FRENCH CYBERLANGUAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

The popularity of the Internet as a vehicle for communication has considerably influenced French written language. This has lead to the development of a new kind of written code, French cyberlanguage. Although cyberlanguage is a recent development, it is actually the product of various pre-existent processes. Some of these influences include constraints on time and space, the impact of informal oral language, and the impulse to be creative and playful with language. Thus it is a new phenomenon that creates modern lexicon by using traditional methods.

The purpose of this study is to describe the aspects of French cyberlanguage and to analyze the discursive choices made by its users using actual chat transcripts. It explores various aspects of this phenomenon, including the demographic of its users, categorization of cyberlanguage, and the many processes that are utilized in order to create new lexicon and methods of expression. The choices of lexicon and style that are a result of these processes reflects the varied nature of cyberlanguage: because it is co-constructed by its users, cyberlanguage consists of a wide array of variable words and tactics available to Internet users.

There is a certain amount of controversy surrounding the use and popularity of cyberlanguage. The arguments for and against its use are given, in addition to a discussion of the future of cyberlanguage. Current research makes it very clear that the phenomenon of French cyberlanguage is not a temporary or passing fad, but is instead

an interesting new means of written communication that is actually progressing beyond

the isolation of the Internet and into mainstream usage.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped me and guided me through the trials and tribulations of creating this manuscript. In particular, my loving family, supportive professors, close friends, and adoring husband who stood by me throughout the time taken to complete this work.

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CHAPTER 1

Characteristics of cyberlanguage

There are approximately ten million internet-users in France today (Anis, Parlez-vous 11). These French-speaking Internet users, or *internautes,* are constantly communicating with one another, using various methods such as email, chat programs, and blogs. Many are even using the Internet to send text messages (SMS) to mobile phones. This continuous communication exists primarily in written form (with the exception of podcasts and webcam), and is often referred to as *cyberlangue* or cyberlanguage. When cyberlanguage occurs in chat rooms and on instant message systems, it is known as chatspeak, from the English verb meaning "to chat." This term has been adapted into French with a variety of spellings (*chater, chatter, tchater, tchatcher*) (Anis, Parlez-vous 22). Whatever the word used to describe this phenomenon, writing on the Internet has noticeably deviated from standard written French.

This deviation has occurred because cyberlanguage adapts to the demands of communication in virtual space, involving the constraints on space and time, and the informal nature of digital communication (Gajos 33). Chatters favor simplified and reduced language in order to correspond quickly and to communicate the maximum amount while using the minimum amount of keystrokes. One example of such adaptation is that cyberlanguage has developed a codification system that shortens words and abbreviates phrases in order to communicate faster and with fewer letters. Also, the orthography of French cyberlanguage is evolving to more closely reflect oral

language than standard written French. Thus, cyberlanguage is written in form, but oral in its source (Déjond 61). This written conversation is informal, spontaneous, immediate, volatile, and co-constructed by its users (Pierozak, Éléments de réflexion 205). Because of these characteristics, the overall nature of cyberlanguage is significantly influenced by the individual linguistic choices that its users make in order to communicate.

Indeed, cyberlanguage is a language that is emerging, mutating and transforming itself according to the requirements of its users (Déjond 17). The communicative options of these users create what linguist Jacques Anis describes as a "melting-script," which requires a certain level of decryption for novice chatters. Another characteristic of this melting-script is that it has various linguistic sources, some of which are English, rap and *le verlan*, a type of slang popular among French youths (Déjond 33). These sources have greatly influenced the lexicon of this new cyberlanguage. Moreover, because the majority of the processes involved in the creation of this language are already existent in other languages and language systems, it is important to note that cyberlanguage is not as new as it might initially seem. It is certainly unique, as it combines many processes and tendencies of language evolution. The venue of the Internet and the direct influence of technology also make it quite distinctive from other written language forms, but in actuality, the melting-script that is cyberlanguage is a phenomenon where various preexistent tendencies, both oral and written, are finding new configurations and combining in interesting ways.

Lastly, it is important to note the distinction between cyberlanguage and chatspeak, although the two are used as synonyms for the purposes of this examination. Chatting, as opposed to emailing and blogging, is synchronous in nature,

meaning that the communication exchange is direct and in real time (Gajos 35). The synchronous aspect of chatting is important in shaping chatspeak because it has created a situation in which language needs to be brief but expressive in order to communicate in an immediate written form. This is an extremely important influence in the development and characterization of this type of cyberlanguage, and it has indeed had a profound effect on cyberlanguage in general, hence the reason why the two terms are often used synonymously.

A derivative of verbal communication

Oral communication is typically and historically very different from written communication. Writing distances the sender of the message from its receiver in both time and space, and its context is contained within the text itself (the language, register, genre, etc.) (Ong 308). Moreover, oral words are always part of a context that is beyond linguistic, because the immediate context of words is not simply other words, but various other factors such as tone and body language (Ong 308). With cyberlanguage, the gap between written and oral language is narrowing. Internet users are finding various ways to complement their written communication with context clues that allow the receiver of messages to assess the text in a way that has never before been possible outside of oral communication.

In fact, many of the features of French cyberlanguage are characteristic of oral language. The use of onomatopoeias, borrowed directly from the wildly popular genre of French comic books, is a good example of the "indirect auditory influence on Internet language" (Lewin 30). Other examples include pause fillers and phonetic spellings that more closely resemble the sounds of actual speech than the standard (Pierozak, Le

'français tchaté' 129). Indeed, these new linguistic and semiotic practices are allowing users access to a greater degree of expression than is typically available in other written genres (Malone 59). This new Internet writing system, drawing so heavily from oral language, gives users tools with which they can more efficiently communicate. Thus, cyberlanguage is a written form of language that derives many of its discursive practices from contemporary oral communication.

Classification

There are many conjectures, with connotations both positive and negative, as to what exactly cyberlanguage is and what it consists of. Is it a neo-language, a dialect, a language variation, a pidgin, a register, etc.? Is it characterized by a lack of rules, or the emergence of new norms (Lewin 30)? Are critics correct in condemning it as a "slanguage" and a "digital virus," (Crystal)? These and many more questions arise when trying to deal with classifying chatspeak.

One aspect is clear: whatever its classification, cyberlanguage constitutes a series of processes that are employed systematically and according to usage rules (Anis, Parlez-vous 30). Thus, there is a certain amount of structure and homogeneity in chatspeak. Moreover, the main difference between other forms of French and French cyberlanguage is simply variation (Pierozak, Éléments de réflexion 201). French itself is made up of many different variations, and thus many linguists have conjectured that this is the same phenomenon: that French cyberlanguage might be just another written variation of standard French (Bagola 107).

One leading cyberlanguage linguist, Aurélia Déjond, defends the classification of chatspeak, asserting that it is not a sub-language, but a parallel language that mixes the

oral and written codes (Gajos 33-34). Some linguists (Pierozak et al) have even gone so far as to say that the way in which cyberlanguage is developing follows the pattern of the creolization of languages. While it is obvious that cyberlanguage does not itself constitute a creole (it is not the maternal language of any French speaker), it is interesting to note the similarities between the development of a pidgin and the evolution of chatspeak. Namely, chatspeak developed as a result of contact: contact that internautes had with chatters of other languages (English for instance), and the connection between technology and language, coupled with constraints on communication (in this case time and space).

Initial attempts not withstanding, there currently exists no agreed upon definition as to what cyberlanguage is and how it can be classified. The fact that it is a purely written form of language does not help with its categorization: most new language varieties are first oral in nature. Indeed, what can really be drawn from the attempt to categorize cyberlanguage is that it consists of many familiar linguistic procedures that have been combined in new ways and in a new venue to create something that is itself unique and innovative. Although cyberlanguage draws its processes from existing trends in the French language, the development of a brand new written code in this manner and under these conditions is somewhat unprecedented. Indeed, chatspeak is rather unique and distinctive, and thus it is not at all surprising that it does not completely fit into our existing perception of language categorization.

Language of youths

Although the development of French cyberlanguage is recent and modern, select groups using language as a cryptic code is certainly not a new concept. Encoding

messages is a way to distance those who understand the code from those who do not, and teenagers have been inventing ways to encode their written communications for generations (passing notes that are encrypted in special alphabets or writing permutations, for instance) (Herring 32-33). This mindset certainly influenced the development of cyberlanguage among on-line French youths: indeed, at its start, cyberlanguage was a tool for teenagers to communicate in coded language that, without some knowledge of the linguistic nature of cyberlanguage, would be extremely difficult to comprehend.

Over the years, cyberlanguage has become a much larger phenomenon than coded messages sent between classmates. With the ever-increasing popularity of the Internet, older generations have come to acquire a certain level of familiarity with the conventions of cyberlanguage (Herring 33). Moreover, chatspeak has entered into the modern French world in such venues as press, advertising and literature, as more and more French speakers are becoming acquainted with its conventions (Anis, Neography 87). Cyberlanguage has evolved from a code intended for use only by an elite population (French youths) into a cultural phenomenon that signifies numerous linguistic choices available to Internet users who seek to communicate (Cervenkova 77).

CHAPTER 2

Processes and strategies that lead to communicative options

The synchronous nature of chat produces an environment where the participants are communicating rapidly and in the same temporal space. This in turn creates a need to respond immediately, and this need for urgency imposes the use of forms that assure fast communication (Gajos 35). The rapidity of these exchanges and the limited number of written signs to use has led to many different types of linguistic modifications and new creations both at the lexical level and the morphosyntactic level (Gajos 33). Thus, the nature of chat creates the need for the development of linguistic strategies that help chatters communicate effectively in a synchronous written environment.

The specific linguistic strategies that cyberlanguage has developed do indeed allow internautes to communicate effectively. As previously mentioned, these strategies come from various different sources, and most of the processes for creating new terms come directly from those already employed by the French language (Otman 38). Therefore, while the variants that cyberlanguage is generating have been created specifically in order to satisfy the needs of communication in cyberspace, the processes behind these variants are actually quite familiar (Gajos 33).

These discursive strategies, although some are familiar, are also extremely complex (Lienard 50). The complicated and rich lexicon alone requires a certain level of knowledge or training in order to follow conversations written in French cyberlanguage. Indeed, cyberlanguage is really just a series of processes that can only be used systematically and according to specific rules and procedures (Anis, Parlez-vous 30).

Regardless of the source of a particular process within cyberlanguage, its comprehension may be extremely difficult for those who are unfamiliar with chatspeak (*les non-initiés*) (Gajos 43). Moreover, although many internautes enjoy breaking linguistic rules, they also understand that they still need to be comprehensible to other chatters. After all, there is no point in sending a message or a text that breaks so many rules that it "ceases to be intelligible," (Crystal).

It is important to note that cyberlanguage functions as a result of the communicative choices that its users make. Chatspeak is not homogenous; the choice to use or to not use the variations of lexicon and discursive strategies of cyberlanguage is a matter of convention and individual preference (Pierozak, Le 'français tchaté' 135). Cyberlanguage supplies its users with many communicative options: lexical options, syntactic options, pragmatic options, etc. Therefore, the following processes can likewise be considered a collection of the types of communicative options that cyberlanguage offers to its users.

Lexicon

The lexicon of a language tends to act as a reflection of the linguistic changes that the language undergoes (Bagola 103). That is why the lexicon has been included first in the types of communicative options available to chatters. Indeed, the neologies of the lexicon of cyberlanguage are extremely rich and remarkable, and certainly the most plentiful of all of the linguistic processes of chatspeak.

Borrowed words

The most salient of all the choices open to cyberlanguage users is that of the borrowing or adaptation of English lexical material. This is not at all surprising, considering that English is certainly the dominant language of the Internet (Anis, Parlez-vous 46). The language of cyberspace and of new technology is principally American English in its origin (Otman 38). These foreign words are quickly introduced into Internet jargon and then adapted to suit the needs of the rapid and efficient communication required in cyberspace (Gajos 35). These Anglicisms (*anglicismes*) are part of the linguistic customs of internautes, and they are used not only by adolescents and teens, but are also widely employed by adult Internet users (Gajos 36).

The wide acceptance of English neologisms in French chatspeak has certainly been the subject of numerous debates: many language purists are distrustful of these borrowed words, and see their existence as evidence that English is invading the French language and threatening to establish linguistic hegemony. It is important to note, however, that English has always "invaded" the French language; that is to say, the two languages have often influenced each other throughout their development (Anis, Parlez-vous 51). English is certainly teeming with words borrowed initially from the French language (Déjond 43). Moreover, one of the reasons that English words have been so easily incorporated into the French cyberlanguage lexicon is that English itself has been heavily influenced by not only the French language, but also by its base language, Latin (Anis, Parlez-vous 54).

Most of the terms borrowed from English are clearly identifiable as such, while others (such as abbreviations and acronyms) are encoded into cyberlanguage (Otman 39). Many English variants are more difficult to recognize because they have been

"frenchified," or modified orthographically in order to more closely reflect French pronunciation or word formation. Sometimes this modification is very minor (changing a letter or adding an accent) while sometimes the suffix or prefix is transformed. Verbs are especially subject to this process, and indeed the word "*chatter*" itself is a manifestation of this procedure (Anis, Parlez-vous 46). These borrowed words often take on the properties of a French word, and new derivatives are created that do not actually exist in the original English (increment in English leads to *incrémentiel, décrémenter, incrémentation*, etc.) (Otman 39).

