodied?).

Re-interpretation of Latinate and other classical terms is also common, Thus “literati” are transformed to “digiterati” (competent in electronic technologies), and “citizen” has its online version “netizen” (a citizen of the “Country of Internet”). On the whole, both irony and auto irony are widely accepted in the electronic discourse, and any object may be its victim.

Cases of foregrounding are extremely typical of devised user names (so-called “nicks”), many of which contain various linguistic tricks, for example, “qt_gurl” (cute girl), “angel_ice” (angel eyes) or “paradice” (paradise in ice / parade+ice / parade+dice / paradise+dice / para+dice, etc.).

In order to avoid monotony, many collocations are distorted and thus converted to mocking phrases. This mostly concerns official names of organizations and enterprises, especially the ones, whose businesses are run in the field of Internet services, extending the area of mockery to their products and basic terminology. Thus the computer program “Internet Explorer” is converted to “Internet Exploiter”, and “Microsoft” is referred to as “Microsloth”.

As one’s dependence to a certain social stratum imposes heavily on one’s speech and the Internet being an element of the culture of the privileged, the topics of conversations, the spectrum of the ideas discussed, and the style of language are typical of the society of users and not of the society in general, although as it may be deduced from what has been stated above, there are societies with no or slight distinction between a user and a member. At least in Lithuania, the results of replies to the same posed questions received on the Internet and on the street sometimes produce an incongruence of more than ten per cent, which further underlines the social stratification of users and non-users of the Internet.

It is evident that the virtual world is heavily affected by the social factor. Those who are able to pass the net of natural selection and thus belong to the Internet society, are no further divided into any social classes. In the virtual world, one’s age, sex, marital and social statuses, religion, looks and other personal details are of no importance. One really estimates the personal skills at computer operation and how interesting and relevant one’s ideas are to the body of the conversation (Rumšienė, 2004:5).

The English language has developed multiple regional variants, presenting some hindrance for the communication of representatives of different cultures. Although there is no centralizing (either an imposed law or a body of theoreticians, whose decisions are compulsory) factor on the Internet, which might relate distinct language traditions so that a unified system of symbols, syntax and lexical fundamentals should be gradually worked out, a certain kind of tradition suggests to an experienced user the elements of text violating the established standard and contributing to the wealth and variety of the language.

The language of Internet websites and chat clubs is not supervised, or controlled otherwise. Consequently, its development is subjected only to standard processes of language development. In comparison to "traditional" languages, where there is a tendency that relatively more complicated phenomena are gradually substituted by simpler and less complex structures, the Internet language shows different trends of evolution. The language develops a code, fully understandable only to the representatives of a certain subculture, which is caused by the above-mentioned xenophobia and other related reasons. Evidently, such a language possesses a relatively smaller complex of fundamental laws, but on the other hand, they are substituted by the multiplicity of variations and individual cases within the general regulations.

Although the electronic discourse usually proceeds in the "universal and worldwide accepted computer English", some regional peculiarities exist nevertheless. For example, there are greetings, which are typical of particular countries: *g'day all* (Australian), *cheers all* (British), or *hiya kara* (United States) (Hock & Joseph, 1996:34). On the whole these differences are of minor importance regarding the Internet culture as a whole, and present little interest to herein discussed issues. Besides, differences of the cultural background of users may be processed by typically Australian, American, etc. lexis used in the process of communication. In some cases, where differences are present between British and American English, American regularized forms "learned", "fitted" (in all meanings), "leaped" substitute the British English variants "learnt", "fit" (2nd and 3rd form in some meanings), or "leapt". On the whole it is unquestionable that the Internet English is accepted and understood worldwide, and hardly any dialects within it can be observed presently.

Considering that communication activities on the Internet take place within a melting pot of nations, the present conditions do not allow for evolution of dialects in the future as the basic precondition of their development is territorial or any other communicational segregation. Consequently, the cosmopolitan nature of the Internet is contrary to any regional or social diversification.

Having taken into consideration the herein discussed issue, a question arises what the status of the Internet English on the map of the English language is. It is evident that the majority of words of the Internet English and standard English coincide. Many grammatical rules differ, but they still have the same fundamentals. This proves that the Internet English is not (at least presently) an independent language. A dialect is a common regular regional or social

variation of a language (Shuy, 1994:534). Differences between dialects are observed at all levels of a language; pronunciation, grammar and meaning of separate words differ (Robins, 1996:51). One of the tests used by linguists to deal with the problem is the "mutual intelligibility" (Steinbergs, 1997:349). One checks whether representatives of two different dialects / languages understand each other easily, and when two dialects tend to be mutually unintelligible, they are considered to be two languages (Fromkin & Rodman, 1988:253). There is no doubt that speakers of English are usually able to understand the general message of an Internet interaction, and to extract some specific information as well. This seems to prove that the Internet English has the same status as a regional variety of the English language.

