

The Impact of Text Messaging on Standard English

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Sms-språkets innvirkning på standard engelsk

Denne avhandlingen tok sikte på å kartlegge hvorvidt sms-fenomenet har hatt en innvirkning på det skrevne engelske språket. Det later til at elektronisk kommunikasjon, som chatting på internett og tekstmeldinger på mobiltelefon, opptar mye av fritiden til dagens ungdom¹. Det kan da virke uunngåelig for skoleelever å holde sms-språket (med dets forkortelser og enkel syntaks) adskilt fra det formelle skrevne språket som forventes brukt i skolen.

Den første hypotesen gikk ut på at high school-elever (i alderen 14-18 år) ikke holdt sms-språket adskilt fra standard engelsk, og denne ble testet ved hjelp av stiloppgaver elever ved en high school i Wisconsin, USA, hadde skrevet. 51 dataskrevne stiler, samt 58 håndskrevne stiler ble samlet inn for så å bli gjennomgått nøye. Hypotesen ble bekreftet av funn fra stilene, da det viste seg at blant annet forkortelser og små bokstaver ble flittig brukt i stilene, enda dette er typisk for sms-språk og ikke hører til standard engelsk.

Hypotese nummer to gikk ut på at de gamle forkortelsene som er en del av standardspråket er gått i glemmeboken til fordel for nye forkortelser som er blitt introdusert gjennom elektronisk kommunikasjon. Dette ble testet ved hjelp av et spørreskjema som bestod av 23, henholdsvis gamle og nye forkortelser. Disse ble delt ut til 55 high school elever, og 24 universitetsstudenter i Wisconsin, USA. Det viste seg at hverken elevene eller studentene hadde nevneverdige vanskeligheter med å forstå de nye forkortelsene, det vil si forkortelsene som typisk blir brukt i tekstmeldinger og internett chatting, mens gamle forkortelser, slik som *ad* og *nb*, ikke ble forstått som en del av standardspråket, og ble istedet tolket i lys av elektronisk kommunikasjon. Hypotesen ble dermed bekreftet.

Den tredje og siste hypotesen tok for seg variasjon innen forkortelsene som blir brukt i tekstmeldinger, og gikk ut på at forkortelsene blir tolket ulikt av ulike personer. Dette gir grobunn for misforståelser og gjør det vanskelig for utenforstående å skjønne hva som er ment med forkortelsene dersom det ikke er gitt av sammenhengen. I likhet med hypotese nummer to, ble denne også testet ved hjelp av spørreskjemaene. Både high school-elevene og universitetsstudentene tolket forkortelsene på ulike måter, og bare de mest etablerte forkortelsene, slik som *lol* og *fyi*, ble tolket noenlunde likt av alle aldersgrupper. Hypotesen ble dermed støttet av funnene som ble gjort, hvilket åpner for misforståelser når mindre etablerte forkortelser blir brukt.

Konklusjonen blir da at sms-fenomenet har hatt stor innflytelse på måten dagens unge bruker språket, og lærere må være oppmerksomme på dette. Sms-språkets innflytelse på standardspråket er definitivt et tema verdt å studere i framtiden.

¹ Det er slående likheter mellom språket man bruker i internett chat og i tekstmeldinger, og forkortelsene, den enkle syntaksen, og de såkalte "smileyene" finnes i begge kommunikasjonsmidlene. Det er derfor meningsfylt å sammeligne bruken av internett chat og bruken av tekstmeldinger.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

One thing that no linguist would counter is the statement that all living languages change. They expand to accommodate names for new items that are introduced from other cultural or geographical venues. Baron says that '[t]rying to standardize language once and for all is like trying to stop the tides' (Baron 2000: 95). Language itself has developed immensely since its origin and until the 21st century. It has gone from sounds, signs and symbols to complex sentences governed by grammatical rules.

At the end of the 20th century, we were introduced to a new language, i.e. the language of text messaging and electronic communication. This language resembles speech, with simple syntax, incomplete sentences and informal structure. As for English, the spelling conventions are quite different from Standard English, and the use of abbreviations and phonetic spelling is frequently occurring. Along with the text message phenomenon, prophecies of linguistic evils that would be unleashed by text messaging arose. Some of these were:

- 'Texting uses new and nonstandard orthography
- Texting will inevitably erode children's ability to spell, punctuate, and capitalize correctly – an ability already thought to be poor
- They will inevitably transfer these new habits into the rest of their schoolwork' (Crystal 2008:151).

Crystal (2008) claims that there was never any clear evidence that supported these assertions. Further, he claims that only one clear example was found, and that was an essay written entirely in a text messaging style. '[N]o other examples of this kind have since been found' (Crystal 2008: 152), and he says that no teachers have ever encountered anything remotely similar.

Nevertheless, educational experience seems to indicate that the language of text messaging is reflected in schoolwork. Some students seem to use abbreviated forms and non standard spelling in their schoolwork, which is very typical of the language of text messaging. If this is the situation in schools today, then this is not something that can be overlooked by those who take text messaging to be exclusively positive. One cannot simply say that the prophecies are wrong, and that all the claims about text messaging are wrong. One needs to study student writings in connection with text messaging further in order to find out if there is any truth to the claims about text messaging.

Chapter 2 - Standard English

2.1 The concept of 'Standard English'

This chapter will mostly concern the concept of Standard English. By that I mean standard written English. I will not discuss the varieties of English around the world, and I will only briefly touch upon a standard regarding pronunciation, i.e. *Received Pronunciation*. The idea of correctness will in this chapter, then, concern grammatical correctness and standard spelling. Grammars will therefore be discussed, as will dictionaries because knowing how to use words in the correct context is also something I consider to be important. I am not concerned with the varieties of English (such as Australian English), so I will only refer generally to Standard versus non-Standard English. For my purposes, grammar and spelling are the most important aspects of language. That is why I will only discuss pronunciation briefly, although pronunciation is also an important part of language.

Linguists and lay people talk about 'correctness' in different respects. Lay people talk about correct and incorrect use of language with regard to dialects, grammatical structures, pronunciation and spelling, whereas linguists talk about different varieties of language. For linguists, there is no such thing as incorrect use of language, merely non-standard use of language. Linguists are known to be of the opinion that there is nothing inherently better about a standard language than any other varieties.

The standard language came about through selection over many years, and the variety that was most widely used survived. Hudson (1980) says that a typical standard language will have passed through four processes. These are as follows:

1. *Selection*. A particular variety must have been selected as the one that would be developed into a standard language. This can be an existing variety or it can be an amalgam of various varieties. The chosen variety gains prestige, and the people who already speak it share in this prestige. Thus the choice is of great political and social importance.
2. *Codification*. Dictionaries and grammar books are written in order to “fix” the variety, so that everyone agrees on what is correct and what is not. This job usually belongs to some sort of agency or academy. After codification has taken place, every “ambitious citizen” wants to learn the correct forms, and this may take years of a child's school career, according to Hudson (1980).
3. *Elaboration of function*. In order for the selected variety to be used in all functions associated with writing and with central government, it may be necessary to add linguistic items or norms to the variety. This may be technical words, for instance, but new conventions for using existing forms may also have to be developed, such as how to write

formal letters or how to formulate examination questions.

4. *Acceptance*. The selected variety must be accepted by the relevant population. Usually, the variety serves as the national language. Once the variety is accepted, the standard language serves as a unifying force for the state. It also serves as a marker of its difference from other states, and as a symbol of its independence of other states (Hudson 1980).

2.2 The historical development of Standard English

Before the Anglo-Saxons went to Britain, Germanic invaders settled there in the fifth and sixth centuries. They all spoke Germanic, which would later emerge as German, Frisian, Dutch, the Scandinavian languages, and Gothic (Barber 2000). We know very little about the linguistic situation in this period because very few written records have been preserved. Old English writings began to appear in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, with a relatively great amount of regional variation. This was the language that Alfred the Great referred to as “English” in the ninth century (Robertson 2003). After the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes had settled in Britain, four major dialects of Old English emerged; Northumbrian in the north of England, Mercian in the Midlands, Kentish in the Southeast, and West Saxon in the south and west (Barber 2000). The original Celtic-speaking inhabitants were then pushed back into what is now Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Cornwall, leaving behind few Celtic words. The majority of modern English words are of foreign, not Old English, origin. However, Old English is still a very important part of the historical development of Standard English, and words like *water*, *be* and *strong* have Old English roots. During the seventh and eighth centuries, Northumbria's language and culture dominated Britain, but this was brought to an end with the Viking invasions in the ninth century. They also brought about the destruction of Mercia, and only Wessex remained as an independent kingdom (Robertson 2003).

By the tenth century, the West Saxon dialect became the 'official' language of Britain, and written Old English is mainly known from this period. It was written in the Runic alphabet, and was derived from the Scandinavian languages (Robertson 2003). The Old English dialects were quite different, each with its own local pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. There was no canon of great literature in the Anglo-Saxon times to provide raw material for dictionaries or grammars, and there were no lexicographers either, so a concept of a 'correct English' would make little sense then. The spellings varied a lot from one region to another. Crystal (2007) lists the following varieties of English dialects from the Lord's Prayer (Our father who art in heaven);

North-East: fader urer ðu art in heofnu

East midlands: feder ure ðu eart in heofenum

South: fæder ure ðu ðe eart on heofonum (Crystal 2007: 4-5)

There was no standard written English at this time but the dialect from the south developed a special status because of King Alfred. He gave the West Saxon dialect a prestige which led to more and more manuscripts being written in this dialect. By the tenth century, a standard was slowly appearing, and a notion of correct usage was beginning to emerge (Crystal 2007). However, after the Norman Conquest in 1066, things got more complicated. The French language then became the official spoken language, and English was spoken mainly by the lower classes of society. Anybody who wanted to get on in the world had to learn to speak French. French did not become the language of the upper classes because of its cultural superiority but because it was the language of the conquerors. The native aristocracy was largely destroyed and William of Normandy's followers became the new ruling class (Barber 2000). Spelling also changed because the Normans followed their own spelling conventions. 'Cwens', for example, became 'queens'.

After the Hundred Years War between England and France (1337-1453), English finally came into more use again. It was not seen as merely the speech of the lower classes any more, and William Caxton's printing press in the 1470s made English texts and manuscripts available to thousands of people instead of just a few. But all was not well just yet. The scribes used different variants for words, and this posed a problem for the reader. If the context did not sort out the meaning, the task of reading became unnecessarily difficult. According to Crystal (2007), there were 50.000 words in the language at the end of the Old English period. In the fifteenth century, by the end of the Middle English period, this number had doubled. There were a lot of unfamiliar words, and people could not carry on spelling these words in whichever way they wanted. People had to agree on how words ought to be spelled; thus there had to be a standard (Crystal 2007). The standard was, and still is, of relevance to everyone who wanted to communicate in writing, and it existed to avoid variability. 'In language', Crystal claims, 'variation causes problems of comprehension and acceptability. If you speak or write differently from the way I do, we may fail to understand each other, and we may also decide not to like each other. The differences may be slight or great' (Crystal 2007: 23). In general, a standard language needs to be taught, and writing is the best way of introducing it. In other words, a Standard English needed to be introduced through the schools and the written media.

2.3 The emerging standard

The emerging standard of English showed its first signs in the fifteenth century (Crystal 2007). The linguistic features of the Midlands, and notably of the London area, began to predominate. It took nearly four hundred years, between 1400 and 1800, for English spelling to reach a relatively steady state, but still, great spelling variation remained (Crystal 2007).

When there were no grammars and dictionaries, literary and academic authors formed the usage climate (Crystal 2007). In the 1580s, the spelling reformer William Bullokar promised to write a grammar and a dictionary, or a whole 'family of books'. The full text of his grammar, if there ever was a complete version, was lost. His dictionary never appeared at all. However, Bullokar's *Pamphlet for Grammar* (1586) stands as the first English grammar, even though it is only a draft (Crystal 2007). Robert Cawdrey's *Alphabetical Table* (1604) was the first proper dictionary; it contained 2449 defined words. Their meanings and usages were explained. He compiled it in order to help all unskilful people to understand difficult words. Now there were both a grammar and a dictionary to help people towards a standard written English.

Around 1616, Ben Johnson wrote another grammar, but the full text of this manuscript was lost when his library burned down in 1623. A draft survived and was published after his death. This grammar was, unlike Cawdrey's dictionary, for foreign learners of English (Crystal 2007). In the Elizabethan period, many authors invented new words, along with new meanings to already existing words. Shakespeare coined new words in order to meet his needs. If he needed a two-syllable word that should mean "large", and the only word with the meaning he was looking for was "vast", he would use the suffix -ly and change it to "vastly". In his plays, one can also find *steepy*, *plumpy* and *brisky*. Studies suggest that Shakespeare alone coined about 850 words that became a permanent part of the English language, in addition to 850 that did not. *Accommodation*, *well-ordered* and *well-read* can be traced back to Shakespeare. It was not only Shakespeare who did this. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* records, Nashe coined 800 new words, Spenser 500, and Sidney coined 400 words, among others (Crystal 2007).

Some words entered the language, and some quickly disappeared. Maybe this had to do with who used them. *Discordant* is one of the words which entered the English language, whereas *discordous*, *discording* and *discordful* disappeared. Shakespeare used *discordant* but it is used in Middle English as well, so he did not invent it (Crystal 2007).

According to Wardhaugh (1999), between 1550 and 1650, people started to think that English spelling should be stabilized. Before that, many felt that '[w]hen writing was a personal matter, spelling could also be a personal matter' (Wardhaugh 1999: 139). The elite in England thought the language was out of control, and when the Royal Society was established in London in 1660, the issue of language was one of the first to be addressed. In December 1664, they set up a committee for improving the English language. They wanted to found an Academy to look after English, as had been done in France 30 years before. The French Academy was founded in 1635 by Cardinal de Richelieu, and the number of its members were fixed at forty. It consisted of learned gentlemen who all were members of the Catholic church. The reason why the Academy was founded was to "purify" the French tongue. It proposed to compile a dictionary, a grammar, a

treatise on rhetoric, and a treatise on poetics, but only the dictionary project was carried out. The Academy was not meant to create words, but to register words that were approved by good society and the authority of the best writers (Barber 2000, Knight 2008).

Just like in France, the English committee that was set up by the Royal Society had many ideas. They wanted to develop a grammar, a dictionary, guidelines to spelling reform and collections of dialect words and translations to act as modes of excellence. This proved to be a difficult task, and none of the ideas were carried out. In the 1680s, the Earl of Roscommon, Wentworth Dillon, formed a plan for refining the language and fixing its standard. Just like his predecessors, he did not go through with his plans.

In 1697, Daniel Defoe developed the idea again in an article called *On Academics*. He proposed that the king, William III, should establish a society to refine the English language. They wanted to remove all the irregular additions and innovations, and establish purity and propriety of style. They also wanted to remove swearing, and Defoe only wanted gentlemen to be members of the Academy because he had seen so many great scholars and lawyers and learned men who used what he considered to be bad and impolite language. Defoe associated bad language with crime, and did not want swear words to be a part of the language. The idea met a similar fate this time, and died away once again (Crystal 2007).

In 1712, Jonathan Swift formed the *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*. Swift was of the opinion that the English language was 'extremely imperfect; (...) its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; (...) it offends against every Part of Grammar' (Crystal 2007: 71). Swift thought that anyone who wrote anything was to blame for these corruptions, and he listed them all; playwrights - with their affected phrases, the poets - who had spoiled the language, the reformers - who wanted people to spell exactly as they spoke, and the young academics - who added all the 'odd words they ha[d] picked up in a Coffee-House' (Crystal 2007: 71-72), or a gambling house, and produced them as "Flowers of Style". Swift did not appreciate all the abbreviations the poets used in order to make better rhymes, and he talked about their 'barbarous Custom of abbreviating Words, to fit them to the Measure of their Verses' (Crystal 2007: 71-72). This included abbreviations like *disturb'd*, *drug'd*, *rebuk't*, *introduced* and *compos'd*. There was no difference in pronunciation, only in spelling. Swift's *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* is considered a great classic of the so-called 'complaint literature' (Milroy and Milroy 2003).

According to Milroy and Milroy (2003), William Caxton formulated an important complaint about the form of English in 1490. He complained that the language was too variable, so that people from different parts of the country could hardly understand each other. Lack of variation (standardisation) was needed, he felt. He chose to use a variety from the South-East Midland area in

his publishing because this area was the most politically, commercially and academically prominent, and had thus gained some status already, as I have mentioned earlier. From the fifteenth century and onwards, the dialect from the South-East Midland area was imposed on others as a standard (Milroy and Milroy 2003). Swift recommended that an official body should be set up to improve the language, similar to what existed in France. Swift's proposal also died away, and Dr. Johnson thought that if the French Academy had not succeeded in 'fixing' their language, the English Academy would not succeed either. If the French with their absolutist government were unable to succeed, what chance would an English Academy have, 'faced with the bolshy, democratic British temperament?' (Crystal 2007: 71). According to Milroy and Milroy (2003), the task of Swift's proposal was carried out informally by private persons. The work was legislative, and described how language ought to be used, rather than how it actually was used by the majority of the population.

Many of the school grammar prescriptions that are current today originated in that period, i.e. the mid 1700s, such as the ban on multiple negations, and the preference for 'It is *I*', and 'different *from*' (Milroy and Milroy 2003). Johnson's view was that nobody would respect the rules of an academy. Johnson claimed that '[t]he present manners of the nation would deride authority, and therefore nothing is left but that every writer should criticise himself' (Crystal 2007: 73). This was said in 1779 and, according to Crystal, it was not a good idea because it would lead to anarchy. Swift did not want power to be put in the hands of 'Everyman', and said that people were naturally not very polite. People left to themselves would descend into barbarism, he claimed in his Proposal (Crystal 2007).

Lord Chesterfield, Philip Stanhope, wrote a letter to *The World* periodical in November 1754, in which he said that the English language was in a state of anarchy. He thought it was a disgrace to his nation that there was no standard language (Crowley 2003). The following year, Samuel Johnson published his *Dictionary*. It was an exhausting task to finish because people's speech was without order and rules, he thought. Johnson wrote in his preface that 'choice was to be made out of boundless variety, without any established principle of selection' (Crystal 2007: 75). The population was rapidly growing, and with it, new dialects emerged. The term *dialect* came into being in the 1570s and it referred to the way people used vocabulary and grammar in a local way (Crystal 2007). The term *vernacular* emerged in the 1650s, in the sense of a local variety. *Ghetto* is first recorded in 1611, and *suburban* in 1625 (Crystal 2007). By 1700, a quarter of the female population, and nearly half of the male population could read and write. The grammarian Lindley Murray said that 'every polite tongue has its own rules' (in Crystal 2007: 81), and grammarians, pronunciation analysts, lexicographers and stylists had to make sure that these rules were known, appreciated and followed. If even Shakespeare broke the rules, ordinary people would be even more

likely to do so.

