

Netlinguistics in the service of Netlish

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Abstract:

Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD/ Netlish) is the language resulting from the use of Computer Mediated Communication which is generally text-based language. This language came as the result of people's attempt to adapt their language to cope with the linguistic constraints and opportunities provided by the new technology. The general assumption is that CMC and the internet have a bad influence on language. CMD is becoming less formal, less polite and highly abbreviated. Therefore people are anxious about the quality of the people's written production because of the breach of the standards and norms of the traditional written language. Netlinguistics studies the effects of the Internet and other new media such as Short Message Service (SMS) and text messaging on the language in terms of the new language forms and styles. Applied Netlinguistics has different applications; one of them is the pedagogical application which is interested in integrating the Internet into EAP to help developing new literacies and language learning skills. In fact, we have to accept the new change brought to language because space and time constraints brought about technology are responsible for this change. This change is not necessarily negative. Here came the importance of pedagogy in instructing students to use CMC properly without feeling the fear from the new technology. Students must be instructed both the well constructed texts used in academic settings as well as the specific texts used for personal interactions.

Keywords : -Netlinguistics - CMC -CMD -Applied Netlinguistics

Introduction

The development of technology led to the emergence of new types of written and spoken genres. They have been the subject of study by different discourse analysts in order to shed light on the effects of technology on the type of the language used.

This language is characterized mainly by:

- A linguistic Economy: such as using chatting abbreviations, acronyms, structural reductions, ellipsis, clippings and orthographic reduction.

- A linguistic Innovation: such as the creative use of capitalization, spelling and punctuation to convey effects of gesture and tone.
- Oral Features and Informality: such as informal greetings and leave-takings.

1 Netlinguistics

Netlinguistics or ‘Internet Linguistics’ not to be confused with “computational linguistics” is a sub-domain of linguistics advocated by David Crystal. It studies the effects of the Internet and other new media such as Short Message Service (SMS) and text messaging on the language in terms of the new language forms and styles.

The study of Internet linguistics takes four main perspectives: sociolinguistics, education stylistics and an applied perspective. Crystal (2005) defines it as follows:

[...] I would define this as the synchronic analysis of language in all areas of Internet activity, including email, the various kind s of chat room and games interaction, instant messaging, and Web pages, and including associated areas of computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as SMS messaging (texting) [...]

Applied Netlinguistics has many applications such as finding approaches to Computer-Aided Translation; Internet as a reference corpus for specialized phraseology in addition to the pedagogical application for example integrating the Internet into EAP to help developing new literacies and language learning skills.

2 Netiquette

Netiquette is a colloquial portmanteau of *network etiquette* or *internet etiquette*. It is a set of rules for behaving properly online. Those rules are a set of social and

moral conventions that govern interaction over networks. These are some rules of netiquette that should be respected by e-mailers

- E-mail messages should be brief.
- They should be carefully edited and reviewed before sending.
- E-mails should be forwarded only after having the sender's permission.
- Flame wars and spams should be avoided.
- Writing in all capitals should be avoided.

3 Computer Mediated Communication

3.1 Definition of CMC

CMC or Computer-Mediated Communication is defined as any communicative transaction that occurs through the use of two or more electronic devices. The term traditionally referred to the communications that occur via computer-mediated formats such as e-mail, instant messaging and chat rooms. Now this term is used to refer to other forms of text-based interactions such as text messaging.

December (1996) defines CMC as the asynchronous and synchronous creation and transmission of messages using digital techniques.

With the rapid progress of technologies CMC users are shifting from the text-based use of the internet toward the new, three- dimensional, multimedia-based world wide web. (Soukup 2000). Multimedia CMC involves communication and information with audio and video in chat room, WebPages, email and mobile phones. Most CMC used today, however, is text based.

3.2 Forms of CMC

Text-based CMC takes a variety of forms such as e-mails, discussion groups, real time chat, and virtual reality role playing games. CMC is divided into synchronous and asynchronous modes.

In synchronous communication, all participants are online simultaneously. In this type of communication, messages are exchanged during the same time interval (e.g. web chat, IM (instant messaging) and IRC. Synchronous CMC allows written communication to be interactive written discourse (Ferrara, Brunner et al. 1991). Most synchronous CMC is text-only. However, there exists clients for audio-and video chat.