As with spoken French, French cyberlanguage easily accepts words from other Romance languages such as Italian and Spanish. The majority of these words are terms of politeness and interjections that are often used to replace the longer French equivalent (Gajos 27). Words from Arabic are also found in French slang and, as a result, are sometimes used by internautes. One prominent example is the verb *kiffer*, which means to really like or appreciate something as in *je te kiff* ("I really like/appreciate you").

Initialisms and abbreviations

Initialisms, abbreviations and acronyms (*sigles*) are not at all contemporary linguistic inventions. In fact, one of the most famous of these dates back to the mantra of the Roman Empire: SPQR (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*) (Déjond 22). In France, many businesses and governmental departments are denoted with this type of abbreviation (SNCF- *Société nationale des chemins de fer français*, EDF- *Électricité de France*). C-à-d has also become a popular acronym (*c'est-à-dire*), as have SVP and STP (*s'il vous plaît*, *s'il te plaît*) (Anis, Parlez-vous 32-33). There are also several customary

abbreviations for French titles: a single *M.* denotes *Monsieur*, while *Mme* stands for *Madame* and *Mlle* for *Mademoiselle*. Indeed, this abbreviating process has existed in French for a very long time, but the extremely high frequency of its use in cyberlanguage is what is so remarkable (Gajos 29).

The limits on time and space imposed on French chatters have essentially led to the development of numerous acronyms and abbreviations (Gajos 29). Many acronyms used in French chatspeak have been taken directly from English (*lol* being the quintessential example), while others have cropped up as a translation of an already existent English acronym (*mdr* has evolved as an alternative to *lol*, from the French phrase *mort de rire*, *asv*, meaning *âge/sexe/ville,* serves the purpose of English's asl age/sex/location) (Anis, Parlez-vous 35). Still others have evolved from the natural need for French cyberlanguage to abbreviate itself.

Technological Neologisms

As has been mentioned above, technology creates the need for new words. The creation of the Internet is certainly no exception. Various new words have entered into the French language through this venue. Many of these new words are derivatives of English: *lagger* for example (meaning to lag, that the Internet connection is slow). It is true, however, that once these words are adapted into French, they are typically subjected to the same process as other French words. For instance, many lend themselves to French derivations, such as *tchateur* (chatter). Verbs, as can be demonstrated by the case of *lagger*, are adjusted in order to make them more functional in the French language. Thus, *lagger* can be conjugated like any other *–er* verb. Indeed, French cyberlanguage is full of these technological neologisms. That is not at all

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surprising, given the need for new terms to describe the new features of technology and computer programs.

Verlan

Le verlan is a type of verbal French slang that dates back to the Middle Ages but is now quite popular with French youths (Antoine 42). *Verlan* is an excellent example of a process that is very typical of cyberlanguage: that of *lexical recycling*, which is the reuse and alteration of already existing words (Antoine 42). The process of *verlan* involves the inversion (and sometimes truncation) of syllables in order to form a new coded word. The word *verlan* itself is an example of the process: *verlan* is *l'envers* ('backwards') with inverted syllables and a new orthography. Like many types of slang, *verlan* is principally a form of oral communication, and written standardization for its terms does not yet exist (Méla 31). (There are, however, a few notable exceptions, such as *beur*. *Beur* has a standardized spelling and is a widely adopted term that fills a lexical gap in the French language, as it is used to represent North Africans living in France). In general, the written forms of verlanized words follow the oral pronunciation (another feature that makes *verlan* so appealing to internautes).

The fact that this type of slang formation seeks to reduce and to shorten words makes for excellent additions to the cyberlanguage lexicon (Méla 32). In francophone chatrooms, the use of *verlan* is somewhat marginal, but the usefulness of these shortened forms in cyberlanguage cannot be overlooked. Moreover, the presence of verlanized words serves to further indicate the large presence of French youths in the development of cyberlanguage (Anis, Parlez-vous 40).

Onomatopoeias from French comic books (BD)

The biggest contribution to cyberlanguage from the realm of *bandes dessinées* (comic books, *BD*) is that of the onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia is a word that imitates the sound it is representing. Some examples include *pang* for the sound of a gun firing, *blabla* for generic blathering, and *dring dring* for the sound of a telephone ringing. Onomatopoeias are often used in verbal storytelling, but until their adoption by the comic book industry they had remained an oral representation of sound. Now, the use of onomatopoeic words in their written form has become very common, especially in the realm of cyberlanguage.

Phonology

The phonological correlations represented by written French words have been tremendously affected by cyberlanguage in various interesting ways. This is not surprising, given chatspeak's inclination toward oral forms of language. Internautes are finding an increasing number of ways to represent the kind of language they are encoding rather than using the mandated orthography of standardized written French.

Phonetic representation

Orthography in French denotes more than just the meaning of the word, both for functional and cultural reasons (Anis, Parlez-vous 39). Functionally, a written message must be more explicit because the writer and the receiver are typically removed from each other in space and time. The nature of the written word makes it more conservative and it therefore better preserves the links with its origins (Anis, Parlez-vous 39).

Cyberlanguage, however, is a written conversation that is inspired by informal speech, and so it is not bound by these types of conventions (Anis, Parlez-vous 38).

The orthography of French cyberlanguage is being simplified in several ways. Many variants are evolving toward forms that either represent the actual sounds of language in less complicated ways or those that are shorter and thus require less effort to type (Gajos 41). Some examples include the dropping of unpronounced letters (*fai* instead of *fais* or *fait*) or even the substitution of *é* for the phonemes *ai*, *ez*, and *er* (*je fé* meaning I do, *vous parlé bien* meaning you speak well, and *j'aime dansé* meaning I like to dance). This simplification is of a phonic nature, and it tends to favor the actual oral pronunciation of words or variants that involve fewer keystrokes. Thus, internautes are writing just as they speak and transcribing words the way they hear them being pronounced.

Another consequence of this phonetic representation is that many chatters are substituting homophones for one another. Thus, when an internaute types *ses* they might really mean *c'est, sais* or *ces* depending on the context. This in itself is a sort of word game, because we are programmed from standard written codes to give certain semantic meaning to *ses* and different meaning to the words *c'est, sais* and *ces*, but these distinctions are *not* marked in oral communication (except from context). This type of change in phonetic representation is indeed indicative of the playful nature of chatspeak.

Spelling value of letters and numbers

Cyberlanguage has adopted a curious linguistic process of using numbers and letters as phonetic representations of their sound, or giving letters a *valeur épellative*

(spelling value). This means that the letters and numbers represent only their sound, sometimes disregarding their meaning. Letters typically represent the sound they are given when said in the alphabet, and numbers can be substituted as homonyms of their pronunciation. In French this is also called an *allographe*. What an *allographe* means is that 2 can be used to substitute not only the number two (*deux*), but also the sounds /də/ *demain* / and /dø/*deux*, hence one very common abbreviation for tomorrow (*demain*): 2m1. In this example, *-ain*, which is the nasal vowel /ɛ̃/ is represented by the number 1. In doing so, this abbreviation is displaying a verbal phenomenon that is currently occurring in French: the merging of the nasal vowel as in the number 1 (/œ̃/) with the nasal vowel as in *demain* (/ɛ̃/). This occurrence further illustrates the ways in which cyberlanguage is reflective of oral French.

As for using letters for this "spelling value" process, they retain the value of the pronunciation of the letter itself (/ka/ for the letter *k*, /se/ for the letter *c*, etc). Often, but not exclusively, a letter that is meant to have the value of its spelling will be capitalized. Thus "I spoke to him" is sometimes written *je lui ai parlE,* wherein it is understood from its capitalization that the letter *E* in *parlE* is to be pronounced /e/. (It should be noted that although *e* is pronounced [ø] in the alphabet, the capitalized *E* is usually understood to represent <é> because accent marks are often dropped from capitalized letters). When letters represent whole words and are isolated by spaces, no capitalization is necessary. Thus, one might see the letter *c* representing *c'est* and *t t* representing the slang pronunciation of *tu étais*, or *t'étais*.

Although this particular process is thought to be a derivative of English chatspeak tendencies (*R* for *are* and *U* for *you*, for example), it has actually existed in French

before the age of the Internet. For example, before the invention of CDs, DVDs and

MP3s, the French rented K7 (*cassettes*, from the letter of the alphabet *k* /ka/ and the

number *sept* /sɛt/). Moreover, using the spelling value of letters has been often used in

the act of writing rebuses, a common French language game using letters and numbers.

Rebuses

      The rebus is a kind of word puzzle, the name of which originated in French in the

1600s from the Latin phrase *de rebus quae geruntur*, which means "concerning things

that are taking place," (Gajos 42). Rebuses are word games that usually involve

pictograms, but the rebuses invented and most used by chatters are composed

principally of numbers and letters (Gajos 42). There is a certain amount of deciphering

that is necessary to understand a rebus, and thus the inclusion of these word puzzles is a

natural addition to the coded language of chatspeak. As mentioned above, capitalized

letters indicate that the pronunciation should follow the sound of the letter as it is

named in the alphabet and not its phonetic correlation in the representational system.

In a rebus, this is very important because there might be other letters that are

pronounced as normal. An example for which capitalization is significant is the phrase

c'est raté, which, when written as a rebus would appear as *CraT*. In this case, the

capitalization of the letters *C* and *T* indicates their pronunciation as members of the

alphabet (/se/ and /te/), while the lower case letters are read as normal phonetic

representations (/ra/).

Morphology

The ever-present need for cyberlanguage to simplify and reduce has led to a large occurrence of morphological changes, especially in regard to the process of truncation.

Truncation

One of the most frequent examples of the lexical processes found in cyberlanguage is that of truncation (Cervenkova 80). The process of shortening a word by using truncation is no stranger to the French language: many different words that are a result of truncation have been accepted into regular verbal use (*prof* for *professeur* for example). In addition to its frequent use in oral language, the practice of truncation has also been commonly applied in written form, specifically in dictionaries and in cases where printers have needed to shorten words (Déjond 24). Another venue where truncations and abbreviations abound in the written word is in *petites annonces* (French classified ads) in newspapers and magazines, where shortened language is quite specifically codified and where abbreviations are ubiquitous. Some examples include *prox* for *proximité* (proximity) and *réc* for *récent* (recent). Truncation has also found much use in note-taking, including words like *chap.* for *chapitre* (chapter) and *introd.* for *introduction* (introduction). Cyberlanguage has implemented this process in order to create a plethora of neologisms, but it has also adopted many of these already existent truncations into its rich lexicon. One very common example is that of *prof.* for *professor*, which is often used as a general term in cyberlanguage to denote all types of teachers.

The process of truncation is fairly simple: it involves shortening a word by the suppression of one (or more) of its syllables. The final syllable is the most common

syllable in a word to be removed due to truncation, and when this occurs it is called

apocope. There are countless examples of this type of truncation, including *télé* for

télévision (television), *ciné* for *cinéma* (cinema, films) and *pneu* for *pneumatic* (digital).

The less popular truncation process of removing the initial syllable is called aphaeresis

or simply aphesis. Examples of this phenomenon include nicknames (*Bastien* for

Sebastien, *Toine* for Antoine) and even proper nouns such as *Ricain* for *Américain*

(American). Sometimes a word that has been subject to the truncation process,

especially apocope, can be resuffixed. This is a fairly common practice in French slang,

and the added suffixes are typically diminutive forms (-asse, -ard, -os, -o and –oche are

common suffixes used in resuffixation) (Gajos 28). Truncations are plentiful on the

Internet, saving time and precious key strokes as compared to their longer variants.

Pragmatics and conversational tools

The use of pragmatics and other conversational tools is quite common for

internautes. One motivation behind this is the oral-like nature of cyberlanguage.

Chatters are simulating a face to face conversation, but the non-verbal clues that are

normally present in oral exchanges are absent from the written word. Consequently,

internautes have generated a large number of pragmatic tools with which to better

reproduce a verbal conversation in a written forum.

Graphic extensions

Graphic extensions occur when an internaute repeats the same grapheme for

emphasis (*bonjourrrrrrrrr*). This type of emphasis is taken from English chatspeak

processes, as French emphasis typically occurs on the first syllable but English emphasis is more fluid.

The reasons for which a graphic extension might occur are numerous. Sometimes, a writer will use graphic extensions in order to fuse the bridge between written cyberlanguage and spoken dialogue: that is to say, to indicate that there would be an oral emphasis on a particular word if the conversation were spoken instead of written (Malone 63). In this case, the graphic extensions indicate sounds that are typically reserved for oral language (Déjond 29).

Another use for graphic extensions is in greetings and salutations. When a member of a chat forum enters or exits the chat room, they may choose to greet their fellow chatters by adding a graphic extension to their words, or they might in turn be greeted by one (*bonjour mes amiiiiiiiiiiiis* is a quite common salutation meaning "hello my friends"). This is a process of the greeting rituals observed in chatrooms, and in fact, the more that a internaute is greeted and the more graphic extensions are used, the more a chatter is "important" (Pierozak, Le 'français tchaté' 133).

Other forms of emphasis

Although the concept of emphasis exists in French, speakers and writers of French tend to emphasize much less frequently than English speakers (Malone 63). In oral communication, emphasis is often conveyed through prosody or gesture, but intonation less frequently marks a French speaker's emphasis. Cyberlanguage, in moving toward a written code that more closely reflects oral language, has developed several ways to express this concept, and thus French internautes have consequently come to embrace the notion of a more flexible emphasis. Among these various methods,

there are no actual enforced standards and conventions. However, this is not particularly different from non-verbal emphasis, as there are very few explicit coding rules, and yet the message of importance is usually understood (Malone 63).