In 1755, Johnson's *Dictionary* finally appeared, but it gained almost no authority, according to Crystal (2007). Barber (2000) writes however, that the outstanding dictionaries of Samuel Johnson and Nathan Bailey (1712) inevitably came to be treated as authorities, with their extensive work that helped to stabilize word-meanings and spellings. Lord Chesterfield wanted to choose a 'dictator' to provide order in the language, and he gave his vote to Mr. Johnson. Chesterfield stated that he would obey him like a Roman, and believe in him as his pope, and hold him to be infallible (Crystal 2007). These statements raised the attention of the lexicographer Noah Webster. In his *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789), he finds it strange that even well-bread people and scholars were prepared to bow when a language expert spoke.

Noah Webster (born in 1758) was a teacher, clerk and a lawyer from Connecticut, USA. He was not very impressed with American schools because there were too many people in each class, the teachers were untrained, and the books were poor (Crystal 2007). Their books came from England, and Webster thought American students should learn from American books, so in 1783, he wrote his own textbook. It was called *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, which turned out to be the most popular book of its time. For a hundred years, Webster's book taught children how to read, pronounce and spell words (Newton 1996). In 1806, he published *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, which according to Crystal, turned out to be the only successful English spelling reform of modern times (Crystal 2007). When Webster was 43 years old, he started writing the first American dictionary. Americans from different parts of the country pronounced, spelled and used words differently, and Webster wanted everyone to use the language in the same way, but at the same time, he thought that their speech should differ from the British language. The work was exhausting and it took him over 27 years to complete. It was finished in 1828 and contained 70.000 words. Webster deleted the letter -u in words like *color* because he wanted to remove all the so-called 'silent letters' and superfluous letters. He also succeeded in replacing -re with -er, in words like *metre* and *centre* (Crystal 2007). Webster also wanted to change *tongue* to *tung*, and *women* to *wimmen* because the latter was the 'old and true' spelling, and it was more similar to its pronunciation, he thought. This did not meet acceptance, however (Newton 1996). Nevertheless, he succeeded in changing the letter -s in verbs like *analyse* to -z; *analyze*, and dropped the final -k in words like *musick* (Crystal 2007). This last change also took place in Britain (Newton 1996).

In England, Johnson's dictionary dominated lexicography for the next 125 years, and the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* named Johnson's work *The New English Dictionary* (Crystal 2007). However, dictionaries alone were not sufficient in order to create a Standard English language; there had to be a grammar with prescriptive rules as well. In 1795, Lindley Murray wrote

the *English Grammar* (Crystal 2007). It sold over twenty million copies and became popular in the United States as well as in England. Until the 1950s, school grammars would trace their ancestry back to Murray's grammar. One of the prescriptive rules was never to end a sentence in a preposition, as in *'This is a picture of the beach we relaxed on'*. The encouraged correct form was *'This is a picture of the beach on which we relaxed'*.

In the eighteenth century, spelling was considered more important than it was in Shakespeare's days. At that time (in the sixteenth century), one could write one's name in many different ways and nobody seemed to mind. Lord Chesterfield did not live in Shakespeare's days, and he said that 'one false spelling may fix a ridicule upon him (the gentleman) for the rest of his life; and I know a man of quality, who never recovered the ridicule of having spelled *wholesome* without the *w*' (Crystal 2007: 163-4). Lord Chesterfield said that orthography was absolutely necessary for a gentleman or a man of letters. Wardhaugh says that '[b]y 1700 the stabilization of spelling had been achieved and people became conscious for the first time of the need to "spell correctly"' (Wardhaugh 1999: 140). He also says that '[t]he dictionaries of the eighteenth century not only stabilized spelling but also fixed it so rigidly that today there is little tolerance of any deviation. Being unable to spell correctly is regarded almost like sinning and being proud of it – it meets with strong condemnation!' (Wardhaugh 1999: 141).

Johnson took the written language as a guide to pronunciation, and said that '[f]or pronunciation the best general rule is, to consider those as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words' (Crystal 2007: 171). Lindley Murray shared Johnson's view and claimed that 'it is a good rule, with respect to pronunciation, to adhere to the written words, unless custom has clearly decided otherwise' (Crystal 2007: 171). This principle was also adhered to in the sixteenth century.

With regards to pronunciation, Daniel Jones described the prestige accent in 1917 and called it *Public School Pronunciation* because of the link between "perfect" English and that taught in respectable public boarding schools, such as Eton and Westminster, in addition to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In 1926, Jones renamed the prestige accent *Received Pronunciation*, or *RP*. In general, the greatest institution of influencing the way we use language is the school, and Crystal says that '[i]t was the school system which eventually made standard English a social reality' (Crystal 2007: 194).

The legislators of the eighteenth century succeeded in establishing a more widespread consciousness of a relatively uniform 'correct' English (Milroy and Milroy 2003). At the same time, advances in technology and communication were spreading the written word more widely than before. Spoken English has continued to change, but advances in literacy and mass education continued to ensure that the public looked to the 'standardised' written channel as the model of

correctness. Milroy and Milroy suggest that standardisation can be characterised as suppression of optimal variation at all levels of language – in spelling, grammar, pronunciation and lexicon (Milroy and Milroy 2003). Standardisation is therefore partly aimed at preventing linguistic change. According to Milroy and Milroy (2003), in the eighteenth century, standardisation was needed in order to keep communication efficient over long distances, and long periods of time, especially in the written channel. The norms of written and formal English have since been codified in grammars, dictionaries and handbooks of usage, and inculcated by prescription through the educational system. Standardisation through prescription has not been very successful in ordinary spoken English but has had greater success in writing, according to Milroy and Milroy (2003). 'The effect of codification and prescription has been to *legitimise* the norms of formal registers of Standard English rather than the norms of everyday spoken English. Codifiers have legislated and prescribers have tried to put the legislation into effect' (Milroy and Milroy 2003: 30). As a result of this, people seem to think that there is only one form of legitimate, or correct English, and that colloquial and non-standard forms, on the other hand, are illegitimate and perverse deviations from what is approved.

2.4 The complaint tradition

Writers of the so-called 'complaint tradition', which I have mentioned earlier, have quite openly promoted the standard ideology. Milroy and Milroy (2003) divide this tradition into two types; the one that is concerned with correctness in spelling and punctuation, and the one that is concerned with the 'moralistic' clarity in writing, and abuses in language that can mislead and confuse the public. Very often, the complainers who belong to the former group do not attempt to explain why they believe that one usage is correct and another one is not. Newspapers and television networks receive numerous letters from people every week complaining about misuse of language. The people who complain also imply that deviations from the standard norm are illiteracies, and that it is quite right to discriminate against non-standard users. 'The idea of linguistic decline is always either directly addressed or hinted at in the correctness tradition' (Milroy and Milroy 2003: 32).

The idea of decline also carries with it the implication that the standards of conduct and morality in society are also in decline. Swif's 'Proposal' is a clear statement of this view. The assumptions that type 1 complainers make is that one variety of the language, i.e. one particular abstract set of linguistic rules, is inherently better than the others. Type 2 complainers do not focus on non-standard deviations, but are concerned with the usage of Standard English in public, written, and formal channels, and the effects of this usage on human behaviour and society. However, usages that are stigmatised at one time may be favoured at another time for social reasons, not

because of linguistic values (Milroy and Milroy 2003).

Milroy (1999) argues that although lay language users believe in the existence of a standard language, the language continues to vary and change. He says that 'standard languages are fixed and uniform-state idealisations – not empirically verifiable realities. (...) However, a standard language has properties over and above those of non-standardised varieties, the chief one of which is existence in a widely used written form' (Milroy 1999: 18). What is described as the standard is not the English language as a whole; it is just one variety of the English language.

Milroy reports various incidents where people are denied jobs because of the way they speak, and that it is just as wrong to discriminate against people who do not speak 'correctly' as it is to discriminate against people of different race or colour of skin (Milroy 1999). However, in jobs where speech is a very important factor, e.g. telephone salespeople or in the courtroom, it is crucial to make oneself properly understood. This is not discrimination, this is simply a matter of making it easier for the customer and to decrease misunderstandings. Honey says that '[h]owever admirable the speaker, her or his language may be devaluated when it sounds like baby-talk or appears in any other way incompatible with educatedness. It is noteworthy that Caribbean and Black American universities do not normally use such forms of Black English [like Jamaican English] as the main vehicle for teaching, for the very good reason that graduates who could only handle this dialect might find few chances of employment' (Honey 1997: 41).

Milroy suggests that '[c]hanges in progress tend to be resisted until they have spread so widely that the written and public media have to accept them. Even in the highly standardised areas of English spelling and punctuation, some changes have been slowly accepted in the last thirty years' (Milroy 1999: 27). Use of a lower-case letter after a colon was required in the 1960s, but it is now accepted to use a capital letter in this situation. Although standardisation inhibits linguistic change, it does not totally prevent it.

In the nineteenth century, there was a great interest in rural dialects of English because these forms and structures were believed to help reconstructing the history of the language. On the other hand, there was also a drive to codify and legitimise the standard form of the language, which is apparent in dictionaries, handbooks and language history of the nineteenth century (Bex and Watts 1999). Milroy (1999) says that the history of English is a history of 'educated speech', and it is as if the non-standard varieties have no part of it at all, even though millions of people used non-standard speech. Lehmann commented that non-standard forms are used by rustics, criminals, and the rebellious younger generation (in Bex and Watts 1999). It seems that some authors feel that these people (who speak non-standard varieties) should not be allowed to take part in the process of language change. According to Milroy (1999), scholars in the early 1900s seemed to 'equate a standard language with a prestige language used by a minority of speakers and thereby introduce an

unanalysed social category as part of the definition of what, in theory, should be an abstract linguistic object, characterised especially by uniformity of internal structure' (Milroy 1999: 32). Ideas of 'correct English' and 'proper English' with connotations of 'perfection' prevailed over alternative notions such as 'variability' and 'development' (Milroy 1999).

In 1873, the English Dialect Society was set up, aiming at organising the words that were not considered 'standard' (Crowley 2003). The goals of the society were to bring together all the studies of provincial dialects of England, to reprint various useful Glossaries among others. In other words, they wanted to save the forms of archaic English. Müller said that '[t]he real and natural life of language is in its dialects ... in spite of the tyranny exercised by the classical or literary ideoms' (in Crowley 2003: 89-90). However, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the standard literary language was the main focus of attention for British linguists. Ellis in the 1880s argued that 'there is no doubt that received literary English, such as I am using at the present time, is considered the English language pure and simple, and the other forms used in England are considered to be its dialects' (in Crowley 2003: 90).

According to Lippi-Green,

the process of standardization and language subordination is concerned not so much with an overall homogeneity of language, but with excluding only *certain types* of language and variation, those linked to social differences which make us uncomfortable. By the simple expedient of substituting one language for another, we hope to neutralize social conflicts grounded in race, ethnicity, and social class (Lippi-Green 2006: 121).

Crystal (2007) says that if we came to terms with the fact that language is changing, we could spend all the time developing methods of learning and teaching rather than complaining about the changes. The language reflects the reality of the time and therefore provides useful insight to social history. Further, he says that '[w]e need to be aware of the areas in the language that are in the process of changing, so that we can be alert to the possibilities of misunderstanding' (Crystal 2007: 90). He sums up by saying 'I am as much against obscure English in public documents as anyone. I applaud the motives of the Plain English Campaign' (Crystal 2007: 216). Crystal says that the fight for English usage has been a battle but he thinks it is drawing to a close now (Crystal 2007).

Meanwhile, the text messaging language has just begun, and with it, new complaints about language are being made. As mentioned earlier, Swift's *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712) is considered a great classic of the complaint literature, according to Milroy and Milroy (2003). Swift did not appreciate all the abbreviations that the poets used in order to make better rhymes, even though the pronunciation was not changed by abbreviating the words. Today, in the 21st century, people still complain about the abbreviations that

are used. There will most likely always be both type 1 and type 2 complainers, i.e. those who complain about spelling and punctuation, and those who complain about clarity in writing. Electronic communication opens for abbreviations, non-standard spelling, and little or no punctuation. The fact that the language of electronic communication has developed so quickly has perhaps given people more reason to complain, whether it is justifiable or not.

2.5 Maintaining the standard

There are people who argue for Standard English, and John Honey is one of them. Honey (1997) sees a clear connection between language and power, and says that critics think that Standard English represents the language of the power elite, and when children are required to learn Standard English, it is an act of oppression. Honey, on the other hand, claims that '[t]he real truth is the opposite: causing children to learn standard English is an act of empowerment which will give them access to a whole world of knowledge and to an assurance of greater authority in their dealings with the world outside their own homes, in a way which is genuinely liberating' (Honey 1997: 42). Lippi-Green (2006), who is not for standardisation, says that Language A and Language B are equal in linguistic and cultural terms. However, Language B is rejected by teachers and employers. Rejection has a negative effect on the speakers of Language B, and Language B must therefore be discarded in favour of Language A. She says that '[t]eachers and employers must learn to accept Language B' (Lippi-Green 2006: 113). The teacher discriminates because the employer does, and the reason why the employer discriminates might be that the public does. African-American poet Maya Angelou was once asked about the Standard English issue in schools, and responded that she thought they should teach the English language, primarily. She then pointed out how fundamental Standard English is in every environment 'because the language is so flexible; [it is] the language which one needs in the market-place' (Honey 1997: 43). Daniel Heller, an American high-school teacher, observed that 'language is power, and those who can enter into the political and economic conversation with skill can attain power' (in Honey 1997: 43). Honey claims that the reason why Martin Luther King's famous speech *I have a dream* achieved its impact was because it was performed in Standard English (Honey 1997). Joseph says that acquiring Standard English 'can aid an individual in improving personal status, on the macrocosmic level it can aid in *maintaining the overall status quo*' (in Honey 1997: 56).

Three closely related elements are at work in determining authority in language, or the question of what is considered right and wrong with regards to use of language. These elements are standardisation, codification and prescription, i.e. imposing the rules on language users (Honey 1997). Linguists in general seem to be against the idea of prescription, and are more concerned with

describing language than *prescribing* it. One task of linguists, then, is not to prescribe how words should be used, but to describe how they are used in actual practise. For generations, prescription has been used in schools to teach pupils the basics of language. Linguists now want to move away from this tradition. The question is however, how this should best be carried out in practise.

Cameron (1995) points out that

[T]he overt anti-prescriptive stance of linguists is in some respects not unlike the prescriptivism they criticize. The point is that *both* prescriptivism *and* anti-prescriptivism invoke certain norms and circulate particular notions about how language ought to work. (...) On that level, 'description' and 'prescription' turn out to be aspects of a single (and normative) activity: a struggle to control language by defining its nature (Cameron 1995: 8).

Lippi-Green comments that '[a]n extreme representation might be that prescriptivists claim the right to tell people how to talk, and that linguists claim the right to tell prescriptivists what not to say' (Lippi-Green 2006: 8).

Mugglestone (2003) says that '[t]here is of course an indissoluble link between education and standard rather than non-standard varieties of a language' (Mugglestone 2003: 213). Trudgill affirmed in 1983 that Standard English is the dialect of education, and that it is spoken by most teachers, as well as it is the dialect which is normally employed in writing and rewarded in examinations. Grammatical features like *I done* rather than *I did* and multiple negation are therefore equally proscribed and corrected as 'wrong' or inappropriate in the written discourse of children (in Mugglestone 2003).

When it comes to language learning, Chomsky claims that all children are born with an innate understanding of language (Taylor 2003). Children learn to speak their native tongue during their first years of life, so that when they have reached the age of four, they have acquired all the grammatical rules and sentence structures that they need in order to produce grammatically well-formed sentences. This is what Chomsky calls I-language, or "internal language". How children put all this knowledge to use is their E-language, or "external language" (Taylor 2003). Chomsky also says that children do not produce grammatically ill-formed sentences because they learn from their parents. However, Honey says that 'every single child to whom standard English is available needs to develop its use of the multiplex semantic resources of standard – its huge vocabulary of words and phrases often with multiple meanings, its generally greater sentence complexity, its distinctive grammatical forms (...) and do this by constant exposure to written forms, to educated speech, and to explicit teaching' (Honey 1997: 52). The question of whether this is best done by teaching grammar explicitly has been a highly debated issue for several decades. The dominant view is that grammar cannot be taught explicitly; it can only be 'caught' by exposure to good models (Honey

1997).

According to Honey (1997), Pinker shares Chomsky's views that language is innate, but Pinker also admits that 'although language is an instinct, written language is not' (in Honey 1997: 49). Pinker thinks that every speaker uses the grammar of their dialect correctly, and therefore it cannot be right for a teacher to correct a student if he or she produces a sentence like *he don't see them birds*, or *I ain't done nothing* (in Honey 1997). Why do people produce these sentences if neither their parents, nor their peers did so before they reached the age of four? According to Chomsky's principle, children should not produce these sentences.² Pinker seems to condemn prescriptivism, but then reveals that he is enraged by incorrect use of words, such as 'disinterested' because they make it difficult to communicate the useful sense he intends (in Honey 1997).

Milroy and Milroy say that '[p]ersons in positions of authority are often prepared to be openly critical of a speaker's language when they would not be prepared to reject publicly other aspects of his identity or culture' (Milroy and Milroy 2003: 83). Halliday *et al.* point out that '[a] speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being: to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him feel ashamed of the colour of his skin' (in Milroy and Milroy 2003: 84).

Milroy and Milroy (2003), among many other linguists, have carried out surveys on people's speech. Almost all of the surveys show that people over-report their use of the standard form in spoken language, when the truth is that they almost never use the standard form. People tend to report what they think is the best way of speaking, i.e. Standard English. This clearly shows that people wish to have knowledge of Standard English, and also that they wish to use the standard forms.³ Hall claimed that 'there is no such thing as good or bad, correct or incorrect, grammatical or ungrammatical, in language' (in Milroy and Milroy 2003: 6). If this was true, people would be able to use whichever word they wanted in whichever context, and other people would be able to understand them. We know that it is not so. Milroy and Milroy use the word 'crescendo' as an example. Misusage of this word, e.g. as in "the sound rose to a crescendo", meaning "loud noise" might not be accepted by many language users. This is not the original meaning of the word, and if members of an orchestra did not agree upon the same meaning, they would not be able to play the same musical piece successfully. Milroy and Milroy think that a musical term such as 'crescendo' will be used correctly when it comes to music, but that the average speaker will have a related meaning for the same word. They also claim that semantic change is a universal process that cannot be stopped or reversed by "guardians" of the language (Milroy and Milroy 2003). Wardhaugh

2 A high school student was concerned about her low grades, and told her classmates *'I ain't gotta fail any more English classes'*. Her English teacher happened to walk by, and quickly commented *'Then you ain't gotta talk like that!'*

3 There are some exceptions, e.g. a group of lower class workers who identified with each other in the way they spoke.

(1999) remembers using the word 'starving' to mean “very cold” when he was a child. However, his English teacher told him that it meant “hungry”. Wardhaugh says that when words shift their meanings, distinctions are being lost. 'The change – or “misuse”, as it is sometimes called – will almost certainly continue until in some cases it may wipe out the old meaning. In other cases the old and new meanings may last side by side in the language for centuries' (Wardhaugh 1999: 56).

