Enregistering internet language

L A U R E N   S Q U I R E S

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A B S T R A C T

This article investigates the enregisterment of an internet-specific language variety and its features. The enregisterment of internet language is explored through several sites of metadiscourse: academic scholarship about computer-mediated communication, uses of the metalinguistic terms *netspeak* and *chatspeak* in print media, and online comment threads about language and the internet. This metadiscourse provides evidence of a shared concept of internet language as comprising distinctive written features, primarily acronyms, abbreviations, and respellings. Internet language's enregisterment emerges from standard language ideology and deterministic views of technology, where the construal of these features as both nonstandard and internet-specific articulates the perceived distinctiveness of internet interactions. Yet empirical evidence shows that these features are relatively rare in instant messaging conversations, one form of interaction to which internet language is attributed; this discrepancy has implications for the application of indexical order to enregisterment. (Enregisterment, language ideology, computer-mediated communication, internet, metadiscourse, indexical order, Standard English, technological determinism, mass media)*

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Technologies are often thought to influence language (cf. Herring 2003), and as access to the internet and its myriad communicative applications has surged over the past two decades, public discourse about its influence has become commonplace in networked society. In many contexts, metalinguistic terms like *netspeak* and *chatspeak* circulate as names for a perceived language variety originating in internet discourse (cf. Androutsopoulos 2006a). This article examines the enregisterment (Agha 2003, 2007) of an internet-specific language variety and the features comprising it, exploring the foundations of this process in ideologies of language and technology.

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To offer some prefatory data: on the popular internet social network site Face-book, member-created groups forge affiliation based on cultural interests, social causes, and so forth. The titles of several groups on the site, given in (1), illustrate a shared stance towards perceived internet-specific linguistic practices.

(1)   Humans Against Netspeak
       Death to Netspeak
       The Anti-netspeak League
       Anti-Netspeak Coalition (A.N.C.)
       Netspeak is the spawn of the devil
       People Against the use of Netspeak in Real Life
       Y R PPL TLKING LYKE THIS?!
       Chatspeak Crusaders
       people against chatspeak
       Chatspeak makes me die inside
       I Think Chatspeak is Annoying
       Stop the Chatspeak! Save the Vowels!
       The United Anti-Chatspeak Coalition
       I Don't Like Chatspeak.
       People Against Bad Grammar and ChatSpeak!
       Everyone that uses internet chatspeak in everyday life
       Chatspeak marks a decline in the intellect of society
       Chatspeak Makes Me Want to Shove Dinner Forks in My Eyes
       'ppl hu tok lyk dis' are annoying.
       Supporters of Proper English on the Internet

       (http://tinyurl.com/yjqo2wk; http://tinyurl.com/ylod2vw, accessed July 6, 2009)[1]

Relatedly, on the collaborative online slang dictionary Urban Dictionary, the meta-linguistic terms *chatspeak* and *netspeak* are defined and exemplified as follows:

(2)   1. chatspeak
       A disgrace to the English language.
       omg wtf r u tinking gothz pwn punkz!!/1oneone
       (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=chatspeak; accessed July 6, 2009)
(3)   1. netspeak
       An easy way to determine the IQ of the person you are talking to over the Internet. See
          chatspeak.
       Person 1: howz r u 2day!!!!!!!111
       Person 2: IQ is 41.
       (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=netspeak; accessed July 6, 2009)

These examples are among the many and varied cultural artifacts that invoke notions of distinctive online linguistic practice—including online blogs, discussion threads, glossaries, translators, and usage guides, as well as offline novels, comics, newspapers, newscasts, teachers' guides, advertisements, t-shirts, jewelry, and aca-demic research. These examples also illustrate several key ideological themes that I argue are central to enregistering internet language: [2] linguistic correctness, a dis-tinction between "real life" and that which happens on the internet, technology-driven language change, social acceptability, and English language protectionism.

After providing theoretical background, I begin with a description of scholarly treatment of computer-mediated communication (CMC), focusing on the tendency to categorize linguistic practices online as constituting distinct registers. I follow this with an account of the North American mass media's use of the terms *netspeak* and *chatspeak*, arguing that these terms have come to share a basic underlying denotation and can be considered part of the metadiscursive process of enregistering internet language. Third, I analyze an online speech chain comprising a newspaper column and two responsive comment threads in which internet language is the focus of interactive metadiscourse. Finally, I discuss this enregisterment process in light of empirical findings regarding linguistic practice occurring via the internet, underscoring the essentially ideological nature of enregisterment, and discuss implications for the application of indexical order to enregisterment.

ENREGISTERMENT, STANDARD LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY, AND TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

As introduced by Agha (2003:231), ENREGISTERMENT is how "a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms" (see also Agha 2005, 2007, Beal 2009, Goebel 2007, Johnstone 2009, Johnstone, Andrus, & Danielson 2006, Johnstone & Kiesling 2008, Remlinger 2009). Through the process of enregisterment, sets of linguistic features are conceived as distinctive, imbued with social meaning linked to social personae, and linked to what are perceived as distinct varieties of language (or "registers"). Several analyses have further developed Agha's work by utilizing Silverstein's (2003) framework of indexical order to show how regional dialect features undergo enregisterment.

In Silverstein's scheme, the valorization of linguistic features can be explicated through dialectics between properties indexed to features. An index is a sign that points to or indicates some property related to it, either naturally (smoke indexes fire) or socially constructed (a three-piece suit may index formality, professionalism, or social class). Linguistic features may index social properties such as a speaker's region, gender, style, or stance (e.g. postvocalic rhoticity in English may index a speaker's Americanness). Social indices are interpreted contextually, and features may have different indices at different times, in different settings, as used by different speakers to different listeners. Silverstein calls the strata of meanings indexed by linguistic features ORDERS OF INDEXICALITY.

Orders of indexicality build: any *n*th + 1-order index presupposes an *n*th-order index, such that indices emerge through (and are dialectical with) other indices. For instance, in examining "Pittsburghese," Johnstone and colleagues (2006) show that certain features, such as /aw/ monophthongization, are sociodemographically correlated with speakers in Southwestern Pennsylvania, which establishes a first-order (*n*th-order) index of linguistic form to social property. When those

regionally distributed features become noticed and metapragmatically linked to regional speech, a second-order (nth + 1-order) index is established. When they are objectified and metadiscursively linked to stereotypic personae, a third-order (nth + 1 + 1-order) index is established, and the features are enregistered as belonging to a variety folk-named "Pittsburghese."

However, it has been pointed out that enregistered features need not be those that a linguist's analysis would show to be distinctly distributed (Johnstone 2009, Remlinger 2009), and linguists also participate in enregisterment when they determine which features are characteristic of which varieties (Johnstone 2009). It is therefore unclear what kind of feature correlation need be present in order to motivate feature enregisterment, or indeed whether a correlational nth-order index is a requirement for enregisterment. I argue that internet language provides an example of enregisterment wherein a correlational index is not presupposed by social indices, showing very plainly that enregisterment is not necessarily a matter of featural distribution, but rather an outcome of sociocultural and historical context. Enregisterment is an ideological process whereby speakers' perceptions of linguistic variation, social structure, and other pertinent concepts are put to use in construing practices as group- and/or variety-specific. Ideologies of language are subconscious heuristics through which speakers perceive and explain patterns of linguistic structure and use (Irvine & Gal 2000, Kroskrity 2000, Mertz 1998, Silverstein 1979, Woolard 1998), and an enregistered variety brings those heuristics into observable and conscious focus, sharpening them into a central organizing concept that specifies (to varying degree) the parameters of a variety and its speakers (or nonspeakers).

Enregistered varieties are both products of language ideologies and key mechanisms of ideological (re)production: an enregistered variety provides the possibility that speakers will perceive linguistic features—including novel features—as belonging to the variety. This dialectic can serve to create, perpetuate, or alter existing ideologies. The data I present show the relevance of standard language ideologies, dominant in the context of American English, to the enregisterment of internet language. These are ideologies that privilege "Standard English," value linguistic or grammatical "correctness," and cast negative judgment on speakers for deviance from these perceived norms (Bailey 1991, Bonfiglio 2002, Bucholtz 2001, Cameron 1995, Lippi-Green 1997, L. Milroy 2000, J. Milroy 2001, Milroy & Milroy 1999, Mugglestone 1997, Preston 1996, Silverstein 1996, 2003). I argue that the notion of "Standard English" is crucial to the enregisterment of internet language, thus one enregistered variety plays a key role in the enregisterment of another; at the same time, the enregisterment of internet language affects ideologies of Standard English.

Just as important to internet language are ideologies about technology. Prior analyses have explicated ideologies driving enregisterment in notions of PLACE, showing that local dialects are enregistered in part through the belief that different localities will have different speech patterns (on "Pittsburghese" see Johnstone

2009, Johnstone et al. 2006, Johnstone & Kiesling 2008; on "Yooper" see Remlinger 2009). In his treatment of Received Pronunciation, Agha (2003, 2005) has also shown that regional dialect features can become linked to supraregional social prestige through enregisterment. While the enregisterment of internet language is similar to these other cases, it is also fundamentally different for at least two reasons. First, the internet is not a geographically bounded place with local, place-distributed linguistic features; the internet also has no clearly definable population of "speakers." Second, communication via the internet, like most CMC, is predominantly text-based and typed, rather than spoken. Thus, the factors laying the foundation for enregisterment are likely somewhat different from those underlying regional dialect enregisterment.

