Internet Slang: The influences of modern technology on language

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1 Einleitung

1.1 Warum ich finde, dass dieses Thema von Interesse ist

Unserer Welt wird immer kleiner, zumindest gewinnen wir dieses Gefühl. Die Gründe dafür sind vielfältig. Darunter sind zum einen die immer schneller werdenden Verkehrsmittel und zum anderen das Internet, welches uns erlaubt uns mit Menschen auf der ganzen Welt auszutauschen und ihre Meinungen zu erfahren. Erwähnenswert sind hier vor allem Phänomene wie Blogs und allgemein das so genannte Web 2.0[1].

Eine Konsequenz daraus ist, dass es wünschenswert wird eine gemeinsame Sprache zu sprechen. Aufgrund der Verbreitung des Englischen und auch in Anbetracht der Tatsache, dass die Entwicklung des Internets in den USA begann hat sich dieses weitestgehend als die Sprache herauskristallisiert, welche im Internet hauptsächlich genutzt wird.

Um in unserer globalisierten Welt zu (über)leben wird es also nötig Englisch zu kennen und zu verstehen, zumindest solange man nicht auf das Internet als Platz des öffentlichen Lebens verzichten möchte.

Der Trend geht allerdings immer weiter dahin, das Internet als selbstverständlichen Teil des Lebens zu sehen. Viele haben die Vorzüge davon erkannt mit Leuten aus komplett anderen Teilen der Welt zu sprechen und Meinungen auszutauschen zu können. Aus mehreren Gründen hat sich der Gebrauch des Englischen an das Internet angepasst. Dies führte zu der Entstehung eines Slangs.

Besonders beteiligt waren hier als eine Art "Ureinwohner" des Internets die so genannten Hacker (hier nach der 1. Definition in [the Jargon File 4.4.7] als spielerisch technisch interessierte Person zu verstehen), welche durch ihren Interessenhintergrund oft Wörter aus dem technischen Bereich mit brachten, aber auch andere Einflüsse sind festzustellen und haben über die Jahre Einfluss auf den Internet Slang genommen.

Um also in Gänze zu verstehen was und worüber im Internet gesprochen wird, wird es nicht nur nötig das Englische, sondern auch dessen spezielle Ausprägung im Internet zu verstehen, wozu diese Facharbeit einen Beitrag leisten soll, indem zum einen geklärt wird wie Begriffe entstehen und zum anderen immer wieder Beispiele und häufig gebrauchte Wendungen einfließen werden. Das Verständnis davon wie Begriffe entstanden sind sollte dann dabei helfen selbige zu interpretieren und sich ihre Bedeutung zu erschließen.

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[1]Begriff für die Änderung des Webs hin zu gemeinschaftlichen Aspekten

1.2 Definition von Internet Slang

Als Internet Slang wird in dieser Arbeit die nicht regelgerechte Verwendung der englischen Sprache im Internet bezeichnet. Dabei werden Wendungen die nicht ausschließlich im Internet in dieser Form gebraucht werden bzw. nicht dort entstanden sind ausgeklammert.

2 Where do we find slang on the Internet

In this section I am going to deal with the question where slang is commonly used on the Internet. This will inevitably include some explanations of technical terms, which will help understanding later sections.

2.1 World Wide Web

Talking about the World Wide Web the first thing to note is that, while often being used synonymously, the World Wide Web and the Internet are two different things. While "the Internet is the worldwide, publicly accessible network of interconnected computer networks" ([Wikipedia: Internet]), the World Wide Web is just a service provided by some of the computers in this network. Overly simplified the Web is what you see when you start up your Web browser[2].

The websites on which slang is found are of various types. They range from news sites (mainly those who are related to technical news, e.g. `http://www.slashdot.org`) over everything where people can comment on content (e.g. blogs, `http://www.youtube.com`, `http://www.flickr.net`) to community sites (e.g. `http://www.myspace.com`, `http://mugshot.org`, forums).

Of course there are many intermediate types of sites where you'll find slang. If one looks hard enough, he might eventually find slang on any kind of website, the list above just includes the most outstanding types.

In some cases the types of sites diffuse. A perfect example for this are blogs. "Blogs" (or Weblogs) are a collection of many different things a person might want to express and share. Their content can range from complete articles to random thoughts and is often a mix thereof.

