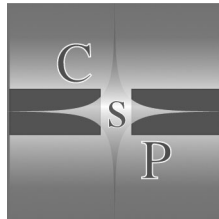


The Texture of Internet

The Texture of Internet Netlinguistics in Progress

Edited by

Santiago Posteguillo, María José Esteve,
M. Lluïsa Gea-Valor



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To Dr Jordi Piqué-Angordans for both his continuous enlightenment
in LSP and linguistic research and his personal guidance through
the ups and downs of life.

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EDITORS' PREFACE

The present volume consists of four sections, each one offering new and interesting insights into the phenomenon of Internet and its influence on linguistics, literature and translation. The authors included in this volume come to define Internet and its relationship with language use from different and complementary angles, providing a detailed description of the *texture* of the net. We have defined this *internet texture description* as *Netlinguistics* in progress, since we feel netlinguistics, as defined by Posteguillo (2003), somehow encompasses the material in this volume. Netlinguistics stands for the analysis of language use in relation to Internet taking into account five distinct levels of study: the technological level, the terminological level, the discursive level, the contextual level and the ideological one.

More specifically, in Tim Shortis' introductory paper, entitled 'Revoicing Txt: Spelling, Vernacular Orthography and 'Unregimented Writing'', readers will find considerations regarding the technological and terminological levels of netlinguistic analysis. Tim Shortis explores the unwelcome effects of the new communication technologies on British adolescents' writing and orthography, and wonders whether this disruption to literacy is a generalisable tendency or an isolated case "in the internet and language paradigm which has followed the age of print." Complementarily, Ming Cheung explores email writing in business contexts, focusing on the interplay of belief, interaction and language.

The second section in the volume, 'Website Texture,' offers various approaches to the study of digital genres with a special focus on the website. In other words, we move from technological and terminological concerns to discursive, contextual and ideological ones. Nuria Edo applies a genre-analysis perspective to study the digital representation of industrial clusters and their discourse communities through their corporate website image. Corporate websites are also the focus of the next paper, in which the authors—Alicia Bolaños, María Jesús Rodríguez, Lydia Bolaños and Luis Losada—study the most frequent persuasive strategies employed in that genre, taking on an interdisciplinary approach which involves genre analysis, pragmatics, captology and social psychology. Rafael Alejo and Cira Fernández close this section with an insightful analysis of the bank company website from a genre perspective, taking into account three essential dimensions: corporate communication, promotional discourse and the digital medium.

In section 3, authors continue combining various levels of analysis but focus on discursive matters. With the title 'Weblogs: Webpages in Search of a Genre?', Francisco Yus explores a relatively new Internet discourse, the weblog, and postulates that its stabilisation as an independent genre is essential to undertake a truly pragmatic analysis which traces the underlying intentions of bloggers and assesses the effectiveness of their interpretive strategies. On a different level, José Ángel García Landa offers a most original and innovative approach to a somewhat neglected matter: the relation between literature and Internet, with a special focus on intertextuality.

The concluding section of the book deals with a variety of topics in relation to 'Applied Netlinguistics,' that is to say, practical applications of netlinguistic analysis either for translation, linguistics or language teaching. For instance, in her paper, Adelina Gómez argues for the positive impact of computer-aided tools on the translation process. For her part, Guadalupe Aguado tackles the fascinating area of specialized phraseology by studying the problems that Internet terminology poses for technical translators as well as for communication mediators. Finally, Carmen Rueda, Elisabet Arnó and Antonia Soler reflect on the multi-dimensional role of the Internet in EAP, offering both criteria and useful guidelines for course design and materials development.

Santiago Posteguillo, María José Esteve and M. Lluïsa Gea-Valor
Universitat Jaume I de Castelló, Spain, 2006

PART I
TEXTING AND EMAIL WRITING:
INTERNET AND LANGUAGE CHANGE

CHAPTER ONE

REVOICING TXT: SPELLING, VERNACULAR ORTHOGRAPHY AND ‘UNREGIMENTED WRITING’

TIM SHORTIS

0. Abstract

This chapter offers an explanatory framework for the re-spellings associated with new technology txt types such as email, internet chat, SMS text messaging and instant messaging. I start by considering some of the features and patterns of UK adolescents’ use of such writing and of the extended ICT-enabled semiotic resources of electronic text. I argue that ICT has enabled an extended set of orthographic choices which users can draw on in order to suit their interests and project their identities. It has offered an extended orthographic palette in place of the normative binary choices of print technology. I argue that such re-spelling is not new but re-cycles popular but relatively undocumented practices from trade names, popular culture and children’s transitional orthographies. In the second half of the paper I go on to consider the contextual pressures which act on users’ choices from the extended set of options. ICT and the internet have not so much changed spelling as re-regulated what counts as spelling, and in so doing, there is a challenge to the official educational discourses of literacy, and particularly as they apply to orthography. It is a challenge which is problematic in theoretical and pragmatic ways. Are these practices better thought of as localised to a UK experience in the context of the complexities of the arcane English orthographic system, or are they a case in a glob-localised disruption to orthography and literacy in the *internet and language* paradigm which has followed *the age of print*?