The ways to emphasize the written word can be divided into two categories: marking that is internal to the word itself (or word-dependent) and external marking. To emphasize one word, an internaute might simply capitalize the first letter or the entire word in order to draw attention to it. (Putting a word in italics is a more standard means of *internally* marking for emphasis, but many chat programs and other Internet media do not allow internautes the option to include italics). To emphasize using external marking, an internaute might surround the word with asterisks or underscores (two symbols that have virtually no other purpose in written text) (Malone 63). Other forms of punctuation are also acceptable for marking emphasis, such as adding a question mark, exclamation point or combination thereof to a word in the middle of a sentence (Malone 65). In order to emphasize an entire phrase or sentence, line-initial arrows (^^^^^) can also be used. A line of upward-pointing arrows will usually follow a sentence that its author wished to be emphasized. Whatever the means to emphasize a word, what is important is that the appearance of the word is no longer normal, and therefore an intensification of meaning will be attributed to this highlighted word (Malone 62).

Non-verbal conversation sounds and pause-fillers

Spoken communication is about more than just spoken words. There are many different non-lexical items that are used as lexical clues to convey things such as agreement, disagreement and sympathy (moans and grunts from *BD* language for

example) (Malone 63). Indeed, many indications of a person's emotional state are wordless, such as emotion driven gestures and intonations (Malone 66). None of these clues are visible when internautes communicate electronically, but now they are being deliberately provided and explained in cyberlanguage. One approach to giving these clues is simply to indicate the extra-linguistic action, sometimes being emphasized such as *sourire* (smile) or *triste* (sad). These phenomena typically indicate either actions or emotional states, and can easily be substituted by emoticons (although emoticons are so plentiful that there is presumably less weight given to emoticons than to this particular type of utterance).

Another characteristic of oral communication that is typically not present in written language is that of pause fillers (Lewin 30). In oral conversation, it is quite normal to include pause fillers, sometimes even as a way to hold on to the role of speaker. To achieve this goal in written form, an internaute might type *ah, oh, bah, ben* or *bon...* or even *beeeeen* to indicate that he/she is reflecting on what to say or reacting to something that has been previously said.

Syntax

The reductive and instantaneous quality of the Internet has certainly influenced the usage of syntax of cyberlanguage in many ways. This was inevitable, as the fragmented nature of chat windows have dictated changes in syntax usage in specific ways that are quickly becoming somewhat standardized in chatspeak.

General changes to syntax usage

The reductive nature of chatspeak has led to a variety of changes to the use of French syntax in cyberspace. Subjects, pronouns, verbs, prepositions and conjunctions are all being reduced or omitted (Pierozak, Les pratiques discursives 122). This discursive practice has led to an overall excess of substantive nouns (Déjond 28). An example of this phenomenon would be *aime ça ?*, for *est-ce que tu aimes ça ?* (do you like that/this?), wherein the subject pronoun *tu* is indicated even without the proper conjugation of the verb as a result of the question mark. Another example would include the dropping of prepositions, such as *j'adore pizza* instead of the standard *j'adore la pizza* (I love pizza). It is important to note, however, that not all of these elements are being suppressed all the time; they are usually only left out when they are deemed unnecessary to comprehension.

Another example of how cyberlanguage has affected French syntax usage is that of fragmented sentences. Many chatters will segment their sentences over several lines of chat (pressing enter between each segment), thus "fragmenting" their statements into several parts (Pierozak, Le 'français tchaté' 130). There are two proposed reasons behind this phenomenon, and indeed users might choose to fragment their sentences for one of these two motivations. The first is simply to aid in typing long utterances. The second, a slightly more deviously motivated reason, is to dominate the chat window (that is to say, to be the principal chatter by quantity alone). Sentence fragmentation is not without its regulation, however, and indeed it is characterized by the following three elements. First, the sentence is typically divided at natural breaking points (whether from speech chunks or where punctuation would typically exist in standard written French). Second, these fragmented parts cannot be considered in isolation from one another. And third,

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chatters do not typically embed utterances between the segments of the fragmented sentence (chatters generally produce their fragmented sentences in a continuous and rapid manner) (Pierozak, Le 'français tchaté' 130).

Changes to usage of the temporal and modal systems

The temporal and modal systems of standard French are quite complex, having many different forms to express the past, present, future and subjectivity. However, the tendency of cyberlanguage is to reduce and simplify, and the temporal and modal systems are not exceptions to this trend. Internautes favor the use of the following forms: present tense (*je parle* meaning *I speak*), the compound past (*j'ai parlé* meaning *I spoke*), the imperfect tense (*je parlais* meaning *I was speaking/used to speak*) and (sparingly) the near future tense (*je vais parler* meaning *I will speak*), (Pierozak, Les pratiques discursives 122). This means that chatters are not promoting the use of the conditional, present subjunctive and simple past tenses, and the occurrences of these verb forms are relatively infrequent. Indeed, following trends in other areas of French, the use of the simple past is effectively non-existent in cyberspace (Nadeau 371).

There have also been changes to the compound past tense. These changes are due to the reductive nature of chatspeak as well as its tendency to imitate oral language, and the issue lies in the agreement of past participles. This agreement (feminine/masculine, singular/plural) is not evident in spoken French unless the pronunciation of the word is changed, and internautes have circumvented agreement in cyberlanguage by finding a way to eliminate the need for it. They have recourse, once again, to the phonetic transcription of the names of letters: instead of writing *elle est tombée*, which requires the extra *e* to indicate the gender of the past participle, some chatters write *elle est tomB*

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(Déjond 66). Again, the capitalization of the letter *b* indicates that it will be pronounced /be/ as in the alphabet, thus supplying the phonetic ending needed to indicate the past tense, but not requiring gender agreement. Since cyberlanguage suppresses most unpronounced letters anyway, the addition of an *e* for gender agreement would be redundant and would probably be misunderstood to indicate pronunciation instead of agreement.

Another way internautes avoid gender agreement in the past tense is by replacing the past participle with the infinitive (*elle est tomber*). This trend seems to have taken off in cyberspace, and may be slowly overtaking the previous process in frequency. Indeed, using infinitive forms instead of conjugating has become quite popular, especially for the second person plural form *vous*, since the verbs ending in –*er* are pronounced the same as if they were conjugated to end in –*ez*. This is also a similar process to what is happening with the imperfect tense of the verb *être*: the standard imperfect form *j'étais* is being replaced by versions such as *j'été* or *j'ete*. Other verbs in the imperfect are often similarly reduced to their phonetic representation or otherwise simplified in comparable ways.

Punctuation

The nature of the Internet has significantly changed the use of punctuation. In fact, former, standard usage is all but absent from the chatroom. For example, internautes will use multiple punctuation marks for emphasis. Often chatters also punctuate in a more playful way, by creating emoticons as well as some remarkable cyber-art.

General punctuation

Cyberlanguage has drastically altered the way internautes use punctuation markings. First of all, there is a definite lack of periods (full stops) in chatspeak, creating an overflow of run-on sentences. This is due in part to the nature of the chatting environment: the synchronous aspect adds immediacy to the communication, and thus full stops are reserved for moments of emphasis. Moreover, many sentences are written in separate fragments in the chat window as discussed above in the section on syntax.

That is not to say, however, that punctuation is missing from cyberlanguage. In fact, punctuation has never before seen such vibrant and innovative use. This is due in part to the fact that cyberspace is otherwise devoid of communicative clues, so internautes make far more use of punctuation than do conventional writers (Malone 63). Indeed, chatters tend to use punctuation to imitate prosody (Malone 63). Question marks and exclamation points are used with extreme frequency, and often duplicated in order to operate as a graphic extension. An internaute might also combine these marks in order to express the combination of elation and doubt (*!?!?!*) (Malone 63). The ellipsis (…) has also seen a remarkable usage eruption, due to the conversational nature of chatspeak. The ellipsis will often be used as an alternative to a period, indicating that a writer is not finished completing his/her thought (i.e., pause-filler). *Je pense…/donc…/je ris* (I think…/therefore…/I laugh) would be a typical example of an internaute using the ellipsis to indicate that his/her thought has not yet been finished.

Whereas before cyberlanguage certain punctuation marks were reserved for sentence-final use only, the need for emphasis in chatspeak allows for mid-sentence punctuation. This is due in part to the fact that punctuation marks have taken on a more prominent semantic role in cyberlanguage (Malone 65). Thus, when just one word or

group of words is important, question marks and exclamation points may be used for emphasis in the middle of a sentence.

Emoticons

Emoticons (also called *binettes* or *smileys*) are another example of the new and interesting uses that cyberlanguage is assigning to punctuation. Emoticons are small artistic representations (pictograms) of mainly facial expressions that serve to clue in other internautes as to the emotion or gestures of the writer. They seem to function as a sort of guide for the interpretation of the textual message in its totality, or to indicate the nature of the relationship between the internautes (Anis, Internet 85). This is why emoticons are typically found at the ends of messages: they are often used as a cryptic tool for the interpretation of the preceding text (Anis, Internet 85). In this way, emoticons provide clues as to how the comment was intended to be construed. For instance, a smiling face at the end of a harsh comment can be used to soften the tone, sometimes to indicate sarcasm (Malone 67).

The use of emoticons has been extremely important to the oral nature of cyberlanguage, as they are representative of gestures that indicate extra-linguistic factors existent in oral conversations. The face is considered the principal resource of non-verbal communication, but these important clues were virtually absent from written language until the emergence of smileys. Now, users can easily indicate hundreds of their moods and emotions, as well as a range of other pictorially represented ideas (hearts, light bulbs, flowers, and even coffee), in order to facilitate a more oral-like conversation in cyberspace (Malone 67). There are also several options

for style on certain emoticons, such as adding a nose, :-), or choosing between different options to represent the eyes of the smiley, :) versus =).

Some common smileys:

:) =) :-)	happy, joyful
;) ;-) ;]	winking, playful, flirting
:(=(:-(	sad, disappointed
:P =P XP	tongue out, joking (X indicates eyes are closed)
:S =S :?	confused, embarrassed
<3 :>	heart, love

ASCII Art

The last aspect of the novel uses for punctuation (as well as, on occasion, letters and numbers) is a type of pictogram called ASCII Art. (Emoticons are actually the simplest forms of ASCII Art.) ASCII Art is created by drawing complex images using only typographic characters (as defined by the ASCII- American Standard Code for Information Interchange). There is no limit to the types of drawings that can be rendered in ASCII Art (indeed, complex images and videos can now be converted into this type of art), but the more common representations are those that are quite simple. Flowers, for instance, are a very common ASCII Art representation. ASCII Art is sometimes given as a gift from one internaute to the other, sometimes incorporated into a conversation, and sometimes added to chat conversations at random for aesthetic appreciation. Here are a few examples of French ASCII Art :

```
          (__)
          (oo)                    ||    ||
   /-------\/             __       ||___||
  /  |     ||            /o)\      (=*.*=)
 *  ||----||            \(o/      (")_(")
    ~~      ~~
```

Vache	*Yin/Yang*	*Lapin*
Cow	Yin/Yang	Rabbit

Reduction/simplification

As has been previously stated, cyberlanguage seeks reduction in order to combat the restrictions of time and space imposed upon chatters. The ways in which language is being reduced are plentiful and quite fascinating, involving a certain degree of creativity and, interestingly enough, often following a regulated pattern.

Graphic fusions

As is the tendency of cyberlanguage to simplify and reduce, the physical spaces that separate words are no exception. Deleting this space allows two or more words to combine and form a graphic fusion (Déjond 21). Spaces are not deleted haphazardly, however. Graphic fusions are limited by syntactical constraints, and mostly occur between words that are often found in conjunction with one another. Thus, one often finds fusions between prepositions, determinants, nouns and pronouns (Pierozak, Le 'français tchaté' 134). Hyphens and apostrophes are also disappearing to create compound word fusions (Déjond 21).

Fusions are another example of the way that the written form of cyberlanguage is reflecting oral language. In a verbal chain of language there are no spaces between words. Thus, graphic fusions are eliminating the superfluous spaces in orthography.

Simplification of negations

In spoken French, the *ne* part of negations is often dropped, but it is almost always preserved when written (Anis, Neography 89). Thus, a French person writes "*je ne l'aime pas*" but typically says "*je l'aime pas*." Cyberlanguage, in following more closely

the practice of oral communication, has welcomed this type of simplification, and there is a definite tendency toward the suppression of the *ne*, especially when accompanied by *pas* (Pierozak, Les pratiques discursives 122). The fact that the sentence is still understood to be negated even without the *ne* demonstrates that this is a comprehensible simplification.

Typing in all lower case

Internet language has seen aided in the decline of proper capitalization. Messages on the Internet are often devoid of upper case letters (Lewin 34). This is a reflection of the informal nature of cyberlanguage, but also, as discussed above, capitalization is now used as a means for emphasis instead of as a feature conforming to the conventions of proper written language. The lack of capitalization also links written language more closely to verbal language, as the concept of capitalization is not present in spoken language (i.e., we do not speak using capital letters).

Omission of vowels

In written language, consonants supply more lexical information than vowels (Déjond 24). That is, consonants contribute more to the recognition of written words than vowels. Hence, the roots of words in most languages are typically characterized by the consonants (Anis, Parlez-vous 37). Because consonants are more salient, it is thus possible to omit the vowels from many words yet still arrive at the lexical identification of the intended word. This practice is not new to French; indeed the tradition of vowel suppression is a practical tool in note-taking, and the conventional abridged versions of several words are now commonly used (tt '*tout,*' ts '*tous,*' and bcp '*beaucoup*') (Anis,

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Parlez-vous 37). Although chatspeak is not the first to use this abridgement technique, the omission of vowels has now become quite a common occurrence in cyberspace.

