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Impact of Social Network Sites on the English Language

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jsem jen ty informační zdroje, které jsou v ní uvedeny.

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Abstract

This study deals with the impact of social network sites (SNSs) on the English language. It is assumed that the language changes as a result of the very nature of the Internet as a medium of communication, especially in the context of English, the most frequently used language. The concept of social network sites is defined at the backdrop of their history and current use. To lay the ground for the discussion of language change, the characteristics of language used in online communication are introduced and objections to it in print media are reviewed. Then the mechanisms of diffusion of innovation both in real life and online are discussed. The aim is to show that social network sites accelerate language change, especially of the English language since English has the highest number of Internet users due to its global status.

1 Introduction

“Time changes all things: there is no reason why language should escape this universal law.” (De Saussure, 1986, p. 77)

This thesis deals with the impact of social network sites on the English language. The aim is to show that social network sites accelerate language change, especially of the English language since English has the highest number of Internet users due to its global status.

Nowadays, most people spend a considerable amount of time online, communicating with each other via technology, rather than speaking with each other face-to-face. To be sure, there are still those who prefer the “old” ways of communication, but especially the new generations, born into living with computers and/or smartphones, cannot imagine life without them. Online communication occurs predominantly on social network sites, which enable their users to interact with each other whenever they like. Most importantly for our purposes here, online communication is characterized by a number of distinctive features resulting from the nature of this mode of electronic contact. These features will be discussed in the present study, the main assumption being that the most frequently occurring instances of these features become entrenched and enter the language on a permanent basis.

This first chapter, The Internet, presents general information about the Internet as a whole, and the languages, which can be found there, with the focus on the English language and its global status. The next chapter, Social Network Sites, provides the definition of social network sites, the broader perspective in terms of their position in computer-mediated communication, the modes of communication supported by them, their features and fundamental activities, their history and last but not least their current use. The following chapter, Online Communication, deals with the language used online, the features of computer-mediated communication, and social network site neologisms. The final chapter, Language Change, provides the theory of language change, objections to it expressed predominantly in print media, and the diffusion of innovation both in real life and online. The major difficulty encountered when analysing computer-mediated communication and especially social network sites, is their rapid and almost constant evolution.

2 The Internet

Even though we nowadays consider browsing the Internet and communicating with our friends online an integral part of our lives, it has not always been like that. In the 1960s, when there were few computers, which were expensive and unwieldy, using computers for communicating with other people was unimaginable. Before the invention of computer networks, it was rather demanding to get information from one computer to another. The Internet was developed in the 1960s in the United States by the Advanced Research Project Agency which belonged to the US Department of Defense, and it played a significant role in the development and popularization of network technology. In the beginning, the Internet was not an instrument for social interaction. In fact, it was designed to enable scientists to run programs on computers which were remote. In the 1980s, it was still under the control of the military. However, it transferred to civilian control during the 1980s and 1990s, and its privatization ensued, due to which ordinary people were able to access the Internet and use it for communication. After that, the World Wide Web, a novel Internet application, was created. It has transformed the Internet itself and attracted millions of people, who no longer saw the Internet as a tool for researching or a medium for communication, but rather as a place for entertainment, shopping, and presenting themselves to the world (Abbate, 1999). As for today (October 2020), the Internet has almost 4.66 billion active users, which represents 59 per cent of the world population (Clement, 2020a).

This chapter presents English as being a global language with a significant power due to several factors, mainly because of being “in the right place at the right time” (Crystal, 2003, p. 10), and as a major language on the Internet.

2.1 English as a Global language

According to Crystal (2003, p. 3), “a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (Crystal, 2003). He then remarks that there are several aspects of this “special role”. Undoubtedly, this special position can be clearly seen in countries with a vast population speaking the language as a mother tongue. Speaking of English, this involves, for example, Britain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada. However, mother-tongue usage of a large number of people in a few countries cannot, on its own, make a language a global language. The language has to be adopted by other countries. Moreover, a special position has to be given to the language by the countries within

their societies, although they might have only a small number of (or no) first-language speakers (Crystal, 2003).

Crystal (2003) provides two main ways in which a language can be given a special place in a country, and thus achieve a global status. The first way is making a language the official language of a country, so it is used in government, the educational system, the law courts and the media. Therefore, it is necessary for the inhabitants to become proficient in the language at an early age. The term for such a language is a “second language” (Crystal, 2003).

The second way of giving a language a special place is prioritizing it in a country's foreign-language teaching. In this case, the language does not have official status. However, it is taught in schools, and accessible to adults who did not learn it during their schooling (or learned it inadequately). Generally, there are several reasons for selecting a language to become a preferred foreign language. They involve “historical tradition, political expediency, and the desire for commercial, cultural or technological contact” (Crystal, 2003, p. 5).

Whether a language becomes global (or not) is not, in fact, related to how many speakers it has (Crystal, 2003). However, as Crystal (2003, p. 7) claims, “there is the closest of links between language dominance and economic, technological, and cultural power, too” (Crystal, 2003). He moreover provides an illustrative example, Latin, a language, which became an international language all over the Roman Empire due to the military power of Romans, and then remained international as a language of education (Crystal, 2003).

According to Crystal (2003, p. 10), “English was apparently in the right place at the right time” (Crystal, 2003). In support of this claim, he provides an overview of the historical events, which led to the strengthening of the language's power. Britain was a highly significant colonial nation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was leading the industrial revolution. English was also the language of the United States, which became the leading economic power in the late nineteenth century and continued with its dominance in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, when new linguistic opportunities were brought by new technologies, English arose as a “first-rank language” in industries such as transport, advertising, press, broadcasting, sound recording, motion pictures, and communications. The English language then happened to become a lingua franca for international alliances, as well as a major language of international political, academic, and community meetings. Its global status has then been assured by two events: political independence movements in several countries, which led to English becoming a language with special status there, and the electronic revolution, which occurred in the USA in the 1970s (Crystal, 2003).

2.2 Internet as an English language medium

As already mentioned above, the Internet was created in the 1960s in the United States. Thanks to the fact that it appeared and first gained popularity there, the Internet was predominantly an English language medium (Barton & Lee, 2013). According to Fishman (1998), the Internet was designed by Americans, who used the English alphabet for ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange), the first computer character system. In 1998, 90 per cent of the Internet servers of the world were located in English speaking countries. Moreover, of all the information stored on computers worldwide, 80 per cent were in English (Fishman, 1998). Barton and Lee (2013, p. 43) claim that, in the 1990s, there were concerns about globalization leading to “the homogenization of the world” (Barton & Lee, 2013). It was feared that the growing Internet use in the United States could give rise to “English linguistic imperialism” (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 43). However, as cited by Fishman (1998, p. 34), linguist D. Graddol envisaged that the dominance of the English language on the Internet would decline. That was due to the fact that more than a half of the usage of the Internet was “local”. Therefore, the arrival of non-native speakers of English online could change its predominance (Fishman, 1998).