Milroy and Milroy say that '[i]t is only in the spelling system that full standardisation really has been achieved, as deviations from the norm (however logical) are not tolerated here. When, however, we refer to “standard” spoken English, we have to admit that a good deal of variety is tolerated in practice, and scholars have often had to loosen their definition of a “standard” in dealing with speech' (Milroy and Milroy 2003: 18). Milroy and Milroy compare standardisation in language to that of coinage and measurements. When we want to exchange money, 'the aim of the standardisation is to ensure reliability and hence confidence. Language is also a medium of exchange, albeit a very much more complex medium than coinage, and the aim of language standardisation is the same' (Milroy and Milroy 2003: 19). Furthermore, '[t]he whole notion of standardisation is bound up with the aim of functional efficiency of the language. Ultimately, the desideratum is that everyone should use and understand the language in the same way with the minimum of misunderstanding and the maximum of efficiency' (Milroy and Milroy 2003: 19).

If we go back to the fourteenth century, the spelling permitted great variation. William Caxton complained about the form of English in 1490, saying that the language was too variable. People from different parts of the country could hardly understand each other (Milroy and Milroy 2003). Things have changed dramatically since Caxton's days, and twentieth century spelling permits virtually no variation. English speaking people from all over the world are able to read and to understand newspapers and other published material written in Standard English. Crystal says that '[n]owadays, we can get away with a certain flexibility in punctuation, and also in grammar, but there is very little leeway in spelling. With just one or two exceptions (such as informal emails), if you spell incorrectly you will, nowadays, be considered careless, lazy, or uneducated, or possibly all three' (Crystal 2007: 24).

In 1998, Richards did research on English examinations on first year Oxford undergraduates, and reported that 78 spelling mistakes were found in the 1986 intake, compared to 140 spelling mistakes in the 1995 intake. Richards found this alarming, but received little support from Milroy and Milroy. They focus on the education problems in teaching mass literacy in an age that demands literacy from everyone (in Milroy and Milroy 2003). However, people have better access to grammars, dictionaries and other linguistic aids these days than twenty years ago, with the Internet available to everyone, and spellcheck on almost every computer. According to Milroy and Milroy, '[t]he idea that literacy standards were higher in the past seems (...) to be a myth' (Milroy and

Milroy 2003: 39). Critics are nevertheless convinced that literacy standards and English usage are declining.

Milroy and Milroy report that the Prince of Wales was concerned about the literacy standard in England, and said that people were not capable of writing like Shakespeare any more (Milroy and Milroy 2003). Shakespeare spelled his own name in several different ways, as I have mentioned earlier, and he also made up words in order to suit his needs. People are generally more educated these days than they were in Shakespeare's days, and there should be no reason why there cannot be a great author who stands out like Shakespeare one day.

Bex and Watts claim that 'the stigma attached to using incorrect forms results in discrimination' (Bex and Watts 1999: 13). This is true for more than language. If someone is not playing or singing in tune, one would not applaud them for it. Air traffic controllers must have a standard way of speaking, and it is crucial that they stick to the standard, otherwise the outcome might be disastrous. One tiny misunderstanding could lead to the loss of hundreds of lives. Milroy and Milroy say that people using 'unacceptable' grammar and pronunciation generally belong to the lower social groups. 'Therefore, such attitudes to language [that there is a correct and incorrect way of language behaviour] can be interpreted as a kind of social-class discrimination, and it may be that political power favouring certain élite groups is exercised in part through these shibboleths' (Milroy and Milroy 2003: 2). This can be seen as more of a natural development than discrimination. The lower social groups generally have lower (if any) education, which leads to the fact that parents cannot be of much assistance when their children need help with their homework, which makes it more difficult for the children to acquire a good knowledge of standard language. Children pick up the speech of their parents and peers, and are off to a difficult start when nobody is there to guide them along the way. Note, however, that I am not referring to those who use their non-standard language to identify with their peers. I am referring to those who want to learn standard language, but are struggling in the process of doing so.

Milroy and Milroy compare prescription in language with other aspects of behaviour, such as table manners or dress codes. Guests are sometimes required to wear an evening dress and to use a knife and a fork. These are prescriptive requirements, imposed from 'above' and not chosen by guests themselves. Deviation from norms in table manners is considered bad manners (Milroy and Milroy 2003). Double negatives in English, like 'he never said nothing', are considered bad language by many, although double negatives are widely used.

2.6 My position

Most linguists are against the idea of prescriptivism in education but, as we have seen, Honey

argues *for* prescriptivism. It is important to note here, that I am *not* talking about prescriptivism in pronunciation or spoken language, I am only referring to standard written language. There is a very important distinction between spoken and written language, and between formal and informal settings. Formal spoken language is expected in official speeches that are performed by the Prime Minister or the Queen, for instance. Formal written language is expected in school work and in official documents, and informal written language may be used in communication among friends.

In my opinion, it is not always sufficient with a descriptivist method when it comes to education because some people find it easier to acquire knowledge if they simply are told what to do. For someone who is just interested in getting from A to B, it is pointless to lecture them on how the car's engine actually works. They just need to know how to drive it. In the same way, people may need to know how to use the language, and not necessarily why all the rules and structures are built up in the different ways. People may need to be equipped with enough linguistic tools to use their language in the 'correct' way, so that they know what is standard language, and what is non-standard language, and this is more easily done in a prescriptivist way sometimes.

Crystal (2007) states how very upset he is at the prescriptive grammar. At the same time, he admits that there is a lot of good ideas in prescriptive grammar as well, and says that one option sounds more native than others. To him, a sentence like '*to boldly love*' sounds more native than '*to love boldly*', or '*boldly to love*' (Crystal 2007: 126). He is disturbed when he sees the rules of Standard English punctuation broken; 'If kids leave school not having learned how to punctuate, then something has gone horribly wrong' (Crystal 2007: 131-132). I also feel that children should be taught standard punctuation rules, and in my opinion, this is most efficiently done with a prescriptive approach. The teachers must be allowed to tell the students exactly how to construct their sentences in order to fit the standard conventions. Wrong use of punctuation may seem like a minor error but in some contexts, placing a comma or a period at the correct place is crucial. Truss (2003) illustrates this in her book *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*⁴ and she lists some examples;

A woman, without her man, is nothing.

A woman: without her, man is nothing (Truss 2003: 9)

Truss also illustrates with an example that contains no punctuation as opposed to one that does;

Charles the First walked and talked half an hour after his head
was cut off.

Charles the First walked and talked. Half an hour after, his head
was cut off (Truss 2003: 13).

Earlier, I mentioned an example from Milroy and Milroy (2003) where people used the word *crescendo* in the meaning of *loud noise*. This is not the original meaning of the word, and it may

4 The title refers to the panda bear that eats shoots and leaves. Placing a comma after *eats* creates a rather odd scenario.

cause many unnecessary misunderstandings if people do not use the meaning that has been generally agreed upon. Richards says that 'there is not much of a future for any language if it is left exclusively in the hands of the careless and the ignorant. Or, worse, in the hands of those powerful minorities who exploit degraded forms of language for their own ends' (in Milroy and Milroy 2003: 43). Milroy and Milroy call this a paranoid scenario and talk about powerful enemies who conspire to corrupt the language, gnawing away its roots (Milroy and Milroy 2003). I do not think that this is what Richards meant. There is some truth to Richards' statement, and that is the fact that language changes when enough people use a certain variety, whether it is considered right or wrong.⁵

Most people would agree that one should not break the laws against crime. The laws may be malfunctioning or bad but as long as it is the law, one has to abide by it. The same goes for standard written language. If the standard does not permit ending a sentence with a preposition, or using double negation, then one should avoid it until the 'laws' of standard written language say otherwise. If the rule was to use double negation, one should do so, and avoid single negation. If teachers are not allowed to correct students for what the teachers think is ungrammatical or incorrect, how are students supposed to learn the difference between standard and non-standard written language, and in which contexts it is appropriate to use the standard form? I do not think that people necessarily need to have standard pronunciation, or even standard spelling in informal settings, but everyone should have knowledge of standard language and be able to use standard language. This would help to decrease misunderstandings, and help people to communicate more successfully across regional and national boundaries. Imagine if people used single, double and triple negation as they pleased, and this was used in prescriptions that came with life saving medicine, for instance. Some think that two negatives cancel each other out, and therefore, double negation is equivalent to an affirmative.⁶ If the prescription said something like '*don't use no alcohol to swallow down the pills*', and the combination of these particular pills with alcohol was fatal, it would be crucial to understand what the prescription said. Some people would think that they *should* use alcohol with the medicine, and some people would think that they absolutely should not. Standard written language has to be clear on these grammatical rules, and in my opinion, prescriptivism is a good way of introducing the rules to pupils and foreign language learners.

Milroy and Milroy (2003) talk about people's pronunciation, and say that speakers who are made ashamed of their own language habits suffer a basic injury as a human being. I agree that nobody should be ashamed of the way they speak. On the contrary, they should be proud of their local dialect. Jones, a phonetician who is quoted in Wardhaugh, says 'I take the view that people

5 The use of Norwegian 'ta selvmord' (take suicide) rather than 'begå selvmord' (commit suicide) is now being accepted as a correct form of the Standard Norwegian language, simply because enough people have used the non-standard 'ta' instead of the standard 'begå' over a substantial amount of time.

6 Wardhaugh (1999) says that the rule that two negatives make an affirmative is a rule of logic, not of language.

should be allowed to speak as they like' (in Wardhaugh 1999: 97). This is my opinion as well. There is, however, a great difference between written language and spoken language, and my view is that people should be taught standard written language, and this would be extremely difficult if teachers were not allowed to use the prescriptivist approach in elementary school. The general idea that linguistics should be descriptive becomes complicated when people at the same time want teachers to teach Standard English spellings and teach students to write correct Standard English and to express themselves clearly. I do not think that one variety of the language is inherently better than another, and in order for one variety to become the standard, it must go through several processes, as I have discussed earlier. One particular variety may be chosen for many different reasons but once it has been established as the standard and people agree on this, people need to be taught the grammatical conventions of this variety, in addition to the spelling and punctuation conventions. Most people do not need to use this standard variety in the private sphere of their homes if they do not wish to. However, official documents and educational books should be written in standard language. People may choose to use non-standard spellings and grammatical constructions in informal settings but they should have adequate knowledge of the standard written language so that they can use it when it is required in formal settings.

Chapter 3 – Electronic communication

3.1 Email

Email has become a very popular means of communication during the last decades, but it was not originally meant to serve as a means of transmitting personal information. The phenomenon was a result of various research projects during the height of the Cold War. The idea was to develop a decentralised network of computers that could be used in order to transmit information across the United States in case there was a nuclear attack. If one target was struck, it would not cripple the nation's ability to distribute defence data elsewhere in the country (Baron 2000). By 1968, the decentralised computing system was realised as the ARPANET, which stands for Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, and it was run by the US Department of Defense. The ARPANET underwent a number of transformations during the next two decades, and in the early 1990s, it emerged as the Internet (Baron 2000). Exchanging electronic messages was not part of the original ARPANET design, until two programmers experimented with sending personal messages to one another in the early 1970s (Baron 2000). In the early days, in the 1970s and 80s, 'access to email was largely in the hands of faculty and researchers connected with the scientific community, many of whose professional activities were funded by the US Department of Defense' (Baron 2000: 226). In the 1980s, email was introduced in the business world on local area networks in order to enable employees to communicate about business matters within their organisation. Some employers sent personal email messages. However, social usage was fairly restricted (Baron 2000). 'Although the Internet as a technology had been around since the 1960s, for e-mails and chat, very few people began exploiting it until thirty years later. The World Wide Web itself came into existence only in 1991. But in an extraordinarily short time, people adopted and mastered the technology, and in the course of doing that encountered, adapted and expanded its highly distinctive language' (Crystal 2005: 64).

In the mid 1990s, computer chat groups such as mIRC, for instance, were very popular. They were inexpensive and provided anonymity by camouflaging voices and sexual identity. They allowed people from all over the world to chat with each other, and one might compare this with the excitement of having a pen-pal from a different part of the world. Email is increasingly replacing the telephone (not the mobile phone), and the traditional letter. 'According to the *Wall Street Journal* (January 14, 1999, p.1), nearly four trillion email messages were sent in 1998, compared with 107 billion pieces of firstclass mail conveyed through the US post office' (Baron 2000: 241). In 1998, over two billion emails were sent daily in the US, and the International Data Corporation projected that the number would rise to eight billion by 2002 (Baron 2000). According to Wolf (2007), the

number has risen from 31 billion emails per day in 2003 to 97 billion emails per day in 2007 (Wolf 2007). There is also reason to believe that the number of spam emails⁷ sent per day is higher than the number of personal emails sent per day. According to Dunn (2007), the United Kingdom alone received 20 billion spam emails per day in 2007, that is each business inbox received between 100 and 1000 spam emails daily. Worldwide, 120 billion spam emails were sent per day (Dunn 2007).

Technically, email is a form of writing but its usage conventions are closer to face-to-face or telephone conversation, according to Baron (2000). 'People sending email often reveal an editorial non-chalance, reflecting the casual tone of the medium and a psychological mind-set (however mistaken) that email, like the telephone, is ephemeral' (Baron 2000: 241). In contrast to a telephone conversation, when writing an email, one has the possibility to edit. However, emails are very often sent with no editing at all. 'E-mails and chatgroup interactions, where the pressure is strong to communicate rapidly, lack the carefully planned, elaborate construction which is characteristic of so much writing. At one extreme, it might well appear that a revolution is taking place. Some people are so happy to send messages with no revision at all, not caring if typing errors, erratic capitalization, lack of punctuation and other anomalies are included' (Crystal 2005: 79). In 1999, a story in *The Washington Post* was published, telling its readers about a virus that was spreading throughout the Internet. It was called the Strunkenwhite Virus and it refused to deliver emails which contained grammatical mistakes (Truss 2003). 'The story was a wind-up. (...) In the process, however, he [The Washington Post writer] painted such a heavenly vision of future grammatical happiness that he inadvertently broke the hearts of sticklers everywhere (Truss 2003: 198). Baron (2000) suspects that two distinct styles of writing may emerge; one informal and unedited, and one formal and edited.

Adults can relegate their texts to spell-checkers (when they even bother), but more disturbingly, young children seem to be developing increasing dependence upon such tools, rather than pressing themselves to test their memories, to sound out words, or to look them up in the dictionary. As with calculators and basic mathematics skills, it can be argued that we're rendering our children an educational disservice by discouraging the development of skills that, while tedious to learn, are still part of basic education (Baron 2000: 213).

The general opinion is that email has elements of both spoken and written style. '[T]he line between spoken and written language continues to fade in America' (Baron 2000: 259). Crystal (2004), however, says that '[t]he Internet has not yet had a major impact on English vocabulary and use' (Crystal 2004: viii). He says that this is not surprising, considering that the Internet has only been

⁷ Spam emails are emails that are almost identical, often with a commercial content, and that are sent to numerous recipients.

around for a relatively short amount of time. This does not correspond to what Baron (2000) reports, and it is more surprising, then, that the Internet actually *has* had an impact on English, considering that it has only been around for a few decades. Abbreviations such as *c u l8r* for *see you later*, and *lol* for *laughing out loud* came into use in chat groups on the Internet. I have heard many teenagers saying *lol* in real life instead of actually laughing out loud. I have also heard of people mimicking a C, a U, L, 8 and R with their fingers to “spell” *c u l8r* when leaving their friends.⁸ This clearly shows that the Internet has had an impact on our usage of language and our everyday behaviour.

With regard to grammar and vocabulary, one might say that email is closer to speech than conventional writing. 'Lexically, the messages tend to be extremely informal, including clipped words (such as *prob* for *problem*), simplified spellings (for instance *thru* for *through*), and the use of words like *nope* or *yep*' (Baron 2000: 193). Crystal (2001) says that the 'save a keystroke' principle is widely found in e-mails, virtual worlds and chatgroups. Whole sentences can be produced without punctuation or capital letters. Further, he says that '[s]pelling errors in an e-mail would not be assumed to be an indication of lack of education (though they may be) but purely a function of typing inaccuracy. Opinions vary' (Crystal 2001: 88). Svennevig (2005) argues that emails have borrowed some conventions from the genre of letter writing, and some conventions from the genre of personal notes. Syntactically, emails tend to be quite casual, omitting modals, articles and subjects. There are similar levels of informality in punctuation, with high use of exclamation points and also lack of capital letters (Baron 2000). So-called “emoticons”, or “smileys” are often used as paralinguistic footnotes to the messages. Baron (2000) thinks that children and young adults use these in messages to one another but adults do not use them, and may not know how to create them. This was said in 2000, and today, in 2009, it would seem that many adults use emoticons in informal emails as well.⁹

Baron (2000) says that '[s]ince World War II, written English (at least in America) has increasingly come to reflect everyday speech. (...) As writing growingly mirrors informal speech, contemporary spoken and written English are losing their identity as distinct forms of language' (Baron 2000: 21). 'Most of us have been taught to maintain distinct styles for speaking and for writing. However, increasingly, people are blurring these distinctions in the direction of the informal patterns of spoken language' (Baron 2000: 2). An official spoken speech may have the qualities one would expect of writing, and a note to a friend may have the structure one would expect of speech. This is also reflected in emails, where people are not pausing to edit the messages before sending them, and therefore the messages may contain numerous spelling mistakes and the

8 In 2008, a television program portrayed a six year old girl from a playground in New York who ended every sentence in “dot com”. This supports the claim that the Internet has had an impact on language use.

9 A teacher at a Norwegian upper secondary school even included a smiley at the end of an assignment to her class.

language may be informal and resemble speech.

3.2 Internet chat

One type of electronic communication is Internet chat. This new means of communication across great distances became increasingly popular in the mid 1990s, with *mIRC* (Internet Relay Chat) as one of the leading channels for this type of communication. *mIRC* allowed people from all over the world to chat with each other either in multi-user group conferences or in one-to-one private discussions. When participating in chat rooms such as *mIRC*, one had to follow the *netiquette*, which is the norms of behaviour online. If one failed to follow these unspoken rules (e.g. by swearing in public or harassing other chat group members), one would be evicted from the chat group, and would perhaps not be allowed to participate until a month had passed. In other words, a certain behaviour online was expected. Svennevig (2005) says that when emails and Internet chat groups came into being, people started communicating with each other without having any conventions that were established for this particular genre of communication. This resulted in new genres being developed. Svennevig (2005) says that Internet chat builds on the conventions of speech. In addition, Internet chat has developed new conventions that are particular for this means of communication, such as a system of abbreviations and icons (such as smileys).

In the late 1990s, *mIRC* seemed to decrease in popularity, and a new type of instant messaging took over. This Microsoft created phenomenon was called *msn* (messenger) and was meant for people who already knew each other, as one had to add people's email address in order to be able to talk to them. When logging on, one would automatically see who else was online, and one was able to chat in private with one's friends online. *Msn* was constantly updated since its debut in 1995, and by 2005, it allowed for more symbols (moving smileys and small figures) to be used, in addition to sharing pictures and transmitting video conversations (www.microsoft.com, accessed 14 April, 2009). A so-called Voice Clips feature allowed people to hold down the F2 button and record a message of 15 seconds which they could send to the recipient. Internet chat had now become more like a face to face conversation.