Suppression of redundancies

In an orthographical sense, double consonants do not typically add any lexical information to the word. Therefore, doubling consonants is a linguistic redundancy. Cyberlanguage, always seeking to shorten and simplify, has a tendency to reduce these double consonants. The elimination of redundancies is in the interest of the maximum efficiency of the message: the shorter the word, the quicker it can be communicated, and therefore it allows the internaute to say a maximum amount of things in the minimum amount of time and space (Déjond 26).

Another linguistic redundancy is gender and plurality agreement. The article used with a noun usually indicates the gender and plurality without the need of the noun to reinforce these aspects. Thus, many internautes choose to neglect this agreement in their chatspeak. Thus an internaute would write *une étudiant* to indicate a female student instead of the proper written form of *une étudiante.* Moreover, making adjectives agree with nouns is even more of a redundancy (based on the article and the noun, the gender and plurality of a noun phrase is usually understood without the additional information contained within an adjective). Again, most internautes choose to simplify their language by not including this linguistic information, for instance typing *une maison blanc* (a white house) instead of *une maison blanche.*

Omission of unpronounced letters and diacritical marks

In the interest of rapid and efficient communication, internautes will often omit unpronounced letters and diacritical marks (Gajos 41). Unpronounced letters are plentiful in French orthography (with the exceptions created by liaisons), yet these letters rarely enhance the comprehension of a word. Typically, unpronounced letters tell a reader more about the form or the origin of a word rather than actually contributing information to the conversation in which the word was used. French cyberlanguage has adopted an orthography that acknowledges the uselessness or redundancy of these unpronounced letters by typically opting to omit them in an effort to increase efficiency.

The omission of diacritical marks differs from that of unpronounced letters in that these symbols (especially accent marks) usually provide information as to the pronunciation of the word. Accent marks, therefore, are usually dropped not as a result of their own ineffectiveness, but rather as an appeal to the rapid nature of cyber communication. Thus *e* is a perfectly acceptable and time-saving substitute for *é*, (Gajos 41).

CHAPTER 3

Discourse analysis of chat conversations

Now that the possible communicative options available to chatters have been defined and categorized, it is necessary to use the understanding of these phenomena in order to evaluate actual French chat conversations. To facilitate this evaluation, certain methods of discourse analysis can be applied to the data. For the purposes of this examination, I have chosen to assess chat conversations using the variation approach to discourse analysis according to Deborah Schiffrin's exegesis.

Variation analysis was developed by sociolinguist William Labov and is based on the assumption that "linguistic variation is patterned both socially and linguistically, and that such patterns can be discovered only through systematic investigation of a speech community," (Schiffrin 282). As can be expected from its name, variation linguistics is concerned with describing, categorizing, and comparing linguistic variation within language use: an appropriate task for discussing the variation in cyberlanguage.

The social context is a very important aspect to the study of discourse, in that the context will determine the register and communicative choices made by communicators. Variation analysis assumes that the social context of speech influences the use of speech in a largely significant way (Schiffrin 289). In the context of the following chat analyses, the social context is already defined by the venue where the chatters have chosen to communicate. In fact, all cyberlanguage is defined by the social context of its users being online in a non face-to-face environment (sometimes synchronous, sometimes asynchronous). Also, there is a perceived informality of online communication that

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influences the ways in which internautes use their language. In the chat venue chosen for the purposes of this analysis, the use of cyberlanguage is welcomed and encouraged.

There are two ways of approaching a text through variation analysis: the first is to examine the way a particular text compares to another type of text, and the second is to consider the way a particular text is internally constituted (via its structures and meanings) (Schiffrin 315). In order to better understand all aspects of the chat text examples, both of these routes will be explored in the discourse analysis of the subsequent chat conversations.

Text vs. text

There are two main aspects to cyberlanguage that make it unique: first is its divergence from written French, and second is its inclination toward oral French forms. Consequently, to better understand chatspeak as a whole, it will be necessary to evaluate it in the context of a comparison to both written *and* oral French. The preceding descriptions (chapters 2 and 3) of the many communicative options available to French chatters provided many points of departure for such comparisons, and the following evaluation of chat conversations will continue along this path. By comparing cyberlanguage to its main substrates (written and oral French), the peculiarities of chatspeak will become clearer.

Text vs. text-internal cues

Variation analysis recognizes that it is common for languages to have many alternate ways of saying "the same thing," (Schiffrin 287). These alternates are called variants, and they are the basis of variation analysis. To analyze these variants in a

quantitative matter is an important strategy of this type of discourse analysis. To do so might involve counting the number of times a particular variant appears in a given text and then comparing that with the number of times that the particular variant would have been possible (Schiffrin 317). For the purposes of this chat analysis, the variants will be collected and then compared to other communicative options available to the chatter.

Blablaland.com

There are many milieus where cyberlanguage occurs on the Internet: email, blogs and listservs being apt examples. Chatting, however, seems to be the archetype of cyberlanguage venues. Moreover, since its relation to oral French is being observed, chatting is useful in that it is more conversation-like than other realms of Internet communication as a result of its synchronous nature. Because of the quick nature of exchanges via chat forums, internautes are more likely to make use of the communicative options of cyberlanguage in order to communicate quickly and effectively.

Blablaland.com was chosen as the chat forum for this study. Blablaland (BBL) is a "chatting game" that is open for all members and has been a free chat venue for internautes since 2004. It is, however, marketed toward adolescents, or *ados*, and is advertised as such. Although it is true that cyberlanguage has recently become more mainstream, and as such is used more and more by other age groups, adolescents remain the most likely individuals to employ chatspeak and are typically the most fluent in its usage. Indeed, the majority of all utterances on BBL involve some aspect of cyberlanguage, and are therefore useful when analyzing chat conversation conventions.

On BBL, chatters, or *blablateurs* as they are called, are represented by *avatars* (in this case, avatars are small comic characters that users choose to represent themselves in the game, also called *skins*). The avatars can travel the magic realm of Blablaland by running, jumping, swimming, climbing, flying with a "jetPack" and having snowball fights. Chatters communicate while navigating the forum, and their utterances appear both in the traditional linear dialogue box as well as in dialogue balloons above their avatar's head.

Figure 1. Demonstration of avatar and traditional chat window vs. dialogue balloon

[accessed online : 17 February 2009]

BBL itself is made up of about 80 boards or scenes, and each board is its own chat room (one such board is shown in *Figure 1*). BBL was chosen because of the large amount of chatspeak being exchanged every moment in its chatrooms; indeed it is estimated that BBL has over 11,000 visitors per day (Blablaland.com). It was also chosen because members feel free to use their cyberlanguage with one another without fear of being ejected from the chat forum or being judged or negatively stereotyped. This aspect is very important to discourse analysis. When people know that their language is being observed, they may "alter their ways of speaking toward socially prestigious forms and/or toward forms more like that of their interlocutors," (Schiffrin 289). Variation analysis seeks to find communication that is not guarded: the type of communication that chatters use when they are paying minimum attention to what they are saying. BBL allows access to these types of utterances by allowing visitors, or *touristes*, who can move about freely but cannot communicate with other members. All chatting transcripts were obtained in this manner.

The corpus of chatscripts that BBL has provided for the purposes of this discourse analysis is plentiful but not boundless. To better explain the phenomena of cyberlanguage, these chatscripts have been broken down into relative segments that are demonstrative of the previously described communicative options. These segments have been specifically chosen with a qualitative focus in mind, as each section of dialogue clearly demonstrates these options. However, it is important to note, as variation analysis seeks to define variation through quantitative analysis of corpora, that more studies and more research would be necessary before reaching satisfying measures of the communicative options available to chatters.

Chat analysis 1 *Variations of style in emphasis*

This segment is taken from a conversation about the acquisition of tomatoes in BBL. Users are able to obtain three tomatoes each from a randomly placed tomato plant in order to launch at other users. If a user is hit by a tomato, his/her avatar turns red until he/she jumps into a body of water. In the middle of this conversation, the user frero-sty interrupts in order to make an announcement, but becomes upset when he is ignored by the other chatters.

a	**frero-sty :**	**ai tou le MONDE** (hé tout le monde) *hey everyone*
b	**frero-sty :**	**ecouter moi!!!!!!** (écoutez-moi !) *listen to me!*
c	**mello :**	**de BBL** (de Blablaland) *from Blablaland*
d	**mello :**	**ten a comment** (tu en as comment ?) *how do you have some (of the aforementioned tomatoes)*
e	**frero-sty :**	**ECOUTER MOIIII!!!** (écoutez-moi !) *listen to me!*
f	**Bulle_Do :**	**on ecoute** (on écoute) *we're listening*

[accessed online : 16 February 2009]

This rather short extract demonstrates several linguistic phenomena common to cyberlanguage, the most conspicuous of which being the need for emphasis. The user frero-sty wants to be listened to, but the other users are otherwise occupied in their discussion of obtaining tomatoes (as demonstrated by lines c and d, which can be understood as belonging to this other strain of conversation). Frero-sty first attempts to

use emphatic punctuation to draw attention to his demand by adding numerous exclamation points in (b). When he feels that this demand has not been met, his use of chatspeak characteristics increases; he retypes his demand in (e) using all capital letters and employing a graphic extension on the last letter of his statement (the *i* in *moi*). In an oral conversation, these practices might be akin to yelling and gesturing for attention, and in both oral conversation and in this particular chatting instance, his choice to employ these devices works and frero-sty is acknowledged by fellow chatter Bulle_Do (f*).

The language in this excerpt diverges from standard written French in many ways. The first example is when frero-sty types *ecouter moi* instead of *écoutez-moi* (b, e). Using the infinitive forms of verbs has become quite a common practice for internautes, and the deliberate "error" is understood. The omission of the diacritical marks (the hyphen and the accent mark) is also a feature of cyberlanguage that is not seen in standard written French. Another example of this type of omission can be found on line d, when the user mello omits the apostrophe that would normally be found in *t'en*. Other than the overuse of exclamation points, no punctuation can be found, even when mello is asking a question (d).

The nature of phonetic representations in this chatscript indicates the influence of spoken French on the language here. Using *ai* instead of *hé* for instance points toward the familiarity of the dialogue as well as its conversational nature (a). However, while the user frero-sty employs an alternative phonetic representation in this instance, he chooses not to represent the word *moi* in its accepted phonetic form of *mwa*. While it is difficult to draw conclusions based on this information alone, the selection of one

phonetic variant and not the other reinforces the fact that internautes have a choice about which communicative options to employ and when to employ them.

Another indication of the informality and oral nature of this chat excerpt is the user Bulle_Do's use of the pronoun *on* to mean 'we,' a connotation that is usually reserved for spoken language. When written, *on* is similar to the English indefinite pronoun *one*, but it is clearly not being used here in that sense.

Chat analysis 2 *Variations of style in expressions of social bonds*

   This chat excerpt is an example of a group farewell. The user Big_D4dd33 begins

the process by announcing that he must leave the other chatters (a). In the context of the

situation, this is understood to mean that he is signing off, as opposed to leaving the

chat room and going to another scene. After this initial announcement, the other

chatters begin to say goodbye to Big_D4dd33. What follows is a cascade of different

spellings and ways to say the same thing: farewell to the departing internaute.

a	**Big_D4dd33 :**	**fo jvous laisse**
		(il faut que je vous laisse)
		I have to leave (you all)
b	**xPOUP33 :**	**Bye**
		(Bye)
		Bye
c	**VOolcom-x3 :**	**Byee Byyee Big xD :) Attention a toi la**
		(Bye bye Big [emoticon] [emoticon] Attention à toi, là)
		Bye bye Big (user's name) [emoticon] [emoticon] *Take care of*
		yourself/watch out
d	**M4Xx-_x :**	**ok byebye mon big**
		(ok bye bye mon Big)
		ok bye bye my Big (user's name)
e	**M4Xx-_x :**	**xd**
		([emoticon])
		[emoticon]
f	**M4Xx-_x :**	**XD**
		([emoticon])
		[emoticon]
g	**Big_D4dd33 :**	**chow tout le monde jvous love**
		(tchau tout le monde je vous aime)
		ciao everyone I love you
h	**xPOUP33 :**	**MI TOO**
		(moi aussi)
		me too
i	**xPLUM3 :**	**JTE LoVVE**
		(je t'aime)
		I love you
j	**VOolcom-x3 :**	**<3**
		[emoticon]
		[emoticon]
k	**xPLUM3 :**	**BEBYYE**

		(bye bye)
		bye bye
l	VOolcom-x3 :	**Baibyee!;]**
		(Bye bye! [emoticon])
		Bye bye! [emoticon]
m	xPOUP33 :	**BYE BYE ON TAIME BIG**
		(bye bye on t'aime, Big)
		bye bye we love you, Big (user's name)

[accessed online : 15 February 2009]

In this sample alone there are six different orthographies for the word *bye* : Bye (b), Byee Byyee (c), byebye (d), BEBYYE (k), Baibyee! (l) and BYE BYE (m), as well as an alternative spelling of the Italian salutation *ciao* (shown as *chow*) (g). Out of these six forms of bye, only two are conventionally acceptable orthographies: Bye (b) and BYE BYE (m). One of the variations, byebye (d), would be conventionally acceptable were it not for the deletion of the space between the words (another feature of chatspeak). Byee Byyee (c) can be seen as using graphic extension to emphasize the leave-taking, while BEBYYE (k) is a probable keystroke error coupled with capitalization for emphasis. Finally, Baibyee! (l) exhibits graphic extension, space deletion and is a phonetic variant. The existence of these six variations of the same word is representative of the variation of style that is the choice of the individual internaute. While all of these variations *mean* the same thing, the manner in which they are presented provides further information as to the connotation (emphasis created by graphic extension or capitalization, the use of emoticons to indicate moods (l), etc.). For instance, it is clear from the parade of goodbyes alone that the user Big_D4dd33 is well-liked in this circle.