Especially central to the enregisterment of internet language are beliefs that technologies have some inevitable consequence on social practice—a form of TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM. A deterministic view holds that technology inherently and autonomously influences society, though this term is applied to views that admit to varying degrees of individual agency and relevance of sociocultural factors (Bimber 1994, Chandler 1996, Dahlberg 2004, Herring 1999, 2004, Hutchby 2001:14–20, Smith 1994, Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic 2004:40–44). Much earlier research on CMC could be interpreted as somewhat technologically deterministic (if unintentionally so), when claims were made that some features of computer technology—its textual basis, asynchronicity, lack of nonverbal cues, or unfamiliar turn-taking mechanisms—determined users' experience or satisfaction with it (e.g. Daft & Lengel 1986, Herring 1996, Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire 1984, Ko 1996, McCarthy, Wright, & Monk 1996, Murray 1989, Rezabek & Cochenour 1998, Rice & Love 1987, Sproull & Kiesler 1991; for an overview, see Dahlberg 2004).

The viewpoint of technological determinism in CMC research has been widely critiqued, and more recently CMC interactions have come to be viewed as sites of potentiality rather than inevitability. Communicative technologies carry both constraints and affordances, which are not deterministic as to their use or impact (see Hutchby 2001, Lee 2007). Yet the viewpoint that a medium in some sense determines what happens in it is present in the way that public discourse frames the internet, and it is highly visible in the way that language in particular is discussed in relation to the internet. The next section shows that this view has also been present in academic discourse about language on the internet.

ACADEMIC ENREGISTERMENT IN CMC SCHOLARSHIP

There is by now a good amount of scholarship focused on language in CMC.[3] Much of this work has foregrounded the medium in its analysis of language, utilizing somewhat deterministic explanations for linguistic patterns. In particular, a much-belabored concern has been CMC's relationship to "speaking" and

"writing," considered to be fundamentally different modes of language with distinct paradigmatic features (e.g. Biber 1988, Chafe & Danielewicz 1987). Early CMC scholars were intrigued by the fact that CMC usage seems to encompass canonical features of both speaking and writing: it may be informal, synchronous, and ephemeral—"like speech"—and/or editable, text-based, and asynchronous—"like writing."

In working from the analytical foundation of a strong distinction between spoken and written language, many scholars characterized language in CMC, or in particular CMC applications, as unique, bounded, and distinct in their "in-between-ness:" early electronic messages as "a hybrid language variety" or "hybrid register" (Ferrara, Brunner, & Whittemore 1991:10), email as "written speech" (Maynor 1994), Bulletin Board Systems as a "new variety of English," "so clearly a 'hybrid' variety of English" (Collot & Belmore 1996:15, 28). Such characterizations persist in more recent accounts: the internet as a "third medium" (Zitzen & Stein 2004:984; see also Crystal 2006:52), chat as "a newly emerging, hybrid form with its own characteristics and uses" (Al-Sa'Di & Hamdan 2005:422), the internet as "a novel medium combining spoken, written, and electronic properties" (Crystal 2006:52), instant messaging as "a vibrant new medium of communication with its own unique style" and "a hybrid" (Tagliamonte & Denis 2008:25, 24).[4]

The technical factors to which CMC's "in-between-ness" are typically attributed are the constraints and affordances of text-based dialogue, especially asynchronicity in some applications such as email (where a time lag exists between messages exchanged), synchronicity in other applications such as instant messaging (IM), where participants presumably seek to exchange messages quickly to approximate real-time, face-to-face conversation, and the modality of typewritten text across virtually all applications (for discussion of taxonomies of CMC, see Herring 2007). These technical factors couple with the idea that internet interaction tends to represent a "casual" space for written language use that was somewhat unprecedented before widespread CMC.

When scholars isolate medium-bounded contexts and characterize the linguistic patterns within them as emerging from those contexts, they imply that new technologies breed new language varieties; that a medium in some sense determines the language used there. As Herring (2004:27) has noted, scholars tend to research technologies seen as "new," an approach that "overestimates the novelty of much CMC."[5] Overall, the medium (typing versus speaking; email versus chat) has tended to be examined without equivalent attention to social parameters within, or surrounding, the medium. In this way, a technologically deterministic slant has been present in academic discourse, and academic discourse has thereby contributed to the enregisterment of internet language.[6]

As noted by Androutsopoulos (2006a:2), the academic construction of internet language as unique and medium-dependent is exemplified by Crystal's (2006) uptake of the term *Netspeak* to denote internet language. Crystal (2006:20) defines Netspeak as:

a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet, and encountered in all of the above [internet-based] situations, arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global and interactive.

Such a term denotes one variety of language that is specific to the internet and independent of social differentiation: the medium determines linguistic practice. Crystal's list of Netspeak features includes lexical items that belong "exclusively to the Internet" (86); various types of abbreviation—including acronyms for nouns or whole phrases, orthographic reduction of letters, and rebus replacements of letter combinations; nonstandard capitalization and punctuation; and nonstandard spelling such as replacements of <s> with <z> (86–98).

As Dürscheid (2004) among others has pointed out, there are two main problems with Crystal's formulation. First, many features named as belonging to *Netspeak* have long been prevalently used in other written contexts, including private correspondence (e.g. Elspaß 2002, cited in Dürscheid 2004:6), personal note-taking (Janda 1985), and telegraph messages (cf. Baron 2002) (this point is also discussed in Herring 2004 and Shortis 2007; for non-internet-specific discussions of the prevalence and significance of orthographic variation, see, for instance, Androutsopoulos 2000, Jaffe 2000, Sebba 2007). Second, while some features may in fact emerge specifically within the bounds of internet discourse, they will not be used uniformly across every setting or by every user of the internet (cf. Hård af Segerstad 2002). In other words, what shapes language use in online environments is not just a matter of its being used online. As with any other use of language, online language use varies by (at least) what format or genre it is used in (chat, email, instant messaging, message boards, blogs, websites, etc.) and the social characteristics and relationships of its users.

Dürscheid's critique resonates in studies of CMC that recognize the importance of sociocultural factors, IN ADDITION TO the medium, in analyzing linguistic patterns in a given medium (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2006b, Baron 2000, 2004, Hård af Segerstad 2002, Herring & Zelenkauskaite 2009, Jones & Schieffelin 2009, Montero-Fleta, Monesinos-López, Pérez-Sabater, & Turney 2009, Paolillo 2001, Su 2003, Tagliamonte & Denis 2008, Yang 2007). In other words, linguistic work on CMC has trended away from determinism and towards more nuanced investigations of how language is used in mediated settings, keeping in mind the affordances of different technologies but not assuming that those will steer language use in one direction or another. Furthermore, many scholars have shown that the linguistic features often claimed to be unique to the internet are not common in certain forms of CMC (discussed further in the GENERAL DISCUSSION). These authors often present their findings in explicit contradiction to the trope of unique, homogeneous new media language (e.g. Baron 2004, Hård af Segerstad 2002, Tagliamonte & Denis 2008, Thurlow 2003).

However, the use of terms like *netspeak* does continue in academic contexts;[7] and the view that there is some distinct variety used across the internet even more frequently surfaces in public discourse (Herring 2003, Thurlow 2003, Thurlow et al. 2004). As noted above, these public perceptions are often mentioned

in scholarly treatments of CMC, yet metadiscourse about CMC and language use has not been a major focus of scholarly study (though see Iorio 2007). One exception is Thurlow (2006), who outlines the mass media's representation of CMC and youth. Thurlow finds that the media tend to portray online language as representing a drastic change in linguistic form that is widespread across internet users; they caricature this form based on a select set of features; and they represent the change as a threat to literacy and social organization.

Though Thurlow's concern is representations of youth language, his analysis more broadly indicates that the internet occupies a place in contemporary ideologies about language, English in particular. Thurlow suggests that metadiscourse about CMC demonstrates a "triple whammy" social panic, wherein adult fears about young people, language, and technology coincide. The following two sections build on Thurlow's work, first, by examining the history of the print media's use of variety-naming terms as evidence of the enregisterment of internet language; second, by examining metadiscourse in online discussion threads to give a broader picture of enregisterment through interactive discourse.

