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## ICT and the changes in the written language

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### Abstract

The development of new communication and information media (ICT) has an enormous impact on the development of the language system, including its written discourse. The Internet itself has changed the way of communication drastically. People's communication is much faster, less caressly done and often not well conceived. Also other ICT media, such as social network facebook or chat groups, make the written speech less structured, more abbreviated in its expressions and less polite. Others, such as e-learning, used in education, try to motivate and encourage a learner in his/ her studies and therefore its content must be more dynamic and *eye-catching* to engage the learner. The purpose of the presentation is therefore to describe the changes in the written speech, particularly in English and show its consequences on communication.

*Keywords: ICT; the Internet; written English; communication; changes; development.*

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### 1. Introduction

The development of new communication and information media (ICT) have an enormous impact on the development of the language system, including its written discourse. The Internet itself has changed the way of communication drastically. People's communication is much faster, less caressly done and often not well conceived. As Crystal [1] presents, the Internet is a completely new medium of linguistic communication, taking some of the properties of the two traditional mediums, speech and writing, synthesizing them in a novel way, and adding further properties which were unavailable to either. He calls this new language *netspeak*. Netspeak is neither speech nor writing. It is a medium of language which communicates in unique ways. Also other ICT media, such as social network facebook or chat groups, make the written speech less structured, more abbreviated in its expressions and less formal. Others, such as e-learning, used in education, tries to motivate and encourage a learner in his/ her studies and therefore its content must be more dynamic and *eye-catching* to engage the learner. In general, the written speech is tending to become more overtly dialogic.

### 2. IT discourse

Common features of IT discourse/ netspeak or hybrid form (see Urbanova & Oakland [2]) of communication are as follows (Fig.1):

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- dialogic form of communication;
- interactiveness and dynamism of a text (animation and movement, change of size and shapes, icons which attract attention);
- heuristic kind of text (it should make a reader think, be active);
- nonverbal means of communication are substituted by punctuation, repeating letters, non-linear text, altering capitalisation, smileys and other emoticons;
- specific lexis (term of arts), such as forward, tools, select, freeze;
- neologisms, for example, usenet, netnews, atsign, knowbot, netiquette, netizen, e-cruting;
- acronyms (BCC – blind carbon copy, ISP – Internet Service Provider, 3Com – a data-networking organisation);
- distinctive graphics (special fonts and styles);
- tendency to use lower-case;
- a change of spelling, such as kool (cool) or filez (files);
- a slightly limited range of punctuation;
- tendency to use an informal style of writing, more friendly;
- tendency to use simpler language;
- tendency to use economical language focusing on key words;
- short sentences prevail, consisting of 20 words at most.

