

Cyber Discourse of Georgian Young Adults

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Abstract

The paper deals with the issue of Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) by Georgian students and generally examines the worldwide accepted computer 'cyberspeak', as the most productive sphere of new words production among teenagers and young adults in the viewpoint of quick discourse, economy of time, space, energy and money. Using the abbreviated words in the World Wide Web is considered as the most efficient way of communication, exchanging information throughout the world.

The research presents practices of CMD texts in Georgian environment which includes types of shortening as abbreviations, acronyms, clippings, blends. Georgian netizens, their social status, awareness of universally accepted shortening and way of communication through social network is also analyzed.

Keywords: Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD), shortenings, netizens (network citizens), Internet Society, cyber communication

Introduction

With the rapid popularization of Internet use recent years have witnessed numerous studies on Internet language or Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD). Interactive networking or, Human-to-human communication through the computer networks is a recent phenomenon. Originally designed in the United States in the late 1960's to facilitate the transfer of computer programs and data between remote computers in the interests of national defense (Levy, 1984; Rheingold, 1993), computer networks caught on almost immediately as a means of interpersonal communication.

Significant studies have been conducted by academic researchers, e.g. Baron 1984 (Baron N. S., Computer mediated communication as a force in language change, 1984), 1998 (Baron N. S., Letters by phone or speech by other means: the linguistics of email, 1998), 2001 (Baron N. S., 2001), 2010 (Baron N. S., 2010), Davis and Brewer 1997 (Davis, 1997), Paolillo 2001 (Paolillo, 2001), Crystal 2001 (Crystal, 2001), Snyder 2007 (Snyder, 2007), Callahan and Herring 2012 (Callahan, 2012). However, when it comes to online chatting, the boundaries between writing and speaking become so fuzzy that some writers call internet language "written speech" (Crystal, 2001). Davis and Brewer (Davis, 1997) commented that "electronic communication written on keyboards and read on computer screens has many characteristics of both speech and writing" (Davis, 1997). Biber pointed out that 'there is no single, absolute difference between speech and writing in English, rather there are several dimensions of variation, and particular types of speech and writing are more or less similar with respect to each dimension' (Biber, 1997). According to Chumsheng Yang, 'in online communication, the spoken discourse is conducted via the medium of writing which makes it carry both the fea-

tures of writing and speaking. To accommodate inadequacies of a writing system and due to the invisibility of the participants' visual and audio gestures, writing systems will be accordingly adapted' (Yang, 2007).

Due to its being an emergent genre, Computer Mediated Discourse is a topic of worldwide interest, but it was not so until 1991, when Kathleen Ferrara, Hans Brunner, and Greg Whitmore published a research "Interactive Written Discourse as an emergent genre" and made the language scholars take considerable attention to the use of CMD. Thus, the importance of the topic has emerged and expanded rapidly, resulting in an ever-growing list of published resources.

Accordingly, the purpose of the present research also is to investigate Computer Mediated Discourse of netizens (network citizens) or in other words, the main means of communication among computer users. This paper examines linguistic features of text-based Computer Mediated Discourse of Georgian young adults, which is basically conducted in English. This is the first attempt of studying and evaluation of usage and knowledge of shortened World Wide Words in Georgian environment.

The main focus of the paper is an attempt to ascertain the function of shortened units and other substitutes of non-verbal language in the development and enrichment of the computer 'cyberspeak' with new words, emoticons and smileys; define types of shortening; examine frequency of their usage; assess their function on virtual word-formation and their possible influence on spoken and written language. It is also important to understand how the net language works. In the study performed at Georgian web community the focus was made on the forums, Facebook and SKYPE instant messaging texts through social network. A questionnaire survey was carried out to find the answers needed.

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Shortening is considered to be one of the most productive ways of wordformation and is a rather interesting phenomenon in respect of vocabulary development of any language. Abbreviated units play great role in the presentation of whole sentences or phrases in a compact way in order to economize space, time, energy, and money as well. Arguably, the system of writing in a shortened way makes communication process easy. That was one of the reasons for the decision to examine the underlying relationship between language and literacy in the context of text-based CMD in Georgia.

Theoretical Background

It is now a cliché that the Internet has affected life and society in many, and in part, fundamental ways. So it does not come as a surprise that it also affects language and communication. The word “Internet” can be considered as the most popular term of 1990-ies, as in the modern conditions World Wide Web is the most efficient and useful means of communication, obtaining, processing, and transmitting information (www.languageatinternet.de, 2006).

