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Филологические науки  
Медиакоммуникации

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## **Internet Slang as the Main Language of Virtual Communication**

*Статья посвящена английскому языку как основному языку виртуального общения. Такой язык имеет некоторые отличительные особенности, которые отличают его от устной и письменной речи. Он может включать и принимать некоторые функции устных и письменных средств общения. Интернет язык отличается очень выразительными и креативными графическими средствами, он включает некоторые элементы символического письма, использует значки и смайлики, он меняет традиционные правила орфографии и пунктуации и включает некоторые элементы языков программирования. При этом грамматическая структура английского языка, используемого в Интернете, мало чем отличается от стандартного английского и остается достаточно стабильной.*

**Ключевые слова:** виртуальное общение, средства общения, символическое письмо, Интернет.

*There were several attempts to study computer mediated communication. The crucial ideas are represented in the works of Naomi Baron whose research was devoted to language of the Internet impact on spoken English and communication. David Crystal coined the term «Netspeak» and made a substantial linguistic study of different types of internet communication and the language of the Web. Santiago Posteguillo developed a new field of research Netlinguistics. Segerstad made an investigation of how written language has been adopted to the needs of virtual communication. Other scholars who made their contribution into the research in this area were Robert K. Logan, B. Plester and others.*

The language of computer mediated communication (CMC) can be classified in different ways. S. Greiffensten concludes that most points of view concerning this problem may be represented as those supporting the idea of CMC language being «a new variety», «a new register», «a new style» and those who consider it to be a «pidgin or creole» [5, p. 55]. D. Crystal sees the language of CMC as a new variety, Naomi Baron tries to compare it with spoken and written language. Segerstad classifies it as a hybrid language displaying characteristics of both oral and written variety. Thurlow suggests several terms to denote the language of CMC, e.g., «a text messaging movement», «a shortland language», «a nouveau form of communication», «a lexicon for electronic communication», «a virtual new written language», «a new language», «a language of its own» etc. As we see, many terms are implied to the language of CMC but no unity in describing this linguistic phenomenon.

Naomi Baron states that nowadays English serves as «lingua franca» for most internet users but not every non-native speaker becomes a fluent speaker of English. This fact facilitates the spread of the simplified English variety and as a result we observe that non-native speakers display better understanding of each other than with native speakers of English [5, p. 5]. She emphasizes: «Many differences in the use of English – mostly regarding accent – are neutralized on the Internet because people communicate via written text but other differences are revealed in writing. They become obvious in spelling, grammar and the choice of vocabulary» [5, p. 7]. S. Posteguillo points out to the lack of ‘appropriate analytical framework’ that may result in a better use of English across the net [5, p. 5–6]. English is the dominant language on the Internet today and virtual communication practice started with English and it is the most shaped and developed language for the internet purposes nowadays.

Thus, to clarify statistic data on the languages represented on the internet and used in CMC we applied to the internet resource which deals with this kind of research. Internet World Stats presents its latest estimates for Internet Users by Language. The following diagram shows the current linguistic situation in the World Wide Web. The diagram is based on only one language for one person approach in order to have all the language totals add up to the total world population (zero-sum approach). No adjustments have been made for infants or illiteracy in the Internet penetration rate calculations. Very few countries have 100% literacy. Australia, Denmark, Finland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Norway are six countries to mention. Regarding children, most are early Internet adopters (when they are given the chance to surf). Thus, bilingual or multilingual users are not taken into account [2]. So, the linguistic situation in the Internet seems to be quite clear. Generally speaking, English is the universal language used in the internet and CMC, but it has no official status. And we can suppose that it will never have because of the political and economic issues.