1. Introduction

In this chapter I examine the use of re-spelling and vernacular orthography¹ as found in digital communications including email, chat, instant messaging (e.g. MSN) and text messaging². I offer an explanatory account of the nature of txt³ respelling, its linguistic features, and the contextual factors which motivate those features. In contrast to studies which have dwelled on the newness of such spelling as a netlinguistic phenomenon (Crystal, 2002, 2004), I argue that this orthography is better thought of as a digital recycling of pre-existing popular practices which are all around us. Digital technology has diffused the use of re-spellings and orthographic principles which were in previous use in vernacular literacy practices including trade names, children's transitional 'creative spelling' and graffiti as catalogued by Cook and others, (Cook, 2004b; Davies, 1987; Read, 1986). Such practices exist in collective consciousness even if they are not recorded in dictionaries. In contrast to studies which have dwelt on the microdistinctions between text messaging language and internet chat, (Crystal, 2004; Hard af Segerstad, 2002), I argue that txt spelling is generic: the spelling practices found in text messaging are similar to those found in internet chat, instant messaging, emails, and other new media text forms⁴.

The respellings of Txt are 'natural', functional and uncodified and are interpreted and replicated by immersion rather than by formal instruction. According to my interviewees, it is an orthography remade by users in their practices rather than one which depends on being received, learned and directly replicated in the manner of the acquisition of standard language spelling accuracy. It reflects a shift in the stability of the identity positions we hold and

¹ 'Respelling' is a term used in the orthographic literature to refer to non-standard spellings: for example, <txt> for <text>. 'Vernacular orthography' refers to the linguistic and semiotic principles underlying the non-standard respellings found in popular culture and txt: for example: vowel deletion.

² The paper is based on a continuing study of the spelling used in emergent ICT text forms including text messaging and MSN Messenger. The study, which started in 2000, combines three empirical methods: linguistic and semiotic text stylistics, corpus analysis and interviews with participants. It seeks to identify the generic features and patterns of Txt respelling, to account for how these work in the sense they can be understood and accessed by users, and to record users stated reasons for their choices. In this paper I am drawing on a corpus analysis of text messaging, email and internet chat data collected in 2000 and 2006 along with sampled comments from digital interviews and a detailed focus on three particular texts which make use of Txt respelling.

³ <Txt> is used in this paper as a generic term for the language found in various digital media.

⁴ Text Form is used to refer to a type of digital media: Instant M, Email, SMS Text Messaging.

the stability of the language conditions which have prevailed during the age of print (Carrington, 2005a). This functionality of ICT respelling, the capacity of users to recover meanings without recourse to glosses, sidelines the popular guides to netspeak and techspeak. In practice, such codification is superfluous, even misleading.

Following this, digital internet has de-regulated what counts as English spelling rather than altered spelling itself. It has not generally led to the invention of radically different new re-spellings and new orthographic principles⁵ although it has diffused and magnified their use. My emphasis is less on the newness of the language and more on the newness of the literacy practices (Barton, 1994): users are variably deregulating spelling and making idiolectal choices in relation to purposes, audiences, their own literacy identities, technological constraints of the form/their own technoliterate competence.

As for the structure of this chapter, it starts with a definition of txt and an examination of one email and two text message examples, before considering the extension of the spelling resources from which users draw in their respelling. I will develop a typology of this popular orthography and outline the factors which motivate these choices before offering a discussion of the theoretical implications.

2. Defining the entity TXT

For the purposes of this paper I am concerned with the spelling found in ‘Txt’, that is, text entered on mobile phone pads and on keyboards in MSN Messenger and other ICT emergent text forms; related to Txt used in IRC and other digital CMC contexts which are interpersonally and socially-focused; characterised by, but not defined by, non-standard orthography, especially in youth settings; emerging out of contexts of co-constructed interactive written discourse as distinct from composed longer documents to be read without intervening interaction; used primarily interpersonally and for socially orientated reasons rather than ideational functions in terms of Halliday’s metafunctions (Halliday, 1979).

In this approach, Txt respelling can be found in a number of different text forms. This working definition does not preclude teasing apart the technoliteracy modalities between email and SMS, or between SMS and Instant Messaging, and to consider Txt as an inflection of IRC chat. Any one subvariety will be better understood by situating it in the intertextuality of other ICT related emergent text forms but as I shall show in the data cited here, the differences

⁵ There are exceptions such as emoticons, although the smiley signifier and similar icons were in use on Tee Shirts and car bumpers long before they were found in the internet.


between email respelling and SMS respelling are less significant than the common denominators.