When *Facebook* was founded in 2004, it gradually started to take over the popularity that *msn* had possessed since the beginning of the 21st century. Facebook allowed people from all over the world to get in touch with one another, and to share photos, videos and send messages to each other. The idea behind the phenomenon was that people would be able to stay in touch with friends, as well as reconnect with old friends. In 2007, Facebook developed a means for instant messaging which allowed people to talk to friends who were online. The chat window at Facebook is smaller than the one that *msn* uses, and it seems that people are now abbreviating even more than they used

to because of this. The use of capital letters is very rarely found in instant messaging (unless capital letters are used for indicating shouting, or marking something of importance), where the need for giving quick responses might be essential. By 8 April, 2009, Facebook has 200 million active users, and more than 3.5 billion minutes are spent on Facebook each day (worldwide), according to the Facebook homepage. More than 30 million active users access Facebook through their mobile devices (www.facebook.com, accessed 14 April, 2009).

The most recent phenomenon in order to keep in touch with people online is *Twitter*. One of the founders had grown interested in the idea of being able to know what his friends were doing at all times, and wondered if there might be an opportunity to build something compelling around this simple status concept. In 2007, Twitter Incorporated was founded.¹⁰ According to the Twitter homepage, simplicity has played an important role in Twitter's popularity and success. Twitter asks one simple question; *What are you doing?* The answers must not exceed 140 characters in length, and answers can be sent via mobile phones or via the Internet (www.twitter.com, accessed 28 April, 2009). Whereas mobile phones allow more than 160 characters per text message now, Twitter takes one step back and introduces the need to abbreviate and write in incomplete sentences once again.

3.3 Mobile phones and text messaging

Another means of electronic communication which has gained enormous popularity during the last decades is the mobile phone. According to BBC, the first mobile phone emerged on March 6, 1983. It was available to anyone who could afford to pay \$ 3995 for the privilege. The DynaTAC 8000X weighed 785g and measured 300x44x89mm. The battery had only eight hours of standby time, or one hour of talk time, compared to over a week standby time in the 21st century. Thirty numbers could be saved in the memory of the mobile phone. By the end of 1984, there were 300.000 users worldwide, even though the mobile phone was extremely expensive, colossal in size and not very practical in use. In 2003, over 1,2 billion people had mobile phones (BBC 2003). In Finland, the home of Nokia, more than half of the population used mobile phones in 1999 (Baron 2000). According to Park, there were 3.3 billion mobile phones worldwide in 2007. This, however, does not necessarily mean that every other citizen in the world had a mobile phone, because many people have more than one mobile phone (Park 2007). According to Khan, there are now 4 billion mobile phone connections worldwide (Khan 2009). The mobile phones are relatively inexpensive to buy if one is willing to subscribe to a particular network company, and people of all ages have mobile phones. Young children often own a mobile phone, even before they learn to read and write

¹⁰ Originally, a prototype was launched in 2006 by Obvious. When Twitter became popular, it was moved outside of Obvious and Twitter Incorporated was founded.

properly. Some companies even market mobile phone imitations meant for babies.

In the beginning, mobile phones were used for making telephone calls. When the display was improved, text messages became more and more popular. A text message is sometimes referred to as an *sms*, which in fact is an abbreviation and stands for “short message service”. At first, the text messages were extremely expensive considering how few characters one could have (only 160 characters per message), and the amount of time it took to send it. In Norway, sending one text message cost 1,50 NOK in the mid 1990s.¹¹ Taking 3 seconds to send, the average price per minute compared to a phone call would then amount to 30 NOK. In 2009, sending a text message costs 0,35 NOK¹², and many network companies let their customers send a certain amount of text messages for free each day, or one has the ability to send via the Internet. In other words, sending text messages has become much cheaper during the last decade.

The *Sify News* (13 January, 2009) reported that a thirteen year old girl from California had sent 14,528 text messages in one month. Her father could not believe what he saw, and had consulted the calculator to see if it was humanly possible. He found that his teenage daughter had sent 484 text messages per day. Luckily, this was not in the 1990s, and the teenager had a subscription that allowed her to send unlimited text messages for only \$ 30 per month. At a rate of 20 cents per message, this young girl would otherwise have owed the network company close to \$ 3000. The *Sify News* further reports that the average number of monthly text messages for a teenager between 13-17 years old is 1,742 in the US. The average number of text messages sent and received by US mobile subscribers were 357 text messages per month in the second quarter of 2008, according to the *Sify News* (24 September, 2008). Only an average of 204 phone calls were made and received during the same period. The number of text messages sent and received in America has increased 450 per cent from the first quarter of 2006, when “only” 65 text messages were sent and received per month (The *Sify News* 2008).

Crystal (2008) reports that 12,2 billion text messages were sent in the UK in 2001. This number had doubled by 2004, and was forecast to be 45 billion in 2007. On Christmas Day in 2006, over 205 million text messages were sent in the UK alone. Gartner, an industry analyst, predicted that the total number would reach 2,4 trillion by 2010 (Crystal 2008).

It seems that text messages are used for all purposes. The Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* (16 February, 2009) reported that construction workers in Oslo were fired through text messages. Crystal (2008) reports that people also file for a divorce via text messages. Baron (2000) says that it only makes sense to send emails if you know they will be received, and this goes for text messaging as well. Firing someone or filing for a divorce with a text message is highly questionable (the

11 This was the price one had to pay with the leading subscription company at that time, i.e. Telenor.

12 There is considerable competition between today's subscription companies, and 0,35 NOK is the price taken from Chess.

former is in fact illegal), because one cannot be sure that the text message has reached its intended recipient. There is an application one can choose, which provides the mobile phone users with a certain reassurance when it comes to the reliability of text messages. It is called a sending report, and when the recipient has received the text message, you will automatically receive a confirmation on your mobile phone. This means that if the recipient has his or her mobile phone turned off, no confirmation message will be sent to you until he or she has turned his mobile phone on and received your message. This, however, does not provide total reliability, because one can never be sure that the phone is not stolen, or that some other person will read the message and delete it, for instance. This is also a service one has to pay for, so very few people that I know of actually use this service.

In the beginning of the 21st century, television shows that are based on text messages emerged. These are so-called “chat shows”, where the viewer can send text messages to the television station, and the text message will be viewed on the television screen nationwide. These shows typically have one or two hosts who are in the studio, and these hosts are there to read the text messages out loud, even though they appear on the screen, as well as talk about whatever they find interesting. Occasionally, there are competitions. The host then asks a question and the viewer has to text his or her answer. These text messages are much more expensive than the average text message that one sends to regular subscribers, and the television companies make a fortune because of these chat shows that are typically sent during night time.

3.4 Abbreviations

According to various authors (for instance Crystal 2008 and Stedje 2001), abbreviations have existed for as long as the written language has existed. Handwritten texts from the Middle Ages contain many abbreviations because of the high costs of writing material. Earlier, the abbreviations belonged to the written language only (such as etc, i.e. and e.g), but now there is a huge amount of abbreviations that are pronounced as words and function as words (such as lol, asap, emo). In the 21st century, there is a tendency to express oneself shortly, which is especially evident in advertisements, the press and in imaginative writing (Stedje 2001). The language of abbreviations, or the 'Aküsprache'¹³, which Stedje is writing about, is a tendency that has been prevalent the last decade. It is an international phenomenon that has become so strong that numerous books on abbreviations have been written. Crystal has written several of these (Crystal 2001, 2005, 2008).

In the first half of the 1800s, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm had some suggestions for

13 'Aküsprache' is the German term for abbreviated language, and is actually an ironic term, in that it is itself an abbreviation. The whole term is 'Abkürzungssprache'.

improving the German language. The German Grimm brothers are perhaps best known for their fairytales, but they also took a great interest in the German grammar and spelling. One of their suggestions was to write all the nouns with a lower case letter, but this suggestion met very little support, and German is now the only language which requires the nouns to be written with an initial capital letter. The Grimm brothers' proposal was only supported by some newspapers (Stedje 2001). Another idea they had was to abbreviate phrases. Instead of having to write *Lehrer und Lehrerinnen*, they suggested writing *LehrerInnen*, with a capital *I* to show that both *Lehrer* and *Lehrerinnen* were included in the word. This abbreviation was not accepted at all, and one still writes *Lehrer und Lehrerinnen* if one wants to include both male and female 'teachers' (Stedje 2001). Now, three centuries later, abbreviations appear everywhere, and they are becoming more and more accepted, even though there is a general idea that these abbreviations are disrupting the language. Text messaging has become very popular during the last decade, and text messages typically contain numerous abbreviations.

The popular belief is that texting has evolved as a twenty-first-century phenomenon – as a highly distinctive graphic style, full of abbreviations and deviant uses of language, used by a young generation that doesn't care about standards. There is a widely voiced concern that the practice is fostering a decline in literacy. And some even think it is harming language as a whole. 'Text messages destroying our language', headed a report in a Washington paper in May 2007 (Crystal 2008: 7-8).

Crystal goes on to say that '[a]ll the popular beliefs about texting are wrong, or at least debatable' (Crystal 2008: 9). He claims that the general belief that texting masks 'mental laziness' (Crystal 2008: 13) and illiteracy is wrong, and that abbreviations in text messages are necessary because of the limited amount of characters one can use in each text message (Crystal 2008). In 2009, this is no longer a valid argument (and was not valid at the time his book was written, for that matter), because these days, one can have much more than 160 characters per message. On my mobile phone, I can have 1836 (!) characters, and if the recipient has the same phone as I do, he or she will receive it as one very long message, rather than twelve separate messages.¹⁴ When it comes to “mental laziness”, as Crystal calls it, Crystal claims that the use of apostrophes is surprisingly frequent, even though it is a tedious and difficult convention to introduce into a text message. He claims that it may take as many as six keystrokes to transfer the apostrophe to the screen, and the fact that it is used at all should give the members of the Apostrophe Protection Society some reassurance (Crystal 2008). However, this is highly debatable. I do not know of any mobile phones

14 If one does not have a subscription that allows one to send unlimited text messages per month, one will be charged for twelve messages when using all the 1836 characters available. However, the cost per text message (at least in Norway) is so low that it cannot be used as an excuse for abbreviating.

during the last decade that did not come with the T9 word list service, or *predictive texting*. The T9 functions as a sort of spellcheck, and it “guesses” the word one intends to write. This makes it very easy to write messages in a short amount of time. The T9 can be set on almost any language, and if one chooses English, the apostrophe comes in just one keystroke. When writing *I'm*, for instance, one simply presses three different keys; number 4 for *I*, number 1 for the apostrophe, and number 6 for *m*. The T9 guesses that one wants to write *I'm*, and automatically changes what one has written to the correct spelling, with capital *I* and the apostrophe. Technology has made it very easy for us to maintain the spelling conventions, yet many text messages are sent with no editing. This corresponds to what Baron (2000) reported with regards to emails.

Crystal (2008) says that texters are prone to mis-spell, either unconsciously or deliberately. He claims that '[t]hey would not be able to use the mobile phone technology at all if they had not been taught to read and write, and this means they all had a grounding in the standard English writing system' (Crystal 2008: 48). While this may be true of most mobile phone users, it becomes a problem when children at the age of four or five get their first mobile phone. They have not yet started school, and have had little or no training in reading and writing. When they start acquiring some reading and writing skills, they may start to send text messages as well. These young children are not, in my opinion, capable of distinguishing between correct and incorrect spelling in text messages they receive from their teenage siblings, for instance, and it might be very confusing to keep the language of the text messages separate from that used in school work and education.

Crystal says that the list of non-standard spellings used in text messages is rather short, and he lists some of them; *cos/cuz* for *because*, *omigod* for *Oh my God*, *shud* for *should*, *wanna* for *want to* and *wenja* for *when do you*, among others (Crystal 2008). The most advanced texters are showing more and more innovation, and may abbreviate or use non-standard spellings for every word in a text message. I have received numerous text messages which did not contain more than one or two words that were spelled in the standard way (the rest was abbreviated), and this is even from texters who claimed not to abbreviate much. This is one of the main irritants to people who do not like the text messaging genre, and I can understand why this is so. It might be very difficult for people who never use abbreviated forms to understand this new form of language, and it takes more time to read through a text message if one has to try to decipher every word. Ambiguities in speech can be quickly cleared up but this is not the case in writing. If one has to provide explanations to the text messages, one has to spend more time and money writing additional text messages. Truss (2003) says that 'in the world of text messaging, ignorance of grammar and punctuation obviously doesn't affect a person's ability to communicate messages such as “C U later”' (Truss 2003: 17-18). She says that if one tries anything longer, it always seems to turn out much like the writing of the infant Pip in *Great Expectations*, and she illustrates with an example;

MI DEER JO I OPE U R KRWITE WELL I OPE I SHAL
SON B HABELL 4 2 TEEDGE U JO AN THEN WE SHORL
B SO GLODD AN WEN I M PRENGTD 2 U JO WOT LARX
AN BLEVE ME INF XN PIP (Truss 2003: 18).¹⁵

Crystal says that the writer must make every effort to make what he or she writes clear. 'Now that we have a standard, to dipaart frm it wood intradjoos unecesri difkulti' (Crystal 2007: 24). Is this not exactly what text messaging does? According to Svennevig (2005), communication within pragmatics consists of two different processes. It involves mental processes within the individuals; the speaker's intentions and the hearer's understanding. It also involves social processes between the participants in interaction; adaption to one another and coordination in order to establish a common meaning in the conversation. A language action demands interaction and coordination on many levels in order to be successful. Grice (1989) has formulated the Cooperative Principle, in which he lists several conversational maxims. In order to engage in a successful conversation one should follow certain maxims, such as 'avoid obscurity of expression [and] avoid ambiguity' (Grice 1989: 27). One should express oneself as clearly as one thinks is necessary, and use words that the hearer understands. Clearly, text messaging tends to break these maxims, because abbreviations may cause misunderstandings and open for various interpretations of the "speaker's" intentions.

3.5 Y [rtn evrθη?¹⁶

People in general are concerned that the text messaging and Internet chat language will ruin the standard language. All the abbreviations are often seen as a symbol for illiteracy, and many have asked themselves why people feel the need to shorten everything. In newspapers and on webpages one can read statements such as 'I hate texting!' and 'I hate those stupid abbreviations!' almost daily (Crystal 2008). Newspapers and magazines play with headlines in order to make them humorous, and this is often done by abbreviating something. 'Posh and Becks', 'Brangelina' and 'Bennifer' are just a few of the celebrity couples that have had their names shortened in newspapers 'just for the fun of it'. When asked why people 'hate' these abbreviations, people have difficulties giving a proper answer but many of them are concerned that students take the abbreviations into schools and therefore, the standard written language will decline.

Why, then, do people abbreviate? The answer may be that people find it amusing. It is convenient, and abbreviating may speed up the writing process. Crystal (2008) says that abbreviating is easier, and this may be true. If one does not know the standard way of spelling a

15 'My dear Joe, I hope you are quite well. I hope I shall soon be able to teach you, Joe – and then we shall be so glad. And when I am apprenticed to you, Joe: *what larks!* Believe me, in affection, Pip' (Truss 2003: 21).

16 Why shorten everything?

word, one can always spell it *foneticky* (phonetically) in a text message, and peers who are used to abbreviating would not react to this. Rewriting poems and famous titles from the literature have also been a source of language play in text messages, and Crystal gives the following examples;

zen & T @ f m2 cycl mn10nc
0,5 a leag 0,5 a leag 0,5 a leag onwrđ
all in t valy o dth rd t 600
w8ing 4 go. (Crystal 2008: 79)¹⁷

It goes without saying that these examples are extremely difficult to understand for anyone who is not used to abbreviating. Even if people are familiar with abbreviations, the @ is often used as a symbol for “at”, and when it suddenly stands for “art”, this may cause confusion. Ronnie Corbett and Ronnie Barker, two British comedians who call themselves *Two Ronnies*, have played out a scenario in a restaurant where the conversation is entirely in abbreviated words. The scetch is called 'F U N E X', and the title is supposed to mean 'Have you any eggs'.¹⁸ They have taken the abbreviations to an extreme, which is similar to what many young adults do today as well.¹⁹

The French novelist Phil Marso, published a book in 2004 that was written entirely in French sms shorthand. He claims that reading text messages is an excellent way of learning a foreign language (Crystal 2008). I strongly disagree with his view. A foreigner with little knowledge of the English language who was presented with the lines above would have tremendous difficulty understanding what the lines meant. Stedje (2001) has an example which is written in an abbreviated German accent; *Wou di Hasn Hosn un di Hosn Husn haßn*, meaning *Wo die Hasen “Hosen” und die Hosen “Husen” heißen*. This is not easy for foreigners to understand, even if they have had years of training in the German language.

People find abbreviating amusing, and many shops and products have names that are abbreviated, such as *Got2be* (which is a range of hair styling products), *Shu* (which is a shoe shop in Torquay, Britain), and *srf, sno, sk8* (which is a shop in Bergen, Norway which sells surfing, snow and skating equipment). The German group *Die fantastischen vier* has made a hit song written almost entirely in abbreviations;

MFG – Die fantastischen vier

Nun, da sich der Vorhang der Nacht von der Bühne hebt
kann das Spiel beginnen...
das uns vom Drama einer Kultur berichtet

ARD, ZDF, C&A

17 Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance; Tennyson: Half a league, half a league, half a league onward / All in the valley of death rode the 600; Waiting for Godot.

18 F = have, U = you, N E = any, X = eggs.

19 The scetch by 'Two Ronnies' is available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkWMcRIE1mQ&NR=1>

BRD, DDR und USA
BSE, HIV und DRK
GbR, GmbH – ihr könnt mich mal
THX, VHS und FSK
RAF, LSD und FKK
DVU, AKV und KKK
RHP, USW, LMAA
PLZ, UPS und DPD
BMX, BPM und XTC
EMI, CBS und BMG
ADAC, DLRG – ojemine
EKZ, RTL und DFB
ABS, TÜV und BMW
KMH, ICE und Eschede
PVC, FCKW – is nich OK

MfG – mit freundlichen Grüßen
die Welt liegt uns zu Füßen, denn wir stehen drauf
wir gehen drauf für ein Leben voller Schall und Rauch
bevor wir fallen, fallen wir lieber auf

HNO, EKG und AOK
LBS, WKD und IHK
UKW, NDW und Hubert K
BTM, BKA, hahaha
LTU, TNT und IRA
NTV, THW und DPA
H+M, BSB und FDH
SOS, 110 – tatütata
SED, FDJ und KaDeWe
FAZ, BWL und FDP
EDV, IBM und WWW
HSV, VFB, oleole
ABC, DAF und OMD
TM3, A+O und AEG
TUI, UVA und UVB
THC in OCB is was ich dreh

Although some of the abbreviations are considered standard, like *SOS* and *MfG*, it is almost impossible even for native speakers of German to understand all the abbreviations in the song. I cannot see how foreign learners of German can benefit from being presented with abbreviations such as these, which are also often used in text messaging.