The leading position of English in the Internet can only be changed in case of some global political and economical changes. For instance, the coalition between China and Japan may supply a good promotion to languages of their own or some artificial universally created languages and thus, English is possible to be replaced from its position. In addition, we should say about the value of English in education, science, business and other spheres of different countries which do not have English as the national language. We know that English learning as a foreign language is almost obligatory at schools in majority of world states. It is widely used in science, medicine, business and diplomatic sphere. Therefore, we can conclude that it is highly valued all over the world. The importance of the Internet grows rapidly in all fields of human life, including not only research and education but also marketing and trade as well as entertainment and hobbies. This implies that it becomes more and more important to know how to use Internet services and, as a part of this, to read and write English. In different countries and cultures, English has different positions. There are countries where English is the native language of the majority, there are countries where English is a widely known second language, and there are countries where English has no special position. Still, there is no conceivable way in which any authority could define an official language for the Internet. The Internet as a whole is not controlled by anyone or anything.

D. Crystal states: «Global English has given an extra purpose to a variety of standard English, in the way it guarantees a medium of international intelligibility but; it has also fostered the growth of local varieties as a means of expressing regional identity, and some of these new varieties will, in due course, evolve into new languages» [3, p. 4].

Thus, popularization of the Web stimulated the development of new electronic variety of English and at the same time stimulated regional languages varieties development in different parts of the world. We have discussed the English language status on the internet and have mentioned that many scholars define it as a variety of the English language. And now we would like to examine some specific features of the English language functioning in the World Wide Web.

I.M. Fandrych speaks about the considerable impact of Internet-related terms on the English lexicon. She points to the wide range of metaphoric terms, structurally innovative ones, the considerable number of shortening based devices for word-building [4, p. 148]. Schwalbach notes that online conversation takes place on the written level but the language is very similar to that of oral communication. This effect is reached by the overwhelming use of abbreviations, emoticons and word plays. She concludes that «acronyms, blends and clippings are responsible for characteristic style of Internet English, and that offline usage is increasingly influenced by Internet usage» [4, p. 148].

McArthur emphasizes that Internet has made a great contribution into the English word-formation.

The language of the Internet shows a large number of abbreviated units usage, including some peculiar formations: numbers, some kind of symbolic writing and iconic features:

**2BZ4UQT** – Too Busy For You Cutey;

**2G2B4G** – Too Good To Be Forgotten;

@}--->----A rose [2].

Emoticons are defined as a borderline case and are not related to word-formation though they fulfill certain communicative function and possess some lexical meaning:

:& Tongue tied, speechless;

:'( Crying;

:') Crying with joy [2].

Many cases of innovative use of symbols, deliberate misspellings, numbers, spaces, subject lines, creative use of punctuation can be find in the internet texts:

G e n e r i c P h a r m a c y W h o l e \$ a l e

*l@@k* (for *look*)

*penIses* (for *penises*)

*V/agra, V/agra* (for *Viagra*) [4, p. 149].

«New meanings are now more freely created by composing them from known words through the use of conjoining, abbreviating, and metaphoric strategies and terminology has come to rely on recycling the existing resources of the language by using available words to produce new ones in the form of acronyms, blends, analogies, metaphors and, most typically, compounds» [4, p. 150].

D. Crystal singles out a great number of special terms which are associated with the Internet connecting software, hardware, some words stand for the terms

labeling screen areas which guide users of the Web, terms which denote the errors or current problems the user may experience while staying online. He suggests the following examples:

Software related terms: *file, view, insert, paste, contact, select, toolbars*.

Terms connected with errors: *illegal operation, not found, 404 error*.

Hardware connected terms: *freeze, bomb, client, down etc.*

He mentions compounding, some creative and productive suffixes and prefixes frequently used for creating neologisms in the Internet English language:

*V-party, @-party, mailbot, @Home, ThanksE6* (Thanks a million).

Crystal pays special attention to the use of abbreviations in Netspeak. He provides several examples:

*BBS* – bulletin board system;

*HTML* –hypertext markup language;

He mentions that ‘letter-plus-number combinations’ show frequent usage in the internet:

*P3P* – Platform for Privacy Preferences;

*Go2Net*.