MASS MEDIA METADISCOURSE ABOUT LANGUAGE AND THE INTERNET

In analyses of the history of English and Standard English, the mass media are often taken as key producers and sustainers of standard language ideologies and engines of language standardization (e.g. Lippi-Green 1997, Milroy & Milroy 1999, Silverstein 1996). The mass media are also a crucial site of enregisterment in media-heavy societies, as shown in several analyses, including Agha 2003 and Johnstone et al. 2006. This section focuses explicitly on the metalinguistic terms *netspeak* and *chatspeak* as used in North American print mass media to trace the enregisterment of internet language.[8] While the use of a metalinguistic term such as *chatspeak* in some sense presupposes a referent for its use, it simultaneously constructs a referent each time it is used, potentially changing its denotational scope (Agha 2007:64–69, 87–89). At the same time, each use may reinforce or alter indexical links associated with the referent. The use of referring terms thus contributes to enregisterment by metadiscursively constructing language varieties and their social indices. I explore two primary aspects of these terms' usage: their denotation(s), including what linguistic practices they are said to include; and their linkage to social contexts, speaker personae (Agha 2003), other language varieties, and so on. I begin with *netspeak* because it is the earlier occurring (and more prevalent) term in searches of print media.[9]

Netspeak: From lexical register to nonstandard writing

Netspeak has been in public usage since at least 1993 (Bacon 1993), when the internet was still considered a novelty to all but the very technically savvy. In the mid-

1990s, the term refers to vocabulary words necessary to use internet applications or talk about them, and *netspeak* is often framed as a code to be translated into common words, as evidenced in the following examples.

(4)   The Internet, which is accessible through most commercial online services, also provides a vehicle for sending and receiving electronic mail, or E-mail. This capability has given rise to more than 5,000 special interest "mailing lists" and newsgroups ('Net-speak for electronic bulletin board and library) … (Gaffney 1994)

(5)   Electronic mail is the most basic Internet service. Assuming you and the person you're messaging have accounts, you can send a letter to your sister in San Antonio asking for her sugar cookie recipe without leaving your desk. No more trying to scribble it down over the phone, or waiting for the U.S. mail (known as "snail mail" in Net speak). (Okamoto 1995)

(6)   Your personal Web site could contain words, pictures, sounds and pointers—called links in Net-speak—to other interesting stuff on the Web. (Robinson 1998)

These usages show *netspeak* naming a code of vocabulary terms (*mailing list, newsgroup, snail mail, links*) that can be glossed, translated, or defined in non-netspeak. News sources also printed glossaries of netspeak terms at this time, sometimes as sidebar companions to "how to access the internet" articles (Putzel 1994).[10] In 1996, *netspeak* was one of *US News & World Report*'s buzzwords—"the language that will shape our world in 1996"—and was defined as a lexicon:

(7)   NETSPEAK. The special argot of the Internet. See spamming, mouse potato, webmaster. Netspeak is not to be confused with newspeak, an Orwellian language that means the opposite of its literal meaning … (Parshall 1995)

This period also saw the creation of glossaries printed in book form, such as Fahey's (1994) *Net.speak: The internet dictionary.* Fahey's book was included in *The Star-Ledger's* (Newark, NJ, 1998) guide to "computer dictionaries," which introduces the need for such books with a list of words said to form "a whole new language" related to the internet.

(8)   Submarining, sneakernet, cluster geeking, larval stage, scratch monkey, TCP/IP, interface, GUI, gopher, splash screen, WYSIWYG, bundle, peanut, Pentium, encryption, open architecture, LAN, push, SIMM, DIMM, RAM, DRAM, VRAM.
      Oh, what does it all mean?
      With the ever-rising popularity of the Internet and personal computers, there seems to be—no, there is—a whole new language seeping into our conversations, our media and our thoughts faster than you can say error message. (Harris 1998)

These excerpts indicate that during the mid- and late-1990s, a set of vocabulary words was being enregistered as a lexical register linked to the internet; netspeak was characterized as a unique "argot," "language," or "dialect."

If netspeak was emerging as an enregistered variety, what kinds of social indexicalities did the variety have? In early instances, netspeak was linked to the "insider" status of internet users, a marker of authenticity acquired through genuine participation in internet culture. The author of (9) laments lacking mastery of netspeak and therefore authenticity as an internet user.[11]

(9) Pity this poor cyberdude. I've got an ISP, AOL, and I'm mastering IRC. I'm a newbie no more.
     I'm a veritable netizen. But I've discovered that walking the walk isn't as important as talking
     the talk. Until I master netspeak, the trendy techno-babble of the Internet, I'm stuck here in the
     breakdown lane of the information superhighway. I'll never be a true nethead. (Cobb 1996)

Earlier usages of netspeak as a set of vocabulary words focused on the internet as
a new sphere of utility and interaction, with a new language being a key determinant
of access. They did not often present netspeak or its users as negative, except to the
extent that the internet was framed as an exclusive tool. However, as the internet
became more widely accessible throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, mass
media applications of *netspeak* came to include linguistic FORMS seen as emblematic
of language online, namely acronyms, other abbreviations, emoticons, and phonetic
respellings. These were typically presented as emerging from the desire for partici-
pants to communicate quickly in the text-based realm of the internet. Perhaps repre-
senting the midpoint of this shift, a 1999 *USA Today* article titled "Language on
the web" mentions both vocabulary words and features, including <lol> 'laugh
out loud', <ftf> 'face to face', and <rotfl> 'rolling on the floor laughing' as
examples of internet-specific acronyms (Viotti 1999). And a 1999 *Seattle Post-
Intelligencer* article claims that in online chat rooms, "a correctly spelled word is
a sign of the inarticulate and an innovative abbreviation is prized above all else"
(Harmon 1999); the headline reads "Netspeak seeps into public lexicon …" With
this headline we begin to see the linking of netspeak to nonstandardness, and
what I call an IMPERATIVE OF CONTAINMENT that stigmatizes the use of internet
language in noninternet contexts. Coinciding with the term being used more to
refer to language FEATURES came an increased scrutiny on netspeak as a potentially
negative social force (cf. Thurlow 2006). I suggest that this came about in part
because netspeak features now were ones perceived as flouting standard written
English norms.

In 2000, *The New York Times* ran a review of the book *Wired style: Principles of
English usage in the digital age* under the headline "Capturing netspeak, but not
reining it in." The author, English usage expert Bryan Garner, characterizes the in-
ternet's "dialect" as "a written dialect in which punctuation is abandoned, uppercas-
ing is largely unknown (unless you're shouting), and all sorts of acronyms replace
phrases" (Garner 2000). Two letters to the editor responding to this review illustrate
netspeak's formulation as counter to standard language practices with the headlines
"The death of grammar" (Woog 2000) and "Long live good grammar" (Skogsberg
2000). One letter even stylizes (in the sense of Coupland 2001) netspeak as a
rhetorical device to demonstrate its detrimental effect on high school students'
writing:

(10) i am a writing tutor, and i have noticed that a number of hi school students are now writing
      formal papers in much the same style as they use on the net—in other words, w/plenty
      of abbreviations, not alot of regard for punctuation, and most of all, virtually no capitalization.
      it is an uphill battle to get them to understand that essay writing is not the same as email.
      do u agree? (Woog 2000)

The author intentionally departs from the English typically encountered in a major American newspaper, attempting to elicit sympathy from readers. Internet language is characterized through abbreviations (<hi>, <w/>), nonstandard typography (uncapitalized <i>, sentence-initial <it> and <do>), and respellings (<u>). These features are linked to "grammar" by the headline and presented as a threat to standard writing. The idea that internet language might undesirably "seep in" to noninternet contexts—articulating an imperative of containment— occurs consistently in the media from the late 1990s to the present.

By the mid 2000s, most print media uses of *netspeak* presented acronyms and abbreviations as iconic of the variety, and acronyms and abbreviations were enregistered as netspeak largely through the idea that people make linguistic adaptations to achieve a level of typographical efficiency on the space- and time-constrained internet. Also in this time, the emphasis on netspeak as emerging from youth practices appeared. In 2002, a syndicated Knight Ridder Newspapers piece stylizes the variety and links it to youth:

> (11) RU der? GR8. Let's TLK bout all d abbrz & othr shrtcts poppin up mo&mo n MSGS …
> 'Are you there? great. let's talk about all the abbreviations and other shortcuts popping up more and more in messages …'
> This might look like a word jumble—unless you're younger than 25, in which case you know it's the lingo used by kids to communicate with buddies. (Knight Ridder Newspapers 2002)

The first line typifies the variety with respellings (<RU>, <der>, <GR8>) and abbreviations (<abbrz>, <bout>, <mo&mo>, <TLK>, <MSGS>), and the article links these features to people "young enough" to be natively entrenched in digital technology. As Thurlow (2006) notes, in public discourse, concern about youth often co-occurs with concern about language, and this is evident especially in news articles from the mid-2000s discussing netspeak. Another Knight Ridder story confronts public concern about young people and netspeak, interviewing David Crystal, Naomi Baron, Susan Herring, and Simeon Yates—some of the most prolific and respected linguists who research CMC:

> (12) [headline] 'Netspeak' is doing more good than harm to English
> [tagline] Were you worried about the imminent demise of language? u shudn't be. lol :)
> Many schoolteachers, editors and parents profess to be horrified by "Netspeak"—the distinctive language that young people are using more and more to talk with each other on the Internet.
> Purists should relax, a panel of experts declared at a recent symposium on "Language on the Internet" in Washington. This rapidly spreading digital dialect of English is doing more good than harm, they contended. (Boyd 2005)

Public fears about netspeak are the author's point of departure, writing that purists need not "worry" about netspeak. This frames netspeak in contradistinction to Standard English, highlighted by the article's subheadings "Violations of the rules" and "Normal English has its place."