The issue of synchronicity is relative since no synchronous CMC is fully synchronous in the way spoken face-to- face interaction is: there is always the lag and delay of typing and sending the message (cf. Kiesler, Siegel et al. 1984; Ferrara, Brunner et al. 1991). Herring (2001) argues that the level of synchronicity affects the type of message and how it is formulated.

On the contrary, the asynchronous communication occurs with time constraints. In this type of communication, messages are exchanged during different time intervals e.g. e-mail and mobile text messaging (SMS). It is worth mentioning that e-mail is delayed, controlled and long in comparison with other forms.

CMC varies according to the technology on which it is based, and according to its contexts of use. Thus synchronous CMC differs systematically from asynchronous CMC in message length, complexity, formality, and interactivity- due, in part, to temporal constraints on message production and processing (Ko, 1996; Herring, 2002)

Crystal (2001) identifies five broad text-based Internet using situations:

- Electronic mail (e-mail).
- Asynchronous discussion groups (bulletin boards).
- Synchronous real time chat groups.
- Virtual worlds.
- World Wide Web (WWW).

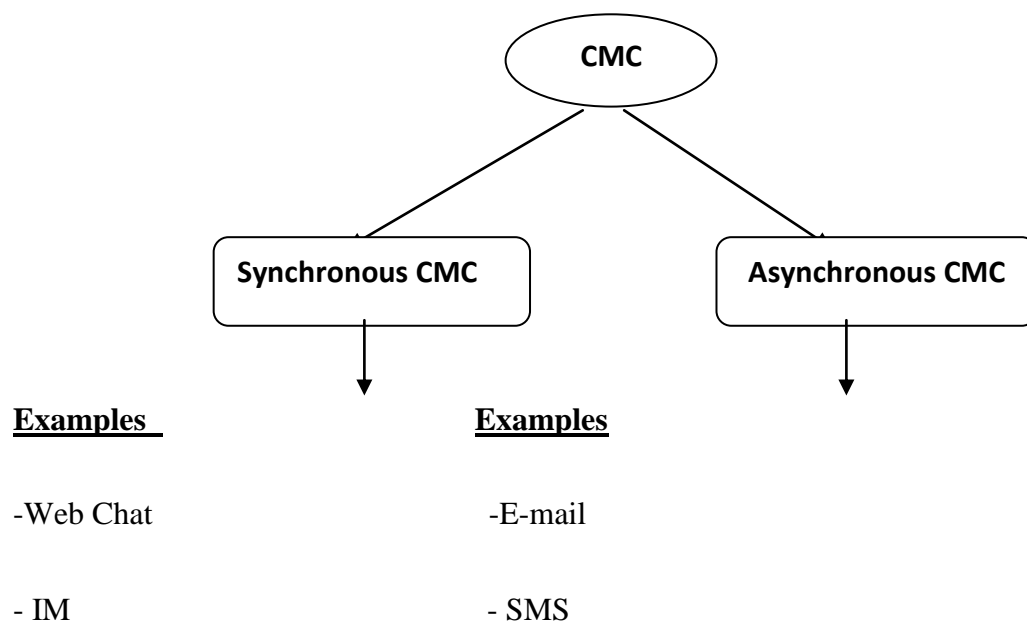


Figure 01: Forms of CMC.

3.3 CMC: A New Medium of Communication (A Third Medium)

The traditional way to look at the language has been completely changed with the emergence of the internet. The clear cut division between speech and writing do not take place in the electronic discourse. The internet led language to evolve a new

medium of communication which is different from traditional conversational speech and from writing.

The properties which make CMC different from speech include the lack of simultaneous feedback found in conversations, the absence of non-segmental phonology (or tone of voice, replaced by emoticons) and the ability to carry on multiple interactions simultaneously.

The properties which make CMC different from writing include its dynamic dimension (through effects such as animation and page refreshing) and its ability to frame messages (e.g. Cutting and pasting in e-mail) and its hyper- textuality (footnotes in traditional writing). CMC is “(...) something fundamentally different from both writing and speech, as traditionally understood” (Crystal 2001: 238)

Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore (1991), one of the first research teams to study computer-mediated textual communication, proposed to call it “Interactive Written Discourse”.