3. Three Examples of Txt Respelling

The e-mail message in **Text A** (see Appendix) was written by a twelve year old female student from Bristol to a friend using her new computer. It is an elaborate text which typifies the preparedness of young people to explore the possibilities of new digital literacies in order to present a distinctive sense of their individual and peer group identity (Carrington, 2003) and to animate written text with properties previously associated with the spoken mode (Baron, 2005). Its artful transgressions of standard English signal a covert prestige with the writer aligning herself with her peer group identity and seeking to distance herself from the conventions of standard forms, and thus from the conventions of teachers and parents. At the same time this email remains intelligible and straightforward in its referential meaning. We may not know who Pauline is, or why the writer is moving from topic to topic in such an abrupt way; we may infer the email is written in response to a previous over-reaction by the addressee (<Who let the dogs out?> implying 'calm down' and also an allusion to a popular song of that time). But the difficulties in understanding this text lie in establishing the context of meaning in a context-dependent text which approximates the norms of informal conversation. At the level of orthographic realisation the respellings are non-standard but also conventional, accessible and recoverable from context. There is also the sense of a text which has been designed and composed with some care. There are no casual misspellings. At points the writer is at pains to indicate missing letters with apostrophes.

The text exemplifies the kind of non-standard orthography associated with new technology texts in general. It has been suggested that its consistent capitalisation is in itself an allusion to text messaging which in UK contexts in 2001 was often carried out using capital letters only. It is perhaps more extreme in its deviance than we associate with email, now that email has diffused into a mass practice. Other studies have shown how standard English in email is shaped by its audience and purpose.

The email typifies the mixed mode ICT text-type features found in emails, text messages and chat, including features intimating spoken delivery: ICT conventions such as initial points (trailing dots) for the kind of vague completion of utterance associated with the spoken mode; letter and number homophone respellings; phonetic spellings; graphical indicators of auditory paralinguistic features of pitch and volume; respellings suggesting accent, or at least pronunciation stylization, eye dialect ('bout'; 'w'pauline'); and an alphanumerically constructed rebus showing a puzzled face.

In one subtle detail, the logos and symbols used in the signature are set out in a non-alphabetical ‘dingbat’ font. When changed to an alphabetic font, it reveals the name of the writer (< for <Jess>). The graphic works as a kind of code spelling.

This act of meaning-making would be severely misrepresented in a reset, spell checked, cleaned-up typeset equivalent: the semiotic forms of the message are a part of its dramatic construction of interpersonal identity and ideational meaning.

This asynchronous email was composed at leisure using a keyboard on a computer with a spellchecker. In contrast to the composed asynchronous email with such facilities and ease of text entry, **Text B** features two ‘mundane’ text messaging interactions between fifteen year olds from south London. In the first, two fifteen year old girls discuss the events of the night before. In the second one of the same girls has a social ‘conversation’ with a boy she has met recently. Here there is a greater preponderance of non-standard spellings but without the compositional ingenuity and relish seen in the previous text. It is also noteworthy that one of these girls is using standard English and predictive text (<I’l> for <I’ll> has been added by her to her dictionary) and the other is using manual entry. In spite of being close friends with many shared values, their practices in this respect are different. Both use the kind of slang associated with youth sociolect. In the case of the girl-boy interaction there is some inconsistency in spelling (e.g. the spelling of school). At the level of spelling this text is again very accessible and difficulties in understanding meaning relate to context dependency rather than orthographic obscurity. The motivation for the use of respellings will be affected more by the manner of text entry. The writers will have had less scope to compose their texts in the artful manner used by the writer of Text A. Here skill in performance relates to sharpness in interaction. In many ways this text is utterly unremarkable text messaging spelling: non-standard and inconsistent yet intelligible and conventionalised. The deviant orthography is primarily driven by the technical conditions and the awkward manner of text entry. There is a minor key of affect. The shortenings may contribute to the sense of informalised digital tenor and teenager identity image. The single use of the winking emoticon allows a semiotic nuancing of meaning which moves outside the strictly linguistic but this is the only instance of this. Taken as a whole these two Txt exchanges appear unselfconscious and routinised.

