The Main Features of Electronically Mediated Communication

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It is a matter of fact that Netspeak has currently developed into a separate medium. Netspeak is akin to both speech and writing, still, it is likely to be considered a new variety of language. At present the Internet is mainly concerned with written texts and in this regard a language variety is defined in terms of its graphic, orthographic, grammatical, lexical and discourse features. Hence, to ground the notion that Netspeak is prone to be represented as a language variety there arises a need to study its main features. Frankly speaking, it will be difficult to speak about common features of languages used in so many types of EMC. Besides, it goes without saying that the Internet is a space of varieties and freedom, i.e. each user is free in his/her choice of language. Language diversity is also conditioned by individual, gender and personality traits differences of Internet users. Interestingly enough, it turns out that the differences of men's and women's communicative styles are reverberated even in electronically mediated communication. Among such diversity certain features which are typical of the language of EMC can also be noticed.

One of the main characteristic features of electronically mediated communication is the abundant use of abbreviated forms. The extensive use of highly abbreviated language in EMC is not accidental and can be grounded by the fact that it accelerates the process of communication. Besides, it goes without saying that the quicker EMC takes place, the more it is akin to natural speech. Abbreviated language implies syntactically reduced forms, the use of acronyms and symbols, the clipping of words, and various other strategies which function to reduce the time and effort necessary to communicate.

The most frequent syntactically-reduced form which is typical of EMC is the omission of the subject, the pronoun and the auxiliaries. Before introducing an example it should be mentioned that syntactically-reduced forms are characteristic of synchronous types of EMC, i.e. they are used for communication in chat rooms, social network, etc. It goes without saying that such constructions are not expected to occur in e-mail messages especially official ones or in the language of World Wide Web. Thus, for example:

> *Ann: Hi, HRU?* Hi, how are you?
> *Mary: Fine. U?* I'm fine, and you?
> *Ann: Me, 2, What r u doing?* Me, too. What are you doing?
> *Mary: Reading.* I'm reading.

Reduced sentences in terms of verb phrases should also be illustrated and discussed. A sentence that is reduced in this way refers to the fact that the verb phrase (i.e. a phrase headed by a verb) is omitted in the sentence. For example: *Dress?* (= Are you going to

wear a dress tonight?) The omission of verb phrases, like the omission of subject/pronoun, is most likely a consequence of the fast-paced character of EMC. Thus, by leaving out the verb phrases, the so-called "save the keystroke" principle is put into use, and consequently, lots of time is saved. The reduced sentences in terms of verb phrases are evenly understandable as those that are not reduced in this way. EMC can also be characterized by sentences reduced with the help of the omission of prepositions or possessive pronouns. This kind of sentence reduction aims at saving keystrokes and thus time for the same reasons as mentioned above.

The next linguistic feature of EMC is atypical, to be more exact, it refers to complicated chaining. In the English grammar chain is the horizontal arrangement of words in a particular order. It is a matter of fact that electronically mediated communication, especially communication in its asynchronous types, is akin to speech, as if being its exact reverberation. Hence, internet users write as if they're speaking. Consequently, multiple coordination/subordination in sequence is common in virtual communication which can be illustrated in the following example: "*The Government have no money but they are giving Syria 60 Million on top of the 50 Million that they already gave plus all of the salaries etc... that will cost to go help them... not quite understanding this...*"

This type of writing somehow resembles "stream of consciousness" style, which implies putting down whatever you're thinking of, such as *"just one more thing, do i want to go to england to teach in a school??? do i? oh well, i'll decide that when i have to."*

The tendency towards brevity typical of EMC is expressed also in the frequent use of abbreviations. They are widespread and commonly accepted during electronically mediated communication. Acronyms and initialisms[1] happen to be the most common and actual types of abbreviations EMC is flooded with. Very often certain abbreviations are used by teenagers as an attempt to make their speech different and not be understood by parents. However, in the course of time, they acquire such a high degree of acceptance that they gain usage in non-virtual communication. This idea which has currently become a matter of fact is interestingly formulated in an article called "Alphabet Soup". It writes; "First developed about 20 years ago to streamline conversation on chat platforms like Usenet and IRC (Internet Relay Chat) and popularized on instant messenger and Gmail chat, terms like *LOL*[2] (laugh out loud), *OMG* (oh my God) and *BTW* (by the way) now seem to be popping up IRL (in real life)" (Quenqua D., The New York Times, September 23, 2011). The language of the extract itself comes to ground the idea that the Internet language has penetrated in all spheres of communication.[3] Apart from the above mentioned ones. The following types of abbreviations are also peculiar to EMC:*ASAP (as soon as possible), BRB (be right back), BAK (back at keyboard), TTYL (talk to you later), ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing), LMK (let me know), AMBW (all my best wishes), KIT (keep in touch), WTH (what the hell), CUL (see you later).* To newbies, i.e. newcomers or new users of the Internet these abbreviations may seem too confusing and illegible. But it will take them quite a little period of time to get used to and start using them effectively.