3.4 Effects of CMC on Language

The general assumption is that CMC and the Internet have a bad influence on language. People are anxious about the quality of the people’s written production since standards and norms of traditional written language will be lost and creativity and expressiveness will be diminished as globalization imposes uniformity (Baron 1984; Crystal 2001)

However, David Crystal (2006) signals that people have to accept the new change brought to language and to consider it as a new phenomenon and that space and time constraints brought about technology are

responsible for this change. This change is not necessarily negative as a lot of advantages are brought to people. He also puts the idea of the necessity of instructing pupils the characteristics of this type of writing in order to make them aware of that specificity and in order to use the medium properly.

According to him a pupil has to distinguish between writing a well constructed written expression for his teacher and writing an informal e-mail greeting his or her friend. This will make him use the new medium properly without feeling the fear from the new technology.

4 Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD)

CMD is the language resulting from the use of CMC which is generally text – based language. Other terms are used to indicate the same notion such as ‘Netspeak’, ‘Electronic discourse’ ‘Online discourse’, “Internet Discourse” ‘Weblish’ and ‘Netlish’. This language came as the result of people’s attempt to adapt their language to cope with the linguistic constraints and opportunities provided by the new technology.

Herring (2001) defines CMD as “Computer-mediated discourse is the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers.”

Herring (2001) argues that the study of CMD is to be regarded as a specialization within the broader interdisciplinary study of CMC. CMD is to be distinguished from the broader field of CMC by its focus on language and language use in computer-networked environments and by its use of methods of discourse analysis to address that focus. Crystal (2001) shares the same opinion and considers that CMC focuses on the medium itself whereas CMD which he prefers to call ‘electronic discourse’

focuses on the language. Brown and Yule (1983) observe that electronic discourse has brought about new conventions in use of graphic features.

Investigating specialized discourse is of a great benefit since it gives insights into how that variety of language or that genre will be taught to ESP students. Investigating electronic discourse has been the preoccupation of a new branch of linguistics “Netlinguistics”. Results can be taken by ESP practitioners to design syllabuses that meet ESP students’ needs.

4.1 CMD as a Specialized Discourse

Discourse has a variety of senses. One of them is: ‘a type of language used in specific kinds of writing or speech’. It is also defined as any unit of connected speech or writing longer than a sentence.

Discourse in context may consist of only one or two words as in stop or no smoking. Alternatively, a piece of discourse can be hundreds of words in length, as some novels are. A typical piece of discourse is somewhere between those two extremes.

Lawrence Erlbaum (2002 p:22)

Specialized discourse, however, is a term which reflects the functional view of language. It is a variety of language which is basically situational-contextual, i.e. it is related to registers of language. SD differs from general language at all levels of analysis quantitatively (frequency of occurrences) and qualitatively (specific use).

SD is designed for discourse community. Discourse communities can stretch across academic, professional or occupational areas of language. The features of specialized discourse can be analyzed according to the dimensions of style, mode and

field, which form different registers. At these levels lexical and grammatical differences are detected. SD, then has distinctive lexical, morpho-syntactic and textual features which set it apart from general language.

It is possible to identify within each specialized language a set of genres (spoken or written) characterized by consistent features. Genres have conventionalized criteria and are culturally defined. Genres are analyzed in terms of moves. Knowledge of different genres can be exploited in EFL teaching at large and in ESP courses in particular.

4.2 Linguistic Features of CMD

4.2.1 Linguistic Shortenings

Internauts use different devices to make their pieces of writing shorter. These devices are aimed also at gaining time and effort by saving the typing time through saving keystrokes. The resort to this device is sometimes obligatory with the new technological inventions such as WAP-phones (Wireless Application Protocol) which have tiny screens and gave birth to new genre of abbreviated forms for reasons of space.

4.2.1.1 Abbreviations

The electronic discourse is highly abbreviated. Internet users resort to this device to ensure the linguistic economy. The abbreviations take different forms such as initialisms and acronyms. Acronyms are not just limited to words or short phrases but they are extended to sentence length. They can be classified accordingly to:

- Individual words reduced to two letter acronyms or to TLAs (three letter acronyms)

e.g. PLS ('please')

THX or TX ('thanks')

WE ('whatever')

- Acronyms like rebuses: the sound value of the letter or numeral acts as a syllable of a word. e.g. R ('are')

2 ('to')

- Acronyms as combination of rebus and letter initial.

e.g. B4N ('Bye for now')

CYL ('See you later')

L8R ('Later')

- Sentence-length acronyms.

e.g. AYSOS ('Are you stupid or something?')