Text C is also a text message but with a less verifiable provenance. It featured in many newspaper articles as the focus text for comments about the catastrophic effect of text messaging on young people’s use of standard English. It is supposedly a text message homework response to an invitation to write about how the student spent the summer holidays. The non-standard

orthography takes a different pattern to that found in the previous two texts with a greater proportion of initialisms and graphical effects. Repeated testing of comprehension of this as a text message and in a survey of its respellings leads me to believe users see this as most unlike the kind of orthography they use in their routine text messaging and internet chat. It is a verbal art performance stretching the conventions to the limits of intelligibility and possibly motivated by a distancing from the expectations of formal standard English as expected in school homework. Whilst there is a certain pleasurable engagement with the ingenuity, meaning is not always recoverable from the combination of orthography and context. Several of the features are reported by my respondents as never seen before whilst others such as <bro> are seen as vernacular respellings which would not be used in Txting. This elaborated example shows by contrast the mundane intelligibility of most Txt orthography of the kind found in Text B.

4. A Typology of Text Respelling

Although Txt practices are heterogeneous it can be argued the resources of non-standard orthography are relatively homogeneous, as shown in the texts cited. In these texts and in the larger corpus from which they are drawn, there seems to be a finite set of orthographic principles which account for the overwhelming majority of Txt respellings. These principles can be subdivided into three groupings which relate to motivational principles. Following the model developed by Werry's account of the linguistic features of Internet Relay Chat (Werry, 1996), there are three main motivations⁶:

1. features for economy and text entry reduction;
2. features for giving the respelling a simulation of spoken language;
3. features which involve a shift to multimodal visual and graphical effects and iconicity in which the linguistic sign is pushed into the periphery of meaning making.

⁶ Compare Thurlow 'While young people are surely using their mobile phones as a novel, creative means of enhancing and supporting intimate relationships and existing social networks, popular discourses about the linguistic exclusivity and impenetrability of this particular technologically-mediated discourse appear greatly exaggerated. Serving the sociolinguistic 'maxims' of (a) brevity and speed, (b) paralinguistic restitution and (c) phonological approximation, young people's messages are both linguistically unremarkable and communicatively adept' (Thurlow, 2003).

In detail each of these groupings consists of a number of orthographic devices. Features for economy and text entry reduction comprise such devices as:

- Omission of vowels (<gd> for <good>)
- Letter and number homophones (<r> for <are>, <2> for <to>)
- Initialisms and acronyms for key bindings and phrases (<G2G> for <got to go>)
- Clippings in which words are shortened by losing word ending (<congrats> for <congratulations>)
- Consonant reduction for medial double consonants (<imedtly> for <immediately>)
- Respellings by analogy with other words with more straightforward sound-spelling correspondences (<thru> for <through>, <fone> for <phone>).

Features for giving the respelling a simulation of spoken language include

- Eye Dialect (<tuff> for <tough>)
- Accent simulation (<goin> for <going>, <wiv> for <with>)
- Semiotic features such as capitals to indicate paralinguistic details such as volume or emphasis (<AUFAUFAUF> for dog barking loudly)
- Stage directions in parentheses to indicate nuance. (E.g. ‘ Monsieur (said in a French accent)’)
- Reduplication for stretched sounds for emphasis (<Soooooo>)

Features which incorporate graphical and kinaesthetic devices such as:

1. Emoticons, sometimes from emoticon banks
2. Use of colour, movement, pictorial imagery
3. Alphabetical rebuses such as (<@}-‘-‘---> for a rose (Werry, 1996))
4. Other special effects such as the use of text written in dingbats/webdings or other non-alphanumeric fonts (which may come to mean in Roman alphabet when put into an alphabetical font, as in Jess’s Text A email signature above).

5. Txt orthography as hybridised technosocial meaning potential

To argue that Txt respelling is not new in its linguistic manifestation is not to deny the transforming meaning potentials of emergent Txt forms. However, there are ways in which the linguistic trace is not altered much at the strict level of 'spelling'. From a social semiotic perspective, text spelling is not simply a linguistic matter and the electronic dimensions can function with significant semiotic potential. The language isn't new but the nature of the communication and the communication technology 'literacy event' may be new. The communication practices around the events are also new, as is clear in the ethnographic and anthropological work done by Ito and others, which describe intricate practices not possible with previous technologies, (Castells et al., 2004; Grinter & Eldridge, 2001; Ito et al., 2005; Ling & Yttri, 1999). At the level of linguistic detail the respellings and the underlying orthographic principles can be seen in other texts dating back at least to the nineteenth century⁷.

6. Motivations, features and effects of Vernacular Orthographies

The vernacular orthographies used in text spelling can be shown to have common features of respelling with five main mass-practice domains of use: trade names, popular culture, ICT practices, children's transitional 'creative spelling' and specialised occupational shorthands. The uncoded orthographic principles underpinning the Txt respelling draw from the patterns found in these popular resources and practices. These patterns and features show underlying principles although these are not codified rules. Free variation is possible whereby a word may be re-spelled differently by the same user in the same document.