Many people write about what has happened during their day in their area, or give statements on recent events. Thus blogs serve as news-sites. At the same time people share opinions on their blogs and sometimes even use them to discuss things with other bloggers[3]. This makes blogs serve as community sites,

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[2]An application to view websites. The most common ones are the Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox

[3]A person who writes a blog

too.

Finally, many blogs allow readers to comment on the blog posts. So as you can see all afore-mentioned types apply to a blog.

2.2   Usenet and mailing-lists

Media over which slang spreads also includes the Usenet and mailing-lists. The Usenet is one of the oldest forms of communication on the Internet. Conceived in 1979 it existed long before the Internet became a mass media. People post so called "articles" to newsgroups which are stored on a server and then mirrored to other servers spread over the globe. Interested persons can than get articles from a Usenet server nearby ([Wikipedia: Usenet]).

Mailing lists are very similar. People still send text (e-mails in this case) to a server. This server than sends the e-mail to a list of people who have registered on the server.

Because both, Usenet and mailing lists, reach a large number of people, slang terms can spread very well and very fast if someone introduces them on either. The first answer you'll find when looking for the origin of a certain slang term often is "This originated on Usenet".

2.3   Instant Messaging

Instant messaging (IM) is probably one of the most widespread forms of communication on the Internet. There are different providers of instant messaging services (e.g. ICQ, MSN, Yahoo!, AOL) who actively advertise their services. The basic idea behind instant messaging is, that everyone registers with one of the providers. After that he connects to the providers server and is then able to see who else has registered and is currently connected. Users can then send messages to other users of the same network. As long as the user the message was send to is connected he will instantly receive the message and can answer.

While it is possible to create Multi-User-Chatrooms (MUCs) using some of the services, communication over an instant messaging service most often takes place between only two people.

2.4   Internet Relay Chat / Chat Rooms

The Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and Chat Rooms are multi-user-chats. In the IRC world there are servers (e.g. irc://irc.freenode.net) with multiple chat rooms. These each have a different topic. Chat rooms are often so called "web applications", which are send over the Web and then connect back to the server they came

from. The main difference between IRC and Chat Rooms is that web chat rooms are very often just single rooms related to one specific topic, which is somehow connected to the website they came from (e.g. ACMEs bowling club may have a web site which has a chat room about bowling), while IRC servers have many rooms which often deal with a wide range of topics. They may however all be related to a broader topic, e.g. technology.

3 Linguistic Specialities of Internet Slang

This section is going to deal with the linguistic specialities that have developed on the inernet during the last years. In each subsection I'll present one or more examples of a certain kind of speciality and explain how it developed and how such specialities develop in general.

3.1 Metaphors

3.1.1 Tools and Applications

Metaphors are naturally composed of things someone knows. Especially in the early days of the Internet one thing most of its users were very familiar with was the system on their computer. This is partly due to the fact that many of the Internets users in the early days were the people who had worked on developing it, while the rest of the user base had to be tech savvy to be able to use it[4].

This lead to the creation of some metaphors that refer to computer programs. One of the most famous is "fsck". fsck is originally a program that is found on most Unix-derivatives[5]. Its name is the abbreviation of "File System Consistency Check" ([Wikipedia: fsck]). It does just what it's name suggests. It checks the file systems[6] consistency.

There are two different meanings of fsck if it is used as a metaphor. They are both referring to its function. The first meaning is plainly "check" ([Wikipedia: fsck], [Urban Dictionary: Fsck]), following a very simple train of thought. After all this is just what the program does.

The second meaning is a bit more complicated to explain. If one has to use fsck in most cases something has happened to the file system. This shouldn't

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[4]This statement makes yet more sense if you consider that even today getting an Internet connection to work isn't exactly simple.

[5]Unix is a rather old operating system. It's name is also used to refer to operating systems that use similar concepts, so called Unix-derivatives. One Unix-like operating system that is still in use is Linux. ([Wikipedia: Unix])

[6]The structure a computer uses to store files on the hard-disk.

ever happen at all, if it does you "are having a bad day" ([the Jargon File 4.4.7]). Another aspect is, that fsck has a certain similarity to the word fuck. The combination of those facts lead to its rise as a profanity which is/can not be filtered in most places[7] .

Most metaphors based on programs seem to be made up in a very similar way. They are based on the function the program has. A simpler example is grep, a tool which searches for a string in files. If someone says he is "greping through something" this means, that he is looking through data trying to find something ([the Jargon File 4.4.7]).