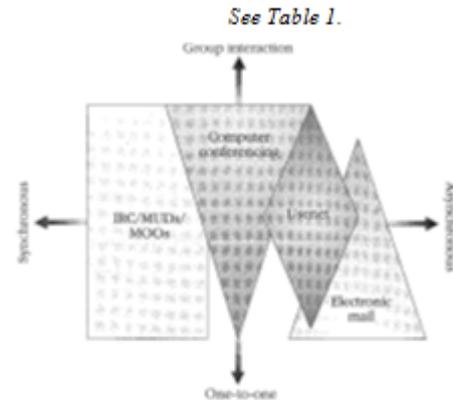
This new system created new realities and naming in the literary language, written and spoken language. Along with the development of computer science international market was occupied by the virtual entertainments such as chatting programs, computer games, electronic mail, etc. Computer mania became so popular and obsessed its users that in terms of technology development it is impossible to replace it by any other inventions. As main means of communication in internetare text-based they show spontaneity and informality of spoken language more than of written language. It enabled the internet users to create and then develop various new textual forms which occupy potential electronic media and envisage new social relations used by members of the so called ‘Internet Society’ or in other words, ‘Netizens’. It should be noted here that newly coined words find the most productive soil in computer cyberspeak. As well as in any professional language in this field also there can be found informal names of some terms. For example, ‘boot’ means ‘to start’, ‘blue-speak’ is ‘person who works for IBM’ (Dickson, 1999), and so on. The same is true for the ‘narrow’ vocabulary of computer technology workers, from where new terms move into the generally used vocabulary. This was caused by constant increase of computer users.

Computer Users, CMC, SMS, Smiley and Emoticon

In the process of using the cell phone and computer, speed of communication, and economy of time, space, energy and even money play a significant role. Inventors of various programs think about all the above mentioned. Specific shortenings of words, phrases and even sentences are

being created for the users which are web or text specific abbreviations, acronyms, clipped words, blends, slangs, the formation of which is an important issue in the present day wordformation and linguistics, as a whole. Each of this type is characterized by colloquial and informal features though many such units or words have entered the formal language and it is rather untimely to make any conclusions at this stage.

In order to define the most popular types of communication within Georgian teenagers and young adults, first of all, it would be better to define the types of communication. Interestingly, computer-mediated communication in the internet may be described in a number of terms, including virtual communication, online communication, electronic communication, cyber communication, or even cyber conversation (Lee, 2002). All these are technically referred to as Computer-Mediated Communication or CMC which can simply be defined as a domain of information exchange via the computer (Baron 1998) and can be synchronous and asynchronous. Typical examples of asynchronous CMC are electronic mail systems, bulletin board system (BBS), newsgroups, and mailing lists. Synchronous CMC tools include instant messaging systems like Facebook, SKYPE, Messenger, or chat-room systems such as Internet Relay Chat (IRC). Apart from the aspect of synchronicity, CMC systems can also be characterized in terms of structures of interaction: one-to-one interaction, one-to-many interaction, and many-to-many interaction (also called group interaction).



To be more specific, in this paper, CMD and CMC refer to textual communication via the internet between at least two or more ‘participants’. Such communication together with the uses of human language often involves combinations of other symbolic systems (e.g. the use of smileys, numbers, etc.) in texts.

As is known, the most popular method of discourse on Facebook and SKYPE is instant messaging, enabling people to send a message that immediately pops up on an online contact's screen. With Instant Messenger one can video/audio chat, send email, SMS and wireless-pager

messages, as well as transfer files and URLs (<http://soft.softoogle.com/ap/icq-build-download-299.shtml>). If users are away from their personal computer they can still chat with friends. Here we can talk not only to our contacts, but to strangers in the real time regime. Blitz questions are more efficient way of dialogue for acquaintance or in order to get to know each other better. That is why it is more convenient to use shortened forms of long phrases and words or simple abbreviated words. For example, when we get in touch with some user online, the first question will always be the same: ASL <Age, Sex, and Location. Similarly, abbreviation 'AFB' means 'Away From Brain' (brain here means computer). When we write 'AYCOOYM' – we want to say 'Are You Completely out of Your Mind'? The latter is initial abbreviation of the whole sentence.