6.1. Trade Names

There is a longstanding scholarly account of vernacular orthography and the kinds of typology associated with this. Txt spelling is amenable to the descriptive typologies found in this scholarship, most of which focuses on trade names, (Alexander, 1930; Cook, 2004a, 2004b; Davies, 1987; Pound, 1914, 1923, 1926; Praninskas, 1968). Those unfamiliar with this literature may be

⁷ See this 1871 example of a alphabetical rebus parlour game with its use of letter and number homophones: (1871) JC Olin Jewellery Store Contest: Alphabetical and Pictorial Rebus Puzzle. Available at: <http://theoldentimes.com/rebus2.html>

surprised to learn how old some of these respellings are. Alexander, writing in 1930, claimed that <U> for <you> was thirty years old then and was diffused by the use of this letter homophone in a mass market product called *Uneedabiscuit*. Pound carried out surveys of American trade names in 1913 and again in 1923 and noted an extraordinary blossoming of non-standard spelling in between her two studies. Her exemplified 1923 typology of trade names marks much the same orthographic territory as that used in text messaging and popular music⁸.

6.2. Popular Culture

Related to trade names there is a frequent and conventionalised use of respelling in artefacts from popular culture including film, games and music. These are popular culture domains in which non-standard orthographic practices are common and appear to represent resistance and covert prestige. Their widespread use also demonstrates the intelligibility of these non-standard forms to a non-specialist mass audience. They amount to a cultural resource in collective memory, if not one much documented from the point of view of spelling. There is coverage of such spelling practices in graffiti, latrinalia and Hip Hop (Adams & Winter, 1997; Androutsopoulos, J. & Scholz, 1998; Romiti, 1998). More recently there has been work in developing a sociolinguistic account of orthography (Sebba, 2002, 2006).

To take the case of pop music, it is common knowledge that respelling is frequent. Millions of items of popular music media have been purchased by millions of people over the past fifty years. These media have routinely contained respellings and must be considered, along with trade names and advertising, to be offering a ubiquitous experience of vernacular spelling. From the current orthographic word play (for example around <parrowdice> for <paradise>) in Hip Hop and Grime, back to the documentary field recordings of *Negro prison songs* by Alan Lomax and others in the 1930s, pop music has been strongly influenced by African American and African Caribbean varieties, and the respelled representations of those varieties. These resources have been recycled by white European and US artists so it is not just a Black Vernacular English phenomenon. From Eminem's rap, to *Get yer Ya Yas Out* and *Gimme Shelter* by the Rolling Stones, now nearly forty years old, back to the respellings in early 20th century African-American genres, starting with *work songs*, *blues*, *jazz*, *gospel*, rhythm and blues, the white make-over of *rock'n'roll*, and the related genres of *ska*, *rocksteady*, *dub*, *lovers rock*, and *reggae*: pop music has consistently used respelling as a matter of course. It is not just hybridised African-American and African-Caribbean. It is seen too in the titles and lyrics of

⁸ As recorded in the full Oxford English Dictionary.

white working class groups such as the English 1970s group Slade (in itself playing on standard English <slayed>). These musical genres and their respelled documentary framings of artist names, collection and song titles, lyrics and sleeve notes are in so many homes, though the phenomenon is little written about. Such studies as there are develop a sociolinguistic model in which non-standard orthography allows the development of the kind of covert prestige associated with non-standard accent and dialect features.

6.3. Children's Transitional 'creative spelling'

There are many overlaps between the features of children's creative spelling and transitional non-standard orthography (Bissex, 1988; Kress, 2001; Read, 1986; Treiman, 1993) and the linguistic coverage of tradenames referred to above. Children's creative spelling often locates the same pressure points in English regularising more complex phoneme/grapheme correspondences: <nite> for <night>, <becoz> for <because>, <gnys at wrk> for <genius at work>.

Children's transitional orthographies are almost inevitable developmental experiences for every person literate in English. They are not just seen in other younger users but reside in memory as a trace of personal biography. The experience is inevitable, because learning English spelling necessitates encountering 'competing' spelling principles and illegal (non-English) letter string sequences of loan word etyma (such as <psy> for /s/ or <ph> for /f (Albrow, 1972; Carney, 1994; Cook, 2004b). The particular nature of etymological and morphological prioritisation in standard English spelling makes for a double system of sound-spelling and morphological-etymological realisations.

Kress has demonstrated the creativity and confusion this causes in his close analysis of the challenges children encounter in 'loan words' with etyma drawn from other orthographic systems (Kress, 2001). The agency of 17th century lexicographers and the deep orthography they created has bearings on what gets respelt in vernacular orthography and in Txt. English spelling is often based on etymological and morphological motivation rather than simple sound-spelling correspondences (Bregelman, 1980; Carney, 1994; Scragg, 1974). This leads to certain likely respellings where a phonologically unlikely spelling attracts a regularisation to phonetic correspondence. For example: <nite> for <night>, <wot> for <what>, <fone> for <phone>. Some of these respellings occur as conventionalised respellings in popular texts written for children such as comics like *The Beano*.