These latter typifications differ sharply from earlier instances of *netspeak* in the print media: rather than lexical items, it is now nonstandard written features—acronyms, abbreviations, respellings—that are enregistered as internet language. These features are portrayed as resulting from the time and space constraints of text-based internet applications. I suggest that these typographical features are akin to the phonological features enregistered in spoken language, such as /aw/ monophthongization in Pittsburghese (Johnstone et al. 2006).[12] Netspeak also became linked to nonstandardness and youth, and an imperative of containment articulated a normative contextual appropriateness for the variety. In both periods, the idea that the internet gives rise to a distinctive and new set of unified language practices can be interpreted as a form of technological determinism. In the later period, the often negative social evaluation of these language practices can be interpreted as a manifestation of standard language ideologies, where netspeak is enregistered as a nonstandard language variety and, hence, an object of public concern.

Chatspeak: From chatrooms to the internet

According to my research, the print media's use of *chatspeak* comes later than its use of *netspeak* and from the earliest instances, acronyms and abbreviations, framed as accommodations to synchronous text-based interaction, form the core of its reference. The first instance occurs in 1998, when a *Dallas Morning News* article reports that some of psychologist Sherry Turkle's chatroom research participants found that "chat is more real than RL—Real Life in chat-speak" (Bedell 1998). As with early instances of netspeak, chatspeak words are glossed, but these are largely limited to spelling out acronyms, as in this 1999 *USA Today* article about online dating:

(13)   Over a month, the instant messages became private chats and then phone calls. Finally, in mid July, they met f2f—face-to-face, in chat-speak. (Kornblum 1999)

A 1999 *Washington Post* article (reprinted across the country in several major papers) also indicates an early focus on both abbreviations and youth, describing teens' use of "shorthand" in chatroom interaction as a means of achieving speed:

(14)   It's fast: Try talking to six people at once. It's brief: three or four words per exchange. It takes wit, concentration and nimble fingers. And it requires tremendous linguistic economy. There's neither time nor space for exposition.
        The solution has been to abbreviate, contract and condense. On a huge scale. Why, for example, consume precious keystrokes telling six friends you have to go smack your little brother when BRB (be right back) will do? (Ruane 1999)

The article also mentions a lack of vowels as common in chatspeak, quotes teens who say that chatspeak words are unspeakable, and offers a glossary of acronyms such as <CYA> 'see ya', <OMG> 'oh my gosh/god', <TTFN> 'ta-ta for now', and <B/F> 'boyfriend'. Several other instances of *chatspeak*

refer to language composed of abbreviations from 1999 through the 2000s. For example, a *Chicago Tribune* story from 2000 emphasizes acronyms, youth, and emoticons:

(15)   If you peek over your teen's shoulder while she's communicating on the Internet you might see something on the screen that reads NMJCHBU or looks like : - (and ends with (MA). It might seem like gibberish or some new-fangled Morse code to you, but rest assured, she knows what it all means. She's using "chat speak," an abbreviated written language created to make it easier and faster to communicate on-line. (Maes 2000)

As with netspeak, several glossaries of chatspeak appear (e.g. Fisher 2000), and chatspeak is linked to internet "insider" status. The same 2000 *Chicago Tribune* story excerpted above portrays chatspeak as a barrier to internet participation for the unversed, a new code that must be learned for full participation:

(16)   You don't have to be stumped by chat speak. You can learn it the way you would learn any foreign language, with a bit of effort and some memorization skills. (Maes 2000)

Several writers also warn against using chatspeak in noninternet environments, echoing the imperative for containment of internet language, such as this 2004 piece in the *Fort-Worth Star Telegram* which divorces chatspeak from "actual communication:"

(17)   Chatspeak has its place in the world of quick screen messages, but actual communication with human beings takes the same attention to detail that it always has. (Hall 2004)

Interestingly, while many earlier instances of chatspeak suggest that it emerged specifically from chatrooms (such as through Internet Relay Chat), later uses sometimes attribute the variety to another form of synchronous CMC—instant messaging (IM):

(18)   The term chatspeak is used to describe a set of IMing conventions that include new, shortened ways to spell words: "u" is you, "ur" is your or you're, "2" is to, too and two, and "bcuz" is because. "Bi" can take the place of bye (it's hard to imagine that saves all that much time). (Abernathy 2005)

Later uses like this broaden the term *chatspeak* to apply to THESE PARTICULAR LANGUAGE FEATURES used ACROSS INTERNET APPLICATIONS. Thus, *chatspeak* refers to a set of features of a medium-dependent, not application-dependent, language variety.[13] Whereas the denotational history of *netspeak* shows a shift in what FEATURES were enregistered, that of *chatspeak* shows a shift in what CONTEXTS were linked to the features, broadening to internet contexts generally—perceived as similar in their technological constraints and hence linguistic practice.

Chatspeak uses also show public concern about the internet's effect on language, writing, and English, especially in the latter part of the 2000s. For instance, following the release of a 2008 Pew Research study,[14] a writer in the *Los Angeles Times* bemoaned English's demise in the face of chatspeak:

(19) Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between a person LOLing and crying—but
      I am definitely weeping. The cause for my earth-shattering depression is an April 25 Pew
      Research Center study that polled 12- to 17-year-olds on their attitudes about writing.
      A heart-stopping 38 percent said they let chat-speak—such as LOL (for "laughing out loud"),
      ROFL ("rolling on the floor laughing"), BRB ("be right back"), TTYL ("talk to ya later")—
      slip into essays and homework.
      I propose a new chat term: KMN. "Kill me now." (Kolesnikova 2008)

In invoking the imperative of containment, this example highlights how extremely
negative (even violent) stances sometimes are towards internet language.

Enregistering internet language; enregistering features of internet language

This section has provided evidence for the enregisterment of internet language by
examining the uses of two metalinguistic terms in the mass print media over the past
two decades. I have said that *netspeak* appears to have occurred earlier and denoted
a lexical register, but around the time *chatspeak* emerged, both terms encompassed
a common set of linguistic features—acronyms, other abbreviations, and nonstan-
dard writing practices. At the time of the writing of this article, in late 2009, these
two terms are often treated as synonyms, demonstrated by the cross-referencing
definition in (3). These data suggest that over this relatively short period of time,
there has consistently been a concept of internet language in the public imagination,
though its bounds and applications have changed. *Netspeak* shifts to include non-
standard features; *chatspeak* grows to encompass broader internet contexts; the
terms' denotations and social indexical links converge.

   The case of internet language shows that it is useful to talk about the enregister-
ment of a VARIETY as partially separate from the enregisterment of the variety's FEA-
TURES. The enregisterment of internet language—the recognition and valorization
of linguistic forms linked to the internet—has been happening since the early
1990s and perhaps earlier, when ideas emerged alongside new technology that
the internet gave rise to unique linguistic practices. But while the concept of the
variety has persisted, its specifications have varied—the enregisterment of internet
language, the variety, is different from the enregisterment of lexical items or acro-
nyms, the features of the variety. This enregisterment process is motivated by a
widespread and compelling perception that the internet is a "new," "different," "re-
volutionary," and ultimately troubling social space (Paradis 2005), along with
experience or perception of the internet as a place for synchronous written com-
munication. For this process to be analyzed via the framework of Silverstein's
(2003) indexical order (after, e.g., Johnstone et al. 2006), one would need to ident-
ify a set of features as correlated with a sociodemographic property or pragmatic
function, such as internet users or internet communication. This index would
then be presupposed by second- and higher-order indexicalities related to personae,
register, social meaning, and so forth. But it is not first and foremost a correlation
between the internet and the use of these features that precipitates their

enregisterment; it is rather the perception that there is some correlation, driven by the belief that internet language is unique. This belief is related to technological determinism. I discuss these issues further in the GENERAL DISCUSSION.

The metalinguistic referring terms *netspeak* and *chatspeak* offer just one possible departure point for investigating how metadiscourse configures an internet-specific language variety. Excerpts from the mass media demonstrate convergence on the features attributed to this variety and its social valuation. While the mass media publicly circulate these tropes about language, to understand enregisterment we must also investigate the processes by which values are transmitted between the media and speakers (cf. Spitulnik 1997) and by which speakers negotiate and circulate ideas about language (cf. Agha 2007:228–32, Johnstone & Baumgardt 2004).