2.3 Multilingual Internet

Even though the Internet started as an English language medium, it did not take the Internet too long to become more diverse in terms of language. A Global Reach survey cited by Crystal (2004) assessed the growth of people with access to the Internet between 1995 and 2000 in those countries which are non-English-speaking. According to the survey, the number of people accessing to Internet grew from 7 to 136 million. Moreover, in 1998 there were more newly created websites in other languages than those in the English language. At that time, the major languages on the Web were Spanish, German, Japanese and French (Crystal, 2004). Another survey (Nua Internet Survey) in 2000 estimated that from the total number of 378 million worldwide Internet users, there were approximately 161 million people online in North America, followed by Europe with 106 million users of the Internet. Furthermore, there were 90 million users in Asia and the Pacific, which was assumed to surpass Europe within a short period of time due to the rapid growth of population in that area (Crystal, 2004).

Although, according to McCulloch (2019, p. 270), from the seven thousand languages spoken in the world, most of them are, nowadays, represented rather poorly on the Internet. To support her claim, she provides examples of the number of languages supported by several sites. For instance, Google Translate can operate with 103 languages. Facebook is accessible in 100 languages while Twitter only in approximately 50. Furthermore, she states that new social network sites (henceforth SNSs) incline to be released solely in one language. As she writes, even national languages that are “relatively substantial” (e.g. Icelandic), are becoming replaced not only by the English language but also by other languages which are profusely presented on the Internet. Importantly, government funding is crucial for a better representation of a language online (McCulloch, 2019).

In 2020, 25.9 per cent users of the Internet speak English. The second most common language on the Internet is Chinese, with 19.4 per cent of the total number of Internet users. It is followed by Spanish, with 7.9 per cent (Clement, 2020b).

Even though English is no longer the only language on the Internet, its immense significance online is still undeniable since it persists in being the most common language among its users.

3 Social network sites

According to Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison (2007, p. 211), SNSs are

“web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Although you can encounter the term “social networking sites” as well, the previous term provided by Boyd and Ellison (2007) is used intentionally. They claim that, between these terms, there is a difference of scope and emphasis. "Networking" indicates starting a relationship, frequently between strangers, which is, though, not the dominant practice on social network sites, since they are often used for communicating with people whom the users already know (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

However, Beer (2008) took issue with Boyd and Ellison’s (2007) definition of SNSs. He claims that if we take into account the fast changes that happen online, there is “a pressing need to classify”, so a more descriptive analysis can be done (Beer, 2008, p. 518). Furthermore, the definition above represents something rather broad, so even sites like YouTube can be included there as well, even though they do not focus primarily on friendship. He states that sticking with the “more differentiated and descriptive” term is wiser than re-defining it since it can create even more difficulties. Moreover, according to him, rather than using the general term social network sites, a blanket term like Web 2.0, within which particular categories can be fit, could be used (Beer, 2008).

Ellison and Boyd (2013) amended their original definition in an effort to keep it up to date with the proliferation of the fast-developing SNSs. According to their latter work,

“a social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site” (Ellison & Boyd, 2013, p. 158).

The main complication, when defining what SNSs actually are, is the fact that they evolve rapidly and some features that were distinguishing them from different types of online sites may, after some time, become less significant and others may, conversely, gain importance. Some may as well be reproduced by other social media genres, for instance, media-sharing websites or websites focusing on games (Ellison & Boyd, 2013).

Ellison and Boyd (2013) state that they still consider the term “social network sites” more appropriate since it justifiably highlights that the users are able to articulate their lists of connections (not only to show their social network but also to see other people’s social networks). Importantly, this is what makes SNSs different from the previous online sites focusing on the interaction of their users. In these sites, the main focus is on the network, not the act of networking (Ellison & Boyd, 2013).

If looked at from a broader perspective, SNSs are a genre of computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC), which Herring (1996, p. 1) defines as “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (Ellison & Boyd, 2013; Herring, 1996). However, in her later work, published in 2007, she expands the scope to involve mobile telephones as well and describes CMC as “predominantly text-based human-human interaction mediated by networked computers or mobile telephony” (Herring, 2007, p. 1). As for the SNSs, they are part of “Web 2.0” (which is more interactive compared to the previous web 1.0 since all users can participate in producing content on the internet) and belong to websites and applications known as “social media” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Ellison & Boyd, 2013). According to Ellison and Boyd (2013), Web 2.0 made online communities more common since before, they were viewed as “geeky”. SNSs indicated a shift in the interest of people engaging in online communities. Interacting with friends, family, and acquaintances on the internet became the primary activity, which replaced going online to meet people who shared the same interests or hobbies (Ellison & Boyd, 2013).

There are several modes of communication which are supported by all SNSs. A user can either communicate with only one user (e.g. by using chat features or private messaging) or with many other users (e.g. by replies on Twitter or comments on Facebook). These modes are referred to as one-to-one and one-to-many communications. Another two are known as synchronous (i.e. at the same time) and asynchronous (i.e. not at the same time) communication. Finally, communication on SNSs can be either in the form of text or media. Users of SNSs communicate mostly with their friends. It is, however, necessary to mention that they may also interact with

the networks of their friends, which may be valuable sources of new information (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Nevertheless, this capability depends on the privacy setting of each user's profile.

Furthermore, Ellison and Boyd (2013) investigate the shifts in the importance of the primary features of SNSs which were defined in the earlier work published in 2007, namely profiles, connection lists, and traversing. The authors found that the most significant change has happened to the role of profiles since media streams have become more prominent. Some profiles might not even display any biographical data supplied by the user himself (as it was customary before). One's profile might consist merely of his activities on the SNS and a connection list. On the other hand, profiles might be a combination of several aspects, such as, for example, content which is supplied by the owner of the profile, content which is provided by other users, and activity reports. As for the connection lists, it has become more important to articulate one's contacts. That is because of two factors: the increase in importance of media streams, and the technology of SNSs, which uses "social graph" to organise content. Conversely, traversing did not alter at the technical level. It, however, became less fundamental after some time (Ellison & Boyd, 2013).

Despite the evolution of SNSs, the fundamental activities (i.e. "sharing content with a bounded group of users") have remained basically the same (Ellison & Boyd, 2013, p. 159). Furthermore, even though the importance of profiles has decreased, they persist in being the backbone of SNSs as they serve as spaces for presenting oneself and distributing content. Importantly, communication and sharing of information have become the practises which motivate users to participate in SNSs.