CIO ('Check it out')

WDYS ('What did you say?')

IWBNI ('It would be nice if')

The table on the following page presents examples of the most frequently used abbreviations found in Netspeak.

AFAIK	As far as I know	IMNSHO	In my not so humble opinion
AFK	Away from keyboard	IMO	In my opinion
ASAP	As soon as possible	IOU	I owe you
A/S/L	Age/sex/location	IOW	In other words
ATW	At the weekend	IRL	In real life
AWHIFY	Are we having fun yet?	JAM	Just a minute
BBFN	Bye bye for now	J4F	Just for fun
BBL	Be back later	JK	Just kidding
BCNU	Be seeing you	KC	Keep cool
B4	Before	KHUF	Know how you feel
BG	Big grin	L8R	Later
BRB	Be right back	LOL	Laughing out loud
BTW	By the way	M8	Mate
CFC	Call for comments	MTFBWU	May the force be with you
CFV	Call for votes	NA	No access
CM	Call me	NC	No comment
CU	See you	NP	No problem
CUL	See you later	NWO	No way out
CUL8R	See you later	OBTW	Oh by the way
CYA	See you	O4U	Only for you
DK	Don't know	OIC	Oh I see
DUR?	Do you remember?	OTOH	On the other hand

EOD	End of discussion	PMJI	Pardon my jumping in
F ?	Friends?	PTMM	Please tell me more
FOTCL	Falling off the chair laughing	RIP	Rest in peace
F2F	Face-to-face	ROTF	Rolling on the floor
FWIW	For what it's worth	ROTFL	Rolling on the floor laughing
FYA	For your amusement	RTM	Read the manual
FYI	For your information	RUOK	Are you OK?
G	Grin	SC	Stay cool
GAL	Get a life	SMTOE	Sets my teeth on edge
GD&R	Grinning ducking and running	SO	Significant other
GMTA	Great minds think alike	SOHF	Sense of humour failure
GR8	Great	SOL	Sooner or later
GSOH	Good sense of humour	T+	Think positive
HHOK	Ha ha only kidding	TA4N	That's all for now
HTH	Hope this helps	TAFN	That's all for now
IANAL	I'm not a lawyer, but...	THX	Thanks
IC	I see; (in MUDs) in character	TIA	Thanks in advance
ICWUM	I see what you mean	TMOT	Trust me on this
IDK	I don't know	TNX	Thanks
IIRC	If I remember correctly	TTFN	Ta- ta for now
IMHO	In my humble opinion	TTTT	To tell the truth
IMI	I mean it	WU	What's up?

T2UL	Talk to you later	WUWH	Wish you were here
TTYL	Talk to you later	X!	Typical woman
TTYTT	To tell you the truth	Y!	Typical man
TUVM	Thank you very much	YIU	Yes I understand
TX	Thanks	2BCTND	To be continued
TYVM	Thank you very much	2D4	To die for
WADR	With all due respect	2G4u	Too good for you
WB	Welcome back	2L8	Too late
W4U	Waiting for you	4E	Forever
WRT	With respect to	4YEO	For your eyes only
WTG	Way to go		

Table 01: List of Examples of Abbreviations Used in Netspeak (Crystal, 2006: 91).

Those abbreviations can be classified into:

- Conventional Abbreviations.
- Unconventional Abbreviations.
- Ad-hoc Abbreviations.

4.2.1.2 Omission

It is aimed at text reduction. It comprises different devices. The following are likely the most used.

- omission of vowels (<gd> for <good>).

- omission of articles e.g. We have (a) meeting tomorrow.
- omission of pronouns e.g. [I] intend to visit you after the meeting.
- omission of prepositions e.g. Thanks [for] replying.
- omission of auxiliary verbs e.g. They [are] waiting for the reply.
- consonant reduction for medial double consonants (<imedtly> for <immediately>)
- letter and number homophones (<r> for <are>, <2> for <two>)
- Clippings in which words are shortened by losing word ending (<congrats> for <congratulations>).
- respellings by analogy with other words with more straightforward sound-spelling correspondences (<thru> for <through>, <fone> for <phone>).

4.2.2 Typographical Features

4.2.2.1 Capitalization

The internet is not case-sensitive. There is a random use of capitals. However there is a tendency to use lower case in different situations. Internet users can write full sentences without using capitals. This situation has given birth to the idea that the use of capitalization is considered to be a strongly marked form of communication. Messages which are wholly written in capitals are considered as ‘shouting’. Writing messages in full capital letters conveys the idea of screaming. Thus there are three possibilities.