METADISCOURSE IN AN ONLINE SPEECH CHAIN: LANGUAGE ON THE INTERNET ABOUT LANGUAGE ON THE INTERNET

In their metadiscursive descriptions of communicative phenomena, the mass media formulate models of language that may be received by others and transmitted through interaction. To account for these processes, Agha (2003, 2007) uses the concept of SPEECH CHAINS—linked series of encounters that are a central mechanism of enregisterment, the means through which semiotic and social values are transmitted and changed. While the mass media might begin a speech chain as sender of a certain message, the chain does not necessarily end at the audience as receiver of that message, since the message can go on to be transmitted and altered by the audience in extensions of the chain. In this section, I analyze metadiscourse in a multi-sited speech chain that begins with an online mass communicative prompt and continues with readers' responses through two online discussion threads. By examining speech chains such as these, we can see how media messages are echoed or reanalyzed by recipients and how internet users—as interactive with the mass media—contribute to the enregisterment of internet language. Each type of metadiscourse is situated within a cultural context that includes the other.

I first overview the data and then analyze how internet language is metadiscursively characterized by participants in terms of linguistic features, Standard English, sociohistorical explanations, and speaker personae.

Overview

This speech chain consists of readers commenting on an opinion column published online by the *Chicago Maroon*, the student newspaper of the University of Chicago (Hogan 2006). Readers left comments directly on the column's webpage, and the column was multiply linked to by readers, as is typical of heavily-read internet content.[15] Among these links was a post on the social bookmarking website Digg (http://digg.com), which enables site members to share links and discuss online content.[16] At the time I captured the data, *Maroon* held 91 comments

while Digg held 214 comments, amounting to 305 comments between the two texts, from 266 delimited commenters.[17] Although two separate comment threads are discussed here, I consider them part of one speech chain, since they emerge from the same originating prompt.

Column author Hogan conveys dislike for what he terms *AOL-speak*,[18] "an increasingly new and incomprehensible language." (It is perhaps useful for the reader to keep in mind that this was published in a university newspaper, which presumably serves students who may typically be categorized as "youth," or at least "young adults.") The following excerpt encapsulates the column's thesis:

> I have become convinced that these abhorrent abbreviations are nothing less than an insidious linguistic plague slowly but surely wreaking havoc on competent communication everywhere. Cute and cuddly abbreviations such as "LOL" and "BFF" may save time and allow for faster, more efficient correspondence, but that is precisely the problem. The efficiency of AOL-speak not only erodes relationships by dumbing down how people talk to one another but it also degrades the English language itself. (Hogan 2006)

When broken down, the column makes three primary claims: First, a type of language called AOL-speak exists that is characterized by the use of "abbreviations" (including acronyms). Second, this variety is motivated by a desire for efficiency when communicating online. Third, this variety contributes to the demise of the English language. The column's stance largely aligns with the content of the mass media presented above. It also aligns with standard language ideologies about English.

These claims put forth a model of language for readers to negotiate, and readers' comments echo much of the claims' main substance. The existence of AOL-speak is hardly challenged; neither is its characterization as an abbreviated form of English. The term *AOL-speak* itself is used in the comments of thirty-two separate commenters, along with numerous other terms that invoke the internet (*netspeak* and *chatspeak* among them).[19] Participants also make reference to internet language through demonstrative deictics (such as "talk *like that*") and the pronominal *it* that presupposes AOL-speak as a given referent. For example:[20]

(20)   As long as it's used in the appropriate environment … [FauxOne]

Other metalinguistic terms invoke nonstandardness, informality, slang, or poor typing, construing internet language in juxtaposition to normative English. Table 1 outlines all metalinguistic referring terms for internet language found in the data, subcategorized by specific indices each might be thought to carry based on the content of the term.

While this list shows that many discussion participants disagree with Hogan's terminology, only one commenter challenges the notion that there exists a particular type of language corresponding to what is meant by *AOL-speak*. Participants here

TABLE 1. *Metalinguistic terms referring to internet language, with bare counts of their occurrence across the Digg and* Maroon *threads (no count indicates the variant occurs only once; asterisk indicates orthographic variation within the variant term).*

Category	Subcategory	Variants	
Transparently internet-specific	General internet	a way of speech that's inherent in the Internet an internet dialect internet acronyms (2) internet acronyms and shortenings	internet lingo (5)* internet speak net-talk netspeak (14)*
	AOL	AOL expressions AOL lingo AOLLOLspeak	AOL-speak (40)* AOL-Speak/hackerz/ d00dtalk the AOL speak poetry
	Chat	chat and leet speak chat lingo chat speak (5)	
	Leet	AIM/SMS/l33t acronyms L337 speak (2)* l33t sp34k (3)*	lame ass leet speak leet leetspeak (3)*
	Instant messaging	IM chat (2) IM chat-speak AIM speak im speech im talk	IM-speak (3)* informal IM-speak instant message slang instant messaging abbreviations instant messaging slang
	Text messaging	txt-tlk short talk	
Internet-indexing	Demonstrative or deictic	all of this crap like that chatroom…like that speak like this spells things like that such language such word talking like that (4)* these abbreviations these ways of communication this	this crap language this devolved English this kind of stuff this language this lingo type like that type that way unprofessional nonsense like that writing like that wrote like that it (13)*
	Language	a language that some of us don't easily understand a new language	sloppy shortcuts the lingo the new language

Continued

TABLE 1. *Continued*

Category	Subcategory	Variants	
		a way to speak	the way they use language
		simple and well established argot	totally separate language
		slang/shortcuts	this form of "language"
			this type of "language"
	Other	dialect of another language	
		its own language, a derivative of English	
		poor English	
		an accepted form of writing	
		a shorthand way to quickly communicate with friends	
		how people type	

share a concept of a variety of language that is internet-specific that subsumes terminological differences, giving further evidence for enregisterment (as argued in the prior section).[21] There is contestation, but it is not about what terms like *AOL-speak* refer to; this much seems taken for granted by discussion participants as common ground. This is seen in how consistently commenters' metadiscourse configures the features of the variety.

Features enregistered as internet language

These speech-chain participants by and large orient to the definition of internet language as a set of orthographic and linguistic features. Following the column's emphasis, commenters primarily discuss abbreviations and acronyms. Mention of "abbreviations" is made explicit by twenty-five different commenters, with more indirect allusions to "shortening" throughout. Thirty-eight different participants make explicit reference either to "acronyms" generally or to specific acronyms, most often <LOL>. Additionally, respellings that mimic phonetic characteristics, such as replacing letters with numbers (<gr8>), are commonly invoked (cf. Sebba 2007, Thurlow 2003). As seen in Table 1, several referring terms contain the notion of "abbreviations" within them, such as in the comment below, where Andy couches the referring term *IM-speak* within the description of its features, "these shortened IM-speak words":

(21)   You must remember that these shortened IM-speak words come from English. One has to know the words "be right back" in order to write "brb." [Andy]

Example (21) shows that while some participants talk explicitly about "abbreviations," others define the variety by demonstrating it. The most common

exemplifications are <LOL>, <BRB>, <OMG>, and <WTF> 'what the fuck' for acronyms; and <u> 'you' for alternative spellings. More extreme modes of demonstration consist of participants stylizing the variety (as the mass media also does) as in (22).

(22) omfg wtf du care bout dis nubs usin aimspek.. they int gonna be getin da jobs i wnt if they
       continue to speak like this so stfu [joe]
       'oh my fucking god what the fuck do you care about these newb(ie)s using AIMspeak. they
       ain't gonna be getting the jobs I want if they continue to speak like this so shut the fuck up'

Demonstration and discussion of textual shortenings link the internet to technology-adaptive nonstandard written renderings of words or phrases that could also be produced in spoken language, and perhaps the idea of written manipulation of speech itself causes some anxiety.

Strictly written ORTHOGRAPHIC features involving punctuation and capitalization are also discussed in the comments, but only in a few instances. Yet mentions of capitalization are embedded within some of the most extremely negative of comments, as shown in MeridianBlade's stylization:

(23) I hate the bitches wHo TyPe lIkE tHiS [MeridianBlade]

The relative lack of concern for punctuation or capitalization is noteworthy here, because these orthographic features are domains where nonstandard usage is very common in instant messaging and other forms of CMC (see GENERAL DISCUSSION). A handful of participants attribute other features to internet language, including typos or "incorrect spelling," "smiley faces," and "bad grammar." In terms of the typification of internet language features, then, this speech chain is generally consonant with mass media metadiscourse; this convergence happens against a common backdrop of standard language ideologies.

Internet language and standard English: The imperative of containment

The discussion above hints at my central claim that internet language features are enregistered as being in contrast and even conflict with Standard English. This metadiscourse shows that the process of enregisterment of one language variety often depends upon the existence of other enregistered varieties within speakers' schemata of language variation (Remlinger 2009 points to similar processes). Hogan's column claims that AOL-speak poses danger to English; while participants do not often use the term *standard* ("standard English" occurs only twice), they frequently employ notions of CORRECTNESS or NORMALITY. Participants juxtapose internet language features to "proper English," "perfect English," "correct English," "coherent English," and "the actual English language." Participants also index standardness when they contrast internet language with the practices of people who "type normally," "form sentences," "type properly," "speak coherently," "write

properly," "[use] proper ways of speaking," and "correctly us[e] the written language." Because standard ideologies are commonly articulated via appeals to "grammar" (cf. Milroy & Milroy 1999), I argue that participants also indirectly reference "Standard English" through mentions of "correct grammar," "proper punctuation and grammar," and "good grammar and spelling." These metalinguistic acts of reference, as with those to *netspeak* or *chatspeak*, point to and re-establish the notion of standard language; again, the terminological differences are subsumed by a conceptual commonality.