SMS is a brief, electronic message (less than 160 characters) sent and received via a wireless network and viewed on any number of mobile, a cell phone (www.netlingo.com/lookup.cfm?term=texting). As more and more people send text messages to each other, they are increasingly using acronyms and smileys since the screens on mobile devices keep getting smaller and smaller. For example, "AFAIK CU 2NITE" means, "As far as I know, I'll see you tonight." Or, "CN U RD THS? IF U Want 2 no abt 100s of gr8 txt msgs, C BAK of BOK!" SMS can deliver any kind of text-based content or service. It should be noted that in Georgia, unlike other countries and the USA for example, the cell phone users are charged for each SMS they send and in this view-point texting in shortened forms is more convenient and of course cheap as it enables them to cut the long story short and save the number of allocated characters (160 symbols) for each message.

As for the smileys and emoticons, these are a sequence of characters on our computer or cell phone keyboard. It is interesting that smileys usually follow the punctuation at the end of a sentence. A smiley tells someone what you really mean when you make an offhand remark. They are also called emoticons because they intend to convey emotion. For example: 8-0 = shocked; :O = singing; :-Q = smoking while talking; :-0 = talkative; %-\ = tired; :-[= Vampire, etc. It's interesting that official birthdate of the smiley is September 19, 1982 when Scott E. Fahlman created it at Carnegie Mellon University. He originally designed :) and :(, later many others have been designed by many others (<http://www.netlingo.com>,2007).

Main chatters and game program users are teenagers and young adults, which cannot be said of electronic mail or E-mail (with the E-mail the letter is in the inbox of addressee in several seconds). It is mostly used by professional people and there is no age limitation.

In order to investigate which type the shortened words fall under it, we consider it necessary to define who uses them, whose vocabulary contains such shortenings, what is his /her age, profession, social status. First of all, these

words unite people of the same profession, in the present case simply those who use computer for different purposes. For example, virtual programs of Chat (IRC – Internet related Chat) such as ICQ (I seek you), SKYPE, MySpace, Twitter, Facebook messenger and others are specially designed for chat. On the specific page of Wikipedia, there is a list of hundreds of chat-related social networking websites (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). Interestingly enough, that there are many terms available to refer to them e.g. Social media, live web, user-generated web, Web 2.0, etc. Social networking websites offer their users an online community to share and explore common interests and activities. They typically provide a variety of ways for users to interact: through chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file-sharing, blogging, forums, discussion groups, and applications

Case study: Georgian Netizens and Their Communication

If we take into consideration the fact that many Georgian participants of internet communication are more or less fluent in English, it contributes to the wide use of English words in internet communication. However, as was mentioned above, for the purpose of internet communication improvement many words or phrases, even sentences are shortened and have become initials. They are so widely used that they have become an integral part of Georgian teenagers' internet culture.

A research was conducted with undergraduate students at International Black Sea University, Tbilisi where language of instruction is English. Accordingly, their age range was 18-22. However, it seems that the chosen age group can be considered as the 'core' group of people who are most likely to perform online communication as the youth constitutes the majority of internet users. Eighty four people volunteered to participate. It should be noted that the target group was selected with only one criterion: native Georgian speakers with English as their second language.

The students were given the list of 100 computer mediated shortenings, smileys and emoticons (see **table 2**). The first assignment was to identify and then define the selected items in order to have the full picture of their awareness of worldwide used popular computer /texting shortenings. The second assignment was to communicate to each other by using computers and cell phones in order to reveal the most popular chat forms in Georgian texting environment. Observation of their language was quite interesting. On the one hand, text-based CMC of Georgian youth was investigated and on the other hand, their awareness of universally used English shortened terms and the knowledge of their definition.

Table 2: questionnaire

shortened form	definition
SU	Shut up
!	I have a comment
*\$	Starbucks
.com	company
?	I have a question
@	angry
^URS	Up Yours
<3	heart
121	One to one
14AA41	One for All and All for One
182	I hate you
2B or not 2B	To Be Or Not To Be
TIME	Tears in my eyes
2G2BT	too good to be true
2moro	Tomorrow
2nite	Tonight
4EAE	for ever and ever
886	bye-bye
a/s/l	age /sex /location
abt	about
AFC	Away From Computer
AIGH	All right
AIS	As I Said
ASAP	as soon as possible
AWGHTGTGA	Are We Going To Have To Go Through This Again
b4	before
B4N	Bye For, Now
BB	bye-bye
BCNU	Be Seeing You
BFF	Best Friends Forever
BFFL	Best Friends for Life
BKAM	Between Keyboard and Monitor
BOTOH	But on the other hand
BRB	Be Right Back
bro	brother
BTW	By The Way
co	computer
cof	coffee
comfy	comfortable
convo	conversation
coz/coz	because
CU	see you
cuz	because
d	drink
dilly	delightful
dunno	don't know
EML	email me later