- Writing in full capital letters: Which is considered rude and conveys the idea of screaming.

e.g.

WE WOULD LIKE TO INFORM YOU THAT OUR COMPANY IS READY TO
SIGN THE CONTRACT AND AFTER HAVING DONE A CAREFUL RESEARCH
MARKET WE ARE PLEASED TO INFORM YOU THAT WE INTEND TO
ENLARGE OUR COOPEARATION AND BUSINESS

- Some use no capital at all. They don't use the shift key in their typing in order to save that keystroke.

e.g.

i would like to inform you that mr ali will not be able to attend the meeting that will
take place in dubai next tuesday since his english is not so good, instead we will send
miss sara for that meeting

- Some people use the upper case for emphasis which can be also maintained by using asterisks or spacing.

e.g.

The contract is IMPORTANT for both of us.

The contract is * IMPORTANT* for both of us.

The contract is *important* for both of us.

The contract is i m p o r t a n t for both of us.

4.2.2.2 Punctuation

Conventional rules of punctuations used in traditional writing are not so important in the electronic discourse. It is much more a matter of personal choice among internet users. Most use punctuation just for avoiding possible ambiguity that a message can carry. However, Crystal. (2006) describes the distinctive features of e-mail discourse and Netspeak in general which can be summarized in the following points:

- The increased use of symbols which is not part of the traditional punctuation system such as:

(called a hash, sharp, pound, crunch, and cross-hatch).

~ (the tilde) Called also a squiggley used to mean “about” or as part of a web address.

! (exclamation mark) called: smash, boing, shriek...

*(asterisk) called star, dingle, twinkle...

- Unusual combinations of punctuation marks can occur such as
 - Ellipsis dots (...) in any number to express pause.
 - Repeated hyphens (---).
 - Repeated use of commas (;;;;;;).
- Exaggerated or random use of punctuation to express emphasis and attitude such as !!!!!!!!!!!!!!! or £\$£\$%!
- Odd combinations of punctuation marks which can occur at the end of the sentences. e.g. We have sent the document earlier!?!?
- Symbols borrowed from programming languages which appear mainly in hacker-influenced interactions such as:

- an initial exclamation mark to express negation. e.g. ‘! Interesting’ to mean ‘not interesting’

-an arrow to express location (dc ~~————~~holyhead = dc lives in holyhead)

- New combinations of punctuation marks can be given fresh values as the case of smileys.

- Underbars are usually used to express underlining , as in the name of a text

I’ve been reading _the contract _

I’ve been reading #the contract#

I’ve been reading =the contract=

I’ve been reading \the contract/

- The use of the ‘caret’ ^ as an emphasis signal or as a part of a more sophisticated convention such as the ^H sequence used in one kind of programming notation to mark an erasure of the preceding symbol.

e.g.

Hear what my mad ^H^H^Hnice computer has done now (to mean: Hear what my nice computer has done now).

- The use of the asterisks for emphasis and other functions such as making imaginary actions or facial expressions.eg. *grin*, *groan* or instead the use of angle bracket which is more conventional. e.g. <grin>, <groan>.
- The use of angle brackets used in HTML in pairs, to indicate the beginning and the end of a command (the latter preceded by a forward slash), can be seen in such pseudo-instructions as:

<moan> I’ve got an interview tomorrow </moan>

<flame> you've got no sense at all </flame>

- The misuse of the diacritics- informally called 'accents' which are the little dots and squiggles sometimes added to printed letters to indicate something about their pronunciation and mainly their foreign origin, like café, façade, Zoë. The most common diacritics among e-mailers are é, ü, ù, â. They may cause a problem since their use is minimalist in English. As a result a great number of e-mailers decide either not to use them at all (e.g. to write façade as facade) or to present the diacritics with other keystrokes (e.g. 'tschüss' is written as 'tschu''s')
- The use of superscripts and subscripts: superscripts are conventionally represented by e-mailers on the screen by using the character ^. E.g. x^2 can be expressed as x^2 in an e-mail. For subscripts there is no comparable convention so the formula H₂O can be represented as H2O.