3.1 History of social network sites

According to Boyd and Ellison's definition of SNSs quoted above, the first social network site (henceforth SNS), SixDegrees.com, was introduced in 1997. It enabled its users to: connect with other people, list their friends, make the Friends list visible for other users, and send private messages. Even though many other sites with some of these SNS features existed before, SixDegrees was the first site that combined them. However, according to some early users, there was not much to do after accepting a friendship, and most people were not concerned with meeting strangers. Moreover, not that many people were online at that time. According to its founder, Andrew Weinreich, SixDegrees was in advance of its time. As a result, the SNS was closed in 2000 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Next, U.S.' SNSs like AsianAve (launched in 1997), BlackPlanet (launched in 1999) and MiGente (launched in 2000) emerged. These sites were dating and community-oriented. AsianAve was focused on Asian Americans, BlackPlanet on the Black community and MiGente on the Hispanic community (Thelwall, 2009). Of these three, the only one still standing is BlackPlanet. The other two SNSs were redirected to it.

Another SNS worth noting is Cyworld, a South Korean site which first launched as a personal information management system in 1999 (Kim & Yun, 2008), and has become "the first successful general-purpose social network site" two years later (in 2001) (Thelwall, 2009, p. 21). Cyworld did not concentrate only on a specific group of people, such as AsianAve, BlackPlanet and MiGente. Instead, it aimed at the entire Internet user-base in South Korea (Thelwall, 2009).

In 2001, an U.S.-based SNS, Ryze.com, launched. It was founded by Adrian Scott PhD whose purpose for making this site was "to help people leverage their business networks" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 215). People who worked for Ryze were a part of the business and technology community in San Francisco and had close personal and professional relations with those from other SNSs such as LinkedIn, Friendster and Tribe.net (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, it has not become as powerful as another business-based SNS, LinkedIn, which was launched in 2003 and has approximately 607 million members worldwide (in 2020) (About us, 2020).

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), Friendster launched in 2002, serving as a social complement to Ryze.com. It had a different approach to meeting people than the majority of other dating-oriented sites. They concentrated on presenting strangers to people based on mutual interests. In contrast, Friendster focused on helping to connect friends-of-friends, based on the premise that strangers would not make as good romantic partners as friends-of-friends. As a consequence of its rapid growth in popularity, the site faced technical as well as social problems. Moreover, despite the initial intention of Friendster to view only profiles of people who were not more than four degrees away (friends-of-friends-of-friends-of-friends), the users started adding acquaintances and strangers to see more profiles. Some users made fake profiles of, for instance, some celebrities and started collecting friends heavily. Therefore, the company removed the "most popular" feature and eliminated the fake profiles. However, due to the combination of technical problems and the lack of trust between the site and its users, many people left (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Since rumours about Friendster's adoption of a system based on fees spread, its users started signing up to other SNSs, including Myspace, a music-oriented SNS launched in 2003. As a result of these rumours and the inability of Friendster to handle large numbers of its users,

the popularity of Myspace grew rapidly. A significant group of its users was formed of bands, who were excluded from Friendster. Importantly, bands helped Myspace expand its reach and engagement because of the relationships with their fans (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In 2005, the purchase of Myspace by News Corporation led to immense media attention. Next year, the SNS became the most-visited site in the US (MySpace Becomes No. 1 Visited Web Site in America, 2006). Nonetheless, by the start of 2008, “simpler and easier to use” Facebook was growing rapidly, and the users of Myspace started leaving. In April 2008, Myspace was surpassed by Facebook (Arrington, 2008).

Facebook was launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and co-founders Chris Hughes, Eduardo Saverin and Dustin Moskovitz. At that time, it was called “The Facebook” and it was aimed at Harvard University students only. Soon, the SNS extended to more US universities, such as the Ivy League and other Boston universities. Subsequently to all US universities and, since September 2005, to high schools as well (Phillips, 2007). Moreover, on 20th of the same month, the official name of the site changed to “Facebook” (Our Mission, 2020). Eventually, after a year, in September 2006, any person who was over 13 years old could join the SNS (Facebook Expansion Enables More People..., 2006). In 2011, it became the second most-visited site in the US. (Google and Facebook top 2011's most visited sites in US, 2012). The SNS introduced Messenger in August 2011, and then, in April 2012, it purchased Instagram. Another SNS acquired by Facebook is WhatsApp, which was purchased in 2014 (Our Mission, 2020; Shead, 2012).

Reddit was founded by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian in 2005. It is a SNS which involves subreddits, communities which are based on specific topics, which are chosen by the users themselves.

Twitter, an American SNS and micro-blogging service, was launched in 2006 as a product of its parent company Odeo. The initial name of present-day Twitter was, however, different. The founders Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone, and Noah Glass first used the name “twtr” and the domain “twtr.com” because, apart from other reasons, the domain “twitter.com” was already being used. Moreover, they did not want to purchase the site until they were sure it would prosper. Then, six months after its launch, the team was confident enough to buy the desired domain “twitter.com” (Segall, 2010). Twitter got people’s attention at the South by Southwest Interactive conference in March 2007. It, moreover, won the festival’s prize. Next month, Twitter separated and became a self-sufficient company (Meyer, 2019). In November 2018, the SNS expanded the character limit in Tweets from 140 to 280 (which seemed hazardous). However, a research made

by the site showed that the characteristic speed and brevity of Twitter has been maintained (Rosen, 2017).

In addition, Pinterest, an American SNS, which serves predominantly for sharing images and discovering information, was launched in 2010 (A brief history, 2020). In the same year, Instagram, also an American SNS for content sharing, was founded and two years later, in 2012, purchased by Facebook (Our Mission, 2020).

3.2 Current use of social network sites

In 2020, it is estimated that 3.6 billion people from all over the world use SNSs. An average Internet user spends approximately 144 minutes a day on SNSs. (Clement, 2020c). Among the most popular sites worldwide, there are Facebook, having 2.7 billion users and being the first SNS to pass the milestone of 1 billion monthly active users, YouTube with 2 billion active users, WeChat, Instagram, TikTok, QQ, Reddit, Pinterest, and Twitter. And the figures are still growing. Moreover, in recent years, SNSs have shown a shift towards mobile phones (Clement, 2020c).