FYE	for your education
FYI	for your information
g2g	got to go
gdnite	good night
GRATZ	Congratulations
GTG	gotta go
Gubbish	Garbage + Rubbish
h	heart
Hymns	hidden message
<u>ILY</u>	I Love You
IM	instant messaging
<u>J2LYK</u>	Just To Let You Know
LJBF	let's just be friends
<u>LOL</u>	Laughing Out Loud -or- Lots Of Love
LY4E	Love you forever
<u>LYLAS</u>	Love You Like A Sister
mo	money
YNK	you never know
mp	Mobile Phone
n	no
NM	nothing much
<u>NP</u>	No Problem
nt	night
OIC	oh, I see
pi	pizza
PM	Private Message / Private Messaging
pos	Parent over shoulder
<u>POV</u>	Point Of View
Ppl	people
prolly	probably
<u>RBTL</u>	Read Between The Lines
ROFL	rolling on the floor
RUS	Are you serious?
secs	seconds
sorta	sort of
spk	speak
TIA	Thanks in advance
TMI	Too much information
tmw	tomorrow
ToD	today
ttyl	talk to you later
<u>TYVM</u>	Thank You Very Much
U	you
wasntm	it wasn't me
swdr	sweet dreams
wk	week
WUCM	Will you call me?
WWY	where were you?
YR	yeah right
WYWH	Wish you were here
<u>XOXO</u>	Hugs and Kisses
y	yes
y?	why?

The results revealed that out of 84 young people 75 not only were well aware of modern CMC, especially initial shortenings, and not only such as 'u – you', 'b – be', 'y – why', 'h – heart', 'n – no', and clipped words such as 'bro – brother', 'sis – sister', 'mom – moment', 'mo – money', 'nite – good night', 'convo – conversation', 'comfy – comfortable', knew meanings and definitions of approximately 85% of the presented words or initials presented above. It was interesting that only seven students could define universally used shortenings, such as 'swdr – sweet dreams', 'rus – are you serious', 'TMI – too much information', 'RBTL – read between the lines'.

There are a lot of shortenings, practiced by most computer users, but usually they are considered as ordinary words decoded and never asked what these abbreviations stand for. And maybe if we are asked what 'Global System for Mobile Communications' is we probably think that we have never heard it before, just as the following: 'Subscriber Identity Module or SIM'. There are a lot of such examples.

Within the framework of the research Georgian online forums were also observed, every piece of communication was studied that included shortenings, acronyms, abbreviations, clipped words, blends and any information considered by us to be useful for the research.

It is a fact that forums, SKYPE and Facebook chats are the most popular forms of CMD where each user has a unique nickname or his/her own name and a database called 'history' to store all incoming and outgoing events. Accordingly, it was quite easy to observe teen communication through the SKYPE and Facebook databases where status updates, chat is conducted simultaneously both in Georgian and English languages. It was observed that a specialized kind of writing is developed among Georgian chatters: they are spontaneous and colloquial. They also contain distinct linguistic features, which have come about as a result of the need to represent colloquial speech. It was observed that a considerable number of abbreviations, special symbols and expressions are used in online chats to represent facial expressions, emotions, and feelings and the frequency of their usage is extremely high. These special features contribute to online communication as an emerging register which has both the characteristics of written and spoken languages. This study shows that online chat is in the process of evolving into a new medium. It is developing into a register with identifiable elements and relatively stable characteristics.