Another important factor regarding abbreviations is that people interpret abbreviations differently. In one geographical area, or within one group of people, the abbreviation *bf* could mean “best friend”, and in another area it could mean “before”. In a third area it could mean something entirely different. How can foreigners be expected to understand the language of text messaging and abbreviations when it allows so much variation? Often, one can understand what is meant by looking at the context, but the text messages are often sent without much context because some people abbreviate almost every word, and do not make the messages longer than necessary.

3.6 Abbreviations in schools

Crystal says that '[w]e know from studies of spoken language that people influence each other in the way they speak, often by adopting features of the accent of the person they are talking to. Very likely a similar accommodation takes place in text messaging' (Crystal 2008: 58). If this is so, this might cause a problem especially in connection with teaching written language. 'The apparent lack of respect for traditional rules of the written language has horrified some observers, who see in the development an ominous sign of deterioration in standards. Text-messaging is often cited as a particular problem. Children of the future will no longer be able to spell, it is said' (Crystal 2005: 81). The students who are struggling with the standard spelling conventions may not be able to distinguish between non-standard and standard spelling. If they receive a text message from a classmate, whom they take to be a better student than they are themselves, they may 'look up to' this student and think that their classmate has written a text message in Standard English, when in fact, he or she has not. The ambitious students know the difference between text messaging language and standard written language, but the weaker students may not know the difference between the two, and this causes problems and concerns among many. Wardhaugh says that 'students should be shown how to tailor their language use according to circumstance' (Wardhaugh 1999: 173). Crystal (2007) thinks that young pupils learn to judge appropriateness, and that they should try to speak and write in a meaningful way. '[S]tudents are being taught to recognize and understand the consequences of making linguistic *choices*' (Crystal 2007: 210-211).

Various surveys show that 'the younger you are the more likely you are to text' (Crystal 2008: 89). Teenagers and young adults are the most enthusiastic users of the text messaging service, and they are also the most frequent users of text messaging abbreviations. There is a rapid decline with age, according to Crystal (2008). A study also showed that women wrote longer messages than men. '[T]he mean number of words per message for women was 6.95, whereas for men it was 5.54' (Crystal 2008: 91). This indicates that people tend to send very short messages, and with only five words written, there is no need to abbreviate any of those words. 'Women [also] used abbreviations and emoticons significantly more than men (although [...] neither group used them much)' (Crystal 2008: 91). It is true that women use emoticons more than men, and I think they are used frequently. I hardly ever receive a text message from one of my female friends that does not contain a smiley of some sort. More and more, one can see teenagers use smileys in school work, because they are so used to including them when they write in their spare time, i.e. when writing text messages and chatting online.

Ling reported that two thirds of all text messages contain simple clauses rather than complex clauses (in Crystal 2008). Further, he says that around 82 per cent of all text messages have no

capitalisation at all. Eleven per cent had only the first letter of the text message capitalised, and only seven per cent used capital letters in names and at the beginning of follow-up sentences (Crystal 2008). If students get so used to using lower case letters when they text (which they sometimes do every hour of the day), it becomes a habit which can be difficult to change when they are required to write Standard English. The simplicity of the text messaging sentences may also be reflected in school work if students start to write incomplete sentences and almost exclusively use simple clauses. Another known phenomenon within text messaging language and Internet chat language is that people tend to write phonetically. They write 'as they speak', and many people also use the non-standard grammar that belongs to their respective geographical or social dialects. Crystal (2005) says that text message abbreviations were designed to meet the needs of economical messaging on a mobile phone screen that only allowed 160 characters. Therefore, he says,

there is little motivation to use the deviant forms elsewhere. They lose their 'cool', group-identifying function when they are taken away from the technology, whether mobile phone or computer. The fact that a few kids might start using their abbreviations in places where they have no purpose – such as school essays – is something to be watched, of course. But that is what teaching needs to do. (...) And children need to be taught, if they have failed to develop the intuition for themselves, that text-messaging abbreviations perform a useful function where space is tight and speed is critical, but not elsewhere (Crystal 2005: 81).

Further, he claims that '[w]e need to show greater concern for those who are having difficulties learning their mother-tongue – whether for medical, psychological or other reasons' (Crystal 2005: 130). In other words, teachers have a great responsibility when it comes to children's language learning. In addition to medical or psychological challenges, the text messaging phenomenon is also something which can make language learning more difficult for children, especially when it comes to distinguishing between standard written language and non-standard written language. 'Language is a form of social behaviour' (Crystal 2007: 103), and one has to be linguistically prepared. Crystal says that the principle of appropriateness rules, and that '[w]e know that we need to change our language – as we do our clothes – as we move from one context to another. And there are hundreds of contexts' (Crystal 2007: 209-210). Teachers have to instil appropriate linguistic behaviour, according to Crystal (2007), and teach the pupils when to use the standard form of language, and when it is acceptable not to.

Chapter 4 – Research questions and hypotheses

The following includes a definition of the language of text messaging. I define the language of text messaging as including: abbreviations (which includes the replacement of letters with symbols in order to save a keystroke on the mobile phone), incomplete sentences, contractions, non standard use of the apostrophe, lower case letters, non standard spelling, exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks. By exaggerated use, I mean using more than one exclamation point, period or question mark. By incomplete sentences, I mean sentences that do not include a subject or predicator, for instance. Under the heading of the language of text messaging I also include other forms of what I call informal language, e.g. novel adjective combinations, slang and personal references. I also define the language of text messaging as including the use of capital letters to emphasise that a particular word or phrase is of importance or needs special attention (cf. Crystal 2008).

Research question 1:

How does text messaging influence standard written English?

Motivation:

There is a general conviction among people that young adults spend a lot of time text messaging each other. Educational experience, including my own, seems to indicate that some students bring the language of text messaging into school work.

Hypothesis 1:

High school students do not keep the language of text messaging separate from standard written English texts, and text messaging language is used in school work.

Motivation:

Increasingly younger children get mobile phones, even before they have acquired all the basic spelling conventions that are taught in schools. The language of text messaging is very similar to that of Internet chat, in that both languages include abbreviations, incomplete sentences and contractions. Children and young adults participate in Internet chats, where the need to give quick responses is sometimes essential in order to participate in the conversation; thus abbreviations are often used. In addition to this, the geographical dialect of the speaker is often revealed in text messages and Internet chat. Through educational experience, this is sometimes reflected in school work.

Research question 2:

Are the old and standard abbreviations (for instance *PS* and *NB*) forgotten because of the new abbreviations?

Motivation:

In the beginning, one could only use 160 characters per text message, and abbreviations were therefore often necessary. The more people abbreviated, the more creative the abbreviations became. New abbreviations were developed in order to suit one's needs, and the old abbreviations were not needed in their original sense. New interpretations of the old abbreviations were sometimes offered.

Hypothesis 2:

Students do not know standard written English abbreviations and offer new interpretations of these abbreviations.

Motivation:

Young adults and children are becoming more and more used to sending text messages and participating in Internet chats, even before they learn to write Standard English. The abbreviations are becoming more creative the more people abbreviate.

Research question 3:

Can text message abbreviations be interpreted variably?

Motivation:

Seeing how people invent abbreviations and offer new interpretations for already existing abbreviations, the meanings may change, for instance according to which age group or social group one is part of, or where in the country one is from. The meanings of the abbreviations may change according to one's needs, and this makes it difficult for anyone who is not part of the particular group to understand what is meant by the different abbreviations.

Hypothesis 3:

There is considerable variation in the interpretation of abbreviations typically used in text messaging.

Motivation:

If new interpretations are offered for old abbreviations, and students use these in essays and student writing, their teachers cannot be expected to understand what is meant by these, especially if the abbreviations mean different things for different people.

I intended to find out if people have reason to complain and be worried about the 'new language' that has come into use because of the Internet and the use of text messaging.

To sum up, then, my research questions and hypotheses are as follows;

Research questions:

1. How does text messaging influence standard written English?
2. Are the old and standard abbreviations (for instance *PS* and *NB*) forgotten because of the new abbreviations?
3. Can text message abbreviations be interpreted variably?

Hypotheses:

1. High school students do not keep the language of text messaging separate from standard written English texts, and text messaging language is used in school work.
2. Students do not know standard written English abbreviations and offer new interpretations of these abbreviations.
3. There is considerable variation in the interpretation of abbreviations typically used in text messaging.

Chapter 5 – Method and subjects

In order to test my hypotheses, I contacted a high school teacher in Wisconsin, USA in the fall of 2008. He promised to collect essays from all his students. I intended to study the essays and look for abbreviations, contracted forms and incomplete sentences that could be connected with the use of Internet and mobile phones. Examples of abbreviations that I looked for are listed below;

c – for *see*

cos/cuz – for *because*

cud – for *could*

em – for *them*

gonna – for *going to*

moro – for *morrow* (in *tomorrow*)

nite – for *night*

rait – for *right* (or even *write*)

r – for *are*

shudda – for *should have*

tho – for *though*

thru – for *through*

u – for *you*

wanna – for *want to*

wud – for *would*

Any -in' endings for -ing

In addition, I looked for instances of non standard spelling. This typically occurs in text messaging if the writer can save some characters, when the meaning is otherwise not lost. I intended to also look for words written with lower case letters instead of capital letters, such as *i* rather than *I*, and the lack of apostrophes in contracted words, such as *Im* and *your* instead of *I'm* and *you're*. For the most part, based on the context, one can understand what is meant if people forget the apostrophe but if the context is unclear or missing, misunderstandings may occur if the apostrophes are neglected. I intended to also look for any contracted forms, such as *didn't*, especially if these forms were written without the apostrophe, and to look for informal language, which includes the use of slang and reflects the syntax typically found in spoken language. The use of capital letters to emphasise that particular words are of importance was also something which I intended to look for, in addition to an exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question

marks. The essays were used to test hypothesis 1;

1. High school students do not keep the language of text messaging separate from standard written English texts, and text messaging language is used in school work.

The reason why I chose the high school students from this particular high school in Wisconsin as my subjects is that I had contacts who made it easy for me to get in touch with one of the teachers at this school. I wanted to collect about 50 essays from this high school, and then I wanted to compare these essays to student writings from an elementary school in Wisconsin. I was in contact with someone who would help me collect material from the elementary school but unfortunately, I never received any essays from the latter school.

As well as collecting the essays, I handed out a questionnaire about abbreviations to the students at the same high school. I originally intended to hand out about 50 questionnaires to the high school students, and 50 to elementary school pupils, as well as 50 to university students, but I did not get the chance to hand out any questionnaires to the elementary school pupils. I did not receive more than 24 questionnaires from the university students. The questionnaire was used to test hypotheses 2 and 3;

2. Students do not know standard written English abbreviations and offer new interpretations of these abbreviations.

3. There is considerable variation in the use and interpretation of abbreviations typically used in text messaging.

The questionnaire consisted of 23 abbreviations. Some are old and standard, some are new, and are typically used in text messaging (Crystal (2008) has listed several of these in his book), and some can be interpreted in different ways. The reader will find the questionnaire as appendix A.

To make it easier for the reader to understand, I will explain the abbreviations that were included in the questionnaire;

lol = *laughing out loud*, typically used in text messaging and Internet chat.

bf = could mean *best friend*, *boyfriend* or *before*, or something entirely different

fe = *iron* (the standard abbreviation for *iron* as it is found in the periodic table)

fyi = *for your information*, typically used in text messaging and Internet chat

emo = typically used to mean *emotional* in electronic communication as well as in speech

roflmao = *rolling on floor laughing my ass off*, typically used in text messaging and Internet chat

brb = *be right back*, typically used in Internet chat

jam = *just a minute* (found in Crystal 2008)

pc = *personal computer*

nagi = *not a good idea* (found in Crystal 2008)

nb = *nota bene*

ad = *anno domini*

kwim = *know what I mean* (found in Crystal 2008)

ps = *post scriptum*

bcg = *Bacille Calmette Guérin* (tuberculosis)

tnx = *thanks*

bgn = could mean *begin*

sms = *short message service*

ie = *that is*

nkotb = *New Kids On The Block* (famous American pop group from the early 1990s)

atm = *automated teller machine*

vip = *very important person*

sys = *see you soon* (found in Crystal 2008)

The reason why I did not include more abbreviations in the questionnaire was that I suspected people would be more willing to fill it out the shorter it was. This turned out to be true, as many of my informants did not fill out more than half of it. All in all, I collected 55 questionnaires from the high school students; 21 from female students and 34 from male students. Their age ranged from 14 to 18 years old. I also collected 24 questionnaires from a university in Wisconsin; 15 from female students and 9 from male students. Their age ranged from 18-29 years old.

The data collection process was interrupted for personal reasons beyond my control, therefore I did not collect any questionnaires from the elementary school. The final set of data available for analysis included:

58 handwritten essays

51 typewritten essays

55 questionnaires from high school students

24 questionnaires from university students

The handwritten essays were on average two pages long each, whereas the typewritten essays were three pages long each. The typewritten essays were graded from C+ to A+, whereas the typewritten ones were graded from F to A+. The topic for the typewritten essays was to discuss

various chapters of Howard Zinn's book on American history. The topic for the handwritten essays was to discuss the amendments in the Constitution that the students found to be the most important amendments. In other words, the essays were all about history. I took this to be a good thing because then the students would perhaps not worry about their language in the same way they would if the essays were to be graded by their English teacher. I therefore expected their language to be quite natural.

The typewritten essays were written at home, which gave the students more time to read through them before handing them in. This might also be the reason why the typewritten essays are longer than the handwritten ones, i.e. on average three pages, compared to two pages for the handwritten essays. The handwritten essays were written in school, which gave the students less time to read through them and look for spelling mistakes and ungrammatical sentences. At school, they did not have the possibility to use a dictionary either, which was something they could take advantage of at home if they wanted to.

The students were not told that I would be analysing their essays until after they had handed in their writings. This gave them no chance to change their language in order to suit my research, as they did not know what my intentions were. In this respect, I avoided “The Observer's Paradox”, which says that in order to find out anything about language and its natural use, one must observe natural use of language. However, if the language is to be natural, one cannot be seen observing it, because the informants will change their language when they know they are being observed (Labov 1972).

Before I started to analyse the essays, I decided to keep the handwritten and the typewritten essays separate. This is because when people write on a computer, they may use a spellcheck which automatically tells them when they have written something which is ungrammatical or misspelled. An abbreviated word written on a computer might be noticed by the writer when it appears with a red line under it, whereas in handwritten essays, one has to rely on one's own spelling abilities.

When I handed out the questionnaires, I was present when the high school students filled them out. Some of them talked to each other and asked what the abbreviations could mean, but they were hushed by their teacher and we asked them not to “cheat”, which they respected. This means that if I come across any surprising results that are similar on several questionnaires, I have to trust that the result is their honest opinion of what the abbreviations mean, rather than that they have copied one another's answers. I was not present when the university students filled out the questionnaires. The only thing my informants knew about the questionnaires was that they concerned abbreviations, and that I wanted them to write what these abbreviations meant. In addition, I wanted the respondents to indicate, by ticking the corresponding box, if they had taken a guess at what the abbreviations could mean, or if they knew that this was the “correct” meaning. They were not

informed that some of the abbreviations could be interpreted in different ways, and that some were old and some were new. As with the essays, I wanted the informants to know as little as possible about what I would be looking for when they filled out the questionnaires. Therefore they did not know anything about my research questions or hypotheses. The students were only informed that I would use their responses in my master thesis.

At the end of the questionnaire, the following questions were asked;

- Do you sometimes abbreviate when you intend to write Standard English, e.g. write *u* instead of *you*?
- How many text messages do you send per day?
- Do you abbreviate when you send text messages?

The first question was asked because I wanted to know if the students who abbreviated were aware that they did so. The second and third question was asked to see if there was any connection between how many text messages the students sent per day and how many abbreviations from the questionnaire they interpreted according to the commonly accepted interpretations within text messaging.

With regards to the questionnaires, the female and male respondents are kept separate. Crystal (2008) claims that women are the most frequent texters, and they are also the ones who abbreviate the most. If this is true, my female respondents would be expected to score higher on the abbreviations typically used in text messaging on the questionnaire. The questions at the end of the questionnaire will perhaps provide a better understanding of the results, in addition to test Crystal's claim above.

Chapter 6 – Results

6.1 The typewritten essays

The results from the typewritten essays (51 essays) will be presented first. The female and male students are not kept separate with regard to the essays because I do not think this is of any importance when it comes to the student writings. Crystal (2008) claims that women are the most frequent users of abbreviations, and I intend to test this claim with the questionnaires. However, in the essays, I looked for more than abbreviations, and that is why I have not kept the sexes apart.

6.1.1 Abbreviations

The results pertaining to the abbreviations are presented in Table 6.1.1 below:

Table 6.1.1 n

Abbreviations	6
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Table 6.1.1 indicates that there were 6 instances of abbreviations in the typewritten essays. Examples of these are: *Brit's* for *British people*, *thru* for *through*, and *image* for *imagine*.

6.1.2 Incomplete sentences

The results pertaining to the incomplete sentences are presented in Table 6.1.2 below:

Table 6.1.2 n

Incomplete sentences	19
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Table 6.1.2 shows that there were 19 instances of incomplete sentences in the typewritten essays, and examples of these are: *'Wrong.'*, *'What about taxes?'*, *'Historical or natural?'*, *'The answer.'* and *'How rude.'*

6.1.3 Contractions

The results pertaining to the contracted forms of verbs that were found in the typewritten essays are presented in Table 6.1.3 below. These were written both with and without the apostrophe. The use of apostrophe will be discussed later. The most frequent contractions appear first on the list, and the least frequent appear last.

Table 6.1.3

n

didn't (for did not)	53
wasn't (for was not)	32
it's (for it has, it was and it is)	20
weren't (for were not)	15
couldn't (for could not)	14
doesn't (for does not)	11
don't (for do not)	11
wouldn't (for would not)	8
that's (for that is and that was)	6

Table 6.1.3 shows that there were 53 instances of *didn't*. In addition to those listed in the table, *I'm* (for I am), *isn't* (for is not), and *let's* (for let us) appeared three times each. The following occurred twice each: *aren't* (for are not), *what's* (for what is and what was), *there's* (for there is and there was), *we're* (for we were and we are), *I'll* (for I will and I shall), *could've* (for could have), *won't* (for will not), *we'll* (for we will and we shall), and *shouldn't* (for should not). Finally, the following occurred once: *we've* (for we have), *you'll* (for you will), *can't* (for cannot), *where's* (for where is), *wouldn't* (for would not), *who's* (for who is), *should've* (for should have), *I'd* (for I had), *hadn't* (for had not), and *he's* (for he is).

What is interesting to note here is that all the forms that could be contracted were also found without the contraction, e.g. *didn't* was written as *did not* in the same essays as well. This was the case with all the contractions in all the essays. In other words, there was a lack of consistency between the contracted forms and the full words among all the students who used the contracted forms.

6.1.4 Non standard use of apostrophe

The results pertaining to the non standard use of the apostrophe are shown in Table 6.1.4 below. Non standard use of the apostrophe refers to the use of apostrophe where it normally does not occur in Standard English, and to the lack of the apostrophe where it normally occurs in Standard English (cf. Truss 2003).