The relation of the standard language and the Internet language is not a one-way road. It was computer users who developed the shortening "Y2K" for the year 2,000 ("Y" stands for "year" after the principle of acronymy, and "K" signifies a thousand, which is commonly used in the computer-related discourse, e.g. 1Kb / 1KByte = 1 Kilobyte), or "thanks E6" (Thanks to power six) in spoken English sometimes replaces the habitual "a million thanks".

There are symbols which have crossed the boundaries of such groups, but they show a tendency towards the expression of the wide amplitude of the given phenomenon instead of the definite object / concept, which was the initial meaning value. For example, the noun "lamer", probably originating from the adjective "lame" or from the idiomatic expression "a lame duck" with the meaning value "someone who is not successful and who has to be helped a lot" (Collins Cobuild English Dictionary, 1997:929), and meaning an "online loser" (New Hacker's Dictionary, 1996) passed on to spoken (slang) English, and its application is not restricted to those who fail at using electronic technologies. The same process is noticed in the case of derivatives of "click" as "one-click" broadened its primary meaning "something available at a single marking with the cursor" to the meaning "instantly available" without any further reference to computers in spoken (slang) English.

The second part of the film "Fast and Furious" was called "2Fast2Furious" following the standard usage of the digit "2" instead of either the preposition or the infinitive particle "to", or substituting "too". Besides, the convention to reflect the exact pronunciation of plural, verb third person singular Present Simple as well as some roots (buses → busiz; dogs → dogz; loser → looser) is adopted in informal written English as well, for example, in the name of the film "the Antz".

The concept of individual freedom implies that differences between speakers are more sizeable than in the case of spoken and formal variants of the language, but the existence of almost complete mutual understanding verifies that the users of the Internet language speak the same variant of English, and besides, that a special universally acknowledged unwritten codex is to be followed. Thus every experienced user subconsciously conceives the basic laws and concepts of the Internet language, but the zone covered by fundamental laws may still be too narrow to let one expect that the perspectives of

the development of the Internet language are encoded in its present situation.

From what has been stated above, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The universal application of computer technologies has led to the development of the electronic discourse. New models of language require adequate analytical approaches, such as “Technology-Conditioned Approach to Language Change and Use” (TeLCU) by Bodomo and Lee (2001). Self-inductive processes within languages cause the development of new types of literacy.
2. Prosodic and paralinguistic elements are not present in the Internet discourse, and the communication is conditioned by material factors such as a limited set of symbols or the speed of typing.
3. The information-and-skill culture is denoted by the key value of an individual's freedom to create.
4. Members of the Internet society are formally equal despite the existence of the hacker cult. There exists an unwritten codex setting general rules.
5. Various symbol play, omission, abbreviations, neologisms and other means of word building and transformation help create a unique vocabulary with a very high innovation rate caused by the philosophy of creativity. The traditional language code is simplified, but special means are introduced to increase the intensity and expressiveness of the language.
6. The key features of an electronic discourse text are: a) foregrounding of particular elements. b) symbol and word economy. c) understandability of the message.
7. The Internet English is close to spoken language, and the two kinds of language are mutually influenced. The Internet English should be treated as a dialect because it does not constitute a fully independent language unit.

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Goda Rumšienė

Anglų kalba interne: alternatyvi leksika, sintaksė ir morfologija

Santrauka

Interneto vystymasis yra lygiagretus internetinės kultūros ekspansijai, kurioje anglų kalba yra dominuojanti. Internetinį bendravimą visų pirmą salygoja tokie fiziniai apribojimai kaip spausdinimo greitis, kuris yra žemesnis nei šnekėjimo, ribotas vartojamų simbolių skaičius ir prozodinių bei paralingvistinių išraiškos galimybių nebuvimas kalboje iš vienos pusės bei internetinės kultūros iš kitos. Tai formuoja kalbą su specifiniu simbolių kodeksu, alternatyvia leksika bei sintaksės, gramatikos bei morfologijos taisykliemis. Nepaisant santykinių individu laisvės bei geografinės ar kultūrinės kalbos vartotojų įvairovės, kalboje egzistuoja bendrųjų taisyklių kodeksas, kurio pasąmoningai laikosi įgudę vartotojai. Internetinė kalba siekia supaprastinti tradicinės kalbos sistemas, tačiau savo ruožtu įveda koda, kurio laikymus vartotojas irodė savo priklausomybę internetinei bendruomenei. Natūralios atrankos principas siekiant pritraukti potencialių bendravimo partnerių dėmesį lemia dalinį atskiro individu kalbos stiliums personalizavimą bei žodžių ir simbolių žaismo kaip optimalios saviraiškos priemonių atsiradimą. Aukščiau paminėti bruožai leidžia kompiuterinę kalbą laikyti savarankišku kalbiniu reiškiniu anglų kalbos sferoje, nesudarančiu visiškai nepriklasomo kalbinio vieneto.

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