At its base, the word *bye* is borrowed from English (from *goodbye*), but the use of *bye* has been assimilated into spoken French for quite some time. Similarly, it is very common to hear a French speaker using the Italian word *ciao*, although it is typically

written as *tchau* and in this instance is written as *chow*, a phonetic variation that is based on English rather than French. Another example of borrowed lexicon in this chatscript is when Big_D4dd33 expresses his "love" for the other chatters (g). The user xPLUM3 imitates his use of the English verb, in addition to allowing a minor keystroke error, possibly intended for emphasis. xPLUM3 also adds her own borrowed word right beforehand, when she types MI TOO (h), which is a spelling of the English *me too* that is closer to French pronunciation.

This chat excerpt also contains various emoticons that link the written text to the extralinguistic functions that are found naturally in face to face conversation. VOolcom-x3 uses two emoticons to indicate her esteem of Big_D4dd33; namely xD, which represents a face that is so happy its eyes are closed to the point of being creased and its smile is huge, XD; and :), the standard smiley indicating happiness. That is not to say that these emoticons signify that VOolcom-x3 is happy to see the other user *leave* the chatroom, but instead the emoticons indicate that VOolcom-x3 holds Big_D4dd33 in high esteem. The next emoticon is put forth by M4Xx-_x, who makes a typing error in line e that he subsequently corrects in line f. While many internautes do not bother with corrections, M4Xx-_x must have recognized that his emoticon xd (e) would not be intelligible, hence his immediate correction to the accepted form of xD (f). This type of linguistic awareness indicates that there *are* rules and forms that are recognized by chatters, for even though there are six orthographies for *bye*, the one typing error by M4Xx-_x is not an acceptable variation and as such needed to be remedied. The fifth example of an emoticon is an interesting instance, in that it is not representative of a face. Instead, VOolcom-x3 wants to show Big_D4dd33 that she feels affection for him by drawing a heart using the ASCII Art method (<3, j). While this does not indicate a facial

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gesture or another type of prosody, the insertion of the emoticon heart certainly indicates a feeling that is otherwise difficult (or more verbose) to express. If VOolcom-x3 and Big_D4dd33 were engaged in a face to face conversation, the need for the emoticon heart could potentially be replaced by a gesture: a hug or, more appropriate in French contexts, kisses on the cheeks. The final appearance of an emoticon in this chatscript is also provided by VOolcom-x3, who says goodbye and then winks ;], a gesture that can be construed as flirting. All of these emoticons serve to provide extralinguistic information to accompany the written text, adding some aspects that might be expressed differently during a comparable verbal conversation.

It is apparent from this chatscript that there are social bonds being asserted with Big_D4dd33's leave-taking. In particular, the user VOolcom-x3 is very insistent upon saying goodbye, indicating first that Big_D4dd33 should take care, then offering an emoticon heart, and finally repeating her goodbye and adding a wink. What can be gleaned from this interaction is that Big_D4dd33 and VOolcom-x3 have an existing friendship that precedes Big_D4dd33's leave of the chatroom. Otherwise, the degree of familiarity and warmth that VOolcom-x3 offers would be highly incongruous with the chatting situation.

Chat analysis 3 *Verlan usage and variations of simplification and reduction*

The following chat excerpt, without the visual aid of BBL, might be rather confusing out of context. This particular chatscript is a result of one of the users in the game dropping gifts from the sky (visible within the chatroom window). A comment from another chatter (Gibbs) sparks a discussion of parties, specifically the *Fête des pompiers,* which is an annual neighborhood celebration organized by local firefighters in France, and which typically involves a street ball.

a	**Gibbs :**	**C'est trop la teuf :D**
		(C'est trop la fête [emoticon])
		It's really a party (in here) [emoticon]
b	**Dragounet :**	**Je prefere la fête des pompier que sa**
		(Je préfère la Fête des pompiers que ça)
		I prefer the « Fête des pompiers » to this (party)
c	**Dragounet :**	**xDDDDDD**
		([emoticon])
		[emoticon]
d	**Gibbs :**	**jété dans la video en plus mdr**
		(j'étais dans la vidéo en plus (je suis) mort de rire)
		I was in the video, too lol
e	**Dragounet :**	**j'y vais chaque anée**
		(j'y vais chaque année)
		I go (there) every year
f	**Dragounet :**	**a la fete des pompier**
		(à la Fête des pompiers)
		to the « Fête des pompiers »
g	**Sephya :**	**Intéressant**
		(Intéressant)
		Interesting
h	**Dragounet :**	**oui a canet il font une fete des pompier**
		(Oui, à Canet ils font une Fête des pompiers)
		Yes, in Canet they do a « Fête des pompiers »
i	**Dragounet :**	**Il mettre du dancefloor , R&B , anée 80**
		(Ils mettent (de la musique) du dancefloor, R&B, les années 80)
		They play dancefloor, r&b, and eighties music.
		[accessed online : 16 February 2009]

The first remarkable element in this chat transcript is Gibbs's use of the verlanized word *teuf*, which means party (a). *Teuf* comes from the French word *fête*. Because *fête* is a single syllable word, before it can be subjected to the inversion of syllables that characterizes *verlan*, what is sometimes referred to as a parasitic schwa is then added to the end of the word having the pronunciation /ə/ and the orthographic representation *eu* subsequent to inversion, which corresponds to the open vocalic variant required for a closed syllable [œ]. After the syllables are inverted, the final vowel (the original first vowel sound) is dropped (*fête* [fɛt] + [ə] > [fɛ.tə] > [tə.fɛ] > [tœf] *teuf*). This is a vastly popular term from *verlan*, and as such is easily recognizable to the other internautes.

Another distinctive element in this excerpt is the chatters' treatment of verbs and verb conjugations. The first example is supplied by Gibbs, when he claims to have been in the video from the last *Fête des pompiers* (d). Instead of using the standard orthography *j'étais* to express the imperfect tense, Gibbs instead chooses to use the form of the past participle (*été*), a common practice among internautes since the two variants are close approximates if not outright homophones of one another (some speakers maintain [ɛ] for the imperfect ending *–ais*). Thus, in speech, *j'été* and *j'étais* would be mutually intelligible.

The second instance of unusual verb conjugation is provided by Dragounet. Instead of conjugating the verb *mettre* in line i either in the present or the future tense, this user chooses to leave the verb in its original infinitive form. The information that the verb was intended to supply is still contained within the phrase as a result of its juxtaposition to the pronoun *il*, although from the context (i.e. line h), it can be assumed that this pronoun is really *ils*. Dragounet simply dropped the unpronounced s. If it

weren't for line h where he conjugates *il* in the third person plural, however, it might not be clear that Dragounet was talking about *they* instead of *he*, something that would elsewhere be quite clear in both written *and* spoken French.

It is apparent from this chatscript that the user Dragounet is fond of simplification and reduction. His plural nouns, for instance, are only pluralized by their articles (*des pompier,* b, f). Another example of this user's tendency toward reduction can be found in line e, where Dragounet reduces the consonants in the word *année* (year). What is interesting is that while the double consonants of this word are generally condensed into one *n*, the superfluous *e* at the end of the word (that really only indicates gender and is not pronounced) is typically kept. This seems to be a common trend on BBL with this word in particular, and thus it might be concluded that *anée* has become an alternate spelling of *année*. Dragounet has simply adopted this version into his own lexicon.

Chat analysis 4 *A discussion of acceptable variations of style in emoticons*

The following chatscript consists mainly of emoticons. It is the result of an argument about the correct representation of one such emoticon. This discussion will also demonstrate the social hierarchy of chatting.

a	Dragounet :	**Xd**
		([emoticon])
		[emoticon]
b	Sephya :	**xD***
		([emoticon]*)
		[emoticon]*
c	Sephya :	**xd = noob**
		([emoticon] égale noob)
		[emoticon] *means « noob »*
d	Sephya :	**xD = pas noob**
		([emoticon] égale pas noob)
		[emoticon] *means not noob*
e	Eedja :	**noob ?**
		(noob ?)
		noob ?
f	Dragounet :	**xd = rigoler**
		([emoticon] égale rigoler)
		[emoticon] *means laughing*
g	Sephya :	**xd = rien**
		[emoticon] égale rien)
		[emoticon] *means nothing*
h	Sephya :	**Ya pas de maj**
		(Il n'ya pas de majuscule)
		There is no capital letter
i	Sephya :	**donc ça veut rien dire**
		(donc ça veut rien dire)
		therefore it means nothing

[accessed online : 16 February 2009]

This particular chat transcript has been included in this corpus primarily because it is demonstrative of the sociological aspect of chatrooms. First, because it is based on a correction from one chatter to another. It also demonstrates the social hierarchy between seasoned users and those who are inexperienced in the ways of chatspeak.

Finally, this chatscript includes metalinguistic commentary on the conventions of cyberlanguage by the chatters themselves.

The chat excerpt begins with the use of a non-standard emoticon (Xd, a). Sephya, a chatter who typically types in a hybrid of standard French and cyberlanguage, takes it upon herself to correct the emoticon of her friend Dragounet (the purpose of the asterisk in line b is a convention that indicates that what she has just typed is to be seen as a correction and not an acceptable or understandable utterance). She then goes on to tease her friend by implying that his use of the inaccurate emoticon indicates that he is a *noob*, a pejorative word meaning someone who is new to the ways of the Internet (c). Dragounet counteracts her assertion by avowing that his version of the emoticon is just for laughs. Sephya, not to be undone, insists that *xd* means nothing because the *d* is not capitalized. This conversation reflects the fact that some rules of usage in cyberspace obviously exist, and Sephya (among other users) serve to champion these regulations. Moreover, to add to Sephya's argument, the point of the capitalized *D* in the emoticon is actually quite purposeful: it is supposed to resemble a large smile.

During this conversation, the user Eedja is confused about Sephya's use of the word *noob*, hence line e. His question, however, is ignored by the other chatters. While this might not seem particularly significant, this interchange reveals a lot about the distinction between noobs and non-noobs. Eedja's confusion over the word clearly indicates that he himself is a noob, and thus none of the non-noobs can be bothered to answer his query. Moreover, Sephya's distinction between the "right" way to use the emoticon (the non-noob way) and the "wrong" way also suggests the dissimilarity between the two groups and the lower status that a noob occupies online.

The word *noob* itself is an interesting Internet phenomenon. Perhaps the reason why Eedja did not recognize it is because noob is an example of a technological neologism whose existence coincides with the popularization of the Internet. Noob is a truncation of the English word *newbie*, which itself is a derivative of the British term *new boy*. Now, noob is used commonly to designate someone who is not only new to chatting, but also someone who doesn't understand cyberlanguage or makes mistakes (i.e. Dragounet's "mistake"). Noob, therefore, is a fascinating word in French chatspeak, as it is simultaneously a borrowed English word, a truncation and a technological neologism, demonstrating that several of the processes of cyberlanguage can exist in but a single utterance.

Another example of truncation in this chatscript is the term *maj*, short for *majuscule* (capital letter). This may also be considered an abbreviation. *Maj* is not a result of chatspeak itself, but the use of the shortened form of *majuscule* is associated with the Internet, specifically the keyboard. In French, the Shift bar on a keyboard is called the *touche maj*. While this might not be acceptable according to standard orthographic rules of French, it is nonetheless an accepted abbreviation stemming from this new technology.

In addition to her use of *maj*, the final two lines uttered by Sephya (h, i) are also very interesting from a syntactic perspective. First, Sephya has dropped the pronoun from her sentence, and instead has begun her utterance with the fused version of the article *y* and the verb *a* (meaning *there is*). This can actually be linked to widespread pronunciation, especially in Paris, where the *il* of impersonal expressions is often dropped in informal conversation. The second syntactic particularity of this sentence is contained in the fact that the utterance itself is separated into its two clauses by

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Sephya's use of the Enter button. Thus the sentence becomes fragmented, a very common phenomenon in cyberspace. Here, the utterance adheres to the tacit rule that sentences are typically fragmented only at natural points, and indeed the conjunction *donc* serves to mark a natural pause (between two clauses) that is fairly reflective of verbal communication. Moreover, although there is no punctuation, it is clear that these last lines do in fact comprise a single sentence. This is because Sephya begins the first line (h) in a capital letter, but does not extend this formality to the next line as it is considered to be in the middle of her sentence. Therefore, the capitalization in this case serves to indicate the beginning of her fragmented utterance.