Table 6.1.4 n

Non standard use of apostrophe	45
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Table 6.1.4 shows that there were 45 occurrences of non standard use of the apostrophe. This was evident in words such as *its* where it should have been *it's*, *tax's* instead of *taxes*, and in the title of the book the students were referring to (*A peoples History of the United States*).

6.1.5 Lower case letters

The results pertaining to the use of lower case letters are depicted in Table 6.1.5 below:

Table 6.1.5 n

Lower case letters	32
--------------------	----

Table 6.1.5 indicates that there were 32 occurrences of lower case letters in contexts where capital letters are expected in Standard English. Lower case letters were typically found in words such as *indians, the south, the new world*, and after a full stop, as in '*Taking a chance on new land. and with the constant advertising*'(...).

6.1.6 Non standard spelling

The results pertaining to the use of non standard spelling is shown in Tables 6.1.6a and 6.1.6b below:

Table 6.1.6a

Non standard spelling n

any thing	2
any ways	2
them selves	2
with out	2
any one	1
how ever	1
it self	1
no where	1
other wise	1
over run	1
where as	1
who ever	1

Table 6.1.6b

Non standard spelling n

women (for singular 'woman')	8
there (for 'their')	5
form (for 'from')	3
the (for 'they')	3
on (for 'one')	3
is (for 'it')	2
agresion	1
particular (for 'particular')	1
then (for 'than')	1
they (for 'the')	1
too (for 'to')	1
tryant (for 'tyrant')	1
wana	1
whose (for 'who is')	1
woman (for plural 'women')	1
your (for 'you are')	1

Table 6.1.6a shows words that are usually written as one word in Standard English. Table 6.1.6b indicates that *women* (for singular *woman*) was spelled in a non standard way on eight occasions. *Wana* can also be seen as a form of abbreviation, and this particular word was taken from the title of the pop song “*Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*”. This was also the title of the student's paper, however misspelled according to the song title. Non standard spelling with regards to verb tenses also occurred, such as *bare* (for *bear*) and *were* (for *wear*).

6.1.7 Exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks

The results pertaining to an exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks (e.g. as in four or five exclamation points) are depicted in Table 6.1.7 below:

Table 6.1.7 n

Exaggerated use of exclamation points	2
Exaggerated use of periods	1

Table 6.1.7 shows that exaggerated use of exclamation points occurred twice, such as in '*Power to the women!!!!*', whereas exaggerated use of periods occurred once. No exaggerated use of question

marks was found.

6.1.8 Informal language

The results pertaining to the use of informal language, as defined on page 40, are shown in Table 6.1.8 below.

Table 6.1.8 n

Informal language	19
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Table 6.1.8 indicates that there were 19 instances of informal language. Some of these were: '*fancy schmancy*', '@#\$' for expletive (ass), '*this was crap*', '*good ole*', '*ouchies*', '*insanely high number*', '*tin workers, brewers (go Milwaukee!)*', '*Forgive my weirdness, I just had Starbucks. ANYWAYS...*', and '*The Super Amazingly Boring Mexican War*'. The latter was the title of this particular student's paper.

6.1.9 The use of capital letters

The results pertaining to the use of capital letters to emphasise that a particular word (or words) is of importance, or to draw special attention to a word or a phrase, are presented in Table 6.1.9 below:

Table 6.1.9 n

The use of capital letters	7
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Table 6.1.9 shows that there were seven occurrences of capitalisation in the typewritten essays. The following are examples of these; '*I DON'T THINK SO!*', '*ANYWAYS...*', and '*MEXICAN TERRITORY*'.

6.2 The handwritten essays

As with the typewritten essays, the male and female students are not kept separate with regard to the handwritten essays (58 essays) either, for the same reason which is given in 6.1.

6.2.1 Abbreviations

The results pertaining to the results of abbreviations are presented in Table 6.2.1 below:

Table 6.2.1 n

FDR (Franklin D. Roosevelt)	19
RR (rail road)	18
& (and)	17
v. (versus)	15
vs (versus)	15
MLK (Martin Luther King)	11
w/ (with)	7
FDIC	5
CP (Central Pacific)	5
UP (Union Pacific)	5

Table 6.2.1 shows that *FDR*, *RR*, and *&* occurred most frequently. In addition to those listed above, the following occurred on four occasions: *CCCC*, and *gov't* (for *government*). *SNCC* was found on three occasions. The following occurred twice each: *AAA*, *NRA*, *opp* (for *opportunity*), *SCLC*, *seprite* (for *separate*), *Trans RR* (for *Transcontinental Rail Road*), and the use of *+* (for *and*). The following were found once each: *am* (for *amendment*), *CA* (for *California*), *cuz* (for *because*), *const* (for *Constitution*), *cred* (for *credit*), *CWA*, *em* (for *them*), *FI*, *LA* (for *Los Angeles*), *LBJ*, *NE*, *now's* (for *nowdays*), *n't* (for *not in could n't*), *PWA*, *SC*, *TCRR* (for *Transcontinental Rail Road*), *thou* (for *though*), *TUA*, *US const* (for *US Constitution*), *VC*, *Vets* (for *Veterans*), *w/in* (for *within*), *WPA*, *yrs* (for *years*), the use of *-* (for *and*), the use of *\$* (for *money*), and the use of *2* (for *two*).

6.2.2 Incomplete sentences

The results pertaining to the use of incomplete sentences are presented in Table 6.2.2 below:

Table 6.2.2 n

Incomplete sentences	12
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Table 6.2.2 shows that there were 12 occurrences of incomplete sentences in the handwritten essays. These were sentences in which the predicator or the subject was absent, such as '*Taking a chance on new land.*', '*Not women. Just men.*', '*What great time in history.*', '*Would think the farmers.*' and '*Fix it!*' Absence of preposition and articles occurred frequently but lack of such clause elements does not necessarily make a sentence incomplete, and the results are not included in the table above.

6.2.3 Contractions

The results pertaining to the contracted forms are presented in Table 6.2.3 below:

Table 6.2.3 n

didn't	19
it's	15
wasn't	14
couldn't	9
weren't	9
wouldn't	8
can't	8
that's	7

Table 6.2.3 shows that *didn't* was the most frequently used contraction, closely followed by *it's* and *wasn't*. In addition to the contractions listed in the table above, the following occurred on four occasions each: *wasent* [sic], and *wouldnt* [sic]. There were three occurrences of *don't* and *you're*. The following occurred twice each: *aren't*, *arn't* [sic], *hadn't*, and *shouldn't*. One instance was found of the following contractions: *doesn't*, *hadn't*, *he's*, *I'll*, *isn't*, *might've*, *wernt* [sic], and *what's*. The contractable forms in the handwritten essays were also written as two words in the same essays.

6.2.4 Non standard use of apostrophe²⁰

The results pertaining to the non standard use of the apostrophe are presented in table 6.2.4 below:

Table 6.2.4 n

Non standard use of apostrophe	49
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Table 6.2.4 indicates that there were 49 instances of non standard use of the apostrophe. This was evident in words such as *its* (for *it is*), *it's* (for *its*), *thats* (for *that is*) and *your* (for *you are*).

6.2.5 Lower case letters

The results pertaining to the use of lower case letters are shown in Table 6.2.5 below:

Table 6.2.5 n

Lower case letters	161
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Table 6.2.5 indicates that the use of lower case letters occurred frequently in the handwritten essays. Lower case letters were used in e.g. *united states*, *i*, and after a full stop.

²⁰ As defined in 6.1.4, page 49.

6.2.6 Non standard spelling

The results pertaining to the use of non standard spelling are presented in Tables 6.2.6a and 6.2.6b below:

Table 6.2.6a n

no where	2
non violent	1
our selfs	1
out come	1
their selfs	1
them selfs	1
with out	1

Table 6.2.6b n

there (for 'their')	4
to (for 'too')	3
were (for 'where')	3
a (for 'an')	2
then (for 'than')	2
arn't (for 'are not')	2
travle (for 'travel')	2
witch (for 'which')	2
an (for 'a')	1
by (for 'buy')	1
here (for 'hear')	1
laying (for 'lying')	1
on (for 'one')	1
tought (for 'thought')	1
villige (for 'village')	1
women (for 'woman')	1

Table 6.2.6a shows words that are normally written as one word in Standard English. In addition, '*our selfs*', '*their selfs*' and '*them selfs*' are written with *-ve* rather than *-f* in Standard English.

Table 6.2.6b indicates that '*there*' was used four times for '*their*', '*to*' was used three times for '*two*', '*were*' was used three times for '*where*', etc. In addition to those listed above, there was one occurrence of *transcontental*, and one of *transcontial*, both referring to the Transcontinental Rail Roads. *Belived* was found three times, *beginings* and *imigrants* were found twice, and *befor* and

particle (for *practically*) occurred once each. The latter occurrences can be seen as both spelling mistakes and abbreviations. *Gard* (for *guard*), *rarly* (for *rarely*), *anprd* (for *angered*), *bettr* (for *better*), *spred* (for *spread*), *braks* (for *breaks*), *dinomite* (for *dynamite*), *alcoholic* and *alcahol* (for *alcoholic* and *alcohol*), *minimus* (for *minimal*), and *pennsylvania* (for *Pennsylvania*) were also found. These instances can be seen as examples of both abbreviations and slang. @\$\$€\$ was also found for expletive (asses).

6.2.7 Exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks

The results pertaining to an exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks (i.e. more than one exclamation point, period or question mark) are presented in Table 6.2.7 below:

Table 6.2.7 n

Exaggerated use of exclamation points	1
Exaggerated use of periods	1

Table 6.2.7 indicates that there was one instance of exaggerated use of exclamation points, and one instance of exaggerated use of periods.

6.2.8 Informal language

The results pertaining to the use of informal language are presented in Table 6.2.8 below:

Table 6.2.8 n

Informal language	12
-------------------	----

Table 6.2.8 indicates that there were 12 occurrences of informal language. This was evident in words and phrases such as '*chillaxing*', '*sorta*', '*the crappy stuff*', and '*that shortened travle [sic] time a bunch*'.

6.2.9 The use of capital letters

The results pertaining to the use of capital letters are presented in Table 6.2.9 below:

Table 6.2.9 n

The use of capital letters	9
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Table 6.2.9 indicates that the use of capital letters occurred nine times, e.g. '*before BOOM!*', '*HOT*,

HOT, HOT' and '*power to the WOMEN!*' This could be to draw special attention to a particular word or phrase. The words that were written in capital letters were sometimes underlined as well, such as '*it is ILLEGAL*'.

6.3 The questionnaires: high school students (male)

The results from the male respondents are presented in Table 6.3 below, whose form is quite similar to the original questionnaire (see appendix A). The commonly accepted meaning within Standard English or within the language of text messaging appears to the right of the abbreviation.

Suggestions from the informants are listed below the commonly accepted meaning. This means that for example with reference to 'lol', 29 respondents wrote that this meant 'laugh(ing) out loud' (which is the commonly accepted meaning within the language of text messaging), and they indicated that they were certain of the meaning. Two respondents wrote 'laugh(ing) out loud' as well but these two did not indicate whether they were certain, uncertain, or if they took a guess at the meaning. One respondent did not write anything at all. One respondent wrote 'laugh' but did not indicate whether he was certain of the meaning or not. Finally, one respondent wrote that 'lol' meant 'lots of love', and he (because this particular example is from the male informants) was certain of the meaning.

Table 6.3

Abbreviation	Meaning	I'm certain of the meaning	I'm a bit uncertain of the meaning	I took a guess at what it could mean	No indication of certainty	No answer at all
lol	laugh(ing) out loud	29			2	1
	laugh				1	
	lots of love	1				
bf	best friend	9	4			5
	boy friend	7	1		1	
	best friend or boy friend	6			1	
fe	iron (periodic table)	1				18
	for ever		3	4	5	
	furry eggs			1		
	feeling emotional			1		
	fairytale ending				1	
fyi	for your information	25		1	4	4
emo	emotional	7	4		4	13

Table 6.3 continued

	end my office			1		
	even more over				1	
	goth kids		1			
	person that cuts wrist		1		2	
roflmao	rolling on floor laughing my ass off	18	1		3	12
brb	be right back	24			2	7
	baking rolls belivolars [sic]			1		
jam	just a minute	11	2	3	2	13
	jack ass monster				1	
	sandwich topping		1			
	jump and move			1		
pc	personal computer	8	4	1	2	14
	price clerk		1			
	peace		1			
	please come			1		
	por cay			1		
	protect chad				1	
nagi	not a good idea	5				26
	not again			1		
	not a great instinct				1	
	nagisaki			1		
nb	nota bene					23
	nobody			2		
	not bad		1	2		
	not back			1		
	noob				1	
	new bush shoe factory			1		
	near by			1		
	no biggy			1		
	nickel back				1	
ad	anno domini					22
	after death			2	2	
	all done			2		
	additionally			1		
	advertisement	1		2		

Table 6.3 continued

	a donkey			1		
	pesrer [sic]			1		
kwim	know what I mean					30
	keep women in mind				1	
	know when I'm mad				1	
	keep writing I'm			1		
	kill white iguana maggots			1		
ps	post scriptum	3	1	4	1	21
	photo shop			1		
	plus			1		
	pot smoker				1	
	pill swallower			1		
bcg	Bacille Calmette Guérin					30
	be careful goon				1	
	bring cady game			1		
	be carring greacious [sic]			1		
	boiling canned green beans			1		
tnx	thanks	7	4		1	21
	thanks or thanxs				1	
bgn	begin	2	3	1	1	21
	bees gene nuts				1	
	bye guy newt				1	
	be great nextime [sic]			1		
	began			1		
	big 'un		1			
	bye good night			1		
sms	short message service					24
	standard messenging system [sic]	1		1	2	
	so many songs			1		
	simple microwave sound				1	
	see me smile			1		
	suck my sandwich				1	
	suck my sausage			1		
	see my self [sic]			1		

Table 6.3 continued

ie	that is					25
	example	2	1	2	2	
	extra			1		
	irky egg				1	
nkotb	New Kids on the Block					28
	not kicking on the ball				1	
	never kick out the bat			1		
	nobody knows other trey ballers			1		
	not kwit [sic] out the bed			1		
	not know of the beginning			1		
	not kicking old tin bars			1		
atm	automated teller machine	2		1		18
	automatic time machine			1	1	
	where you get money	1				
	at the moment	5		1	1	
	at this moment				1	
	asist tu madre				1	
	at the mouth				1	
vip	very important person	13	1		4	15
	very important			1		
sys	see you soon	2	2		1	20
	send your system			1		
	so your [sic] skitzophrenic			1		
	see you sunday [sic]			2		
	system	1	1	1		
	say your [sic] sorry		1		1	

Any spelling mistakes or words that are usually written as one word in Standard English but are written as two words in the questionnaire by the informants are presented as they were written by the respondents.

6.4 The questionnaires: high school students (female)

The results pertaining to the questionnaires from the female respondents are presented in Table 6.4 below in the same way as the results from the male students were presented.

Table 6.4

Abbreviation	Meaning	I'm certain of the meaning	I'm a bit uncertain of the meaning	I took a guess at what it could mean	No indication of certainty	No answer at all
lol	laugh(ing) out loud	19				
	laugh out loud or lots of love	1				
	a lot	1				
bf	best friend	5	2			
	boy friend	2	1			
	best friend or boy friend	8	2	1		
fe	iron (periodic table)	1				14
	for ever	2				
	Iron or fairytale ending	1				
	friend				1	
	fee			1		
	friendly enemy			1		
fyi	for your information	18			1	1
	fight			1		
emo	emotional	5	6	1		8
	sad			1		
roflmao	rolling on floor laughing my ass off	18	1			2
brb	be right back	18			2	1
jam	just a minute	4	6		1	9
	jammin			1		
pc	personal computer	1	3	1	1	10
	portable computer			2		
	pickled cucumber			1		
	peace				1	
	picture comment			1		
nagi	not a good idea	4	3		1	13
nb	nota bene					14
	no bother		1			
	not bad		1			
	no big /biggie		3	1		
	nothing but				1	

Table 6.4 continued

ad	anno domini	1				15
	after death	1	2			
	after dark			1		
	advertisement	1				
kwim	know what I mean					14
	know when I'm mad		1	2	1	
	fruit name			1		
	swim		1			
	kwik mart			1		
ps	post scriptum	7	1			10
	personal secret		2			
	personal				1	
bcg	Bacille Calmette Guérin					16
	be careful goon			1	1	
	be careful girlfriend		1			
	because good			1		
	big cats growl			1		
tnx	thanks	8	3			9
	tanks				1	
bgn	begin / began	3	4	3	1	7
	be gone now	1	1		1	
sms	short message service					13
	standard messaging service	2	1			
	standard messaging system		1	2		
	send / save me some			1		
	so much sushi			1		
ie	that is					12
	in example	6		2		
	internet explorer	1				
nkotb	New Kids on the Block					19
	not kicking outside box			1		
	not knowing other time bob			1		
atm	automated teller machine	3	2			9
	automated transaction machine			1		
	at this moment		1			

Table 6.4 continued

	at that moment		1			
	at the moment	3				
	machine		1			
vip	very important person	10	5			6
sys	see you soon	5	1			10
	so you say		1			
	system			2	1	
	sorry you're sick			1		

6.5 The questionnaires: university students (male)

The questionnaires from the university students are also divided according to sex. The results pertaining to the questionnaires from the male university students are presented in Table 6.5 below:

Table 6.5

Abbreviation	Meaning	I'm certain of the meaning	I'm a bit uncertain of the meaning	I took a guess at what it could mean	No indication of certainty	No answer at all
lol	laugh(ing) out loud	7			2	
bf	best friend	2				
	boy friend	2	1		1	1
	best friend or boy friend	1			1	
fe	iron			1		4
	for ever		1	2		
	forget everything			1		
fyi	for your information	6			3	
emo	emotional	1	2	1	1	4
roflmao	rolling on floor laughing my ass off	5		1	1	2
brb	be right back	7			2	
jam	just a minute		1		1	6
	NBA Jam			1		
pc	personal computer	3	2			3
	politically correct		1			

Table 6.5 continued

nagi	not a good idea					8
	now and again			1		
nb	nota bene					4
	nobody		1	1		
	no biggy		1		1	
	not bad			1		
ad	anno domini					6
	additional			1		
	advertisement	1				
	another day				1	
kwim	know what I mean	1				8
ps	post scriptum	2	1			6
bcg	Bacille Calmette Guérin					8
	but can guess			1		
tnx	thanks	4		1	1	3
bgn	begin		1	2		6
sms	short message service					7
	something on I phones (message)			1		
	text message				1	
ie	that is or in example					5
	in example	1	2			
	internet explorer		1			
nkotb	New Kids on the Block					8
	tie a knot			1		
atm	automated teller machine	1	3			4
	at the moment				1	
vip	very important person	5		1	2	1
sys	see you soon		1		1	4
	system		2	1		

6.6 The questionnaires: university students (female)

The results pertaining to the questionnaires from the female respondents from university are presented in Table 6.6 below.