6.4. Emergent ICT Text Forms

There is an orthographic intertextuality in spelling practices developed by users across a range of ICT emergent text forms including software programmers' argot and the emergent text forms of email, internet chat, SMS, and Instant Messaging. These text forms may have situational constraints of awkward text entry or limitations in message size. As emergent text forms they have less determinate space and expectations of adherence to conventions than those expected in pen and paper letters. Carrington refers to one subvariety of this ICT-situated orthography as 'squeeze text', a term used for spellings produced by the automatic production of shortened forms by software for abbreviated language use in specialised computer contexts which restrict the size of the message (Carrington, 2003). From a less technical standpoint ICT has spawned a variety of emergent text forms with new and unfamiliar contexts of composition, text entry and interaction. In many cases, these have been innovated by younger users and those with specialised technical knowledge. In many cases they have been associated with informalisation and non-standard spelling. The existence of this profusion of text forms has created an orthographic intertextuality by which users are aware of varied ways of spelling and more relaxed social attitudes towards spelling in emergent ICT text forms (e.g. SMS, MSN), especially given the relaxed *digital tenor* associated with these forms (Posteguillo, 2003). This context destabilises existing expectations about the need to write using standard English spelling and formal tone. The respellings function as an interpersonal marker of informalised rapport.

6.5. Codified and Uncodified Shorthand

There is a fifth context in text-shortening practices adopted in specialised contexts. This includes codified varieties such as *Pitman shorthand*, or the shortened language used in telegraphy and related contexts, and uncodified abbreviated respellings used in impromptu occupational procedures in which there is much repetition – the clippings and other shortenings used by teachers and markers of public examinations in their marginal annotations, to give just one domain: <Punct> for punctuation and so on. Again, these shorthands are based on principles of simplification and reduction related to the kinds of shortening found in Txt. These are longstanding practices not confined to ICT: in 1930 Alexander compared the shortenings of trade names with the shortenings used in simplified spelling schemes.

7. The Effects and Affects of Respelling

In many accounts of respelling in ICT contexts, there is a practical emphasis on the value of respelling in reducing the demands of text entry: this is almost a default explanation (Hard af Segerstad, 2002). Respelling can also alter the meaning potential of the sign and invest it in dimensions of vivid engagement and affect which would not be available in standard forms. In her study of trade names, Praninskas cites a memorable image taken from I.A. Richards, likening the psychosocial effect of respelling to that of walking over flat, even ground giving way to difficult terrain, with all the attendant refocusing and emotional re-engagement (Praninskas, 1968). Katakoo has argued similarly about the effect of orthographic and graphological innovations and transgressions in informal letter writing (Katakoo, 1997, 2003). Re-spellings re-embody the linguistic sign, de-familiarise reading experiences formed mainly in practices which engage with standard English orthography, and can be powerful in eliciting active, engaged modes of re-reading and de-coding. In particular, respelling can embody text with simulations of spoken effects, often with complex psychosocial nuances of emotional affect (Besnier, 1993; Jaffe, 2000a). Respelling can index social, political and cultural stances and dispositions including oppositional stances and covert prestige (Androutsopoulos, 2000; Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou, 2002). It can take ludic forms which invoke delight and playful absorption in the manner of the popular appeal of word games and puzzles (Cook, 2000; Crystal, 1993). Respelling can be used as part of identity performance in the context of a society in which identities are multiple and managed (Carrington, 2005b; Carrington & Marsh 2005c; Smith & Kollock, 1999). Respelling nonetheless remains bound to its relationship with the standard orthographic iteration: it feeds off the formal linguistic patterns and naturalised social prestige connotations of the standard forms (Jaffe, 2000a; Jaffe, 2000b; Sebba, 1998; Sebba, 2006). Spelling performance continues to act as a shibboleth which gatekeeps access to educational resources reproducing social class-differentiated access to resources and life chances through the meritocratic 'playing field' of competitive public examinations and the looking glass world of social penalties for failure (Cameron, 1995; Carney, 1994; Carrington, 2003; Carrington, 2004; Carrington, 2005a).

8. The normative Orthographic Palette and the extended Orthographic Palette

From the evidence of the texts examined here, and my collection of messages and interviews, Txt re-spelling practices are far from homogeneous and there are marked variations between users, even within the practices of a

single user, within and across their Txts. My data sets show idiolectal variation over the sociolinguistic clines of class gender and ethnicity, and across the lines of age. To use a phrase like ‘the language of Txt’ masks practices and events which are highly specific in their motivation in a particular instantiation. Txt spelling is a matter of options but it is also a matter of choices made in the context of complex and varied day-to-day practices, identity positions and immediate practical discourse-in-place contexts.