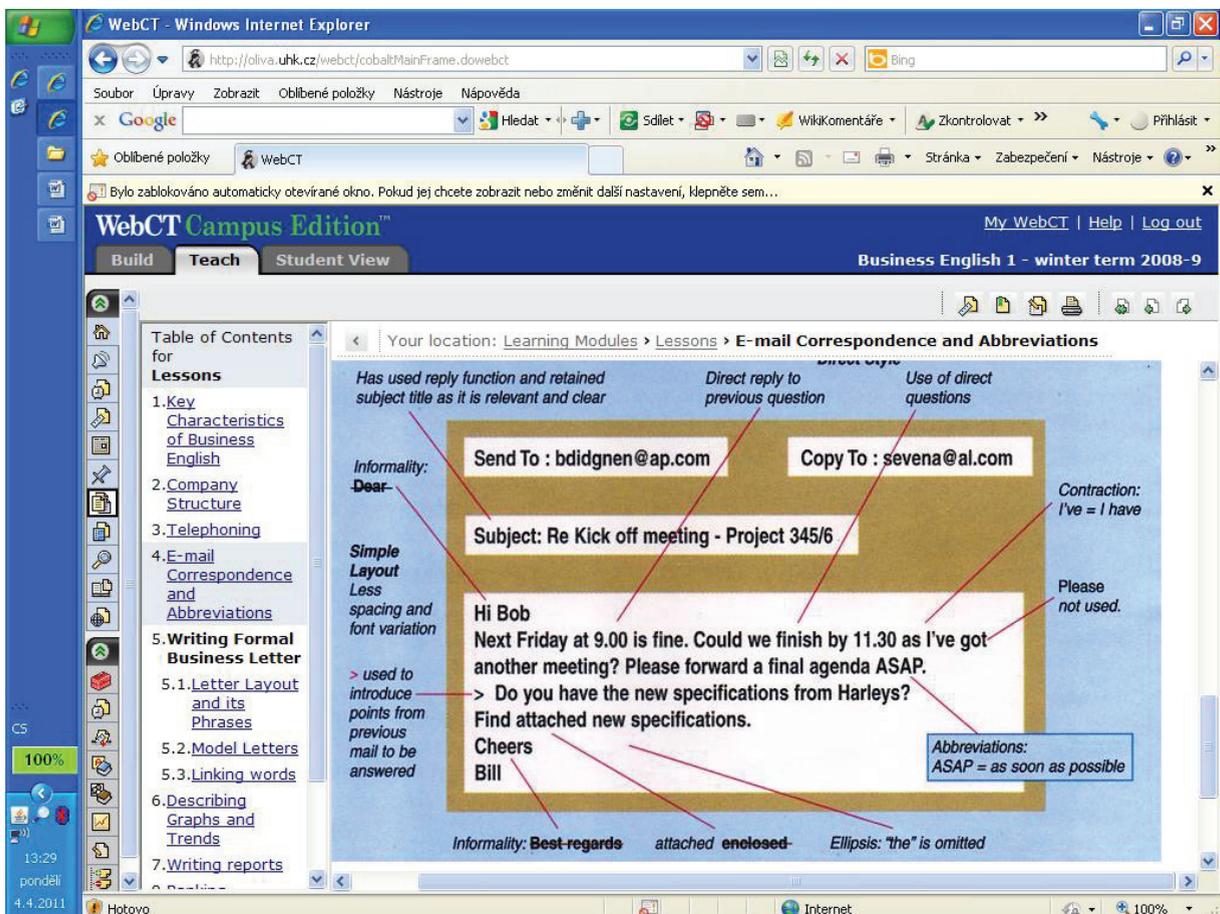


Figure 1. Model e-mail correspondence in the e-learning Course of Business English [3]

### 3. Changes in the formal English language

Even though it might seem that the above-mentioned new technologies or media have entered the world of language relatively recently, they have hit the language quite rapidly and influenced it extensively. Furthermore, they have already refuted most of the points stated by Hoffmannova [4].

The development and modification of the formal written English language challenged by the impact of modern information technologies can be illustrated as follows:

- written discourse is more freely structured and more carelessly done than it used to be;
- there is a greater tendency to simplicity, either of the topic or the sentence structure;
- the written text becomes more dynamic, which is connected with the use of multimedia, graphics and animation;
- under the influence of IT technologies even the written discourse becomes more and more contextualized (e.g. *on-line chatting* or *e-mail informal correspondence*);
- written discourse becomes more fragmented and non-linear;
- the syntax of the written discourse is less complex; some authors of e-learning texts (e.g. Bednarikova [5]) say that short sentences should prevail and they should consist of 20 words at maximum;
- new technologies also affect the use of non-standard English, such as a use of contracted forms or a lack of punctuation;
- written discourse also is tending to become more overtly dialogic and multimodal in its nature.

In addition to that, Mair & Leech [6] list the following linguistic changes in English which have been caused by grammaticization (e.g. the use of progressive forms or semi-modals), socio-cultural (e.g. colloquialisation of the written English) or ideological (e.g. a rise of gender-neutral coordinated pronouns *he* and *she*) factors:

#### LOSING GROUND

modal auxiliary  
 infinitive complement  
*be*-passive  
*of*-phrase  
*wh*-relative  
 gender-neutral *he*

#### GAINING GROUND

semi-modal  
 gerundial complement  
*get*-passive  
 s-genitive  
*that* or zero relativisation  
 singular *they* or coordinated pronouns (*he or she*, etc.)

Thus, particularly a decline of the canonical *be* passive is a significant discourse marker pointing to the fact that in the course of the past century written English has moved closer to the norms of spoken usage. However, in theory, *be* passives need not necessarily be replaced by active paraphrases, but could be being displaced by a rival construction, such as *get*-passive, which has increased considerably, both in British and in American English. Another feature of the shift towards the spoken English is the marked increase in the use of contracted forms, both verb (it's, he'll) and negative (n't). See Fig.2.