Table 6.6

Abbreviation	Meaning	I'm certain of the meaning	I'm a bit uncertain of the meaning	I took a guess at what it could mean	No indication of certainty	No answer at all
lol	laug(ing) out loud	14				
	laugh out loud or lots of love	1				
bf	best friend					
	boy friend	9	1			
	best friend or boy friend	4	1			
fe	iron	1		1	1	8
	for ever			4		
fyi	for your information	15				
emo	emotional	1	2	1		7
	goth person			1	1	
	scary kids			1		
	death wishers				1	
roflmao	rolling on floor laughing my ass off	7	2			6
brb	be right back	15				
jam	just a minute		1			11
	like jelly			1	1	
	ROCK OUT (I have no clue)			1		
pc	personal computer	1	1	2	1	7
	politically correct	1	1	1		
nagi	not a good idea					14
	lame			1		
nb	nota bene					13
	not bad		1			
	no bother			1		
ad	anno domini					13
	advertisement		1		1	
kwim	know what I mean					15
ps	post scriptum	4	2			9
bcg	Bacille Calmette Guérin					14
	because guy			1		

Table 6.6 continued

tnx	thanks	2	3		2	7
	tuning nasty xylophones			1		
bgn	begin		1	4	1	8
	beginning			1		
sms	short message service					10
	text message on Blackberry	1				
	text message	1	1		1	
	message - instant		1			
ie	that is					7
	example	5	1	1	1	
nkotb	New Kids on the Block					14
	no kings on the boat			1		
atm	automated teller machine	1		1	1	8
	where you get money	1				
	automatic time machine		1	1		
	at the moment	1				
vip	very important person	7	1			7
sys	see you soon					10
	system		2	2	1	

Quite interestingly, both informants who claimed not to abbreviate and those who admitted doing so sometimes wrote 'IDK' instead of offering an interpretation to the abbreviation. *IDK* is abbreviated for 'I don't know'.

6.7 Additional questions from the questionnaire

The answers from the questions that were asked at the end of the questionnaire are listed in the tables below, starting with question 1 in Table 6.7a.

Table 6.7a

Question 1; Do you sometimes abbreviate when you intend to write Standard English?	High school (male) (34 informants)	High school (female) (21 informants)	University (male) (9 informants)	University (female) (15 informants)
Yes	19	13	3	11
No	12	6	4	3
Sometimes	1	2		1
No answer	2		2	

Table 6.7a shows that 19 male informants and 13 female informants from high school abbreviated when they intended to write Standard English. Three male informants from university abbreviated when they did not intend to do so, compared to 11 female informants. Less than half of all of the informants did not abbreviate when they intend to write Standard English, and some informants abbreviated occasionally.

The answers from question 2 are presented in Table 6.7b below:

Table 6.7b

Question 2; How many text messages do you send per day?	High school (male)	High school (female)	University (male)	University (female)
0-10 per day	15	5	2	2
10-20	2	3	3	
30	1	1	2	2
Over 50	5	2		3
70	1			2
100	2	3		4
150	1	2		
200	2			1
250				1
325		1		
400		1		
400-600		1		
700	1			
A lot		1		
No answer	4	1	2	

Table 6.7b indicates that the majority of the male informants from high school sent between zero and 10 text messages per day. Some male informants from high school sent more than 100 per day, and one sent 700 text messages per day. The female informants from high school sent between zero and 600 text messages per day. The male informants from university did not send more than 30 text messages per day, whereas the female students from university sent between zero and 250 per day.

The answers from the third question are listed in Table 6.7c below:

6.7c

Question

Informants

3. Do you abbreviate when you write text messages?	High school (male)	High school (female)	University (male)	University (female)
Yes	16	15	4	10
No	9	2		1
Sometimes	7	3	3	4
No answer	2	0	2	
No mobile phone		1		

Table 6.7c shows that more than half of the male and female informants from high school abbreviated when they sent text messages. Some male informants from university abbreviated regularly, and some on occasion. The majority of the female informants from university abbreviated regularly in text messages, and only one female informant from university never did so.

As the tables from 6.1 and 6.2 show, various features that are frequently associated with the text messaging phenomenon were found in both the handwritten and the typewritten essays. Tables 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 show that all of the abbreviations, both those that are considered standard and those that are associated with text messaging, can be interpreted variably. Tables 6.7a, b and c show how many text messages high school students and university students sent per day, which can provide a better understanding for how many, or how few, of the abbreviations they interpreted according to what is common within the language of text messaging, cf. Crystal (2008). How important these findings are will be discussed in chapter 7.

Chapter 7 – Interpretations of the results

7.1 The results from the essays

The following includes interpretations of the results from both the typewritten and the handwritten essays collected from the high school students. As mentioned in chapter 5, the typewritten essays were 51 in total, and the handwritten ones were 58 altogether. These numbers are almost equal, and it therefore seems appropriate to compare the essays.

7.1.1a Abbreviations: typewritten essays

The abbreviations found in the typewritten essays amounted to a total of 6, which indicates that abbreviations were not frequently used. This may be due to the fact that the students used a computer for these particular essays, and as most word processing programmes provide a spellcheck, abbreviated forms of words will automatically be underlined by the computer. This makes it easier for the writer to notice any irregularities, and abbreviations may be avoided. However, *Brit's* (for *British people*) was included in one of the essays. This abbreviation corresponds to that typically found in spoken English but is not a part of formal Standard English. *Thru* (for *through*) occurred in one of the essays, and this abbreviation is frequently used in both text messaging as well as in Internet chat. The last example from 6.1.1 is *image* (for *imagine*). This abbreviation can be seen as a spelling mistake rather than a deliberately abbreviated word. The use of *image* for “imagine” is typical of neither spoken, nor text messaging English.

7.1.1b Abbreviations: handwritten essays

Abbreviations occurred on 167 occasions altogether in the handwritten essays, which is in sharp contrast to the results from the typewritten essays. It was possible to understand most of the abbreviations based on the context (or based on other students' essays). However, many of the abbreviations appeared with no explanation at all, and were therefore difficult to interpret. The most frequently occurring abbreviations were *FDR* and *RR* (for *Franklin D. Roosevelt* and *rail road*), and these abbreviations were associated with the topic of the essays. Therefore, they cannot be seen as typical of text messaging. *&* (for *and*), however, is typically found in text messaging (cf. Crystal 2008). This use saves several keystrokes and may save valuable space in a text message. The use of *w/* (for *with*) is also typical of text messaging, as well as the use of *cuz* (for *because*), *yrs* (for *years*)

and 2 (for *two*). By abbreviating *amendment* to *am*, the writer saves seven characters (or letters), which is considered a substantial amount of characters in text messaging. Although the word *amendment* is not likely to appear frequently in text messaging, the concept of writing the first few letters of a long word and deleting the rest of the word is typical of text messaging. This suggests that text messaging has changed people's attitude towards the written language, seeing how students abbreviate words that are not normally part of text messaging as well. *Em* (for *them*) is not a part of Standard English. However, it is frequently found in text messaging.

7.1.2a Incomplete sentences: typewritten essays

The results of Table 6.1.2 indicates that incomplete sentences occurred on 19 occasions in the typewritten essays. Young adults participating in Internet chat seem to use incomplete sentences rather frequently. The need to give rapid responses in order to contribute to the ongoing conversation or discussion online is essential, and using incomplete sentences allows for a quick response to be posted. In text messaging, the use of incomplete sentences is sometimes necessary in order not to exceed the amount of characters at hand. As these particular essays were written on a computer, the resemblance to writing an email or participating in an Internet chat may be striking. I am therefore not surprised by the fact that incomplete sentences occurred in almost half of the typewritten essays.

7.1.2b Incomplete sentences: handwritten essays

The use of incomplete sentences was not as frequent in the handwritten essays as it was in the typewritten ones. There were only 12 occurrences of incomplete sentences in the handwritten essays. Writing by hand does not resemble writing a text message or participating in Internet chat, and one might therefore not expect the use of incomplete sentences to be as frequent in handwritten assignments as in typewritten ones. Nevertheless, about one fifth of the students included this particular feature in their essays.

7.1.3a Contractions: typewritten essays

The distribution of the various contracted forms found in the typewritten essays (as presented in Table 6.1.3) indicates that 207 instances of contracted forms occurred in the typewritten essays. In text messaging and Internet chat, it seems that contracted forms are considerably more common than forms that have not been contracted. Writing *did not* in a text message rather than *didn't* rarely

occurs, unless it is to put emphasis on the two words.

7.1.3b Contractions: handwritten essays

In comparison to the typewritten essays, contractions occurred on 119 occasions in the handwritten essays, which means that they were almost twice as commonly used in the typewritten essays.

These results may not be surprising because young adults may be more used to contracting forms when they write on a computer (because of Internet chat and emails) than when they write by hand.

7.1.4a Non standard use of apostrophe: typewritten essays

Non standard use of the apostrophe occurred on 45 occasions in the typewritten essays. Non use of the apostrophe is relatively frequent in text messaging (cf. Crystal 2008), as well as in Internet chat. The use of the apostrophe where it should not have been used according to the norms of Standard English cannot be seen in connection with text messaging or Internet chat, where the trend is to delete letters and characters rather than add more characters than necessary. Non standard use of the apostrophe by adding an apostrophe might instead be seen as an example of rules that some students are not familiar with (cf. Truss 2003).

7.1.4b Non standard use of apostrophe: handwritten essays

In the handwritten essays, non standard use of the apostrophe occurred on 49 occasions. Non use of the apostrophe occurred relatively frequently, which may indicate that students in general seem to be unfamiliar with the norms of use of the apostrophe in Standard English.

7.1.5a Lower case letters: typewritten essays

Table 6.1.5 indicates that lower case letters occurred on 32 occasions in the typewritten essays. On some mobile phones, a capital letter does not automatically occur after a full stop, and some texters seem to find it too time consuming to type in a capital letter rather than a lower case one. A capital letter is relatively easily typed on a computer, requiring only one key to be pressed in addition to the key with the letter one wants. Spellcheck programmes automatically insert a capital letter after a full stop. However, in Internet chat, the use of lower case letters in every situation (e.g. in names, in proper nouns and at the beginning of sentences) seems to be the norm. This might therefore be reflected in typewritten essays.

7.1.5b Lower case letters: handwritten essays

The use of lower case letters in the handwritten essays is surprisingly frequent, with 161 occurrences. This number is five times higher than the number in the typewritten essays. The use of lower case letters in handwritten assignments may be due to the fact that writing lower case letters has become a habit for many young adults. When there is no spellcheck available, the informants may not have noticed that they used lower case letters.

7.1.6a Non standard spelling: typewritten essays

Table 6.1.6a indicates that 16 instances of so-called split words, i.e. words that are normally written as one word in Standard English but were written as two words in the essays, occurred. Some word processing programmes do not accept compound words, and many writers therefore divide the compound words. From this, it follows that this feature is expected to occur more frequently in the typewritten essays than in the handwritten ones. However, dividing words cannot be seen in connection with either text messaging or Internet chat, where dividing words would mean one more keystroke and one less character available. Table 6.1.6b, on the other hand, indicates that several students have difficulties with the spelling of *woman* versus *women*. This has nothing to do with the use of mobile phones or Internet, to the best of my knowledge, rather it might indicate that this is something which needs to be practised through education. Non standard spelling in text messaging is a frequently occurring feature. However, the instances found in the typewritten essays are not typical of text messaging because they do not save any keystrokes or characters.

7.1.6b Non standard spelling: handwritten essays

Table 6.2.6a shows 8 instances altogether of words that have been split, which are otherwise written as one word in Standard English. As expected, this feature occurred on twice as many occasions in the typewritten essays, which may be due to the use of spellcheck and word processing programmes. There is no logical reason why this feature should occur in handwriting, other than that the students concerned might not be familiar with the norms of Standard English in this respect. The results from Table 6.2.6b might indicate that some students need more practise in Standard written English, rather than that the occurrences are due to the language of text messaging, as the results presented in Table 6.2.6b are not typical of text messaging. However, *bettr* (for *better*), and *angrd* (for *angered*) are typical examples of the language of text messaging, where deleting a letter is common when the pronunciation is otherwise not affected by this. The use of symbols instead of

letters is commonly found in electronic communication, and is illustrated by the use of @\$\$\$ for *asses*. One would therefore expect this use to occur in the typewritten essays rather than in the handwritten ones. The use of @ in various situations (e.g. instead of *a*, *at*, *art*, and for making a rose: @}-->---) became popular in the mid 1990s, when the Internet and mobile phones were available to anyone who could afford them. One might therefore say that the occurrence of @\$\$\$ illustrates the impact technology has had on people's everyday use of language. The replacement of letters with symbols is commonly used as euphemisms in electronic communication.

7.1.7a Exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks: typewritten essays

As table 6.1.7 indicates, exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks did not occur frequently in the typewritten essays. With only three occurrences altogether, this use is too infrequent for any conclusions to be made.

7.1.7b Exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks: handwritten essays

As was the case in the typewritten essays, exaggerated use of exclamation points, periods and question marks did not occur frequently in the handwritten essays. Two occurrences in the handwritten essays compared to three occurrences in the typewritten essays are not enough to base any conclusions upon.

7.1.8a Informal language: typewritten essays

In the typewritten essays, 19 instances of informal language (e.g. in the form of novel adjectives and personal references) occurred. The use of formal language in Internet chat and text messaging seems to be against the norm of electronic communication because these particular forums are usually highly informal. As writing on a computer may be associated with e.g. writing an email, the use of informal language is expected to be more frequent in the typewritten essays than in the handwritten ones.

7.1.8b Informal language: handwritten essays

In the handwritten essays, 12 instances of informal language occurred. This result is as one might expect, according to the explanation in 7.1.8a above. Writing by hand does not resemble writing on

a mobile phone, and the total number of occurrences is naturally lower in the handwritten essays than in the typewritten ones. Informal language only occurred in about one fifth of the handwritten essays (12 out of 58), compared to almost one third (19 out of 51) in the typewritten ones.

7.1.9a The use of capital letters: typewritten essays

As Crystal (2008) says, capital letters are often used in electronic communication to indicate shouting, to draw attention to particular words or phrases, or to emphasise that a particular word is important. In Standard English, stressing a particular word is normally done by writing in italics. The total number of words that were written in capital letters in the typewritten essays is seven.

7.1.9b The use of capital letters: handwritten essays

Capital letters were used on nine occasions in the handwritten essays. Some students may find it easier to write in capital letters than in italics when they are writing by hand, and this may be the reason why there are more instances of this feature in the handwritten essays than in the typewritten ones. On a computer, it is fairly easy to recognise words that have been written in italics, whereas in handwritten assignments, some people may find it difficult to write in italics if they have little training in this. However, the total number in both the typewritten essays and the handwritten ones is almost equal, and might therefore be of no significance.

As the results above show, some features that are frequently used in text messaging were found in both the handwritten and the typewritten essays. Abbreviations occurred on surprisingly many occasions in the handwritten essays, and it was sometimes difficult to understand what the abbreviations meant, as they occurred without any explanation. Some of the abbreviations were also typical of the language of text messaging, such as *em* for *them*, and also the deletion of seven characters in *amendment*. Incomplete sentences and contractions also occurred frequently in both the handwritten and the typewritten essays. The use of lower case letters was surprisingly frequent in the handwritten essays. I see this as a result of text messaging and Internet habits, where young adults hardly ever seem to use initial capital letters unless it occurs automatically on their mobile phone or computer screen. Ling reported that 82 per cent of all text messages have no capitalisation at all, and only seven per cent of texters used capital letters in names and at the beginning of follow-up sentences (in Crystal 2008).

7.2 The results from the questionnaires

The informants from high school were 55 altogether; 21 female and 34 male informants. The informants are kept separate according to sex, as explained in Chapter 5. The number of female and male informants is not equal, and the results will therefore not be entirely comparable. The distribution of female and male informants from university is even more unequal, with 15 female informants and nine male informants.

7.2.1 *lol*

Tables 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 indicate that *lol* for *laugh(ing) out loud* is a well established abbreviation among young adults in my sample. Only one high school male informant said that this meant *lots of love*, as did one female informant from university. This abbreviation was almost exclusively interpreted as *laugh(ing) out loud*. *Lol* is now frequently used in speech as well as in informal writing among young adults, and this abbreviation is well established among high school students as well as among university students.

7.2.2a *bf*

The abbreviation *bf* offers for more variation in interpretation. The majority of the male high school informants (13 informants) said that *bf* meant *best friend*. The rest said either *boyfriend*, or that it meant both *best friend* and *boyfriend*. (Five male high school informants did not suggest any interpretation of this abbreviation.) One third of the female high school informants said that *bf* meant *best friend*, whereas only three said it meant *boyfriend*. The majority of the female high school informants (11 informants) said it meant both *best friend* and *boyfriend*. The university informants interpreted this as either *best friend* or *boyfriend*. Most female students interpret this abbreviation in two ways, whereas most male students interpret it as *best friend*. This opens for misunderstandings if the abbreviation is used in a context such as “*c u l8r bf!*”, especially if this is written by a girl in a text message sent to a boy.

7.2.3 *fe*

Crystal (2008) includes the following poem in his book *Txtng: the gr8 db8*:

14: a txt msg pom.
his is r bunsn brnr bl%,
his hair lyk fe filings
W/ac/dc going thru.
I sit by him in kemistry,
it splits my @oms

wen he :-s @ me²¹ (Crystal 2008:15-16).

Crystal explains that 'on first glance it [the poem] seems to be totally deviant. But ... *fe*, *ac*, and *dc* are standard abbreviations' (Crystal 2008: 16). Although *fe* is a standard abbreviation, I did not expect many students to write that *fe* meant *iron*. Only one male high school student wrote that it meant *iron*, and he also indicated that he was certain of the meaning. This student was labelled a "smart student" by others because he had chosen to study the most theoretical subjects.²² One male informant from university also wrote *iron*. Most of the other male informants indicated that *fe* meant *for ever*, and the rest did not write anything. In comparison with the male informants, only one female high school informant indicated that she was certain that *fe* meant *iron*, in addition to one who wrote that it meant *iron or fairytale ending*. Both of these informants were labelled "smart students" by their peers. Three female university informants wrote *iron*. The majority of the female informants did not give any suggestions for what the abbreviation could mean, and some informants were certain that it meant *for ever*. Because of the fact that most male and female informants did not suggest any interpretation for *fe*, one may conclude that most young adults do not know the meaning of this abbreviation, however standard. This makes the poem in Crystal (2008) very difficult for young adults to comprehend.

7.2.4 *fyi*

Almost all of the male informants had no difficulties understanding this abbreviation, as the overwhelming majority of them wrote that it meant *for your information*. The majority of the female informants also wrote that *fyi* meant *for your information*. This indicates that *fyi* will most likely not be misunderstood among young adults, and it is often heard in speech as well as seen in writing.

7.2.5 *emo*

Emo proved to be a more dubious abbreviation, as 15 male high school students wrote that it meant *emotional*, and almost as many (13 male high school students) did not have any suggestions at all. Several of the informants associated *emo* with the Gothic subculture. Table 6.3 indicates that almost half of the male high school students would most likely not understand the meaning of the abbreviation if they were presented with it in a text message. None of the female high school students interpreted *emo* as something that could be associated with the Gothic subculture. 12 female high school informants wrote *emotional*, and one wrote *sad*, which is also associated with feelings. Table 6.4 indicates that if someone were to use *emo* in the sense of *Gothic*, the female high

21 14: a text message poem. His eyes are bunsen burner blue, his hair like iron filings with ac/dc going through. I sit by him in chemistry, it splits my atoms when he smiles at me.