Chat analysis 5 *A discussion of chatroom relocation*

This chatscript begins with a suggestion that the users leave their current chatroom for another location. What follows is a discussion of which users plan on departing with the group, while certain users encourage their friends to follow along.

a	mello :	**go au amac** (allez au hamac) *go to the hammock*
b	frero-sty :	**vien mello** (viens mello) *come mello* (user's name)
c	mello :	**tu viens kira?** (tu viens kira ?) *are you coming kira* (user's name)?
d	Incorecte :	**Bha vazi toi** (Bah vas-y toi) *Well go, you*
e	Incorecte :	**xD** [emoticon] [emoticon]
f	mello :	**jy vais** (j'y vais) *I'm going*
g	Incorecte :	**Ouè** (Ouais) *Yeah*
h	MODO Tictactoe : ***bisous*** (*bisous*) *kisses*	

[accessed online : 16 February 2009]

Since there are numerous different chat rooms contained in BBL, chatters will often travel through Blablaland as a group or in pairs. In order to accomplish this goal, friends on BBL will have to rally their troops by suggesting where to go (or simply to leave). What usually ensues is a discussion of who agrees to go and who does not, an

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occurrence that is very typical of face to face interaction. This chat excerpt is an example of this type of conversation. In this instance, the user mello suggests to his friends that they *go au amac* (a). This utterance is interesting in and of itself because it combines a borrowed English word (*go*) with the suppression of the unpronounced letter *h* in *hamac*. Both of these are presumably done for simplification (*go* in English is easier than giving the same command in French, not only because it is shorter, but also because there is no choice between plural/singular and formal/informal). The use of the variant *go* might also be employed for emphatic purposes: to catch the attention of the other users in order to better persuade them to go to the hammock. Obviously this tactic works, as the other users begin to agree to follow mello there (a fact that indicates a social bond between mello and the other users, and indeed reflects upon his status as an established chat user).

When mello asks if kira is coming, Incorecte offers encouragement in line d. Incorecte then recognizes that the language she uses to encourage the other user to go along might be construed negatively as a sort of brush off, so she amends her previous utterance by adding an ecstatic emoticon (e). As previously mentioned in the section on emoticons, this is a practical tool to indicate the mood with which something is said. This corresponds neatly to oral communication, when a person who smiles while they speak (at least if the smile is genuine) indicates the speaker's intended tone. This example is all the more reflective of the oral nature of cyberlanguage in that Incorecte chooses to include a pause filler (*bha* is a mistyped yet common variant of *bah*).

Most of the participants indicate that they're going to the hammock (it can be inferred that frero-sty and Incorecte both plan to go because they are encouraging others to come along, or else frero-sty omitted the pronoun in line b and was actually

asserting that he was coming rather than asking mello to come). After this is done, the leave-taking ritual naturally begins, and in this instance it is set in motion by the moderator Tictactoe (whose status is indicated by the abbreviation MODO before the username). Tictactoe uses an interesting tactic to relay an extra-linguistic function: by enclosing the word *bisous* in asterisks, she indicates that this is an action and not an utterance. (This is not interpreted as a correction as in the previous chatscript because the word is enclosed in two asterisks, and because the word *bisous* did not appear elsewhere to necessitate correction). Accordingly, she is signaling that if this conversation were taking place outside of cyberspace, she would bestow upon her fellow chatters the conventional French salutation: kisses on the cheek.

As for the linguistic side of this chat excerpt, the users are definitely employing many of the communicative options available to them through the use of cyberlanguage. The omission of the unpronounced letter *h* has already been mentioned, but there is another occurrence of this phenomenon in line b with the verb *vien*. Whether frero-sty means it as a suggestion to mello (as in, "yes, I will go with you so come along") or as a statement directed *toward* mello (as in, "yes, I am going"), the standard orthography of this verb conjugation would be *viens*. The *s*, however, is not pronounced so it is not deemed necessary in chatspeak.

In addition, there are two examples of phonetic representations that are interesting to note. The first phonetic representation comes in the form of *vazi*, which is a variant of the standard form *vas-y* and is more reflective of the actual sounds of the utterance (*s* is pronounced as /z/ when it is located between two vowels). The second is a variation of the familiar derivative of *oui*, which is *ouais*. Incorecte has chosen the phonetic version *ouè* to indicate her personal pronunciation [wɛ] . Other variations

include *oué, ouai* and *wé* (all [wɛ]), and the choice between these variants is simply a reflection on the style of the particular chatter.

Chat analysis 6 *A discussion of inappropriate social protocol*

In this chat transcript, a male chatter asks for personal information from a female chatter that he does not know. The female is comfortable providing certain details about herself (her physical appearance and her age), but when he implies that he wants her email address in order to chat privately, she refuses and promptly thwarts his advances.

a	**Chixie-FlO :**	**jai les cheveux blond les yeux brunn**
		(j'ai les cheveux blonds les yeux bruns)
		I have blond hair brown eyes
b	**Chixie-FlO :**	**pii jaii presque 14**
		(puis j'ai presque 14 ans)
		also I am almost 14 years old
c	**SEXY-PIERO :**	**ok**
		(ok)
		ok
d	**SEXY-PIERO :**	**ta tu msn**
		(as-tu MSN)
		do you have MSN (Microsoft Network- chatting program)
e	**Chixie-FlO :**	**ouii jai msn mais jteuu connais pas jtel donne pas mrd**
		(oui j'ai MSN mais je te connais pas je te le donne pas merde)
		Yes I have MSN but I don't know you I'm not giving you sh*t
f	**Xx_M4RTIN3 :**	**kk1 viens de lévis ici?**
		(quelqu'un vient de Lévis ici ?)
		Is anyone here from Lévis?
g	**SEXY-PIERO :**	**moi ses --------------------@hotmail.com**
		(moi c'est --------------------@hotmail.com)
		My (address) is --------------------@hotmail.com
h	**Chixie-FlO :**	**jtadd pas mrd : P jaii djja 400 contact**
		(je ne t'ajoute pas merde [emoticon] j'ai déjà 400 contacts)
		I am not adding you shit [emoticon] *I already have 400 contacts*

[accessed online : 16 February 2009]

Because of the non-private nature of BBL (there are no exclusive areas where one can reserve a room and all members can enter all chatrooms at any given time), many of the internautes propose to meet up on another chatting system, MSN the Microsoft Network Instant Messenger program. (MSN also allows the webcam function that

permits its users to see each other while they chat). While BBL does not require that a user share information with the network, MSN necessitates that its users know one another's email addresses in order to converse. Perhaps as a result of not wanting to share this important and personal information with strangers, there is a tacit protocol for asking someone for their MSN contact information. In this chatscript, SEXY-PIERO is evidently unfamiliar with this etiquette, as he requests the MSN address of Chixi-FlO before getting to know her well enough that it would be appropriate to do so. This is not different from normal social protocol: personal information is not given out freely to strangers even in a face to face situation (at least in general).

The flow of the conversation (or rejection as the case may be) is interrupted briefly by the arrival of a newcomer to the chat window. Xx_M4RTIN3 enters the room by asking if there is anyone from Lévin in the chatroom (f). This is very typical of a chat conversation, but it is not very typical of verbal communication (at least not according to the laws of conversational decorum). Thus, Xx_M4RTIN3's interruption is an example of the way that the notion of turn-taking has been transformed in cyberspace (mostly due to it being rendered somewhat unnecessary). In a face-to-face situation, usually there is only one speaker at one time. In a chatroom, however, there are many simultaneous speakers. The chat dialogue can be sifted through at a chatter's leisure, and so it is not considered particularly rude to interrupt someone else's train of exchange. In this way, chatting has simplified in a very interesting way some of the protocol for verbal communication, an interesting corollary to the fact that most of the simplifications of cyberlanguage have to do with reducing the written codes instead.

From this chat excerpt, it can be gathered that Chixie-FlO's linguistic style favors simplifications. She begins in line a by suppressing the plural marking of adjectives.

Moreover, this first statement, if written in standard French, would include either a conjunction (perhaps 'and' or 'with') or a comma to separate the fact that Chixie-FlO has blond hair *and* brown eyes. She again forgoes the use of conjunctions or punctuation in line e, which makes her utterance seem somewhat disjointed (yet perfectly acceptable according to the rules of cyberlanguage). Chixie-FlO also uses several fusions that mimic oral pronunciation: *jteuu, jtel* (e) and *jtadd* (h). She also uses the variant of the word *merde* with omitted vowels in two distinct instances (e, h), and simplifies negation by dropping the *ne* (h), both of which are more reflective of oral language than written. On the contrary, it seems as if Chixie-FlO has adopted the orthography *jaii* to signify *j'ai*. This variant is a reduction in the sense that she has omitted the diacritical mark (apostrophe), but not a reduction given that the same amount of keystrokes are necessary to type this variant and its standard orthography, since the last letter is duplicated. She seems to have chosen this variant not for emphatic reasons, but for stylistic ones, since it occurs twice in this short excerpt alone). Chixi-FlO also chooses to use the English word *add* instead of the French *ajoute*, possibly because it is shorter (or again this could be for emphasis or a reflection of her personal chatting style).

Xx_M4RTIN3 and SEXY-PIERO also have some interesting elements to their utterances in this excerpt. In his only line of this transcript, Xx_M4RTIN3 uses the rebus form of *quelqu'un*, that is *kk1*, which is a combination of the phonetic representation of the sound that associated with *qu* (/k/), a reduction of the word that rids it of its vowels and other letters, and the semiotic representation of the number one. *Kk1* is an extremely common example of a rebus that is used among chatters.

As for SEXY-PIERO, he exhibits an interesting and popular phenomenon as well: that of substituting a homophone. This again is linked to pronunciation: *ses* is

pronounced the same as *c'est*, and only the standard written code of French dictates that these are represented differently in an orthographic sense. In cyberlanguage these are perfectly acceptable substitutes for one another.

Chat analysis 7 *A discussion of couple politics as affected by BBL*

The following chatscript is a public display of a conversation that would

otherwise be very private. Two of the users have been conversing in a flirtatious way

when one of them (Tchoumy_x3) slyly mentions that he has a girlfriend who would end

the relationship if she knew he was chatting on BBL. The conversation that ensues

discusses his "complicated" relationship status.

a	Tchoumy_x3 :	**Bah moi ma meuf ces que jte parle la bah ces fini nous deux** (Bah moi (si) ma femme sait que je te parle là-bas c'est fini nous deux) *Well me (if) my woman knows that I talk to you there (BBL) we're finished*
b	Delirious :	**Pk ?** (Pourquoi ?) *Why?*
c	Tchoumy_x3 :	**Elle est trop trop jalouse** (Elle est trop trop jalouse) *She is too too jealous*
d	Delirious :	**Ah donc** (Ah donc) *Ah so*
e	Delirious :	**T'es célib xD** (Tu es célibataire [emoticon] *You're single* [emoticon]
f	Tchoumy_x3 :	**Non** (Non) *No*
g	Tchoumy_x3 :	**^^** (^^) *^^ (refer to the above)*
h	Tchoumy_x3 :	**Je suis en couple** (Je suis en couple) *I'm in a couple*
i	Delirious :	**Cest compliquer là..** (C'est compliqué là..) *It's complicated..*
j	Tchoumy_x3 :	**Lol** (Lol) *Lol- laugh out loud*
k	Tchoumy_x3 :	**Bah ya rien de compliquer ^^** (Bah il n'y a rien de compliquer ^^)

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l	Delirious :	*Well there's nothing complicated about it ^^(refer to the above)* **Ouais mais nan** (Ouais mais non) *Yeah but no*
m	Delirious :	**Je suis pas jalouse mais possessive.** (Je ne suis pas jalouse mais possessive) *I'm not jealous but possessive*
n	Delirious :	**xD** [emoticon] [emoticon]
o	Tchoumy_x3 :	**Bah moi elle et jalouse ma meuf** (Bah moi elle est jalous ma femme) *Well (as for) me my woman is jealous*
p	Tchoumy_x3 :	**si elle sais que je parle a des meuf sur BBL c fini** (Si elle sais que je parle à des femmes sur Blablaland c'est fini) *If she knows that I talk to women on Blablaland it's finished*
q	Delirious :	**Ah bn** (Ah bon) *Oh ok*
r	Delirious :	**ElleEstFolle.** (Elle est folle.) *She is crazy.*

[accessed online : 16 February 2009]

This chat excerpt, a discussion of the user Tchoumy_x3's relationship status, is one of the more cyberlanguage-rich samples. As a result, the best way to conceivably dissect this chatscript is simply to evaluate the conversation as it appears line by line. Indeed, in just the first utterance by Tchoumy_x3 the chatspeak features are abundant. He begins with the conversation-style expression, *bah*, which reinforces the informal, oral-like nature of the discussion that will follow. Tchoumy_x3 then employs the popular word from *verlan*, *meuf*. *Meuf*, like *teuf*, has been verlanized according to a special procedure for single syllable words, wherein a parasitic schwa is added to the end of the word. This is why these two terms share the same internal vowel: it is the result of the added syllable being inverted and the original vowel being dropped (*femme* [fam] + [ə] > [fa.mə] > [mə.fa] > [mœf] *meuf*). *Meuf* is certainly a feature of oral

language, and indeed it is a very popular and widely used term meaning anything from woman (as in not a man), woman (as in a girlfriend/lover), or even wife, just as the original word *femme* can signify all of these things.

The next word in this phrase is used in a fascinating way: Tchoumy_x3 uses the orthography *ces* twice in this sentence to mean two different words, neither of which is actually written as *ces*. The first occurrence is easily understood to mean *sait*, while the second clearly represents *c'est*. He uses yet another version of the pronunciation in line p with the orthography *sais* (which, in this case, is actually an incorrect conjugation in the third person singular). Thus, these words can be understood to be orthographic variations of each other in cyberlanguage. This linguistic information is gleaned from the context and not the denotation of the written word itself, again a characteristic that leans more toward the oral form of language than the written. Tchoumy_x3 then goes on to use a graphic fusion, *jte*, which is reflective of the informal pronunciation where, when the sound /ə/ occurs twice or more in succession, one (or every other) of these sounds can be omitted to offer a more smooth elocution.