3.1.2 Real World

There are only very few metaphors referring to things in the real world in Internet slang. In my opinion this is not surprising, because most such terms can also occur to someone not using the Internet at all. Still there are a few.

One very wide spread is "Easter Egg". This term is used to refer to hidden "features" in software. These "features" can range from sentences that are contained within an executable, without interfering with its function to dialogue-boxes that pop up when the user clicks somewhere special, or enters a certain key sequence ([the Jargon File 4.4.7]). The analogy to real Easter eggs is obvious. Both are hidden, but meant to be found.

As there are only few examples of this kind of metaphor it is hard to say something general about them. They seem to emerge when something technical resembles something in the real world very closely, so that many people will associate both.

3.1.3 Military

While it is not always obvious whether this is true, some expressions in Internet slang are said to have originated in military slang. One expression where it is evident that it originated in military slang is foobar. "Foobar" is often used split in the parts "foo" and "bar" as example names for about anything in a lot of computer centric documentation ([RFC 3092 - Etymology of "Foo"]).

According to [RFC 3092 - Etymology of "Foo"] and [the Jargon File 4.4.7] it originated in the World War II expression FUBAR, which was the abbreviation of "Fucked Up Beyond All Repair". While it was originally thought that the replacement of "u" with "oo" was the result of applying leet (3.4) to FUBAR, recent theories say that the original form might have been foobar and became fubar

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[7]Of course it is technically possible to filter it, but especially on Unix-centric chats it is not feasible to do so.

when people learnt about the German word "furchtbar". This theories are based on the fact that the words foo and bar have been used in comic strips appearing before the war started ([RFC 3092 - Etymology of "Foo"]).

Security related terms have a certain tendency towards militancy, too. Different kinds of attacks (which is arguably a military word itself) against computer systems have "bomb" as a part of there name (e.g. forkbomb, logic bomb). [the Jargon File 4.4.7] also notes that bomb can be used synonymously to crash.

There are no solid facts on how this terms were introduced in Internet slang. It might be the fact that the army is interested in the Internet, because it is an information source and a communication channel. Or it might just be the fact that "boys" like to play war. Both are just guesses though, which may or may not be completely off.

3.2 Emotions

One of the things hardest to express when you only have text to communicate[8] are emotions. There is no face you can smile or cry with and no hands to gesticulate with. People have found different ways to circumvent this restrictions.

3.2.1 Naming actions

One thing that is done fairly often is just naming what you are doing and putting it between asterisks (e.g. *grin*, *waves*). Sometimes such expressions can also be found without asterisks. "lol" (abbreviation for laughing out loud, but currently misused for any kind of laughter) and other abbreviated expressions can almost always be seen without asterisks.

A variation of this can be found on IRC. If someone types "/me waves" in IRC everyone else will see "*user-name waves". Sometimes /me is also used in environments where it is not substituted automatically. The person reading it is supposed to know what it means and do the expansion in his head ([the Jargon File 4.4.7]).

Sometimes people also write out the sound their reaction to some statement makes. This is what you might also find in any book. For instance one might says "ha ha ha" instead of "I laugh" or "/me laughs".

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[8]This sounds even worse if you keep in mind that this text consists of characters that consist of 8 or 16 bits that are merely ones and zeros

3.2.2 Emoticons

Another way of expressing emotions are so called "emoticons". These are small pieces of ASCII art[9]. They are always on only one line and usually two to five characters wide ([Wikipedia: Emoticon]). Examples are: ;) (hinting irony) or >:-O (angry/yelling). Some common emoticons include (this table is loosely based on [Wikipedia: Emoticon] and what I have personally seen):

:)	Smiling, Happy
;)	Wink, hinting irony
:(	Sad
:D	Laughing, Wide grin
B)	Wearing sunglasses, indicated pride in something
<3	Heart, often used as "I <3 you"
</3	Broken heart

3.3 Writing Style

Especially those with a technical background have developed a style of writing that is based on programming and markup languages. Constructs used most often are taken from the C programming language and the Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML). The following paragraph shows some commented examples of such usage. Note that the comments themselves are part of the examples, because they are marked as they would be specified in the respective language. The examples are loosely based on the "Hacker Writing Style" section in [the Jargon File 4.4.7].

```
/* The following is based on C syntax.
 * '#ifdef' and 'if' are both statements that evaluate
 * an expression and interpret everything between
 * '#ifdef' and '#endif' or '{' and '}' if the expression
 *  is true.
 * #include includes the content of the specified file
 */
#ifdef FLAME
Yeah I know tracker is fscking fast and nice and C and ultra cool,
but what use is that if it can't index most of my stuff man.
Beagle FTW!!!
#endif /* FLAME */
```