22 Their teacher informed me of this.

school students would misinterpret the expression. The only interpretation that was offered by the male informants was *emotional*, whereas the female informants interpreted this as both *emotional* and the Gothic subculture. In other words, this abbreviation opens for misunderstandings among the male and female university students.

7.2.6 roflmao

Rolling on floor laughing my ass off was the only interpretation offered by the male high school students, and almost all of the informants were certain of the meaning. The rest of the male high school informants (12) did not write anything. This indicates that if this abbreviation is used in electronic communication, two thirds of the male high school students would understand what it meant, and one third would need an explanation. As many as 19 of the 21 female informants were either certain or a bit uncertain that the abbreviation meant *rolling on floor laughing my ass off*. This indicates that most female high school students are very familiar with this abbreviation, and it is not likely to be misunderstood. This may support Crystal's (2008) claim that women are more frequent users of abbreviations than men. *Roflmao* was widely understood by both male and female university informants, which indicates that this abbreviation is well established.

7.2.7 brb

Brb is not likely to be misunderstood by male or female high school and university students, as almost all of the informants wrote that it meant *be right back*, which is the meaning commonly used in electronic communication. As was the case with *roflmao*, the *brb* abbreviation is not likely to be misunderstood by any of the male or female high school and university students.

7.2.8 jam

More than half of the male high school students wrote that this abbreviation meant *just a minute*, which is the interpretation that Crystal (2008) offers. There was some uncertainty among the male informants, as many of them did not write anything. Thus, *jam* is most likely to be understood as *just a minute*, or not be understood at all. 11 female high school informants wrote that *jam* meant *just a minute*, and most of them were either certain or a bit uncertain. Many informants did not write anything. As with the male students, most female students are either most likely to understand the abbreviation as *just a minute*, or not understand it at all.

7.2.9 pc

15 of the male high school informants wrote that *pc* meant *personal computer*. Almost as many (14) did not write anything, and the rest offered various other interpretations. I find the results rather

surprising, as many young adults today seem to spend a lot of their free time on the computer. It is quite common among young adults to own a computer of their own today as well. One would therefore expect a higher number of informants to write *personal computer*. Only six of the female high school students wrote *personal computer*, and two wrote *portable computer*. The university informants also offered *politically correct* as a possible interpretation. Many informants did not write anything, and the rest offered various interpretations. This indicates that this abbreviation may not be understood, even though it has been in the English language for several decades.

7.2.10 *nagi*

Crystal (2008) claims that this is an abbreviation that frequently appears in text messaging. However, only five male high school informants wrote that this meant *not a good idea*. 26 of them did not know what it meant, which indicates that this abbreviation is rarely used by male high school students. Eight female high school students wrote *not a good idea*, which suggests that female high school students are more familiar with this abbreviation than males. However, many of the female informants did not write anything, which indicates that this abbreviation is not yet a well established one within electronic communication and the language as a whole. Almost none of the university students offered any interpretation for this abbreviation.

7.2.11 *nb*

None of the informants wrote that this meant *nota bene* ("note well"), even though this abbreviation has been a part of the English language since 1673, according to Crystal (2008). The majority of the students did not write anything. This supports my hypothesis that young adults do not know the standard abbreviations. The informants who did write something, offered different interpretations for *nb*.

7.2.12 *ad*

Anno domini is also a well established abbreviation in Standard English but surprisingly, none of the male informants wrote this. Only one female high school informant did, and this was the same informant who wrote *iron* for *fe*. None of the female university informants wrote *anno domini*. Most of the informants did not write anything, which suggests that *ad* will not be understood according to Standard English.

7.2.13 *kwim*

According to Crystal (2008) *kwim* is used in the meaning of *know what I mean* in electronic communication, and is typically associated with text messaging. However, none of the male high

school informants shared Crystal's knowledge about this, and as many as 30 of them did not write anything. Only one male university informant wrote *know what I mean*. This abbreviation will most likely not be understood by male students. None of the female students knew what this abbreviation meant, and more than half of them did not offer any suggestions at all. Tables 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 indicate that none of the high school students use this abbreviation in text messaging.

7.2.14 *ps*

Less than one third of the male informants and about one third of the female students wrote that *ps* meant *post scriptum*. Most of the informants wrote nothing. The rest offered new interpretations of this abbreviation, even though the abbreviation has been a part of the Standard English language for a considerable period of time.

7.2.15 *bcg*

As expected, none of the informants interpreted this abbreviation like I do myself, i.e. as the injection that prevents tuberculosis (*Bacille Calmette Guérin*), and the overwhelming majority wrote nothing. The rest offered various suggestions, and one female high school informant indicated that she thought it meant *be careful girlfriend*. However, she was a bit uncertain of this meaning, which indicates that she does not use this abbreviation in any sense.

7.2.16 *tnx*

According to Crystal (2008) and personal experience, *tnx* seems to be a well established abbreviation within electronic communication. However, two thirds of the male high school informants and one third of the male university informants did not write anything for this abbreviation. The rest of them wrote *thanks*, which is as expected. Only half of the female informants wrote *thanks* and the rest (except from one informant) wrote nothing. I find these results very surprising, as I expected this particular abbreviation to be the one that would be understood most easily among all of the informants.

7.2.17 *bgn*

The majority of the male informants did not offer any interpretation for this abbreviation, and some of them wrote *begin*. Not all of them were certain of the meaning, which opens for misinterpretations if they encounter this abbreviation. Half of the female informants wrote *begin or began*, and many of them did not write anything. This indicates that if used, this abbreviation is likely to be misunderstood by both male and female students.

7.2.18 sms

The overwhelming majority did not know that this abbreviation meant *short messaging service*, and only a few of them indicated that it had something to do with text messaging. This is quite surprising, and rather ironic, as the male informants sent up to 700 text messages per day, and the female informants sent up to 600 text messages per day. Thus it is fairly safe to say that both male and female students are frequent users of the *short message service*, even though they do not know the term for it.

7.2.19 ie

This is a standard abbreviation, however none of the informants wrote that *ie* means *that is*. I find this very surprising. Seven of the male high school informants interpreted this as something which had to do with an example. Two thirds of the male high school informants wrote nothing at all, which indicates that most male high school students would not use this abbreviation in written assignments, as they do not seem to know the meaning of the abbreviation. Eight of the female high school informants and half of the university informants thought this meant *example*. More than half of the female high school informants, and half of the female university informants did not write anything, which indicates that this particular abbreviation is not very common among students, and it supports my hypothesis number 2.

7.2.20 nkotb

None of the informants associated this abbreviation with the pop group *New Kids on the Block*. Although *nkotb* can hardly be called a standard abbreviation, the group is from America and they recently had a comeback, so one would perhaps expect young adults to be familiar with them. The overwhelming majority did not offer any interpretations for this abbreviation.

7.2.21a atm

Only a few informants associated this abbreviation with transaction of money. Most of the informants did not write anything, and the majority of the ones who offered different interpretations wrote that it meant *at the moment*, and they were certain of the meaning. I find this rather surprising, as most of the students most likely have withdrawn money from such a machine, and the *atms* appear on almost every corner of the streets. The commonly used interpretation in electronic communication (i.e. *at the moment*) seems to be more common among students these days than the meaning associated with money transactions.

7.2.22 vip

Half of the male high school informants and almost all of the male university informants knew the standard interpretation of this, and wrote that it meant *very important person*. However, almost half of the male high school informants did not write anything, which partly supports my hypothesis that the old abbreviations are forgotten by the younger generations. Two thirds of the female high school informants and half of the female university informants wrote *very important person*, and the rest wrote nothing. However, some of them were a bit uncertain, as was the case with the male informants. The fact that no other interpretation was offered for this abbreviation does not support my hypothesis that students offer new interpretations of the old and standard abbreviations.

7.2.23 sys

The last abbreviation on the questionnaire was found in Crystal (2008) and according to Crystal, this was commonly used as *see you soon* in text messaging. However, most of the male informants did not offer any interpretation, and there was considerable variation among those who did write something. This abbreviation is therefore likely to be misunderstood. Almost one third of the female high school informants wrote *see you soon*, and they indicated that they were certain of the meaning. This supports Crystal's (2008) claim that women abbreviate more than men. However, none of the female university informants did not write *see you soon*, and half of the female high school informants, and two thirds of the female university informants did not write anything, which indicates that this abbreviation will not be understood by many students if encountered in a text message.

The abbreviations that seem to be relatively frequently used in text messaging (and also in spoken language) were the ones that were interpreted in the same way by most of the informants. There was little variation in the interpretation of abbreviations such as *lol* and *fyi*. Less established abbreviations within the language of text messaging, such as *nagi* and *jam*, opened for different interpretations, and will most probably lead to misunderstandings in many cases if they are used. The old and standard abbreviations were not understood according to Standard English, which suggests that young adults do not understand and do not use these standard abbreviations. In cases where the informants took a guess at what the abbreviation could mean (and they indicated this by ticking the corresponding box on the questionnaire), their interpretation may be disregarded. However, in cases where they indicated that they were certain of the meaning, their interpretation provides a general picture of how young adults interpret the abbreviations on the questionnaire.

The questions that were asked at the end of the questionnaire showed me that even though some informants sent several hundred text messages per day, there was not always a clear

connection between how many text messages the informants sent per day and how many of the abbreviations that are frequently used in text messaging they interpreted according to what is common within text messaging. Some informants sent between 1-10 text messages per day, and their results were almost equal to the results from the informants who sent over 200 text messages per day. The most frequent texters were not always the ones who interpreted the abbreviations according to what is commonly accepted within the language of text messaging (cf. Crystal 2008). The well established abbreviations within the language of text messaging were interpreted in more or less the same way by both male and female informants. The standard abbreviation *vip* was understood according to Standard English by more female informants than male informants. However, Crystal's (2008) claim that women were the most frequent texters and that they abbreviated the most did not seem to be of any significance when it came to the questionnaires. Both sexes interpreted the well established abbreviations within the language of text messaging in more or less the same way, and the abbreviations that are coming into more use opened for different interpretations by both sexes.

As I did not have more than 24 informants from university, one may not be able to depend completely upon the results from this age group. However, 55 informants from high school is (in my opinion) sufficient in order to get a general idea of young adults' language use.

7.3 Summary

In view of my results;

Hypothesis 1 (high school students do not keep the language of text messaging separate from standard written English texts, so that text messaging language is used in school work) was strongly corroborated.

Hypothesis 2 (students do not know standard written English abbreviations and offer new interpretations of these abbreviations) was strongly corroborated.

Hypothesis 3 (there is considerable variation in the interpretation of abbreviations typically used in text messaging) was corroborated.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

The prophecies that texting inevitably will erode children's ability to spell, punctuate and capitalise correctly, and that children will transfer these new habits into their schoolwork seem to have some truth to them, despite what Crystal (2008) says. Crystal reported on his work with teenagers from schools in the United Kingdom. He asked them whether they would use text message abbreviations in their schoolwork, and they looked at him 'with blank incomprehension' (Crystal 2008: 152). The students answered that they had never heard of anybody who used text message abbreviations in their schoolwork, and that 'you'd have to be pretty stupid not to know the difference' (Crystal 2008: 152). He also maintains that 'all the evidence suggests that belief in an impending linguistic disaster is a consequence of a mythology largely created by the media. Children's use of text abbreviations has been hugely exaggerated' (Crystal 2008: 173). However, my fieldwork in the United States supported my hypothesis that high school students do not keep the language of text messaging separate from Standard English written texts, so that text messaging language is used in school work. If high school students do not keep the language of text messaging separate from Standard English, there is reason to believe that younger pupils do not keep the languages separate either.

Crystal says that '[i]f there are children who are unaware of the difference between texting and standard English, then it is up to teachers to make them aware. If there are children whose discourse skills are being hampered by texting, then it is up to teachers to show them how to improve' (Crystal 2008: 165). In other words, teachers are given a great responsibility when it comes to raising the awareness of appropriate and non appropriate language behaviour. However, politicians sometimes seem to be of the opinion that school and education should be 'fun', and that there is no point in teaching grammar explicitly. This makes it very difficult for teachers to include more aspects of grammar in the lessons without losing the students' attention. Once the students have left school, it is not the teachers' responsibility to ensure that people use Standard English in formal writing. It is then up to each individual to make sure that they maintain the rules of Standard English.

'We know from studies of spoken language that people influence each other in the way they speak, often by adopting features of the accent of the person they are talking to. Very likely, a similar accommodation takes place in text messaging' (Crystal 2008: 58). The problem here might be that weak pupils, or those who are not certain of the rules of Standard English, may not be able to distinguish the text messaging language that their peers use from Standard English that should be used in school work. Crystal says that texters are prone to mis-spell, either deliberately or unconsciously, and that '[t]hey would not be able to use the mobile phone technology at all if they had not been taught to read and write, and this means they all had a grounding in the standard

English writing system' (Crystal 2008: 48). Increasingly younger people get their own mobile phone, and they are fully able to use the mobile phone even though they have not been taught the rules of Standard English. Children who do not know how to write Standard English yet tend to write phonetically, cf. the example from *Great Expectations*, with infant Pip's phonetically written letter to his friend Joe.²³

According to Crystal (2008), text messaging did not become popular in the United States until 2004, which makes the results from the essays even more surprising. This means that text messaging has had a great impact on people's spelling in just four years. The way people speak, as well as the way people write, has been affected by text messaging and Internet chat, even though electronic communication has not been around for a very long time yet. Crystal reports that 'in 2006, the chief examiner's report of the Irish State Examination Commission drew attention to a concern over one section of the Junior Certificate' (Crystal 2008: 153). The complaint was as follows:

Expertise in text messaging and email in particular would appear to have affected spelling and punctuation. Text messaging, with its use of phonetic spelling and little or no punctuation, seems to pose a threat to traditional conventions in writing (in Crystal 2008: 154).

Crystal is not concerned. My view, on the other hand, is that this is something which needs special attention in the future. The results from the essays from my fieldwork indicate that high school students are not completely confident in how to use the apostrophe according to the rules of Standard English, and text messaging may not make it any easier for those who are struggling. Truss (2003) reports that many people have difficulties with this particular feature, and The Apostrophe Protection Society is not happy with the misuse of the apostrophe, which can be seen e.g. on street signs and in shop windows. Teachers can dedicate a lot of time teaching the students how to use the apostrophe, but once the students have left school, the teachers are not in control any more. Abbreviations were frequently used in the essays from the high school in Wisconsin, and it may not always be as easy as it seems for the teachers to control and correct this. Some students are so against written assignments, that it can be a tedious task just to make them write anything at all. If one was to correct every spelling mistake and every abbreviated word in these students' essays, the joy of writing might be lost for these students. The question is how much one should correct, and how interested the student is in learning.

I remember from my own education that we were taught to write as if the reader did not know anything about the subject at hand, and to elaborate and explain all our claims. In the handwritten essays from my fieldwork, an enormous amount of abbreviations occurred, and many

23 As shown in Chapter 3 – Electronic communication

of these appeared without any explanation. The meaning sometimes became clear from the context but on many occasions, it was impossible for me to understand what the abbreviation stood for. When I had to interpret the abbreviations, it took more time to read through the essays. Abbreviating saves time for the writer, not for the reader. If students abbreviate either deliberately or unconsciously on written exams, any external examiner might have difficulties understanding what the students mean by the abbreviations. This might cause low grades for the students, and they need to be warned that abbreviating may cause unnecessary misunderstandings. As we saw from the additional questions at the end of the questionnaire, more than half of the high school informants, as well as almost all of the female university informants abbreviate when they intend to write Standard English. Only one third of the male university informants did so. However, this suggests that special attention needs to be paid to Standard English on one hand, and the language of text messaging on the other hand. I know of a teacher who started the semester by asking each student to bring a text message to class. This was to demonstrate the difference between text messaging language and standard language. It might be a very good idea to raise the awareness that the two languages are different. This must perhaps be done very early in the educational process.

The claim that 'you'd have to be pretty stupid not to know the difference' (in Crystal 2008: 152) sounds a bit harsh. If one is struggling with the language learning process already, and one has to learn a second language in addition to one's mother tongue, it may be difficult for the weak students to keep up. Then, the difference between text messaging language and standard language has to be taught on top of that, and this may simply be too much for some students. When one does not master a language, all the languages that one tries to learn seem to be easily mixed up with one another. One should never give up on the students because they have difficulties learning the languages, but the teacher has a more difficult task at hand, trying to find good ways of teaching all the different languages. My point is that electronic communication has brought with it a whole new genre of language that needs attention, and if one has to devote more time to teaching grammar, it must be at the expense of another branch of the education.

'The popular belief is that texting has evolved as a twenty-first-century phenomenon – as a highly distinctive graphic style, full of abbreviations and deviant uses of language, used by a young generation that doesn't care about standards. There is a widely voiced concern that the practice is fostering a decline in literacy' (Crystal 2008: 7). Crystal goes on to say that '[a]ll the popular beliefs about texting are wrong, or at least debatable' (Crystal 2008: 9). The results from the high school essays suggest that there might be some truth to the popular beliefs about text messaging language, and that this is something which definitely needs more studying in the future.

The fight for Standard English will continue to be fought by many, and the text messaging phenomenon will continue to provoke the supporters of Standard English. Even though mobile

phones and text messaging has only been around for a few decades, it has managed to have an impact on people's writing habits and people's everyday use of language. Some people do not seem to mind this at all, and some people are very concerned that the written standards will decline because of the text messaging phenomenon, with all its abbreviations and non standard spelling. There is no doubt in my mind that text messaging has had an impact on Standard English, because people have started to use the abbreviations in spoken language, and as my fieldwork showed, some people also transfer these new habits into their school work. Some of the abbreviations might be included as a part of the standard language, as happened with *ps* and *nb* a long time ago. Other abbreviations may already be forgotten by the time the next generation takes over. However, Standard English will continue to be taught in schools, and there will always be students eager to learn the standard norms of spelling and punctuation. Some students seem to have difficulties keeping the language of text messaging separate from the Standard English, and whether Standard English will change as a result of this remains to be seen. One thing is certain, and that is that text messaging has had an impact on Standard English, however slight or great.

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Appendix A

Your age ____ Your occupation _____ Male ____ Female ____

Abbreviation	Meaning	I'm certain of the meaning	I'm a bit uncertain of the meaning	I took a guess at what it could mean
lol				
bf				
fe				
fyi				
emo				
roflmao				
brb				
jam				
pc				
nagi				
nb				
ad				
kwim				
ps				
bcg				
tnx				
bgn				
sms				
ie				
nkotb				
atm				
vip				
sys				

Do you sometimes abbreviate when you intend to write standard English, e.g. write *u* instead of *you*? Answer: _____

How many text messages do you send per day? _____

Do you abbreviate when you send text messages? _____

THANK YOU!