Internet language and Standard English are also distinguished by the domains in which participants claim they are acceptable. Several participants argue that users of internet language should be able to switch into Standard English when the situation demands it. The imperative of containment is visible here in the contexts in which the two varieties are said to be acceptable, a summary of which is given in Table 2. Participants often juxtapose pairs of settings that require different types of language: formal and casual, school and internet, business and internet, formal writing and informal chatting, IM chats and written letters.

An especially interesting aspect of the imperative of containment is how notions of SPEECH and WRITING are deployed within participants' metadiscourse. As seen in the mass media examples, comment thread participants talk about internet language features as "slipping" or "creeping" into unwarranted contexts, including contexts of SPEECH. By most scholarly accounts, written English forms a zone where standardization has been most successful and where nonstandard features are least acceptable (cf. Milroy & Milroy 1999; see also Sebba 2007 for a complementary view). As Bucholtz (2001) notes, standard language ideologies typically

TABLE 2. *Summarization of reported contexts of use for internet language and Standard English.*

Variety	Acceptable context	Unacceptable context
Internet language	Online	Speech
	AIM	(School) papers
	chats	Everyday life
	instant messaging	Real life
	text messaging/SMS	Public
	short emails	College
	Digg comments	Workplace
	MySpace	Emails
	Talking to friends	Talking on the phone
		Talking to boss
Standard English	Formal settings	Instant messaging
	(School) papers	
	Business environment	
	Newsmedia	
	Speaking	
	Professional setting	

characterize varieties of SPOKEN English as nonstandard when they diverge from the rules of WRITTEN English. Internet language indeed consists of divergences from Standard Written English, yet participants claim that internet language should be confined to what are fundamentally WRITTEN domains. Meanwhile, internet language is also NOT to be used in more "formal" online settings, such as emails to a boss.

This suggests that for these participants, the distinction between standard and nonstandard English obtains primarily through contexts dichotomized by social function, rather than modality—formal versus casual, business versus personal, not writing versus speaking. Indeed, while most of the features ascribed to internet language are dependent upon a written modality, they are NOT dependent upon being used in one written modality versus another, and in practice many of these textual strategies—namely abbreviations, acronyms, and phonetic respellings—are used across written contexts, from the handwritten to the typewritten to the printed sign (see Shortis 2007). This underscores the importance of technological determinism to the enregisterment of internet language. As seen in Table 2, internet language is never said to be acceptable in noninternet contexts, yet it is also said to be unacceptable in CERTAIN internet contexts. Thus, in this case, I suggest that certain types of online interaction are characterized as INTERNET interactions, and these contexts form the conceptual foundations that motivate the enregisterment of internet language features. For most participants in this data, email is not one of these contexts, likely because it is perceived as used for more formal purposes; but instant messaging is, because it is used more casually (see also Quan-Haase 2007, Squires 2003).

The foregoing discussion relates to scholars' conclusions that internet language is a "hybrid" between speech and writing, because it shows that speakers' concepts "speech" and "writing" are actually not dichotomous. With the increasing social contexts in which writing is used, distinctions like SPOKEN and WRITTEN are less important to users than those based on speaker roles and pragmatic functions. Internet language is constructed here as a variety that ought not encroach on Standard English, but what counts as "Standard English" does not include the whole of WRITTEN English. Thus enregisterment may reinforce some aspects of ideology while reconfiguring others; and indeed may impact the ongoing enregisterment of other language varieties (at least, in this case, Standard English).

Sociohistorical explanations for internet language

The enregisterment of internet language follows fairly recent developments in social infrastructure, and accordingly, Digg and *Maroon* participants often explain its existence in terms of sociohistorical processes of technological change and language change (or change in language proficiency). The issue of technological change is, as I have said, related to a viewpoint of technological determinism. The issue of language change has been common throughout "the complaint tradition" in English

history (Milroy & Milroy 1999; also documented in Bailey 1991), in which public debate has focused on perceived declines in language or literacy.

In this speech chain, communicative technologies are said to catalyze language change, as in krosk's supposition in (24) that new technologies require linguistic adaptation, resulting in "shorthand."

(24) Saying that AOL-speak is destroying the English language is bullshit. AOL-speak is merely necessary right now, we don't have computers that link directly to our brains that type out thoughts as soon as they enter your head. [krosk]

Some participants also give historical context to internet language by historically situating the technologies implicated, and pointing out that abbreviations and acronyms are not new, as Steve writes in (25).

(25) Ten years ago, the same issue, with many of the same abbreviations, was occuring in Internet Relay Chat (IRC) chatrooms, and prior to that, many abbreviations (though, perhaps different ones) were used on the Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) that preceded the public "internet" as we know it now. However, long before even those things, high school students have been using abbreviations, codes, and substitutions in notes and yearbooks literally for decades … [Steve]

Steve argues for broader historical perspective and more accuracy in how "internet" is conceptualized, contesting the idea that "internet" can be considered one thing, or that "internet" gave rise to these linguistic innovations. Steve thus resists technological determinism, taking a minority stance among the commenters. Nevertheless, (25) indicates a belief that new settings (yearbooks, BBS, IRC) motivate linguistic change or adaptation to their technical constraints and affordances. Many commenters similarly focus on language change—beyond the context of the internet—as an element of internet language's development.

Most attributions to language change are value-neutral declarations that language always changes, denying that internet language can be any better or worse than other changes. There are, however, disagreements, with claims that internet language is "devolution" not "evolution." For instance, soupisgoodfood (26) claims that the change is regressive.

(26) Everytime this issues comes up, some dolt spits out this "but it's evolution of language" thing without even thinking. You see, just because something changes, it does not nessesarily mean that it's evolving. Sure, there are some advantages to this trend, but that doesn't mean that on the whole it's progress. [soupisgoodfood]

The attribution of positive values to language change, including the changes giving rise to internet language, is much more common and co-occurs with affirmations of its efficacy:

(27) Language evolves naturally and I doubt that adopters would choose a language which cannot express everything that they want to say which probably means that netspeak works just fine for normal net dialogue. I think netspeak is an extremely interesting evolution for language for exactly the reasons the author stated … [schriste]

Participants making claims about internet language as a positive progression refer to its efficiency, utility, and suitability to the internet, reinforcing the notion of the variety as "shortened" elements of English.

The imperative of containment appears again in several comments claiming that internet language results from a negative change in English proficiency, due to inadequate schooling. In such comments, participants bemoan the negligence of the (presumably) American education system in teaching students grammar and writing:

(28)   I remember getting told it was ok to use such word in my final year tests at school. I couldn't believe it, when your writing an English essay, the least you can do is use proper English. [chrismcelligott]

As Thurlow (2006) shows, both technological change and language change are common sites of societal moral panics. When participants orient to the salience of these factors as motivating internet language, they orient to aspects of existing ideologies about the value of Standard English, and about technology as a societal determinant.

Personae linked to internet language

The speech chain also gives evidence of speaker personae—social types—linked to internet language, though this occupies a relatively small portion of the comments. There is an implicit, presumably stable link to an undifferentiated "internet user" who uses internet language, but this in itself does not suffice for explanation, since ALL participants in this speech chain are internet users, yet most claim not to use internet language. Links to personae are an integral component of enregisterment (Agha 2003), and here I offer a brief discussion of this component of the data.

Participants attribute internet language primarily to four broad categories of speakers: youth, females, the lazy or inexperienced (those who do not put forth the effort required to type in standard fashion, including novice internet users), and the uneducated/low-status/unintelligent. These categories often overlap in descriptions, such that gender is hardly mentioned without reference to youth. Table 3 shows these four social categories as evoked by specific referential constructions in the data.

Just as language change and technological development have often sparked moral panics, the categories of youth, gender, and education status have long been staples of public discourse about nonstandard English (cf. Cameron 1995, Milroy & Milroy 1999); youth and gender have in particular also been common in mass media representations of CMC (Thurlow 2003, 2006). It is thus not surprising that these personae linkages occur for internet language; what is perhaps surprising is how relatively little of the metadiscourse draws links to specific personae, focusing instead on the medium of the internet.