After Tchoumy_x3 explains that if his woman were to find out about him speaking to Delirious on BBL and MSN that they would likely break up (be finished), Delirious naturally asks why (b). To do so, she uses the variation of *pourquoi* that is abbreviated to *pk*. It is important to note that Delirious employs a question mark here, perhaps to indicate that the word is not *parce que*, which can also take the variant *pk* (although it might be otherwise understood from the context that she is asking a question). *Pk* itself is a combination of a few processes common to chatspeak. First is the phonetic substitution of the letter *k* for the combination of *qu*, which is identical in

pronunciation. Next is the process of vowel omission to gain a consonantal skeleton. The *r* is also dropped in this case, which is most likely an indication of pronunciation as well.

In line d, Delirious begins an utterance that she subsequently fragments into two lines, a discursive technique often favored by chatters. In this case, it seems to be a question of style. She sets herself up for a joke of sorts, with an inference about the relationship status of her conversation partner. She indicates that she is kidding by the inclusion of the emoticon in line e. As for the linguistic traits of her utterance, Delirious chooses to employ the informal, conversation-style form of *tu es*, which is *t'es* (e). She then utilizes the truncated version of the word *célibataire*. Both of these are variants that are not accepted in standard written French.

Tchoumy_x3, perhaps not getting the joke or perhaps just wishing to emphasize his status of being taken, disagrees with Delirious's statement and then subsequently directs her attention to his assertion of not being single. He does so by using the circumflex accent to indicate that she is to refer to the above text (g). This is a tool that internautes will often employ in order to add emphasis to something that has already been typed. Tchoumy_x3 makes use of this device again in line k, when once more he wishes to refer back to a previous line of text. Perhaps in face to face conversation, the words *I just said* might replace these referents.

To further reinforce his non-available status, Tchoumy_x3 adds that he is in a couple, to which Delirious claims that his status is actually complicated. In doing so, she employs the use of the ellipsis (although she makes a typing error in only using two periods instead of the typical three) to indicate that her thought is unfinished and trailing off. In conversation, this punctuation might be replaced by a gesture (such as a shrug or the wave of the hand).

Tchoumy_x3 finds Delirious's comment to be funny, and so he employs the English term *lol*, which is an acronym of the phrase *laugh out loud*. Although the alternative form of *mdr* (*mort(e) de rire*) has entered into popular usage in French chatspeak, the variant *lol* is obviously still preferred by some chatters and in some instances.

In line k, Tchoumy_x3 demonstrates again his tendency toward variants that are reflective of verbal language. He begins this utterance with the conversational *bah* once more (a feature that he again repeats in line o). Then he drops the pronoun in the impersonal expression *il y a* to reflect informal conversation-like pronunciation, and then fuses the pronoun *y* with the verb *a*. Indeed, the orthography *ya* is more representative of the current pronunciation of the phrase than its standard written orthography, *il y a*. Delirious reflects this conversational style in line l, when she uses the informal derivatives of *oui* and *non*.

In line m, Delirious does something that is very rare in cyberspace: she uses a sentence final period. This is perhaps to draw emphasis to her sentence, and also possibly to stress the fact that she is different from Tchoumy_x3's woman. She also uses the simplified negation form (a form that is quite popular in speech codes). To soften the tone of her words, Delirious adds a smiling emoticon on the next line (n).

Tchoumy_x3 responds by reaffirming that his *meuf* is quite jealous. In doing so, he chooses to use the variant *et* for *est*, which are (according to some pronunciations) homonyms of one another. The two words are used interchangeably in cyberspace, but usually only if the denotation is clear from the context (as it is in this instance).

In line p, Tchoumy_x3 uses the letter *c* to replace the term *c'est*. This is an example of the phonetic representation of letters; as it is set aside from other words, the

c is understood to have the pronunciation value of the actual letter instead of a /s/ or /k/ sound as it would normally indicate. (Another way of signifying its pronunciation would be to capitalize the letter). Thus, the lone letter *c* enters into the collection of variants for the pronunciation /se/, along with *ces, sait, sais, c'est,* and *ses.*

Delirious's reaction to Tchoumy_x3's restatement of the fact that if his woman finds out about his escapades on BBL they would break up includes several interesting linguistic choices. First is her use of the form *bn* to express the word *bon* by omitting the vowel (q). The next is her interesting statement on line r. The words in Delirious's sentence in this case are all fused together. As fusions are typically reserved for words that are naturally fused in spoken language, and in this instance that is not the case, she simply capitalizes the beginning of each word to separate them from each other. These two practices, along with the sentence final stop, serve to clearly emphasize her statement. This is very remarkable because for one, it implies that what she is saying is stating a fact more so than making a presumption. Also, it is interesting because there is no precedent for this kind of emphasis in either verbal or written language (although of course there are many other routes to achieving this same effect).

Chat analysis 8 *Variations in arguing*

      In this chatscript, the couple from the previous transcript is interrupted by a third party (Myriiam_x3) who begins the process of wooing the male chatter, Tchoumy_x3. Delirious is instantly enraged, "yelling" at the other female, asserting dominance, and attempting to drive her from the chatroom.

a	**Myriiam_x3 :**	**ah tes un mec ?**
		(ah tu es un mec ?)
		Oh you're a guy?
b	**Tchoumy_x3 :**	**Ouai**
		(Ouais)
		Yeah
c	**Myriiam_x3 :**	**ta kelle age ? x)**
		(tu as quel âge? [emoticon])
		How old are you? [emoticon]
d	**Delirious :**	**CASSE TOI**
		(casse-toi)
		Go away
e	**Delirious :**	**CEST LE MIEN**
		(C'est le mien)
		(*He)'s mine*
f	**Tchoumy_x3 :**	**J'aime Delirious**
		(J'aime Delirious)
		I like Delirious (user's name)
g	**Myriiam_x3 :**	**inkiete je te le vole pas**
		(Ne t'inquiètes pas je te le vole pas)
		Don't worry I'm not stealing you
h	**Tchoumy_x3 :**	**Viens ma chérie on s'enva**
		(Viens ma chérie on s'en va)
		Come darling we're leaving
i	**Delirious :**	**NAAAN**
		(Non)
		No
j	**Delirious :**	**Reste aqui**
		(Reste ici)
		Stay here

[accessed online : 16 February 2009]

This chat transcript is taken from the continuation of the previous chat excerpt. After Tchoumy_x3 and Delirious engage in a long conversation, the user Myriiam_x3 enters into the chatroom and begins conversing with Tchoumy_x3. Delirious interprets this as flirting and encroaching upon her territory (after all, she has previously mentioned that she is possessive). Thus, this chat excerpt is the transcript of the exchange between these three users.

Myriiam_x3 begins by confirming that Tchoumy_x3 is a guy using the slang word *mec* that is indicative of an oral register (a). She also abridges *tu es* to *tes*, dropping the apostrophe and rendering the utterance closer to its informal conversational variant (she then repeats this process in line c, where she shortens *tu as* to the variant *ta*). Tchoumy_x3 responds with the slangy *ouai*, a variant of *ouais* that omits the unpronounced letter *s* (b). When Myriiam_x3 asks Tchoumy_x3 his age in line c, she uses the orthography *kelle* to replace the masculine quell. This mistake in gender is not uncommon to internautes, although typically the masculine gender is preferred because it tends to be the shorter form. In this case it is not the shorter of the two, but Myrriam_x3 also replaces the *qu* with *k*, making it shorter than the proper form *quelle* anyway.

Because Myriiam_x3 seems interested in Tchoumy_x3, and also perhaps because she sends him a smiling emoticon, Delirious's possessive nature emerges. In line d, Delirious tells Myriiam_x3 to go away, using a slangy term (made fashionable by France's current president, Nicolas Sarkozy). She also chooses to write in all upper case, indicating emphasis, and in this case, meaning that she is "yelling" her statements. Indeed, Delirious goes on to say that Tchoumy_x3 is hers, again in all capitals and omitting the diacritical mark (in this case the apostrophe) (e).

Myriiam_x3 tells Tchoumy_x3 not to worry because she is not trying to steal

him. In doing so, she employs the use of the variation *inkiete*, from *t'inquiète pas*. As is

the case in spoken French, this turn of phrase has dropped the negation and indeed is

only used in a negative sense (thus the negation is rendered irrelevant, because it is

tacitly understood). Another variant of this form is *tkt*, but the user Myriiam_x3 seems

less inclined to use the extremely abridged orthographies (hence *kelle* from line c). She

also chooses to write out *je te le* instead of using fusions and/or dropping one or two of

the vowels. This is much more indicative of standard written French than oral language,

but her choice to do so may be for emphasis.

When Tchoumy_x3 suggests that he and Delirious leave that particular chatroom

(i.e. get away from Myriiam_x3), Delirious expresses her desire not to leave. Indeed she

also emphasizes this point by using all capital letters (i). Finally, Delirious insists that

Tchoumy_x3 stay as well by using the Spanish word *aqui*, which is a fairly typical

borrowed word that is generally understood by French chatters. Again, her decision to

use Spanish instead of French might be caused by her desire for emphasis.

Chat analysis 9 *Variations of style in emphasis and onomatopoeic language*

      In this chatscript, the user mec__bi wishes to convince the other chatters of the appearance of Harry Potter's vehicle in the sky. There had briefly appeared a flying contraption ridden by another chatter, who must have had enough Blabillons, BBL currency, to purchase a ride on the air scooter. The other internautes do not see the vehicle before it departs, however, and so he attempts to convince them of its existence.

a	mec__bi :	**ooohhhhh la voiture d'harry potter dans le ciel !!! REGARDEZ !!!** (oh la voiture d'Harry Potter dans le ciel !!! Regardez !!!) *Oh Harry Potter's car in the sky !!! Look !!!*
b	Oasis--x :	**jla voie pas xD** (Je la vois pas [emoticon]) *I don't see it* [emoticon]
c	mec__bi :	**si si regarde** (si si regarde) *Yes yes look*
d	mec__bi :	**...** ... ...
e	Oasis--x :	**mais nn c dans ta tete** (mais non c'est dans ta tête) *No it's in your head*
f	mec__bi :	**eu...kof kof** (euh...kof kof) *uh...cough cough*
g	mec__bi :	***vrouuum vrouumm*** (*vroum vroum*) **vroom vroom**
h	mec__bi :	**vous entendez :D** (vous entendez [emoticon]) *you can hear (it) (?)* [emoticon]
i	Nawelle :	**ya trop dchoses dans ta tete XD** (il y a trop de choses dans ta tête [emoticon]) *there are too many things in your head*
j	Nawelle :	**s afsai longtemps jlavai aps embetté XD** (Ça faisait longtempts que je ne l'avais pas embetté [emoticon]) *I haven't annoyed him for quite a long time* [emoticon]

[accessed online : 13 February 2009]

Mec__bi begins the conversation by highlighting his initial statement through the use of several methods of emphasis (a). First is his use of graphic extension on the word *ooh*. Next, he includes several exclamation points at the end of his sentence. Finally, he capitalizes the word *regardez*. All of these tactics serve to make other chatters quickly pay attention, and, were the Harry Potter vehicle's presence not quite so brief in the chat window, the others might have been able to react more quickly to his statement than if he had not accentuated his statement.

Oasis--x responds by saying that she doesn't see it (b). In this line, she makes use of the conversational dropping of the *e* in *je* and fusing *je* and *la* together. Oasis--x then writes *voie*, which is the incorrect form of the first person present tense conjugation of *voir*, but is also a homonym of the standard form *vois*. The user has also simplified the negation and headed toward oral conversational language by dropping the *ne* from her sentence.

Mec__bi, however, insists on the existence of this flying thing and tells them to look again (c). In line d, mec__bi uses the ellipsis to indicate a pause while he waits for the others to look for Harry Potter's vehicle. Oasis--x counters his argument and claims that it actually only exists in his head. She does so by using the variant of *non* where the vowel is omitted and by using the phonetic representation of the letter *c* to mean *c'est*. Obviously a fan of simplification, Oasis--x also leaves out the accent mark over the first *e* in *tête*.

In lines f and g, mec__bi makes use of some interesting features that come from the domain of comic books: onomatopoeic words that phonetically represent sounds. The first example is *kof kof*, which is the French onomatopoeia for the sound of coughing. He then tries to indicate what Harry Potter's vehicle would sound like if it

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were still there by saying *vrouuum vrouumm*. Mec__bi employs graphic elongation in this case not to emphasize the noise, but to indicate the length of the sound (copying how he might otherwise say it in verbal conversation). He also encloses his statement in asterisks, which, again, is less for emphasis in this instance and more to indicate that it is a sound and not a statement that he is making.

Mec__bi's next utterance is an interesting phenomenon (h). Although it can be assumed from context that he means for this to be a question, since he writes *vous entendez* without a question mark, the phrase could also be interpreted as him telling the other chatters that they indeed can hear the noise of Harry Potter's vehicle. Thus, the absence of certain linguistic features that are customary in standard written French is not always to the benefit of comprehension. Even his added emoticon does not really indicate to the other chatters as to whether he is making a statement or a question.