It is essential to understand what SNSs are, what features they have, and how they change over time to be able to see the connection between them and their impact on language. SNSs enable their users to interact with people whom the users know very well as well as with strangers (which are, however, somehow connected to their network). Therefore, their reach is much wider than in real life where it might be more complicated to meet somebody outside their circle of acquaintances. Since Web 2.0 is more interactive than Web 1.0, users can create their own content (text and/or media), which is then displayed on media streams and which can be seen (and eventually adopted) by a large number of people, especially thanks to sharing features. Such wide reach of electronic media makes it fair to suspect that their effect on the language is also more dramatic than is the case of face-to-face communication.

4 Online communication

This chapter deals with the language used online, especially its non-standard forms. The aim is to examine the characteristics of online discourse and the frequency of the features, in order to question the common misconception that the language of online communication is incomprehensible. Moreover, it attempts to prove that the features associated with the Internet are not that innovative. Additionally, several SNS neologisms will be provided.

To be able to describe what online communication looks like, it is necessary to provide a description of CMC because online communication is a part of it. That is because online communication is possible thanks to technology, such as, for example, computers and mobile phones (as already cited in Chapter 3). Nevertheless, it is rather challenging to characterize CMC. As Barton and Lee (2013, p. 5) claim, there, at times, was an inclination for the overgeneralization of some findings and suggesting that “there are static and predictable conventions across all CMC language”. That is, however, certainly not true about all of them (Barton & Lee, 2013). There are various registers of the communication mediated by computers, such as, for example, Email, SMS, and Instant messaging, which differ in various criteria (e.g. time-dependency, durability and architecture) (see Tagliamonte, 2016). Several linguists (Barton & Lee, 2013; McCulloch, 2019) write that CMC, even though written, cannot simply be taken as writing since it shows features of speech as well. Hence, it is often called a “hybrid” of these two types of communication (Barton & Lee, 2013).

At the start of the 21st century, David Crystal coined a term to make reference to the language people were using on the internet, Netspeak. He defined it as “a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet, [...], arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive” (Crystal, 2004, p. 18). According to him, it is an alternative to the terms used by other linguists (e.g. “cyberspeak”, “electronic discourse” and “CMC”). Moreover, he states that Netspeak is not just a mixture of written and spoken features, and it, therefore, must be viewed as “a new species of communication” (Crystal, 2004).

However, as Tagliamonte (2016) writes, the features of Netspeak were not used only on the internet, as it soon became evident. She, moreover, supports this claim by providing several examples of previous usages of those features, which were, according to Crystal, unique to the internet. For example, the infamous “lol” with two more variants of laughter, “haha” and “hehe”, have been present in writing much earlier than when the Internet was born. “Haha” and “hehe” have been used since 1000 AD and “lol” was presumed to have been used in 1917 in a letter

written to Winston Churchill. Furthermore, even using abbreviations and non-standard spellings is not a very recent phenomenon since these features were used, for instance, by adolescents of prior generations who passed notes which were “enciphered” in specific alphabets (Tagliamonte, 2016). In addition, Dąbrowska (2018) claims that Old English and Middle English scribes already used some abbreviated forms. For example, deletion of letters in words that were frequently used (e.g. “ē” for “est” and “sci” for “sancti”) (Dąbrowska, 2018). As for acronyms, McCulloch states that, for instance, the Romans were using them for, inter alia, inscribing statues (McCulloch, 2019). Moreover, the “features of Netspeak” can be found in SMSs as well (Tagliamonte, 2016).

4.1 Features of computer-mediated communication

During the course of the existence of telecommunication technologies, such as personal computers and mobile phones, several researchers have focused on investigating the communication held via them since these inventions lead, to a greater or lesser extent, to the transformation of all aspects of life, including communication and language (Barton & Lee, 2013). Most of the studies focus on the English language, since the non-standard features (e.g. acronyms and abbreviations) are, according to Dąbrowska (2018, p. 235), most visible in this very language. She ascribes the occurrence of these features to English because the language “shows great flexibility with regard to such modifications, mainly due to homophony between numerous words and individual sounds as well as lack of inflectional endings, which otherwise would limit the abbreviation options” (Dąbrowska, 2018).

According to Barton and Lee (2013), CMC is mostly described as a “new variety of language” since it involves features which are not common for any other modes of communication. The features provided by them are divided into six categories (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 5):

- *Acronyms and initialisms (e.g. GTG for “got to go”, LOL for “laughing out loud”),*
- *Word reduction (e.g. gd for “good”; hv for “have”),*
- *Letter/number homophones (e.g. U for “you” and 2 for “to”),*
- *Stylized spelling (e.g. I’m soooooooooo happy!),*
- *Emoticons (such as :-) and :(),*
- *Unconventional/stylized punctuation (e.g. “!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”, “.....”).*

However, that is not the only “list” of CMC features. In fact, there are far more since almost every researcher uses his own set of categories (or at least different terminology). As can be seen in the two following studies.

AbuSa’aleek (2015), in his study, analyses a corpus which contains electronic discourse of 160 undergraduate students and focuses on nine “e-discourse features” adopted by several linguists (e.g. Thurlow, 2003). The categories are: shortenings (i.e. the end letters are missing), clippings (i.e. the final letter is dropped), contractions (i.e. the middle letters are missing), unconventional spellings, word-letter replacement, word-digit replacement, word combination, initialisms, and emoticons (AbuSa’aleek, 2015; Thurlow, 2003). He, moreover, provides some examples of each of the nine features used by the students participating in his study. Some of the shortenings used by the students are “Bro” (for “Brother”), “Sis” (for “Sister”) and “Lang” (for “Language”). As for the clippings, there are, for instance, “Til” (meaning “Till”), “Goin” (meaning “Going”) and “Hav” (meaning “Have”). Some contractions found in the corpus are “Gd” (for “good”), “Bck” (meaning “Back”) and “Bt” (for “But”). Next, there are unconventional spelling, such as “Sory” (for “Sorry”), “Thanx” (meaning “Thanks”) and “plez” (for “please”) [sic]. There can also be found word-letter replacements, for example, “Y” (meaning “Why”), “U” (meaning “You”) and “R” (for “Are”), and word-digits replacements, such as “4” (standing for “for”), “2” (meaning “two”, “too” or “to”) and “8” (for “ate”). Some of the word combinations are “Wanna” (standing for “Want to”), and “Dunno” (meaning “Do not know”). Moreover, there are also initialisms, for example, “AFAIK” (standing for “As far as I know”), “LOL” (standing for “Laugh out loud”) and “IDK” (standing for “I do not know”). The last category, emoticons, involves “ :) “ (i.e. smile), “ :O “ (i.e. surprise”) and “ :(“ (i.e. sad). The results show that all these features represent only 25 per cent of the analysed corpus. Furthermore, the most frequently used category is unconventional spelling, while the least often used one is word combination. According to the author of the study, the findings are contradictory to the commonly held notion that an electronic discourse among students is unintelligible (AbuSa’aleek, 2015).