Crystal emphasizes that acronyms are no longer restricted to words or phrases but can represent sentences:

*AYSOS* – Are you stupid or something?

*WDYS* – What did you say?

And individual words are often reduced to two or three letters, some words seem like rebuses including numerals which sound value acts like a syllable of the words:

*PLS* – please;

*B4N* –Bye for now;

*L8R* –Later.

D. Crystal provides several special features of modern Internet graphology. He points to a wide range of some special fonts, styles and creative graphic means. He mentions that orthography has been affected by modern tendencies too. Here we should speak about a strong tendency to lower-case everywhere. The so-called «save a keystroke principle» is implied in e-mails, chats and virtual worlds: *john are you going to London next week*.

This example demonstrate that avoiding capitalization does not influence our understanding of the message very much though it produces another effect: capitalization becomes strongly marked in any forms of communication. Messages written in capitals can be considered as shouting or just add an extra emphasis, as D. Crystal shows providing his examples:

*There is VERY important point.*

*There is a \*very\* important point* [5, p. 87].

Capitals tend to be recognized in particular contexts being of necessary usage. These cases include using in path names or business names. A new way of capitalization is found in the Internet, This is bicapitalization, intercaps, incaps, midcaps, which is recognized in the usage of one initial and one medial letter. D.Crystal provides the following examples to illustrate this tendency: *AltaVista, ThomsonDirect, DreamWorks, EarthLink, GeoCities* etc [5, p. 87].

One more point of many concerns is Internet spelling. D. Crystal notes it has



more common features with the USA variety of English. He emphasizes that Internet spelling gradually penetrates into traditional writing. Symbols and numbers often replace the letters: *Micro\$oft*, *AO£*, *d00dz* – dudes etc [5, p. 87].

As for punctuation, it has a tendency to minimalism or can be even completely absent in some of the Internet writings. We can also observe an increase of symbols which are not usually characteristic for traditional punctuation system, such as the #, (---), (...), (,,,), !!!!!, £\$£\$%! etc. Crystal adds to these lists of symbols those which are borrowed from programming languages: ←, ↑, =, and etc [5, p. 89–90].

D. Crystal concludes that «The most general features of Netspeak distinctiveness are currently found chiefly in graphology and the lexicon – the levels of language where it is relatively easy to introduce innovation and deviation. As with language change in general, grammatical variation is less frequent or widespread. When it does occur it tend to be a particular situation or group of users» [5, p. 91].

We can conclude that English language is the leading one in the Internet nowadays. Though, many researchers predict that it can give up its position and for the sake of other languages. Nowadays it continues to be the matter of politics and economics. There is no unity among the scholars who study the English language used in the Internet about the linguistic status of this language as a variety, register or an independent language. Thus, further in our research we will use a general term «English computer and internet slang» (ECIS). So, English language used in the Internet is a complex linguistic phenomenon and needs a careful and thorough study. There are several notable features which most linguists relay to it. It demonstrates much creativity in using linguistics means. A visible tendency to using different devices of the abbreviation for words creation is seen in the language used in the Internet. New graphic means and different types of symbolic writing and emoticons can be found in this language. Lexical level of the language is also characterized by a wide range of peculiarities. However changes in the English language used in the Internet on grammatical level are not numerous. So, grammatical base of the language has a tendency to stability and should be learned.

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### **Internet Slang as the Main Language of Virtual Communication**

*This article deals with the English language as the main language of virtual communication. This language has some distinguishing features that differ it from spoken and written language. It can include and adopt some features oral and written means of communication. Internet slang noted for having very expressive and creative graphical means, it incorporates some elements of symbolic writing, uses icons and emoticons, it changes traditional rules of orthography and punctuation and incorporates some elements of the programming languages. But grammatical structure of the English language used in the Internet does not differ much from standard English and remains quite stable.*

**Key words:** *virtual communication, means of communication, symbolic writing, Internet.*

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