It is interesting to observe that there are certain principles with the help of which the Internet abbreviations are created. The main principles are as follows:

- To reduce the number of required keystrokes to the absolute minimum, some words get truncated, especially those that resemble the sound of a single letter when pronounced, e.g. "U" stands for you, "UR"- you are, "B"- be, "BCOZ"- because, "CU"- see you, "IC"- I see, "Q"- queue, "NE"- any.
- In EMC netizens make use of words where the letters are substituted by numbers on the basis of analogous sound system, e.g. "L8"- late, "4"- for, four, "B4"- before, "4ever"- forever, "2"- to, two, too, "2day"- today, "2morrow"- tomorrow, "wan2"- want to, "No1"- no one etc.
- The abbreviated forms of the words in electronically mediated communication imply also consonant writing which refers to the fact that some words are written with consonants only; i.e. the vowels are left out, e.g. "PLS"- please, "THX"- thanks, "HV"- have, "WK"- week, "WKND"- weekend, "MSG"-message, "DCTNRY"- dictionary and many others. Consonant writing, for the most part, is a consequence of the fact that people avoid being accused of non-acceptable behavior such as swearing, insulting etc. by means of attempts to make such behavior difficult to notice. Otherwise stated, all negatively charged words are written without vowels. This, in all likelihood, is an attempt to get away with insults and suchlike without risking netiquette[4]. However, the omission of vowels can sometimes contribute to saving time as well.

Another feature peculiar to the electronic language is word clipping, i.e. word formation process which implies the reduction of word to one of its parts. Here are the main four types of clipping:

1. Back clipping in which the beginning is retained, e.g. net (network), ad (advertisement), doc (doctor), exam (examination), gas (gasoline), gym (gymnastics, gymnasium), memo (memorandum), pop (popular music), etc. This is perhaps the most common type.
2. Fore-clipping retains the final part, e.g. phone (telephone), chute (parachute), etc.
3. In middle clipping the middle of the word is retained, e.g. flu (influenza), tec (detective), etc.
4. In the case of complex clipping one part of compound words is retained, e.g. cablegram (cable telegram), op art (optical art), etc.

It may sound nonsense to insist that clipping is the prerogative of electronically mediated communication, but still it can't be ignored that clipping is very common in electronic language for the reason that netizens are often compressed with time while communicating.

The exchange of long words with their shorter synonyms is also frequently observed in EMC especially in its synchronous types. This exchange, simply put, refers to the fact that a short word with the same meaning as a longer word is written instead of the longer one. For example, instead of writing *I've given up/abandoned smoking* netizens are more likely to use the word "quit". In terms of using short words rather than long ones the choice seems to be one of preference. The short words that are used instead of longer ones are not that much shorter than their longer equivalents, and thus do not take much less time to write, which precludes that the intention is to save time. Moreover, the short words that are used are more colloquial, which, as a whole, is more consistent with the

nature of electronic language. Indeed, the use of colloquial lexicon is typical of its synchronous types such as chat rooms and social networks. Chatting is more like talking on the phone than writing letters, despite the fact that you use the keyboard and, thus, actually write. Some colloquial expressions – such as *ain't you, I been waiting, I don't got time* and *it don't seem* – might indicate the writers' membership of certain social groups, ethnicity as well as educational level. Such colloquial expressions, then, help to establish our identity and influence other people's views of who we are.

Another characteristic feature of the vocabulary in EMC is the use of interjections. In face-to-face communication emotions can be expressed with facial expression or gestures. In EMC, with the lack of visual cues, interjections are extensively used to compensate for it as in the following examples:

Very often electronically mediated communication is criticized that it fails to express the emotions of interlocutors as opposed to face-to-face communication. The criticism is unfair because in the electronic language there exist phenomena known as smileys (or smilies) or emoticons (emotional icons). The term *emoticon* is undoubtedly preferable for the simple reason that the name itself points at the function an emoticon carries out which is conveying emotions. Besides, not all the emoticons are smiling faces there are also sad emoticons. They are used particularly in on-line chat rooms, social networks, blogs and e-mails. Emoticons are basically short sequences of keyboard letters and symbols, usually emulating a facial expression that complements a text message. There are no strict rules for composing emoticons. Therefore, it is natural that numerous varieties have been created and are in use. The principle is to create a face or other symbols with the help of keyboard characters and punctuation. A typical emoticon would be constructed from a colon or equals sign for eyes, a hyphen or "O" as a nose, and a bracket forming the mouth. Examples of different emoticons are: :) :-) :o) :-)) - happy (☺); ;) - smile with a wink; :~(:~ (:'-(- crying, etc.