TABLE 3. *Social personae categories linked to internet language (asterisk indicates overlapping categories; brackets indicate author notes).*

Social personae category	Referential terms
Age	normal teens
	many youth
	American youth
	American kids
	high school students
	teens
	the kids
	young generation
	kids who grow up typing gr8
	younger users
	younger generation
	teenagers
	kids today
	the mainstream teenagers
	these kids
	youth of 2day
	nearly illiterate teenagers
	MySpace generation
	young people
	my age [teenager]
Gender	girls
	10-year-old niece*
	pre-pubescent girls*
	13 year old girls*
	my sister (14)*
Effort/experience	people not bothering to properly learn how to touch type
	just plain laziness
	someone who can't type fast enough
	just a sign of their effort put into tapping keys on a keyboard
	nubs ['newbies']
Education/	no one talks like that on aIM unless they are fucking retarded
class/	a few idiots
intelligence	nearly illiterate teenagers*
	job at McDonald's [indicating low status]
	(so called) "well educated people"
	people who can't put together coherent sentences
	from the ghetto

Metadiscursive themes in enregistering internet language

This section has overviewed metadiscursive assessments of internet language in an online, interactive speech chain. These assessments are generally positive when internet language is presented as an adaptation to specific settings and negative when it is presented as an unnatural deviation from Standard English. These assessments

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are interpretable in the context of their connections to other spatially, textually, and temporally disconnected discourse. This speech chain is a temporally-bound snapshot, one chain among many, in the enregisterment of internet language—as evident in the print media, this process has been occurring for over a decade. Furthermore, its foundations predate the internet itself. This speech chain—from the initially printed column to the unfolding, interactive participant responses—emerges within a climate of ideological attitudes toward technology and nonstandard language, and it is a site where those ideologies are reconstructed in light of perceptions of technological and social change.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

I have presented evidence for the enregisterment of internet language from academic discourse, mass media discourse, and interactive internet discourse. My argument has been that two ideological factors most centrally motivate this enregisterment process: standard language ideology and technological determinism. I have argued that these two forces converge in metadiscourse about the internet, and that internet language is foremost an ideological construction based on perceptions of the uniqueness of internet interaction and its language. Here, I elaborate on my claim that this enregisterment process does not completely mirror the processes of enregisterment of regional varieties discussed elsewhere, primarily because the enregisterment of internet language does not proceed from linguistic features that bear a "first-order index" of either a sociodemographic category or pragmatic function (as the notion of indexical order has been developed and applied by Johnstone 2009, Johnstone et al. 2006, Johnstone & Kiesling 2008, Remlinger 2009, Silverstein 2003).

    For regional varieties like "Pittsburghese" and "Yooper," there is claimed to be an underlying frequency distribution of the enregistered features (what Johnstone and colleagues (2006:87) have called "preconditions for dialect enregisterment"). This means neither that, for instance, ONLY one variant of a sociolinguistic variable is used in a geographical area, nor that that area is the ONLY area to use that variant. But it might mean that either a) in that area, the variant is more likely to be used than other variants, or b) the variant is more likely to be found in that area than in other areas. If the enregisterment of internet language comes about in a similar manner, we might expect that the relevant features—acronyms, abbreviations, and phonetic respellings—are either more commonly used on the internet than their orthographically standard counterparts are, or more common on the internet than in other settings. This would provide a kind of feature-based first-order indexicality for speakers to "notice" and work into existing sociolinguistic schema. Yet there is evidence that neither of these properties holds true for enregistered internet language features.

    First, empirical studies have called into question the notion that these features are more common on the internet than their standard counterparts are. For example,

regarding acronyms, both Baron (2004) and Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) found very few acronyms in English-language instant messaging (IM) conversations. Baron (2004) found only ninety acronyms in a nearly 12,000-word corpus, and many of the variants occurred only once. The form <lol> was most frequent, occurring seventy-six times. In a much larger corpus, Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) found numerous uses of <lol> (.41% of total words) and <omg> (.11%), but very few instances of other stereotyped forms, including <brb> (.04%) and <wtf> (.02%). Together, all of these features constitute just 2.5% of total words in their corpus. Tagliamonte and Denis also found few cases of <u> relative to the standard variant <you> (8.6% vs. 91.41%, with <u> used by only by twenty-seven speakers out of fifty; Tagliamonte, personal communication), and Baron found only thirty-one "CMC abbreviations" altogether (and reports no cases of <u>).

My own corpus of sixteen IM conversations, collected in 2004, shows similar patterns. The tables below summarize the occurrence in my data of these forms. Table 4 shows the acronyms discussed in Tagliamonte & Denis (2008) and Baron (2004),[22] and Table 5 shows two forms of letter substitutions. Each variable shows a preponderance of standard usages compared to nonstandard ones, and few overall stereotyped features.

However, some nonstandard forms do appear to be more common in IM than their standard counterparts, especially in the domains of punctuation and capitalization. For instance, lowercase <i> rather than uppercase <I> for the first-person pronoun was found commonly (though conditioned by individual) in both Tagliamonte & Denis 2008 and my own data, shown in Table 6.[23]

My corpus also shows individual differences in the use of apostrophes in contractions and possessive nouns, where some speakers use apostrophes 100% of the time while others use them 0% of the time; the overall apostrophe usage rate is at just over half (see Squires 2007). I believe it to be remarkable that these orthographic features—punctuation and capitalization—are relatively rarely discussed as part of internet language, though their nonstandard versions occur as common variants to their standard versions, and in many cases the nonstandard variants overwhelm the standard ones; this contrasts with the features that ARE commonly attributed to internet language but are relatively rarely used.[24]

It is more difficult to prove whether or not internet language features are indeed quantitatively used more often in online versus offline contexts, due to the historical lack of serious analysis of vernacular written texts. But as Shortis (2007) and others have argued, the orthographic features that the media have recently focused on have long been commonly used in written arenas outside of those sanctioned by dominant language standards. Shortis provides a number of orthographic features often cited as being common to text-based practice—especially text messaging and internet communication—including vowel omission, letter replacements, and acronyms. He shows that these features have long been part of many vernacular literacy practices, such as trade names, codified occupational and uncodified

TABLE 4. *Use of forms in instant-messaging data in a corpus of approximately 10,000 words.*

Form	Frequency	Number of speakers (out of 26)
lol	16	4
omg	0	0
brb	0	0
ttyl	3	3
btw	0	0
wtf	2	2
Total	*142*	*21*

personal shorthands, and popular culture (such as song lyrics). What is new about these features' role in written practice is that internet discourse documents, publicizes, and diffuses them—not that they are more frequent in internet discourse than in other realms.

This evidence suggests that for the enregistered features of internet language, patterns of usage do not exist that clearly correlate with either "internet user" or "internet." The construct of internet language (referred to by various terms) glosses over many different patterns of variation in an extremely large sphere of discourse with many different types of speakers, the heterogeneity of which is typically erased. In the empirical studies on IM described above, the subjects were teenagers or young adults, which is precisely the population implicated as personae linked to internet language, yet these speakers did not commonly employ the stereotyped features. Hence, instead of presupposing a sociolinguistic feature correlation, the enregisterment of internet language proceeds from ideas about technology and social space, and language is taken as a way to delineate that social space. It is not the case that features are distributed along "internet/noninternet" lines and come to be perceived as such, but rather that an "internet/noninternet" line is perceived, and features are categorized as belonging on either side of the line. This categorization is based largely on what features are enregistered as belonging to another type of language, Standard English, and which social settings it is perceived as appropriate to.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to provide more rigorous analysis of a popular phenomenon—public discourse about language and computer-mediated communication—often noted but rarely interrogated, utilizing a developing theoretical framework for understanding the social significance of language variety. Internet language provides one example of how enregisterment brings the forces that bear on language's significance to the forefront, helping us see which cultural logics, facts, and perceptions are pertinent in a given place at a given time. By taking metadiscourse about language and the internet as a central point of investigation, I have shown the enregisterment of internet language to be interpretable as outcomes of extant

TABLE 5. *Distribution of standard and nonstandard variants for (you) and (are) in instant-messaging data in a corpus of approximately 10,000 words.*

Variable	Variant	Frequency	Percent	Number of speakers (out of 26)
(you)	<u>	23	7.4%	5
	<you>	288	92.6%	24
(are)	<r>	2	2.8%	1
	<are>	70	97.2%	21

TABLE 6. *Distribution of variants of (I) in two sets of instant-messaging data.*

Data	Variant	Frequency	Percent	Number of speakers
Squires	<i>	466	86.9%	25 (out of 26)
	<I>	70	13.1%	9 (out of 26)
Tagliamonte & Denis (2008)	<i>	30,222	74.07%	48 (out of 49)
	<I>	10,581	25.93%	38 (out of 49)

dominant ideologies of language and technology. Only a small slice of the enormous potential evidence for this enregisterment has been dealt with, and only a small bit of its complexity is represented here. I hope that more scholars will provide more nuanced analyses of the ever-changing social and linguistic practices involved in computer-mediated communication, and of the value that those practices hold within networked (and nonnetworked) social life.

NOTES

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[1]A lesser number of group names take less negative stances:

I use netspeak even though it isn't socially acceptable
I really do "laugh out loud" when I type "lol!"
Everyone that uses internet chatspeak in everyday life
i dont mind using internet talk to chat with friends…..
Jewish Chat-Speak
Chatspeak is for chat!
Making Chatspeak Family Friendly: Change WTF to WTP (What The Phoque)
Help ban the uses of the term "chatspeak" when its really called 1337
I own a ROFLcopter.
WTF, we're so OMG!