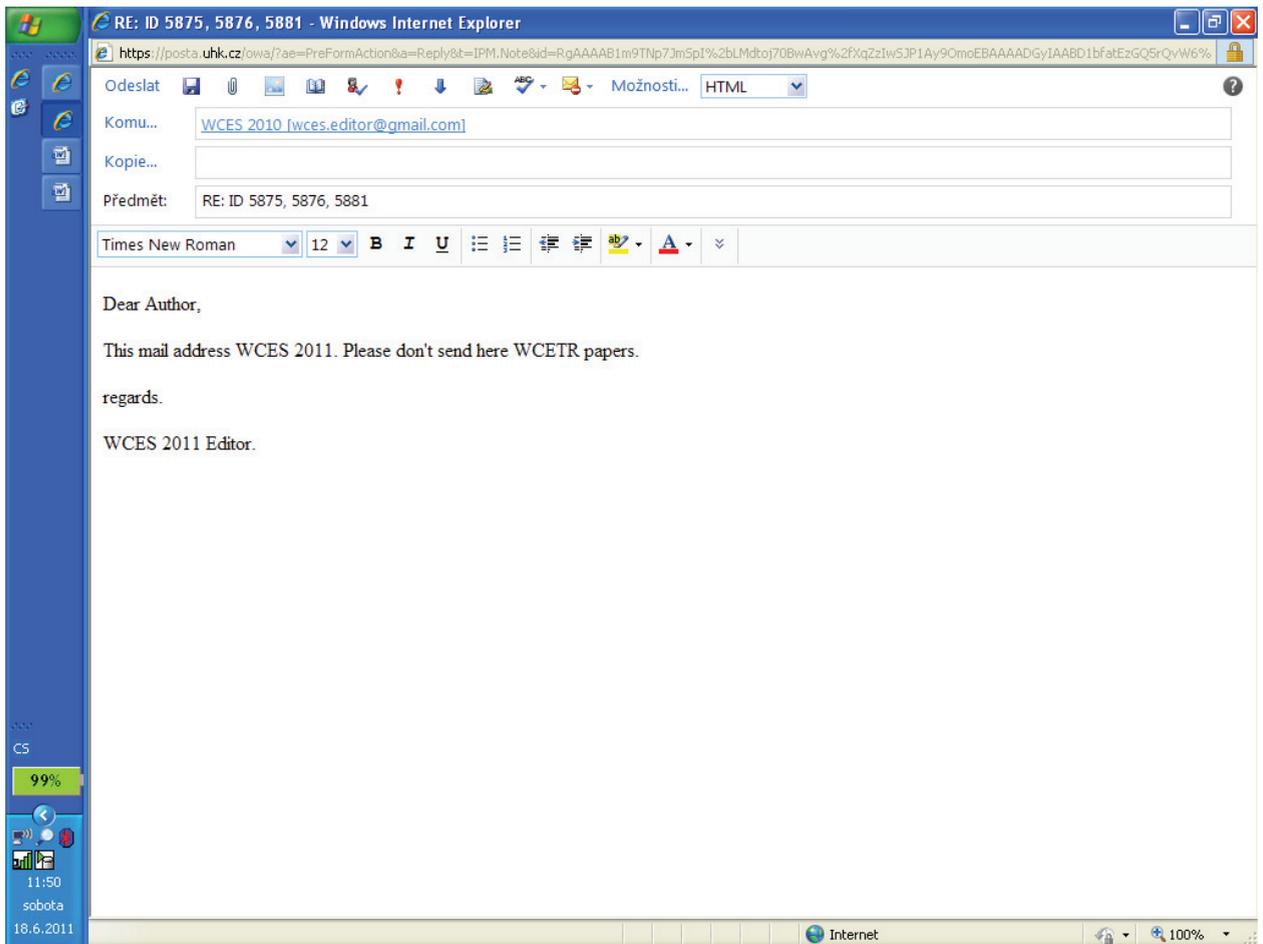


Figure 2. An example of formal e-mail correspondence [7]

#### 4. Conclusion

The above mentioned information demonstrates that there have been noticeable changes in the past 60 years even in a rigidly codified language variety such as written standard English. One can state that formal written language is becoming increasingly more heterogeneous and blended in its discourses and mixing of modes. Undoubtedly, this is being caused by a wish to reach ever more heterogeneous and diverse audiences and to fulfil as many goals as is feasible in a piece of writing. On the other hand, there is a tendency for its comprehensibility to affect wider audience and to put a message across with the help of different media and modes (cf. [8]).

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