Dąbrowska’s (2018) analysis of CMC deals exclusively with SNSs. Her aim is to investigate the current state of the English language used online as well as to determine the frequency and visibility of abbreviations. To do so, she conducts the analysis on three SNSs, namely Facebook (here she investigates two registers: fan pages and private profiles), Twitter and YouTube. Moreover, she focuses on nine features of online language, which are: acronyms, clippings, vowel deletion, apostrophe deletion, lower case, rebus writing, phonetic spelling, sound-word substitution, and number-word substitution. The findings indicate that the frequency

of the features is relatively low since “abbreviated English” represents only 2.5 per cent of the analysed corpus. Furthermore, the most informal SNS with the highest share of non-standard spellings is YouTube, followed by Twitter. According to Dąbrowska, the fact that users on YouTube use the most informal language may be due to their anonymity. Conversely, the register with the lowest frequency of the investigated features is Facebook (private profiles). Moreover, each register has its most often used features. For YouTube and Facebook (fan pages), they are lower cases, while for the users of Twitter and Facebook (private profiles), they are sound-word substitutions. Importantly, the features that were discussed the most in the earlier studies of CMC (e.g. Crystal, 2004), number-word substitutions, are rarely used in this corpus. Worth noting is also the finding, which is in line with the claims about women-led language change (in Chapter 5), that women are those who choose to involve CMC features in their communication online more often than men (Dąbrowska, 2018).

There is no rule on how to analyse CMC, which features to choose and how to call them. Some researchers use their own terms (or categories) for the investigated forms while others adopt them from prominent linguists. Therefore, it might be challenging to compare them. Moreover, the forms are not stable, meaning that they may decrease in popularity (or vice versa) at any time, which can be seen, for example, in the decline in the use of number-word substitutions in the study by Dąbrowska (2018) above. Moreover, the frequency depends on several, mainly sociolinguistic, factors (e.g. anonymity, tie-strength, age, and location of the users) and, obviously, the register (Dąbrowska, 2018). Correspondently, Barton and Lee (2013, p. 6) state that people do not use the same CMC features in all context. Instead of that, they “constantly reappropriate their ways of writing in different modes of CMC to suit different purposes” (Barton & Lee, 2013).

4.2 Social network sites neologisms

Every innovation has an impact on the lives of people. Moreover, all these changes are then reflected in the language (Barton & Lee, 2013). That can be said about the Internet and, admittedly, also about SNSs, on which this study focuses, as well. For a layperson, these changes can be first seen thanks to new words (or neologisms).

According to Peterson and Ray (2013, p. 81), “a neologism is a newly coined word or phrase that is just emerging into mainstream use” (Peterson & Ray, 2013). Neologisms can be created in various ways. Some of the word-formation processes in English are clipping,

acronyms, abbreviations, blending, back-formation, derivation, borrowing, coinage, compounding, conversion, and onomatopoeia (Murray, 1995).

Roig-Marín (2016) states that due to the fact that large numbers of neologisms emerge constantly, dictionaries cannot keep pace with them. Therefore, she, in her study, uses two online databases instead. Her focus is on “cyber-blends”. However, only some neologisms, which are associated with SNSs, will be provided. For example, “drunkbook” (meaning “to write on Facebook under the influence of alcohol”) is a blend of “drunk” and “Facebook”. Another one is “facecrook” (“an individual who uses Facebook to commit, plan, or talk about a crime”) which was created by blending “Facebook” and “crook”. Next, there are new words which are connected to Twitter. “Twitterverse” (“Twitter” and “universe”) means “posting on Twitter considered collectively”. Moreover, “tweetup” (“Tweet” and “meetup”) is “a real world meeting between people who know each other through Twitter” (Roig-Marín, 2016).

New words are on SNSs created by various word-formation processes almost continuously, which is presumably because of the immense creativity of people online. However, due to the fact that dictionaries do not provide them, it is rather challenging to find credible sources in order to analyse them and be certain about their origin.

5 Language change

As quoted before, Ferdinand de Saussure (1986) states that language, like all things, changes over time (De Saussure, 1986). The change is constant and inevitable. However, it might not be easy to notice it if you do not consider the way people used to speak and write in the past (Burridge & Bergs, 2017). Burridge and Bergs (2017), in their book, provide some examples of well-known texts of English literature in order to demonstrate how the English language changes over time. The first piece of writing presented is the Anglo Saxon Chronicle, written about a thousand years ago. It is highly improbable that somebody, without the knowledge of Old English, would nowadays understand the original text. Another example is an extract taken from the *Canterbury Tales*, written by Geoffrey Chaucer, a famous author of the Middle Ages. Compared to the first text, it is considerably easier to understand. However, it still does not resemble the way we speak and write today. The third example is an extract of William Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, written around 1600. This text is, undoubtedly, more similar to present-day English, even though it may still be intricate for a layperson to understand it. This "experiment" indicates the evolution of the English language over almost a millennium (from 8th to 17th century). Furthermore, it shows how drastic the change was (Burridge & Bergs, 2017).

A branch of linguistics, historical linguistics (or diachronic linguistics), studies not only the nature of language change but also its causes. Thanks to the examination of language change, we understand how some factors, namely social, cultural, and psychological, interact to shape language (Murray, 1996).

As mentioned before, language change is inevitable. That is assured by the way the language is transmitted to the next generations. Children have to construct a grammar by virtue of the available data because they do not acquire a complete grammar in the beginning. Consequently, at least subtle differences occur (Murray, 1996).

According to Burridge and Bergs (2017), language change affects all "layers or levels of linguistic structure." The levels include the sound level, the word level, the sentence level and the meaning levels. Furthermore, because of the connections between different levels, a change on one level can cause a change on a different level to happen (Burridge & Bergs, 2017).

In the beginning, the change can be seen in the language use within a small number of people, who are often connected (e. g. by age, geographical area). A crucial role, in the spread of an innovation, is played by social (or peer) pressures. Because people can, knowingly or not,

adjust the way they speak in order to make their speech sound more “prestigious or socially desirable”, the change can easily expand into the whole linguistic community (Murray, 1996, p. 355). As McCulloch (2019) writes, linguists Milroy and Milroy ascribe language change to “strong and weak ties” (which are presented in Figure 1). Strong ties are people one knows very well and with whom he spends a lot of time. Moreover, they have some friends in common. Weak ties are people one knows only partly and those, with whom he does not necessarily have friends in common. Furthermore, weak ties are much more important in getting new information than strong ties. That is because people with whom one has close relations know the same things as he does. Therefore, the more weak ties, the more language change. Milroy and Milroy demonstrate this claim on the example of the history of English and Icelandic. Undoubtedly, English has changed much more during the same amount of time, which is caused by more weak ties over the past. That is a result of the rich history of England. For instance, invasions by other nations such as the Danes and the Normans. Another reason for the faster language change is that in big cities there are, naturally, more weak ties than in smaller ones (McCulloch, 2019, p. 36-39).