[2]I utilize the term INTERNET LANGUAGE out of a need for simplicity. It is meant to imply that there is a concept of a language variety that is being enregistered as something emergent from the internet and used

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on the internet. As will be seen, it is not meant to imply that the features enregistered are indeed uniquely used on the internet. I also do not mean to reify the object of investigation, though this seems nearly unavoidable in such an endeavor.

[3]For excellent reviews of language-centered CMC research, with many of the same points addressed, see Androutsopoulos 2006a or Georgakopoulou 2006.

[4]The hybridity characterization has been used in non-English contexts as well, such as Fung & Carter's (2007:54) discussion of Cantonese speakers' ICQ language as "hybrid in a double sense, as a hybrid of prototypical features associated with speech and writing, and as a hybrid of English and Chinese."

[5]There are practical reasons behind scholars' treatment of CMC as distinct. First is the matter of methodology: to collect and study data from the internet (whether through chat, IM, email, etc.) requires methodologies different from those typically utilized in the realm of speech. Second is the matter of disciplinary acceptance: while linguists have been studying CMC for many years, their work has remained somewhat marginal to the field as a whole. And as with other sociolinguistic inquiry, there is sometimes a feeling that linguists' investigations of CMC serve as antidotes to popular discourse about CMC. Linguists sometimes set language practices apart in order to show that they are, from a scientific point of view, "just like everything else" (for example, American sociolinguists have sought to educate the public about the systematicity of African-American English in order to combat prejudice and the discriminatory view of it as "bad English"). In this case, highlighting the novelty of CMC is perhaps a necessary step toward establishing its ordinariness (cf. Herring 2004).

[6]This happens both through scholarly writings and their publicization—the media tend to be keen to publish results about CMC.

[7]For instance, in their textbook, Thurlow and colleagues (2004) point out problems with the term *netspeak* but nonetheless use it to talk about language on the internet: "Although the terms 'netlingo' and 'netspeak' can oversimplify things, we'll stick with them in this unit because they are convenient and recognizable" (119). Another example comes from the title of a Georgetown University linguistics course offered in 2008, "Netspeak: Computer mediated communication" (http://tinyurl.com/ykqzo8y; accessed July 7, 2009).

[8]Whereas Thurlow's (2006) focus is on recent discourse (2001–2005) and youth language, I examine news sources with earlier instances of specific terms that explicitly demonstrate internet language's enregisterment. My search (through the Lexis-Nexis Academic, ProQuest, and NewsBank databases) was not restricted to articles about youth. While youth are often discussed in the uses of *netspeak* I have found, this is by no means categorical, especially in earlier years when internet access was much more limited and *netspeak* referred to a lexical register.

[9]The picture from the World Wide Web is less clear as to the terms' relative frequencies. A search using Google (http://google.com, July 19, 2009) retrieves about 137,000 hits for <netspeak> and 41,000 for <net speak>; 107,000 for <chatspeak> and 66,700 for <chat speak>. Tellingly, there are just about 8,000 hits for <netspeak AND chatspeak> and I did not locate any print media instances of these two terms used in the same text. Many of the websites containing both terms are glossaries or encyclopedia entries dealing with "internet slang"; the terms are often cross-referenced to each other. In the following discussion, I use the terms *netspeak* and *chatspeak* but the searches I performed included spelling variants, such as <net speak>, <net-speak>, <Netspeak>, and so on.

[10]See also *Chicago Sun-Times*, Net speak, August 24, 1995.

[11]Since only computer experts were privy to the earliest days of internet communication, the use of *netspeak* in early periods was often explicitly linked to not just internet users as we might think of them as Web browsers in 2009, but people with extensive technical expertise and computer programming skills, some "hackers" (for a compendium of the lexicon developed by early computer users, see early jargon guides such as the FidoNews [1989], http://www.textfiles.com/fidonet-on-the-internet/878889/fido0619.txt; or The Online Hacker Jargon File, version 4.4.7, http://catb.org/jargon/html/index.html; both accessed August 21, 2009). See Brandon 2008 for one take on the origins-in-use of many enregistered acronyms. This should also make clear that my analysis is not a complete discussion of the history

of the use of the features enregistered as internet language, but rather an analysis of how features are enregistered by metadiscourse at the levels of both mass media and interaction.

[12]For more on treating orthographic variants in the same manner as phonological variants, see Squires 2007.

[13]When text messaging via mobile phones became more common in North America, uses of *chat-speak* also came to include cell phone text messaging:

(i) "Chat-speak," an Internet dialect that abbreviates words and phrases, has been growing and adding vocabulary like "brb" (be right back) and "lol" (laugh out loud).
Digital communication—mobile text messages, e-mail, chat rooms, and instant messaging— are molding the English language into byte-sized bits that can be quickly typed. (Romalino 2008)

[14]The study in question (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill 2008) was conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project in conjunction with the National Commission on Writing. Among other findings, the report found that of the teens surveyed, 64% self-reported incorporating "some informal styles from their text-based communications into their writing at school," such as nonstandard capitalization and punctuation, "text shortcuts … such as 'LOL'," and emoticons (5). Pew's website lists "Media mentions" of the report, and many of the headlines stylize internet language and echo the imperative of containment. For instance, "OMG! TXT TLK BL33ding In2 Teenz Forml Riting" ('oh my god! text talk bleeding into teens' formal writing') was the headline in *Tech News World* (http://pewinternet.org/Media-Mentions/2008/OMG!-TXT-TLK-BL33ding-In2-Teenz-Forml-Riting.aspx; accessed August 21, 2009).

[15]I discovered the column and Digg page through a blog post by Bridget Samuels (http://bridgetsamuels.com/blog/2006/04/sky-is-falling-aol-speak.htm). In disclosure I note that I also posted a link to the column and brief commentary on a community blog of CMC-oriented sociolinguists (http://sociocmc.blogspot.com/2006/04/destroying-english-language.html). I found these threads potentially fruitful to analyze in-depth because they formed RESPONSES to an explicitly negative media prompt, allowing for investigation of how media tropes are negotiated in interaction, and because the prompt was originally geared toward a college-aged audience, the population of internet users often implicated in media tropes.

[16]Membership is free but required to post links or comments on the site; posts and comments are accessible to the general public without membership. See Lerman (2007) on the social dynamics of Digg.

[17]*Maroon*: http://web.archive.org/web/20070411220134/http://maroon.uchicago.edu/viewpoints/articles/2006/04/14/aolspeak_is_destroyi.php, accessed January 28, 2008. Digg: http://digg.com/tech_news/AOL_has_destroyed_the_English_language_with_chat_speak, accessed February 1, 2008. Of the 305 comments, 257 distinct commenter names are represented (persistent site usernames on Digg and single-time usernames on *Maroon*); nine are posted under no name. I included all unique comments, excluding duplicate and obviously automated (spam) comments.

[18]This moniker refers to America Online, a longstanding internet service provider whose instant messaging service, AOL Instant Messenger or AIM, is one of the most popular in North America (Shiu & Lenhart 2004).

[19]*Chat-* invokes "chat room," "Internet Relay Chat," or "online chat." *Leet* (also known as *Leetspeak*, *leet*, *l337*, etc.) is a substitution code whereby numbers replace Latin letters not for the purpose of phonetic approximation (as in <gr8> 'great'), but for the purpose of data encryption (as in <h4x0r> 'hacker'). Emerging from computer hackers and gamers, leet is codified and now used (or imitated) by an expanded scope of internet users; the fact that many commenters in these threads conflate leet with other names for internet language indicates that leet's subcultural origins are unknown to many participants, or perhaps that they do not perceive a delineation in these practices, which center on different orthographic issues. For treatments of leet, see Blashki & Nichol 2005, Ross 2006, Tavosanis 2007.

[20]Comments are reported in the original orthography by the participant, with my glosses/notes in brackets. Participants' screennames (if present in the data) are attributed in brackets.

[21]This is not to say that there are not places where these terms mean substantially different things, just that they occur in this speech chain (as in the media examples) as pointers to the same enregistered variety.

[22]Pronoun variants include (you) in isolation, as well as possessive and contracted forms: (your/yours), (you're), (you've), and (you'd). The counts for (are) only include isolated (are) to avoid duplication across variables.

[23]Including (I'll), (I'm), (I'd), and (I've).

[24]I have limited my presentation to findings from instant messaging for several reasons: IM was the initial starting point for discussion in Hogan's column and the interactive speech chain; the data presented here were collected from categories of speakers to which internet language is often attributed (youth—either college students or teenagers); IM is a form of CMC that has been treated to variationist analysis in a number of cases; as a synchronous form of CMC we might expect that if acronyms are due to wanting "speed" or "efficiency," we would find them in IM; more formats would require a much longer article. However, these features have also been found to be far from categorical on whole in other forms of computer-mediated discourse (e.g. Paolillo 2001 on IRC, Ling & Baron 2007 on text messaging, Iorio 2007 on the City of Heroes game).

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