Quite often, in order to give specific emotional expression, words are shortened to the initials, and sometimes only one letter is written. This symbol can be digit or punctuation mark. And it was not surprise to observe Georgian netizens writing such shortenings as, for example: B4 < Before; /C < Because; C4N < Chao For Now; F2F < Face to Face; L8r < Later; O;-) = Angel; 0*-) = Angel wink –

female; 0;-) = Angel wink – male; :-){ = Very Angry; >:-) = Annoyed; ~:o = Baby; :-)^< = Big Boy; :-)^8< = Big Girl; :-)! = Bored; :-S = Confused; :-'(= Crying; :-e = Disappointed; %-} = Dizzy; ;#) = Drunk; %*@:-) = Freaking Out; :0 = Hungry; :-x = Kiss; :-D = Laughing; |-(= Lost Contact Lenses; ;-(= Mad Look; =:-) = Punk; 8-0 = Shocked; :O = Singing; :-Q = Smoking while talking; :-0 = Talkative; %-)\ = Tired; :-[= Vampire; :-))) = Very Happy; %) = Very Tired; :-(- = Very Unhappy; [-:) = Wearing a Walkman; :* < Kiss; 0:t < Angel; :E < Vampire; >:-> which means Devil; :-)) is Very Happy; :-Q means I am a Smoker; 143 is encoded as I Love You (I=one letter, Love=four letters, You=three letters); U2=You Too. As is seen, these smileys require much less energy and effort from the users. On its turn, the addressee encodes them very easily. This type of wordformation can be called as DC < Digital Chaos, which is not unknown for Georgian netizens as well.

Network citizens are highly mobile individuals. In the internet community the degree of diversity of the stylized linguistic varieties indexes the virtual and/or social status of its participants: the more diversified one's Internet language is the higher is his/her virtual and/or social status. The style of written language of internet users, in most cases, is not understandable for outsiders, but they can understand each other so easily that in most cases the abbreviated-acronymic way of communication is useful for them. It is impossible for the 'uneducated' or unaware person to understand the following examples, when he reads: AFC < Away From Computer or AIS < As I Said; AMIGA < A Merely Insignificant Game Addiction; BKAM < Between Keyboard and Monitor(1992). As they are bearers of such a specific language the programmers, chatters and users consider themselves as the members of the so called closed community. Despite the fact that at one sight these abbreviations seem to be pure English and can be used only by native speakers, the target group shared the experience of finding the definitions of new words or phrases. As Internet gives every user the opportunity to communicate worldwide, Georgian netizens also have foreign 'friends' and if there is something unknown or new, they use online resources such as: www.netlingo.com, <http://au.answers.yahoo.com>, <http://www.garde.org>, and others in order to solve their problem of unawareness of some specific terms.

Usage of shortenings for stylistic purposes was also observed during virtual dialogues. One of the widely spread ways is humorous understanding of abbreviations, when some abbreviations obtain new ideas for stylistic purposes and have evident expressive color. Quite often, such attempts are carried out successfully and we receive pun, word plays. For example, IBM can be used as Italian Business Man, CK which is abbreviation of Calvin Klein and his brand name, is used as Cocaine. Young age of netizens enables them to give humor coloring to the shortened terms. For instance: KISS < Keep it simple, stupid; AYT

< Are You There?; BASIC < Bill's Attempt to Seize Industry Control. Here they mean Bill Gates. Also CATCH < Come Again? That Can't Help! or MUDS < Multi-User Dimensions (Webster's New World Dictionary of Computer Terms, 1998) and others.

Some of such shortenings have homonyms in the language. For example, while investigating Georgian forums the following was found: STING < Star Track: The Next Generation; SATAN < Security Administration Tool for Analyzing Networks; Doc < Drive Operator Crazy; SOS < Sign Off, Stupid [Spears, Richard A, 1991 57-73], which was invented to describe the situation like Save our Souls; CRASH < Continue Running After Stop or Halt. These examples display the attempt of adapting new terms to the commonly used words in the language. Such coinages are interesting not only because they economize time and space, but also express emotion given to the word.

Number of acronyms in the language of teens and young people are understandable only for college students as they find it easy to communicate this way. If even one letter is changed in those acronyms the whole concept changes with it and the shortened unit obtains different stylistic and emotional coloring. For example: WUSIWUG < What U See Is What U Get; WUSIWUAG < What U See Is What U Almost Get; FIFO < First In, First Out; FILO < First In, Last Out; LIFO < Last In, First Out; LILO < Last In, Last Out (<http://messenger.msn.com>). During the research the usage of suffixes with the acronyms and abbreviations was found, which can be observed again in the language of teenagers. Such are Grampies < Growing, Retired, Active, Moneyed Persons in Excellent State; Phonies < People Hooked on Talking on the Phone; Hookies < Who Cares? Examples of clipped words are: 'sapping? < What's happening?; 'za < pizza; 'zup? < What's up an s'up/ 'sup/ what's up? As can be seen, this type of shortening is very useful for the quick rate of virtual conversation, as it enables the users to minimize the word or phrase to initial abbreviation. More, the clipped part of the word can be recovered at any time and the establishment of relation between the full form and the derivative is not difficult as it is characterized by the clipped words: Net, VB; E-Mail, E-Mailbox; E-zine < Electronic Magazine; P-mail < Physical Mail; I-way < Information Highway. During the research very few participants had idea that the so called computer mouse is the shortening of one of the favorite virtual heroes - Mickey Mouse.