I suggest the metaphor of ‘the orthographic palette’ as a model for understanding the actual heterogeneity in the use of Txt respelling conventions. That is: the choices available for spelling words. As I have argued, in disturbing the pre-existing configurations of what counts as spelling, ICT/Txt has disturbed the print standardisation settlement by which only standard English spelling has recognition as an available choice in public writing: a binary with any other choice constructed as a deficit form, motivated by eccentricity, esoteric contexts, partial formation or by incompetence.

To develop the analogy, the normative orthographic palette offers the normative options of the English writing system and its constituents as described by Carney, Albrow and others. It is codified in dictionaries such as the Concise Oxford Dictionary or those found in Spellcheckers. Other types of spelling such as pre-standardisation spellings, children’s transitional orthographies, and spellings used in popular culture are not available for public writing and would be considered deficient spelling in terms of standard English accuracy. This ecology of orthographic varieties is a discarded option: seen but with no recognition of it as an available option except for private or low status contexts.

The frequency and ubiquity of Txt language has moved this ecology on to the palette in a set of extended options for users. *Standard English* spelling is available, and often used, along with the options and meaning potentials of vernacular orthography and its provenances. As argued, respellings have different meaning potentials from those found in *standard English* (including consequences for effect, affect and intertextuality).

9. The Force Fields which act on User Choices of re/spelling

In determining the choices of spellings to be made from the ‘extended orthographic palette’ users are subject to a number of pressures or ‘force fields’ which impact on their choices: ‘technoliteracy’; ‘literacy identity’; ‘audience and purpose’; and discourse-in-place constraints of time, place and text entry convenience. These schematised ‘force fields’ are now examined in turn.

9.1 'Technoliteracy': ICT affordance/ potential capability...

The ICT affordances and enhancements made available and the users 'techno-literacy' in being able to access these features limit what can be done. They have inevitable consequences for orthographic control and choices. A measure of 'technoliterate' familiarity with mobile phone procedures is necessary even to be able to enter text in a phone pad. Other determining factors include users' knowledge of, and access to, 'banks of emoticons', phone spelling dictionaries, or the device which determines whether the user is in predictive text mode. To give two specific instances: some of my users routinely entered their textisms into their mobile phone dictionaries and wrote in non-standard forms using predictive text; other users were unable to use predictive text and were constrained to awkward manual entry and its pressure towards shortenings. These novice problems are there for all users at some point in their technoliteracy biographical trajectories and are shown graphically in truncated fragmentary/text messages and comments from absolute beginners.

9.2 Literacy identity: spelling 'stakes'

To learn to spell in standard English is not an easy accomplishment: the attainment has been compared with learning musical notation. Accurate standard English 'performativity' is a key requirement and guiding objective of the literacy curriculum in school. Many users have notions of self-esteem and identity bound up in their literacy identity as a speller and the literacy dispositions of toleration and acceptance they show towards other people's spelling. Non-standard spelling can be a matter of 'high stakes' for personal and professional identity: an inhibition for the accomplished and less accomplished. My respondents had markedly different attitudes towards their need to use standard forms. I am regularly told by academics that they make no use of non-standard forms in their txts. This may not be surprising given the value and currency of standard English accomplishment in academe. However, such choices were not necessarily related to age or literacy accomplishment in simple direct correspondence. Some younger users used predictive *standard English* text spelling claiming they did not like the 'gangsta' covert prestige of non-standard re-spelling. Some older users, including those with higher degrees in linguistics, were happy to use extreme shortenings. Some teacher trainees were at ease with Txt respellings but were concerned to use punctuation and syntax with standard English accuracy. One linguistics graduate, working as a teacher, took an extreme and censorious attitude towards both non-standard spelling and the use of non-predictive text believing these to be trivial and unevolved practices. The point is that Txt respelling is an idiolectal choice

related in part to attitudes and beliefs about the users' literacy identity, in turn related to beliefs about orthography, standard English, identity and social (and technoliterate) accomplishment. There is a variation in these idiolectal choices which cuts across social clines of age, gender and educational attainment.

9.3 Audience, purpose, context, penalty

Audience, purpose and context (social expectations of public discourse) all influence the level of insistence on the use of standard orthographic forms. In formal institutional and public contexts, there is a strong expectation that spelling will be 'accurate' *standard English* and users may moderate their use of Txt respelling in relation to audience. This accommodation may be surprisingly pragmatic and innovative. For example, taking the example of capitalization conventions rather than respelling, one university researcher reported that she used lower case writing in all contexts except in her editing of a journal and when writing to academics whom she did not know. As a 'touch typist' it suited her to write at maximum speed without the redundant markers of capitalization. As a researcher she was confident about her literacy identity: accommodation to the standard form was only necessary when there was a social penalty accruing from the audience and context. Given Txt often occurs in dyadic informal exchange this pressure is less marked in *SMS* and *MSN* than it might be in email. But this account typifies the way users are mediating and filtering the affordances of ICT in relation to audience.