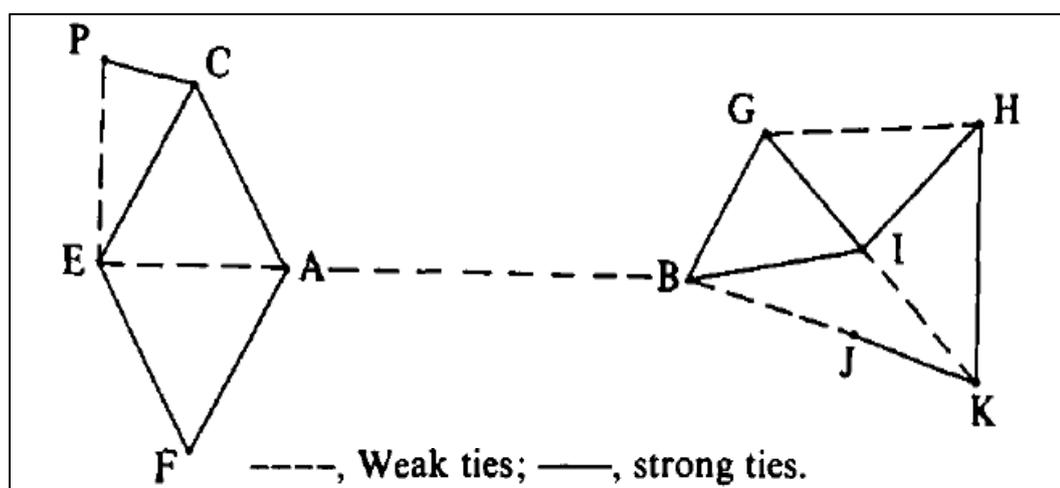


Figure 1 Weak and strong ties

(Milroy & Milroy, 1985, p. 365)

If we consider gender, according to many sociolinguists, women are the ones who, for centuries, dominate language change. For instance, William Labov, in his research from 1990, found that 90 per cent of language change is led by females. The reason for this is that women learn language from people their age, whereas men learn from their parents. However, the reason why they do so is unclear (McCulloch, 2019, p. 34).

5.1 Moral panics in print media

Since the invention of the Internet, some objections from lay people have arisen. They have disagreed with some linguistic features, often used in communication held online. These so-called “moral panics”, concerning the negative impact of the Internet on language, can be found predominantly in mass media (Barton & Lee, 2013).

Thurlow (2006) reviews 101 print media accounts of an international collection (from 2001 to 2005), which focuses on the use of language in technologies including text messages and instant messaging. His study involves a type of meta-discourse which combines critical discourse analysis and folk linguistics. This type of discourse about discourse discloses “the conceptual and ideological assumptions by which particular communication practises come to be institutionalized and understood” (Thurlow, 2006, p. 667). Thurlow provides a large number of examples, from the whole collection, to show the most persistent meta-discursive themes which appear in mediated descriptions of technologically or computer-mediated discourse (henceforth CMD) (Thurlow, 2006).

According to Thurlow (2006), public discourse includes worries about how technologies affect language. He writes that because people are afraid of changing standard language practices as well as all language change, they try to control the language change by proscribing disliked forms and prescribing those which are common. Moreover, Thurlow claims that disapprovals of declining standards of the use of language can be found above all in print media, where CMD is often labelled with new names (e.g. “netspeak”, “webbish”, “technobabble” and “textese”) partly in order to establish it as new, extraordinary or different than standard English (Thurlow, 2006).

As Thurlow (2006, p. 676) found, print media are “generating or at least feeding popular, social anxieties about the impact of new media” (Thurlow, 2006). Journalists, for instance, use figure citations, so the articles seem trustworthy. However, in fact, in the majority of cases, there were no sources for the figures mentioned. Admittedly, for the public press, the dramatic effect of the articles is more important than their credibility. Furthermore, in print media, the differentness of “netspeak” and non-mediated discourse is often exaggerated. That is sometimes achieved by using fabricated excerpts which are often caricatured. Moreover, generalizations about the usage of the new media language by teenagers are frequent (Thurlow, 2006).

Although it is not true that the corpus investigated by Thurlow did not contain articles with positive attitudes to the effects of CMD, negative depictions and pessimistic claims prevailed. Technology was, for example, accused of being accountable for “dumbing down the

English language”, “creating a whole new culture in the country” and “lowering standards all round” (Thurlow, 2006, p. 677).

To get a sense of what these fabricated excerpts look like, Thurlow (2018) provides an example of a message written in an article in Irish Times (1), and also two more extracts taken from his own empirical data (2).

(1) *Mst f d tym dey usd ds knd flng 'ge 2 tlk 2 1 anthr nt lly n txt bt evn n wrtng ltrs 2*

(2) *Have you had a shower today as I'm sure I can smell u from here!(Teehee)*

Where r u?We r by the bar at the back on the left. (Thurlow, 2018, p. 140)

5.2 Innovation diffusion

It is first necessary to consider the distinction between language (linguistic) change and speaker innovation. As stated in Milroy and Milroy (1985), linguistic change and speaker innovation are not identical. It is because a speaker innovation is a speaker's action while change is the reflection of an innovation. A community may not accept some innovations and so they may not conduce to language change. However, if it is a successful speaker innovation (accepted by a community), it “may lead to a change in one segment or part of the grammar, which then sparks off a chain reaction that seems to be internal to the language system” (Milroy & Milroy, 1985, p. 348). Milroy and Milroy (1985) also argue that the relationship between an accepted innovation and the change reflected by it does not have to, perforce, be a one-to-one relationship. This claim implies that several changes may be actuated by a single speaker innovation (Milroy & Milroy, 1985).

Speaker innovations may, according to Milroy and Milroy (1985), be categorized into three classes based on the success in their ensuing diffusion. Innovations which are included in the first class are not able to diffuse beyond the speaker. The second class involves novelties which may spread into a community with which the speaker itself is in contact but do not go any further. The third, and at the same time the last class, consists of speaker innovations which may (as well as those in the second class) spread into a community with which the speaker is in contact. Additionally, they may afterwards diffuse into other communities by “a further innovator” (explained later in this subchapter) who has links with both pertinent communities. When the process is successful, the results are described as “linguistic change”. Milroy and Milroy (1985) also remark that there is theoretically an infinite number of communities throughout which a change like this can diffuse (Milroy & Milroy, 1985).