Usage of blend words or blendings in computer cyber-speak is very popular as well, which can also be called the principle of the least effort. Users remember blends quite easily as creators adjust them to familiar words. Everyone working in virtual space is required to know netiquette < on-line etiquette, otherwise he or she will face blem < blemish problem, which can be ended with abend < abnormal end. Infomercial < information +commercial is also

interesting. It can be observed during chat, playing game, writing e-mail or surfing the net. On our desktop there is permanently displayed an ad window which is called fanac < fan activity. If data becomes old or the user wants to delete some mails, he /she uses Gubbish < Garbage + Rubbish or if the mail is hidden then we use Hymns < hidden message, and such formations are very popular.

Many shortened words and units used social networks enter official vocabulary and are incorporated into the lexicons. They exist not only in the spoken language but in numerous electronic documents, letters, mails, forums or web pages. Doubtlessly, they can be found in written language. These shortened words or phrases are quite actively used in media due to their lexical consistence, expressiveness and informality.

Because Netizens are involved in various sub-communities online they are not attached to any particular group. Different from the physical world, where highly mobile individuals update their vocabulary according to their particular motivations, such as conforming to the standard language, individuals in cyberspace transform their language in accordance with the particular nature of the Internet communication, such as the nature of written speech, the trouble of input and so on. In this sense, internet discourse is more or less similar to jargons in a particular field.

Netizens construct modern identities through the use of internet language, namely, a fashionable and cool identity, an interesting and entertaining identity, an unconventional and even rebellious identity, an internationally oriented or transnational identity, and a knowledgeable or technologically advanced identity. The development and widespread of this linguistic phenomenon speaks doubtlessly of deep installation and penetration of CMD in the life of modern society. This type of terminology, as well as specific vocabulary of various fields, after some time, are widely used in the official language and later, settled there.

Conclusion

On the basis of analysis of social network based young adult shortenings it is possible to draw several conclusions:

Firstly, there are different ways to substitute non-verbal language. Shortenings and smileys can be found in every kind of Computer Mediated Discourse as SKYPE, Facebook, E-mail, etc. One of the most remarkable features in CMD of Georgian netizens that could be monitored is the creative forms of English shortened words and units. It is a fact that forums, SKYPE and Facebook chats are the most popular forms of CMD and it is quite easy to observe teen communication through the social network databases. This study shows that online chat is in the process of evolving into a new medium. It is developing into a register with identifiable elements and relatively stable characteristics. Quite often, in order to give specific emotional expression,

words are shortened to the initials, and sometimes only one letter is written. This symbol can be digit or punctuation mark.

Secondly, network citizens are highly mobile individuals. In the internet community the degree of diversity of the stylized linguistic varieties indexes the virtual and/or social status of its participants: the more diversified one's language is the higher is his/her virtual and/or social status. The style of written language of social network users can be understood mostly only by each other as abbreviated way of communication is useful for them. Many shortened words or phrases are quite actively used in media due to their lexical consistence, expressiveness and informality.

Thirdly, netizens construct modern identities through the use of internet language, namely, a fashionable and cool identity, an interesting and entertaining identity, an unconventional and even rebellious identity, an internationally oriented or transnational identity, and a knowledgeable or technologically advanced identity. The development and widespread of this linguistic phenomenon speaks doubtlessly of deep installation and penetration of CMD in the life of modern society. This type of terminology, as well as specific vocabulary of various fields, after some time, are widely used in the official language and settled there.

Finally, the research has revealed that all four types of shortening: abbreviation, acronym, clipping and blending are very productive, useful and adoptable ways for the creation of new words among CMD users. It could be observed that in maximizing the effectiveness and functionality of their communication, participants of internet communication are confronted with different language resources and situations, including English proficiency level, and attitudes towards English usage.

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