It is beyond doubt that emoticons are very entertaining and useful. However, they are more interesting from the linguistic point of view. It has already been stated that they complement to the message, but they may alter its meaning too. Here are examples: *a) Yeah, but you are never on time anyways. b) Yeah, but you are never on time anyways ;-)*

It is easy to notice that the first example has an ambiguous mood, i.e. it can be easily taken as a cutting remark and may even sound offensive. Whereas the second example conveys warmth and friendly attitude by simply adding the three characters emoticon for winking.

In a lot of cases emoticons are the only cues which help to decipher the speaker's intention as in the following cases:

> *a) Simon is one of the best dog trainers EVER! The changes he's shaped in Skittles are awe inspiring! :) (☺)*
> *b) Simon is one of the best dog trainers EVER! The changes he's shaped in Skittles are awe inspiring! : ((☹)*

It is evident that the same message could be interpreted differently if there were no emoticons. Some of the most characteristic and interesting features of the language used

in electronically-mediated communication are the result of a complex set of orthographic strategies designed to compensate for the lack of intonation and paralinguistic cues that interactive written discourse imposes on its users. An innovative set of linguistic devices has evolved that functions to create the effects of voice, gesture and tone through the creative use of capitalization, spelling and punctuation. For example, reduplicated letters are used to represent drawn-out or expressive intonation. So, in the following examples the reduplication of letters intensifies the messages and makes them more expressive:

> *"You are going to Germany? Greaaaaaaaaaaat!!!"*
> *"Veeeeeeeeeeeeeeeery bad joke... how could you think of it?!*

Repetition of words is also typical of EMC as it helps to highlight the emphasis. Using this way of emphasizing something is also quite common in the spoken language, e.g. when one, for example, says: *Well, well, well, would you look at that?* For example, *"no nonoplzzzz"* is more accentuated than *"No, please!"*

Other non-standard forms of orthography are endemic to EMC and are appropriated to serve as alternative systems of signification. For, example, capitalization is almost never used for proper nouns or at the start of sentences mainly because changing the shift to capital letters is an unnecessary slowing down of communication speed, something which speech is liberated from. In general, it can be stated that capitalization is highly disregarded, and lower case is generally the rule. Anyway, although in most Internet situations upper or lower case make no difference, certain contexts (as web addresses and path) are case sensitive; moreover sometimes in a name there can be found two capital letters, a phenomenon which is known as bicapitalization or intercapitalization (i.e. GeoCities). Above all, capitalization is most commonly employed as a convention for expressing emphasis.

> *"omg this young lady is the cutest most adorable singer i have EVER seen!!!"*
> *"I think to myself what a wonderful world when i hear HER sing this song."*

In both examples capitalization is used to add impact to the users' statements. Here another important notion should be noticed in respect to capitalization, i.e. writing personal pronoun "I" with lower case letter. This deviation from traditional English orthography is very typical of EMC. One should be very careful while using capitalized letters during EMC because it is very often associated with shouting especially among foreigners. In other words EMC is sensitive to capitalization and as such the use of capital letters may cause misunderstanding.

Colloquial verbalization and non-standard spellings appear to be self-consciously selected in preference to "standard" linguistic expressions. All the spelling deviations point at the fact that EMC is unedited. Undoubtedly, there are a lot of blogs and websites which are censored but the most of the comments and the conversations that take place

on the Internet is unedited. Internet gives its users freedom which is expressed even in the language they write in. Such messages are common on the Internet.

If all da happiness I have ever known, If all the happiness I have ever known, *would b all dat I would ever own,* Would be all that I would ever own, *It would b all right, it would b ok,* It would be all right, it would be ok.

If suddenly my life came 2 an end If suddenly my life came t an end *& of good things dr would b no more* And of good things there would be no more *it would not matter, bcoz of da bst* It would not matter, because of the best.