An innovator is a person who introduces a novelty. These people are “marginal to the group adopting the innovation, often being perceived as underconforming to the point of deviance” (Milroy & Milroy, 1985, p. 367). As marginal individuals, they have weak ties with the communities. On the contrary, early adopters are in the centre of their group and have strong ties with other members. Importantly, they are the ones strongly connected with a change (Milroy & Milroy, 1985). In addition to these two adopter categories (innovators, and early adopters), Rogers (1983, p. 269) provides three more. They are: early majority, late majority, and laggards. He moreover describes these five categories by their superior attributes as follows: “innovators—venturesome; early adopters—respectable; early majority—deliberate; late majority—skeptical; and laggards—traditional” (Rogers, 1983).

After a novelty is transmitted by an innovator to more central members of the community and adopted by them, the innovation is diffused from the inside to the outside with increasing speed. Furthermore, it generally shows an S-curve of adopter distribution (which has an S shape and is following a “slow-quick-slow” pattern) in the course of time (Milroy & Milroy, 1985; Maybaum, 2013). According to Rogers (1983), this rate of adoption is the most prevalent one. He also explains that the same data of adoption may be depicted either by a “bell-shaped frequency curve”, showing the data in terms of the number of people who adopt the innovation each year, or an S-shaped curve which shows the cumulative data of the adopter distribution (Rogers, 1983). These two curves are presented in Figure 2. It is, however, necessary to remark that the S-curve shape and wide diffusion are not accomplished by many innovations. That may be caused by various reasons concerning the innovation itself or the social system (Maybaum, 2013).

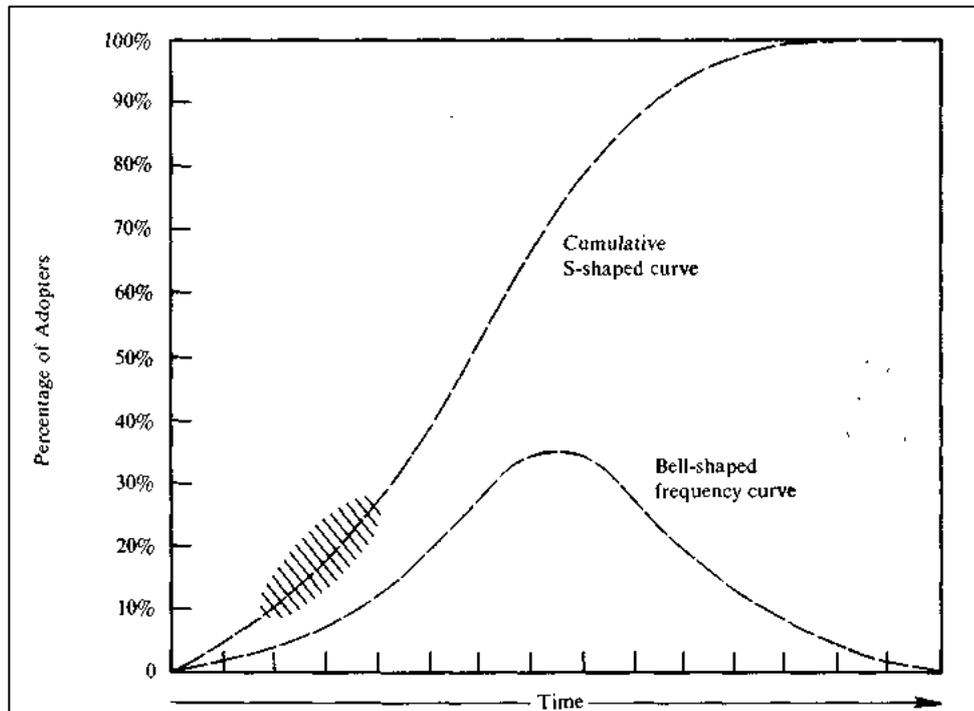


Figure 2 The cumulative S-shaped curve and the bell-shaped frequency curve

(Rogers, 1983, p. 243)

At the macro-level, innovations may be quickly transferred “along considerable social and geographical distances” especially when societies go through social processes which induce mobility (geographical as well as social) and the disintegration of close-knit networks (Milroy & Milroy, 1985, p. 370). That is because of the increase in the proportion of weak ties (at the expense of strong ties) in the community/communities (Milroy & Milroy, 1985).

5.2.1 Innovation diffusion in social network sites

Del Tredici and Fernández (2018, p. 1591) research “the birth and diffusion of lexical innovations” online by using data from Reddit, an SNS containing communities referred to as subreddits (Del Tredici & Fernández). The authors select and examine twenty of the site’s subreddits, which differ in the topic and size, and concentrate on Internet slang (such as, for instance, abbreviations). They, furthermore, evaluate the applicability of Milroy and Milroy’s theory of social networks and speaker innovations to the birth of lexical innovations in social communities interacting online (Del Tredici & Fernández, 2018).

In Reddit communities, innovators are, compared to other users, markedly more central. Furthermore, they are considerably more active concerning the number of posts. As stated by the

researchers (Del Tredici & Fernández), innovators are not part of tightly connected cliques and have low tie-strength. Moreover, they are located in the centre of the network. The latter finding is though contradictory to the Milroy and Milroy's (1985) concept of an innovator which is, according to them, a marginal individual. Nevertheless, Del Tredici and Fernández's result, indicating that innovators are core members of a community, can be construed as providing support to Labov who characterises innovators as leaders (Del Tredici & Fernández, 2018).

Del Tredici and Fernández (2018) write that strong-tie users play a crucial role in the diffusion process since they spread novelties, introduced by innovators, in their cliques. Moreover, they found that in the online social communities, individuals with high tie-strength are a minority. The results from all the researched subreddits revealed that around 15 to 20 per cent of users have strong ties (Del Tredici & Fernández, 2018). This finding is contradictory to the one of Milroy and Milroy, indicating that most people have strong ties and belong to tight-knit cliques. However, it is necessary to remark that in the research of Milroy and Milroy (1985), the investigated communities were, in contrast to the ones analysed by Del Tredici and Fernández, small-scale. Another difference between Milroy and Milroy's results and the ones of the research of online social communities using Reddit is the position of strong-tie users in the network. Since, as the analysis shows, the users of Reddit with high tie-strength are considerably more central. They form "a loose ring" around innovators who are in the centre and act as hubs. The authors furthermore state that the results of their study support the claim of Milroy, which says that "innovation diffusion is connected to sustained adoption by strong-tie community members" (Del Tredici & Fernández, 2018).