9.4 Physical constraint of text entry/time available

ICT technical contexts can carry situational constraints of awkward text entry and the effort needed to 'get things right' must be traded off against the practical exigencies of a situation. Earlier in the histories of ICTs, the keyboard itself would have been associated with a kind of skilled accomplishment particular to someone who had undergone specific training as in the question "Can you type?". In some cases the need for speed arises out of social expectations that interactive written discourse in *MSN* will be 'quickfire', short entries and in real time. Other times it is the raw physical difficulty of text entry. The practical constraints of the message construction may affect the use of respelling. Composing a Txt message in a hurry on a train may lead to a different pattern of respelling than composing it comfortably at home with no time pressure.

10. Discussion: Standard English Spelling, the Prescriptivist model and 'Unregimented Writing'

Standard language spelling has been ubiquitous in the age of print. As Deborah Cameron has shown, the expectation of a consistent standard language uniformity in spelling was a practice developed during the emergence of print literacy and the nation state regulation of a standard language (Cameron, 1995). Printing houses developed strict craft practices for ensuring consistency in spelling in the interests of what Cameron terms "*verbal hygiene*". The variation in the spelling of words documented in historical dictionaries underwent a narrowing as the spelling of any word was cut down to a single acceptable form. Spelling was either *standard* and correct or *non-standard* and deficient. This followed the linguistic prescriptivist model associated with the codification of language in the 17th and 18th centuries and attracted the notion of spelling performance as objectively measurable and freestanding from social motivations. This model of spelling could be considered as the orthographic instantiation of what Brian Street has termed 'autonomous literacy' (Street, 1984, 1993).

In the post print age of *unregimented writing* in informal contexts, the spelling practices associated with the age of print appear to be giving way to a looser, more permeable sense of what counts as spelling. Spelling is becoming a deployment of choices from a range of options including the standard English form among others. It is a matter of appropriateness and identity rather than a matter of rectitude and uniformity. It is a shift to a model of orthography as a semiotic resource adapted and inflected by users to re/make their meanings and identity positions. This is a model akin to Street's definition of "*ideological literacy*" in which literary choices can only be understood in terms of social functions and context (not as autonomous regulation for its own sake (Street, 1993)).

Users' choices from *the orthographic palette* are choices made from a range of spelling conventions and orthographic principles rather than choices from a palette of free variation in which all options are available. As Cook and others have shown, vernacular orthographies are seldom haphazard and often present logical alternative systems to those used in standard forms (Cook, 2004b). The patterns of respelling found in emergent ICT text forms – and there appears to be relatively little difference between the kinds of respelling used in the different forms - show a high degree of linguistic convention, logic and commonality. Many of the spelling choices, the majority of words in most contexts, continue to follow a standard English default.

In this analysis, the Internet, and digital communication generally, have not revolutionised spelling in the sense of altering the possibilities of respelling

linguistically. But they have revolutionised what counts as spelling by legitimising and popularising longstanding vernacular orthographic practices found in popular and domestic culture but underrepresented in public, academic and media accounts of language use, and in linguistic corpora, which largely draw from texts spelt in standard English. There is not much new about vernacular spelling features such as vowel deletion, the use of homophones, phonetic spelling, accent stylisations, eye dialect and the other features listed earlier.

The case of spelling has a bearing on how we may think of the impact of the Internet and *netlinguistics*. Some of the discourse around this prioritises the historical discontinuity and novelty of the effect of ICT on language and linguistic study. In popular discourse much has been made of the analogy of revolution in such collocations as the *information revolution*: it may be more appropriate to think of the metaphoric forces of *deregulation*, *re-regulation* and *cultural flows* associated with a networked society (Carrington, 2005a). The vernacular spelling used in netlinguistic and digital contexts is predictable, norm-related, ubiquitous and culturally allusive. In considering the emerging development of *internet language*, it is necessary to recognise the vast scale and immeasurable frequency of informalised interactive written discourse in Txt. Such texts, which I term unregimented writing, are ungated by the institutional forces of traditional education, print technology and employment. In analysing data it is not easy to show how such language use is *revolutionary* although aspects of it may be unexpected. However it is possible to make a case for the ICT disrupting and re-configuring the cultural flows feeding into *spelling* choices and making spelling less of a prescriptivist expectation.

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