4.2.2.3 Spelling and Orthography

Old conventional rules of spelling are not always respected by internet users. Moreover spelling mistakes are so common in e-mails and they are not considered by most of them as a lack of knowledge but rather as a matter of typing inaccuracy resulting from the typing speed. Crystal (2006) signals that the electronic discourse has the following spelling distinctive features.

- The emergence of totally new spelling conventions. e.g. the replacement of plural 's' by 'z' to refer to the pirated versions of software. e.g. warez, tunez, gamez, serialz.
- The use of non-standard spellings which reflect pronunciation such as: yep, yup, yay, nope, or such forms as kay and sokay ('It's OK').

- Reduplication for stretched sound for emphasis e.g. ‘soooooo’, ‘yyyyyyyy’ ‘nooooo’.
- Emotional expressions of horror, shock and the like can be expressed by varying numbers of vowels and consonants .e.g. ‘aaaiiiee’, ‘yayyyyyyy’.
- Some deviant spellings which become virtually standard because of their excessive use such as phreak, phreaker, phreaking for freak (etc).
- The dollar sign \$ sometimes replaces s, if some sort of dig is being made about costs as in micro\$oft.
- £ sign can replace L, as in AO£.
- Several deviant spellings, that come from teenage and children users, which indicate the phoneme/grapheme correspondences.

e.g.

- kool for (cool).
- fone for (phone).
- nite for (night).
- becoz for (because).
- thru for (through).
- Gnys at wrk for (genius at work).
- The replacement of a lower-case o by a zero as in d00dz (dudes) and l0sers (losers) or a percentage sign as in c%l (cool).
- Semiotic features such as capitals to indicate paralinguistic detail as volume or emphasis. e.g. <AUFAUFAUF> for dog barking loudly.

4.2.2.3 Emoticons

Emoticons – a word which means emotional icons, known also as smileys, - are combinations of keyboard characters typed in a sequence in a single line, and placed

after the final punctuation mark of a sentence. They are read sideways, in most times, and can be classified mainly into two types expressing either positive or negative attitudes.

The table on the following page represents the most widely used emoticons.

Smileys'types	Structure	Meaning conveyed
Basic smileys	:~)	Pleasure, humour, etc.
	:-(Sadness, dissatisfaction, etc.
	;-)	Winking (in any of its meanings)
	;-(:~-(Crying
	%-(%-)	Confused
	:-o 8-o	Shocked, amazed
	:-] :-[sarcastic

Joke smileys	[:-)	User is wearing a walkman
	8-)	User is wearing sunglasses
	B:-)	User is wearing sunglasses on head
	:-{)	User has a moustache
	:*)	User is drunk
	:-[User is a vampire
	:-E	User is a bucktoothed vampire
	:-F	User is a bucktoothed vampire with one tooth missing
	:~	User has a cold
	:-@	User is screaming
	-:-)	User is a punk
	-:-(Real punks don't smile
	+:-)	User holds a Christian religious office
	0 :-)	User is an angel at heart
Smiley stories	:-) 8-) 8-{})	Smiley to disguise himself gets glasses and a fake moustache
	C:-) >[] C8-)	A smart smiley left watching too much TV

Table 02: List of Examples of Emoticons Used in Netspeak (Crystal, 2006:40).

David Sanderson clarifies the use of smileys in his dictionary.

You might include a smiley as a reminder of the ongoing context of the conversation, to indicate that your words don't stand on their own. A smiley can point out to the other participants of the conversation that they need to understand you and your personality in order to understand what you've said.

Sanderson

(1993:25).

Besides smileys, there are other mechanisms devised to compensate the absence of kinetic and proxemic features in the e-mail discourse. Crystal (2006) mentions the following

- The use of verbal glosses, often within angle brackets as in the prosodic examples

below:

< Eagle smiles sympathetically at Gunner>

< Spoon nods in greeting>

<smirks> and <laugh>

- Abbreviated words especially <g>='grin', to convey teasing or to mark a funny attitude. Bigger smiles are symbolized by <gg>, <ggg>, etc. Also a range of acronyms based on the letter(g) have been devised such as <vbg> which means 'very big grin' and <gd&r> which means grinning ducking and running.

Conclusion

we have to accept the new change brought to language because space and time constraints brought about technology are responsible for this change. This change is not necessarily negative. Here came the importance of pedagogy in instructing students to use CMC properly without feeling the fear from the new technology. Students must be instructed both the well constructed texts used in academic settings as well as the specific texts used for personal interactions.

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