Another study (Goel et al., 2016), which deals with information (innovation) diffusion, investigates a large-scale dataset of all messages publicly posted on Twitter. The dataset includes messages posted on the SNS over the course of one year (from June 2013 until June 2014). Moreover, the focus of this work is only on messages posted from the United States, and which are, at the same time, written in English. According to Goel et al. (2016), Twitter is used by famous people with millions of followers as well as by users who treat the SNS more like an intimate space for communication with their friends. Hence, the ties of followers may be asymmetric. The authors, furthermore, state that the rapid increase in social media popularity has resulted in a rise in linguistic creativity and diversity, having an impact on all levels of written language (ranging from spelling to grammatical structure and semantic meaning) (Goel et al., 2016). In the study, they focus on "variation and change in the use of individual words" (Goel et al., 2016, p. 3) and testing "whether and how geographically distinctive linguistic markers spread

through Twitter” (Goel et al., 2016, p. 6). The results show that densely embedded (strong) ties are more influential than other ties. Moreover, the authors determined that abbreviations (e.g. “tfti” meaning “thanks for the information” and “lls” meaning “laughing like shit”) and phonetic spellings (e.g. “asl” meaning “as hell”, “ard” meaning “alright”, and “dese” meaning “these”) display complex contagion. In other words, the more times a person is exposed to them, the more likely he is to adopt them. In contrast, that is not true about lexical words, which are, for instance, “hella” (an intensifier) and “phony” (fake). Furthermore, even though the theory suggests that geographically local ties have greater influential than non-local ties, the results show no evidence of it. In addition, on Twitter, the spread of a non-standard word is most likely to happen between people connected in a mutual-reply network (Goel et al., 2016). According to the authors, “language change in social media can be viewed as a form of information diffusion across a social network” (Goel et al., 2016, p. 14). Moreover, it is a diffusion process over a differentiated social network where some connections are more significant than others (Goel et al., 2016).

As these two studies show, innovations can be diffused in SNSs as well as in real life. Among other important findings presented above, one of the most valuable ones, for this project, is the fact that, on SNSs, there are much more low tie-strength users who are more active in posting content than those with high tie-strength, which explains the large number of innovations arising on them, which are spread by users with strong ties within their cliques.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to show that social network sites accelerate language change, especially of the English language since English has the highest number of Internet users due to its global status.

The main idea of this thesis was the notion of the inevitability of language change. This change is assumed to be accelerated as a result of the nature of the medium. Moreover, a surprising fact about females being the leaders of language change was provided. In addition, some objections to the process of language change, which were expressed predominantly in print media, were presented.

The non-standard features of computer-mediated communication are most visible in the English language because of its flexibility. These modifications are possible mainly because of homophony between individual sounds and several words, and the lack of inflectional endings.

Even though the features of online communication are not exclusive to social network sites, they, as well as some innovations (e.g. social network site neologisms), are introduced by an innovator, which has weak ties with other users, and next spread by strong-tie users among their cliques. Thereafter, a further innovator can diffuse the novelties into other cliques as well. As a consequence, the innovations can spread into the whole community and result in language change.

Most importantly, the effect of social network sites on language is more dramatic than that of face-to-face communication. That is not only because of the wider reach of their users but also due to the fact that, on social network sites, there are more weak ties than in real life. These ties are essential because they have been shown to correlate with language change.

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8 List of abbreviations

CMC	computer-mediated communication
CMD	computer-mediated discourse
SNS	social network site
SNSs	social network sites
ASCII	American Standard Code for Information Interchange
U.S.	United States

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Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vlivem sociální sítí na anglický jazyk. Je rozdělena do čtyř kapitol, kterými jsou: internet, sociální síť, online komunikace a jazyková změna. Cílem této práce bylo prokázat, že sociální síť urychluje jazykovou změnu, a to především v případě anglického jazyka, jelikož se jedná o jazyk s největším počtem internetových uživatelů. Tento fakt je zapříčiněn tím, že je anglický jazyk definován jako globální.

První kapitola se věnuje internetu, jako takovému, jeho stručné historii a jazykům, které na něm můžeme nalézt. Dále tato kapitola objasňuje, jak jazyk může získat globální status a soustředí se přitom právě na anglický jazyk.

Další kapitola vymezuje termín „sociální síť“ a pojednává o jeho složitém definování, způsobeném jejich rychlým vývojem. Následně popisuje postavení těchto sítí v rámci počítačem zprostředkované komunikace, způsoby komunikace a změny v důležitosti jejich funkcí. Dále se věnuje jejich historii a současnému používání.

Následující kapitola popisuje jazyk používaný online, především jeho nestandardní prvky. Dále pak představuje některé neologismy, které vznikly díky sociálním sítím.

Poslední kapitola se zabývá teorií jazykové změny, články v tisku, které s ní nesouhlasí a také šířením inovací jak v reálném životě, tak v sociálních sítích.

V závěru práce byly zdůrazněny nejdůležitější poznatky vycházející z dostupné literatury a elektronických zdrojů. Jedním z těchto poznatků bylo to, že je jazyková změna nevyhnutelným procesem, převážně vedeným ženami. Dalším faktem je, že nestandardní prvky nevznikly díky sociálním sítím, ale již mnohem dříve. Tím nejpodstatnějším zjištěním této práce bylo to, že sociální síť mají mnohem větší vliv na jazyk, než je tomu při komunikaci v reálném životě.

Anotace

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Název práce:	Vliv sociálních sítí na anglický jazyk
Název v angličtině:	Impact of Social Network Sites on the English Language
Anotace práce:	<p>Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vlivem sociálních sítí na anglický jazyk. Tato práce je sestává ze čtyř kapitol. První kapitola představuje základní informace o internetu a jazycích, které tam můžeme nalézt. Další kapitola se soustředí na sociální sítě, jejich definici, historii a jejich současný stav. Následující kapitola se soustředí na online komunikaci a jazyk, který se při ní používá. Poslední kapitola se zabývá jazykovou změnou, panikou v novinách a šířením inovací.</p>
Klíčová slova:	Internet, sociální sítě, online komunikace, jazyková změna, šíření inovací
Anotace v angličtině:	<p>As the title suggests, this bachelor thesis deals with the impact of social network sites on the English language. The bachelor thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter presents general information about the Internet and its languages. The next chapter focuses on the social network sites, their definition, history and current use. The following chapter deals with online communication, and the language used there.</p>

	Finally, the last chapter deals with language change, moral panics in print media, and innovation diffusion.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	The Internet, social network sites, online communication, language change, innovation diffusion
Přílohy vázané v práci:	
Rozsah práce:	24
Jazyk práce:	angličtina