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[9]Pictures consisting of the 95 printable characters defined by the ASCII standard ([Wikipedia: ASCII art])

```
if (nicePerson = true) {
        Have a nice day
}


#incude "signature.h"


<!--
The following is based on HTML
HTML as a markup language uses so called tags to classify text.
The classified text starts with an opening tag (<tag>)
and ends with a closing tag (</tag>).
-->
<!-- No comment ;) -->
<irony>Yes I really like the state watching my back
as close as possible, maybe they'll find a tick or a fly.</irony>
```

3.4 Leetspeak

Leetspeak (also leet, 1337, 1337speak or other combinations thereof) is a style of writing, where characters are replaced with other characters which either look similar or sound similar to the original ones. Some quite common substitutions include:

A, a	E, e	S, s	T, t	L, l	eye	see	you	why
4	3	5	7	1	I	C	U	Y

The term leet itself is derived from the word elite and is used to refer to something that "deserves" this attribute ([Wikipedia: Leet]). Since it has been overused by some people (often to refer to themselves) it is generally used in an ironic sense now.

Leetspeak was originally used to bypass word filters, but it now is also used to annoy people, resp. make it hard for them to understand what you are saying ([Wikipedia: Leet]). Some people also used it to avoid being found by search engines in the past, but there are more effective ways to be ignored by web crawlers[10] today. Recently it has been used in spam mails[11], which try to circumvent spam filters this way.

Leetspeak has gained some popularity through it's use in games (many shooters have artificial intelligences that speak leet), movies (e.g. Se7en, L4Yer

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[10]A program that collects information for search engines
[11]Mails containing unwanted content, mainly advertisements

CAK3), album and song names (e.g. Linkin Park - PLC. 4 Mie Haed) and webcomics (e.g. Megatokyo strip 09[12]) ([Wikipedia: Leet]).

3.5 Abbreviations

Abbreviations are something very common in Internet slang. Based on what people have told me and personal experience this seems to have two main reasons. On the one hand most people are lazy, on the other hand most people can't type very fast and are therefore happy for every letter they don't need to type.

Very wide spread abbreviations are those used to express emotions (3.2). Examples include:

- LOL for Laughing Out Loud

- ROFL for Rolling On the Floor Laughing

- LMAO for Laughing My Ass Off

- OM(F)G for Oh My (Fucking) Good

- WTF for What The Fuck

Most other abbreviations abbreviate phrases that are used very often. One of them is (sadly) RTFM, which is short for Read The Fucking Manual, which is mostly said to people who ask questions they could have answered themselves with a small amount of research ([Wikipedia: RTFM]). One reason it might be easy to find could be that it was a FAQ, which is the abbreviation of Frequently Asked Question. FAQs[13] are a phenomenon of their own. Both concept and name originated on the Usenet (2.2) and got popular there ([Wikipedia: FAQ]).

4   Conclusion

Concluding this I'd like to say is that it seems sheer impossible to capture the whole bandwidth of different incarnations of Internet slang. Still I think this paper should give a good overview of the many different types of slang terms. Very noticeable is that you can create way more different things that can be considered slang if you can type, because possibilities for words expand beyond being pronounceable. Things you wouldn't normally express with words (laughter, irony, ...) suddenly need to be expressed with words. Interestingly humans develop a huge

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[12] http://www.megatokyo.com/index.php?strip_id=9
[13] Collections of frequently asked questions

amount of creativity when it comes to this. They start drawing with characters and make noises like comic-figures would.

While understanding Internet slang terms might not always be simple it can broaden ones horizon by forcing you to look up terms from many different fields. Additionally there is often some humour involved, which can be a great stimulus for trying to understand them.

5 Bibliography

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[Wikipedia: Leet] `http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leet` vom 27. März 2007

[Wikipedia: RTFM] `http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RTFM` vom 27. März 2007

[Wikipedia: Unix] `http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unix` vom 26. März 2007

[Wikipedia: Usenet] `http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usenet` vom 25. März 2007

Selbständigkeitserklärung

Ich erkläre, dass ich die Facharbeit ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt und nur die im Literaturverzeichnis angeführten Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt habe.

Hürth, den 29. März 2007   . . . .

<div align="center">(Unterschrift des Schülers)</div>