Interestingly enough people are tolerant towards orthographic mistakes in EMC. Reading such a message a netizen is not likely to think that the sender of the message is illiterate and would not consider the errors as mistakes but rather misspellings. Moreover, it is a matter of fact that such writing has been accepted and has even become common within the domain of electronically mediated communication. Additionally, given that many people do not know each other well while chatting, they do not seem to care about the spelling of words, they do not have to feel ashamed since they know for themselves that the risk of encountering those people in real life is quite low. In order not to miss to reply to a post they write messages fast and often with no concern regarding spelling. Consequently, there occur many typos. The concept of "typos" refers to the fact that some words have been misspelled as a consequence of accidental keystrokes, which result from the rapid pace on EMC. In relation to this, the following examples were found in the conversations in chat rooms: *"are u going to the concert on friday???? (=Are you going to the concert on Friday?)", "how ar you? (=How are you?)"* and so on.

Regarding punctuation in electronically mediated communication, D. Crystal clarifies that "punctuation tends to be minimalist in most situations, and completely absent in some e-mails and chat exchanges", adding that "some do not use it at all, either as a consequence of typing speed, or through not realizing that ambiguity can be one of the consequences" (2001:89). In addition, he states that "unusual combinations of punctuation marks can occur, such as (to express pause) ellipsis dots (…) in any number, repeated hyphens (—), or the repeated use of comas (,,,,)", adding that "emphasis and attitude can result in exaggerated or random use of punctuation, such as !!!!!!! or £$£$%!" (ibid.). Besides, Crystal makes clear that "some odd combinations of punctuation marks can appear at the end of a sentence" (ibid.). So, punctuation is also used to create effects of a spoken delivery.

Notes:

1. Though both acronyms and initialisms (also referred to as anacronyms) are abbreviations formed with the initial letters of the successive parts of a compound term, still they differ in the way they are pronounced. Acronyms form words themselves and are pronounced accordingly (e.g. NATO, Aids, UNESCO, laser, etc.), whereas initialisms are pronounced by spelling out letters individually (e.g. BBC, HIV).

2. Interestingly enough many abbreviations may stand for more than one thing, e.g. LOL may stand for 1. laughing out loud, 2. laugh out loud, 3. lots of love, 4. lots of luck. Very often their interpretation may not be as evident as they seem. In such cases it may be useful to refer to certain online dictionaries designed to decipher acronyms and abbreviations such as NetLingo (Dictionary of Internet Terms), FOLDoC (Free Online Dictionary of Computing), Gutenberg: (Project Gutenberg; producer of free electronic books) and many others.

3. Time-saving online abbreviations like LOL, OMG, and IMHO acquired such a high degree of acceptance and usage that have become already part of the official English language. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) announced the addition of several acronyms to its dictionary adding some interesting trivia behind the origins of these Internet-associated expressions such as LOL (little old lady), etc. A word has to be in use for at least five years before it can earn its place in the dictionary.

4. Netiquette (short for "network etiquette" or "Internet etiquette") is a set of social conventions and rules that facilitate interaction over networks.

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Էլեկտրոնային հաղորդակցման առանձնահատկությունները

Փաստ է, որ համացանցը ներկայումս վերածվել է հաղորդակցման մի յուրօրի-նակ միջոցի։ Համացանցային հաղորդակցման լեզուն ընդ մեկ է և՛ գրավոր, և՛ բանա-վոր խոսքին, այդուհանդերձ այն պետք է դիտարկել որպես լեզվի նոր դրսևորում, որը կարելի է սահմանել մի շարք բնորոշ ուղղագրական, քերականական և իմաս-տային հատկանիշներով։ Չնայած կան էլեկտրոնային հաղորդակցման լեզվին հա-տուկ ընդհանուր հատկանիշներ՝ բայցևայնպես համացանցը զանազանության և ազատության տիրույթ է։ Լեզվական միջոցների օգտագործման բազմազանությու-նը պայմանավորված է նաև համացանցից օգտվողների անհատականությամբ, սե-ռով և նույնիսկ բնավորության գծերով։ Էլեկտրոնային հաղորդակցման լեզվին բնորոշ են հապավումների և համառոտ գրելաձևերի, «զիտակցության հոսք» հի-շեցնող բարդ ստորադասական նախադասությունների, յուրօրինակ ուղղագրություն-յունը և այլն։ Նշված միջոցները միտված են էլեկտրոնային հաղորդակցումն արա-գացնելու և հուզա-արտահայտչական ազդեցությունը ուժգնացնելու նպատակով։