Nawelle, in recalling Oasis--x's thought in line e, adds that there are too many things in mec__bi's head. She indicates the jovial nature of her utterance by adding an emoticon. She also makes use of other chatspeak features in this utterance, such as pronoun dropping, graphic fusions, and the absence of diacritical marks. Nawelle reduces *il y a* to *ya* and drops an /ə/ when she graphically fuses *de choses*. Her next line of text is even more indicative of chatspeak, and, to the untrained chatter, would likely be incomprehensible. She makes a typing error in the first two words by putting the space in the wrong position. The line was meant to read *sa fsai*, *sa* of course being the phonetic simplification of *ça* and *fsai* being the phonetic representation of the verb form *faisait*. *Fsai* is quite interesting since *faisait* is one of the rare instances in which the grapheme *ai* is pronounced /ə/, and as such may be dropped from spoken French.

Thus, this variant is actually more indicative of the pronunciation than the standard spelling.

Next, Nawelle also reduces the /ə/ in *je l'avais*, as well as fusing the words together and dropping the apostrophe and the unpronounced *s* (j). This is a great example of the way in which the different processes for cyberlanguage can merge into one written form, *jlavai*. Nawelle also chooses to use the variant of the negation *pas* that has been purposefully misspelled as *aps*. As previously mentioned, *aps* may have originated as a mistyped word, but this misspelling is now an acceptable and commonly used variation.

This particular chat conversation is just that: a conversation. It seems that it would be quite typical of a real life exchange, where mec___bi shouts for emphasis to cause his friends to look, but when nothing appears his friends begin to tease him. The added features of the onomatopoeic words enhance the verbal nature of this banter, and the chatters in this instance seem to really favor the forms of words that are more verbal in nature (phonetic spellings, fusions, etc).

Chat analysis 10 *Variations of style of a linguistically playful nature*

This final chatscript has been included in order to demonstrate the playful (*ludique*) nature of cyberlanguage. This exchange is triggered by the moderators of BBL releasing money into this particular chatroom. The user momo87 subsequently begs for more money, and several linguistic jokes ensue.

This excerpt is actually abridged, as the jokes were a sort of second-hand stream of conversation in the chat window. This is fairly typical of chatrooms with numerous participants: there are often several conversations that occur simultaneously, and it is the job of the chatter to make sense of the different strands of thought. In this case, for the sake of simplification, I have extracted this particular strand of dialogue from the other utterances.

a	**momo87 :**	**mor**
		(plus)
		more
b	**tilolo :**	**mort**
		(mort)
		death
c	**sdorval :**	**mord pliz**
		(mord s'il te plaît)
		bite please (more please)
d	**tilolo :**	**svp**
		(s'il vous plaît)
		please (formal)
e	**momo87 :**	**stp**
		(s'il te plaît)
		please (informal)
f	**-alexandre :**	**mor moi**
		(plus moi)
		more (for) me
g	**beicy :**	**mort moi**
		(mort moi)
		death me (I'm dead) (more please)

[accessed online : 16 February 2009]

What is occurring in this conversation is a game of homophones and multilingual synonyms. Instead of asking for more in French, momo87 requests in English (omitting the unpronounced *e*) (a). In response, tilolo jokingly responds with the homophone *mort*, meaning death or dead (b). Sdorval joins in the joke by adding *mord pliz*, which he means to denote both *more please* and *bite please* (c). Titolo then counteracts the *pliz* with the French alternative *svp*, a conventionalized acronym to mean please in the formal sense (d). Momo87 adds the French synonym in the informal sense (*stp*) (e). -alexandre joins in the game by adding *mor moi*, intending to convey that he would like more for himself (f). This might also be a play on words, alluding to the previous phrase *mord pliz* 'bite, please', which has possible sexual connotations that become more explicit in *mor moi*. This comes from a slangy and offensive French phrase used to indicate that something is f*cking stupid, as in *une idée à la mords-moi-le-nœud*, which means a f*cking stupid idea.

Beicy concludes the playful banter by reusing the homophone *mort* and playing off of -alexandre's *mor moi* to say *death me* or rather *I'm dead* but at the same time meaning *more (for) me* (g). This exchange is a rather good example of the way in which chatters are creative and playful with chatspeak. In fact, it is quite possible that in the future *mort* or *mord* will become a pun-like homophone for the English word *more*, as exchanges such as this one are quite typical of French internautes.

CHAPTER 4

Arguments in favor of and against the use of cyberlanguage

It is quite apparent that French cyberlanguage has diverged significantly from standard written French. As with any large-scale change, this evolution of the written code has been the center of much debate. Many language purists consider cyberlanguage to be "linguistic garbage," while linguists and artists tend to view the communicative choices of chatspeak as a "great source of creativity," (Nadeau 376). Many arguments have been made in support of either side, and in order to understand the phenomenon of cyberlanguage and its current status with regard to sociopolitical controversy, it is necessary to reflect upon both sides of the dispute.

In order to discuss the position of those against cyberlanguage, one must first understand the reasons behind which the French language is being so fiercely defended. The rules of French orthography are generally regarded as absolute law (Anis, Neography 89). What this means is that language forms and oral conventions that are completely acceptable in spoken language are not tolerated in written form, and thus writing serves to preserve the grammatical, morphological, and syntactical rules of normative French. Another reason for which French differs from other European languages lies in its history: it was not so long ago that French enjoyed a highly elevated position vis-à-vis world languages. Many champions of the French language are unhappy with its apparent decline in global influence coupled with the intrusion of American English.

Between the rigidity of standard orthography and the somewhat waning

popularity of the language, conditions were ripe for the development of chatspeak.

However, many French language enthusiasts are opposed to the transformations made

by cyberlanguage and would greatly prefer that orthography in general remain reflective

of standard French. Moreover, public debate has so far supported this point of view, in

that French orthography has to this point remained rather untouchable (Pierozak,

Éléments de réflexion 220).

There are many reasons for which one might be opposed to the use of

cyberlanguage. One main reason has been that cyberlanguage is naturally exclusionary:

it requires at least a minimal knowledge of the processes in order to decode meaning.

Therefore, many non-users feel excluded and marginalized from these new linguistic

codes (Déjond 72). Others believe that chatspeak cannot even be considered to be a

language because its rules (especially in regard to orthography) are somewhat flexible

and certainly not homogenous (the same word can take many different spellings

according to the communicative choices of the internaute). On the other hand, some

critics insist that cyberlanguage is leading to a globalization of thought, due in large part

to the overwhelming influence of American English (Déjond 72).

One other major argument marshaled against cyberlanguage is the claim that it is

ruining conventional French. Some might go as far as to claim that users of chatspeak

(especially teens and adolescents) are now unable to communicate in standard written

French. There are even those who feel so strongly against the use of chatspeak that they

have formed organizations to fight against its use and popularity: the *Comité de lutte*

contre le langage SMS et les fautes volontaires (Committee fighting against SMS

language and deliberate errors found at http://sms.informatiquefrance.com) claims to have over 17,000 members (Anis, Neography 88).

Nevertheless, the defense of cyberlanguage is not without its champions. Within the last few years, dozens of books, articles and even dictionaries have been published in vindication of this new linguistic phenomenon. These advocates for the defense of chatspeak have combated the two main assertions made by its opponents: the exclusivity of the language and the conjecture that it will 'destroy' written French. First, the popularity of cyberlanguage has grown to the point where it is no longer restricted to use by the young: more and more French adults are becoming familiar with the codes of cyberlanguage and adopting (at least some of) its conventions and neologisms (Herring 33). Second, many linguists are arguing that in order for someone to develop fluency in chatspeak, they must already have developed considerable linguistic awareness of the standard (Crystal). This means that in order to write and play with all of the communicative options available to chatters, they must first have a sense of the language from which the abbreviations and phonetic spellings are derived. David Crystal argues that if a chatter is aware that their texting behavior is different, then they must have "already intuited that there is such a thing as a standard," (Crystal).

While dissenters claim that cyberlanguage has led to a lack of richness in vocabulary, its supporters are impressed at the vast amount of neologisms and communicative/linguistic options available to internautes. Moreover, they claim that cyberlanguage is not quite so "iconoclast" as is being alleged. Their evidence lies in the fact that most of the communicative options available to chatters are based upon linguistic processes that have existed for years, if not centuries (Anis, Parlez-vous 31-32). Indeed, processes such as ideograms, rebuses, the reduction of words to their

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consonants, and truncation are no strangers to the French language. Even abbreviations

and non-standard spellings are not actually new at all, and are reflective of the need for

teenagers to prevent teachers and parents from understanding their written notes. In

fact, teenagers have been encrypting notes and using special alphabets or writing

permutations for many generations (Herring 32-33). What makes cyberlanguage unique

is certainly not that it makes use of all of these processes, but that it is combining them

all in new and interesting ways. Indeed, director of editing for the dictionary *Petit*

Robert, Alain Rey, has been quoted as saying that cyberlanguage is not killing French,

but instead simply modifying the way it is practiced (Anis, Parlez-vous 52).

CHAPTER 5

The future of cyberlanguage

Technology and language

In order to comprehend the current situation of cyberlanguage and its potential future, it is important to grasp the relationship between technology and language. Technology influences and shapes human communication (Herring 27). Throughout time, modes of technology have greatly affected the way in which we connect to, and hence, communicate with one another, but at the same time these technologies have often met with opposition based on fear of change. Indeed, the arrival of the printing press was thought by some to be an invention of the devil that would put false opinions into people's minds (Crystal). The introduction of the telegraph, telephone and broadcasting system also met with similar fearful and negative reactions (Crystal). Thus, it is certainly not a new phenomenon when detractors claim that Internet-based technology will have destructive consequences for language.

For good or bad, the popularity of communication via the Internet has exploded to an unprecedented level. Billions of people worldwide have come to embrace this new way of interaction. Indeed, the compelling popularity of email and chatting over the past 30 years "suggests that it satisfies some important communicative needs," (Herring 31). Due to its speed, ease and effectiveness, sending messages online has come to be the preferred method of communication for most people having Internet access (Lewin 29). In fact, e-mail has recently overtaken the telephone as the "primary means of business

communication," (Lewin 29). As the method and means of communication changes, language change is sure to follow. Indeed, as the foregoing summary and analysis demonstrate, change is already happening.

The current situation

Compared to other francophone countries, the issue of the Internet and language has been somewhat ignored by French authorities (Bagola 109). This might seem curious given that France has been preoccupied with the protection of the French language since the 16th Century (Bagola 108). The foundation by the French government of the *Académie française* in 1635 exemplifies the fact that the French have historically taken a strong stance regarding official codification of language (Bagola 108). It is a myth, however, that the duty of the *Académie* is language protection: its main mission is to define the language and not to safeguard it (Nadeau 392). In publishing the first list of Internet-based terms in its official journal in 1999, the *Académie française* did just that: it recognized the existence of linguistic norms on the Internet and defined them just as any other word might be recommended for entry into the French lexicon (Bagola 111).

As France becomes more and more involved in the debate over cyberlanguage, other governmental groups and committees have joined the *Académie française* in working to define the new terminology of the Internet. Some of these groups include the *Commission spécialisée de terminologie et de néologie de l'informatique et des composants électroniques* (CSTIC, General commission for terminology and neology of technology and electronic components), the *Commission spécialisée de terminologie et de néologie des télécommunications* (CSTNT, General commission for the terminology

and neology of telecommunication), the *Groupe d'experts français pour les standards d'Internet* (GFSI, Group of French experts for the standards of the Internet), and finally the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France* (DGLFLF, General delegation for the French language and languages of France) (Bagola 111). There are also a large number of dictionaries and glossaries, both online and in print, that serve to describe and define the new terminologies of the Internet. This includes the official terms given by the DGLFLF (Bagola 111).

At the same time that it influences the language people use in order to communicate, the Internet is also influencing the way in which people interact and contact each other. One result is that the "distances that separate nations are disappearing," (Gajos 34). The world is becoming more and more interconnected on an almost daily basis. As previously stated, the ease and efficiency of communication via the Internet has allowed for its popularity to continue growing (Herring 26). From a sociolinguistic perspective, it is not at all surprising that social aspects are emerging from this discourse and vice versa (Pierozak, Le 'français tchaté' 127). After all, the Internet and cyberlanguage provide a setting where social and linguistic dimensions merge (Pierozak, Le 'français tchaté' 141). It does not seem as if the popularity of the Internet will wane any time in the near future, and indeed the line between online and offline communication is starting to blur due to the mobility of text messaging and wireless technologies (Herring 33).

The future of cyberlanguage

As new dictionaries and lexicons of cyberlanguage emerge, alongside novels written in chatspeak, it is clear that cyberlanguage is not a temporary or passing fad. It

is also clear that these new linguistic codes are no longer restricted to use by adolescents and teens: age, social status and sex are no longer factors in the use of cyberlanguage (Déjond 33). More and more studies are being conducted in order to define and better understand the phenomenon of cyberlanguage, both linguistically and socially. But what exactly is the *future* of chatspeak?

The next few decades will determine the answers to many questions that are currently troubling linguists. For instance, in ten or twenty years, what will be left of these controversial neologisms? To what degree will cyberlanguage transform or replace standard orthography? Will more advanced technologies (webcam, for instance) usurp the place of written communication on the Internet? Whatever the case may be, one thing is clear: cyberlanguage is growing and thriving in today's technological and interconnected world. While not all of its neologisms may last, it is likely that cyberlanguage itself will continue to transform language in the near future.

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