

# Netspeak features

Internet lexicon is one of the most evident Netspeak features. The lexicon does not include the terminology associated with computer science and other relevant subjects. Words like *disk*, *bit* are part of the jargon of science which extends beyond the Net.

Many words and sentences have emerged used only in Internet situations.

Many terms are associated with the software which enabled people to use the Internet. There are terms which have got a permanent presence, in the form of labels used to designate screen areas and functions, and to specify user options and commands: *file, edit, view, insert, paste, format, tools, window, help, search, refresh, address, history, stop, contact, top, back, forward, home, send, save, open, close, select, toolbars, fonts, options.*

Some other appear only at intervals on a screen, depending on the circumstances (error messages): *forbidden, illegal operation, error, not found.*

Many terms are associated with the use of the computer hardware: *freeze, lock, down, crash, client.* Terms have emerged for the Internet users themselves: *netizens, netters, netties, netheads, cybersurfers, nerds, newbies, surfers, wizards, lusers, wannabees.*

Some of these words are neologisms but most of them are everyday words which have been given a fresh sense.

Crystal reports that a popular method of creating Internet neologisms is to combine separate words to make a new word (compound).

Some elements appear repeatedly: mouse,  
(*mousepad, mouseclick, mouse across, mouse over*),  
click (*click-and-buy, one-click, cost-per-click, double-click, click-and-mortar, clickthrough rate*),  
ware (*firmware, freeware, groupware, shareware, shovelware* {Software that is hastily made, without proper testing, and 'shoveled' down consumers throats in order to make some quick cash}),

Web (*webcam, webmail, webcast* {A live or pre-recorded audio and/or video session that uses the Internet as the broadcasting and distribution medium}, *webmaster, webonomics, webzine, webster* {a person who acts like a dictionary and explains a joke or a reference when no explanation is necessary}, *webhead* {*web addict*}), net (*netlag* {A feeling like jetlag that happens after you use your computer after sunset and the bright backlight tricks your body into thinking it's still daytime},

*Usenet* {A long-standing system of internet bulletin-boards divided by topic into “newsgroups”}, *Netspeak*, *EcoNet*), hot (*hotlist*, *hotlink*, *Hotmail*, *hotbot* {A bot who poses as a hot girl on MySpace and assails male users with friend requests}), bug (*bug fix*, *bug bash* {*hunt for bugs*}).

Similar in function are the use of *cyber-* and *hyper-* as prefixes or combining forms and the suffixal use of *-bot* (*mailbot, spybot, annoybot*).

Other prefixes include *e-*, *V-* (*virtual*), *E* (*a number raised to power – ThanksE6, thanks a million*).

The word *@*, *at*, (abbreviation of the accounting term “at the rate of”) has an increasingly prefixal function (*@home, atcommand*).

The suffix *-icon* is also used, as people derive words based on *emoticons*, such as *assicon*.

Like an emoticon, an *assicon* is a smiley in the shape of an ass.

*The following are assicons:*

(!\_) A regular ass

(!!\_) A fat ass

(!) A tight ass

(\*\_\_) A sore ass

{!\_} A swishy ass

(o\_) An ass that's been around

(x\_) Kiss my ass

(X\_) Leave my ass alone

(zzz\_) Tired ass!

(E=mc2\_) Smart ass

(\$\_) Money coming out of his ass

(?\_) Dumb Ass

Blends (part of one word is joined to part of another) are illustrated by *netiquette*, *netizen*, *infonet*, *cybercide* (the killing of someone in a virtual world game), *infobahn* (information superhighway (internet) in Germany), *Internaut*, *Bugzilla* (a bugtracker).

An innovation is the replacement of a word-element by a similar sounding item (*ecruiting* – electronic recruitment) and the retaining of the period found in certain electronic addresses within compounds (*net.legend*, *net.police*, *net.citizen*).

*Dot* is increasing in frequency (*dot address, dotcom organizations*).

Reduced sentences and phrases may appear as words (*whois* instructions {for looking up names in a remote database} and *whowhere* {for finding a person's e-address by entering name and location}).

It is not possible to know how influential are individual coinages, but they are an important feature of many conversations.

Lexicon suffixes are extended, as the noun-forming suffix *-ity* might be used in *dubiosity* (from *dubios*), *obviousity* (from *obvious*).

Ludic extensions include the use of *-itude* (*geekitude*, *hackitude*), *-full* (*screenfull*), and *-ification* (*geekification*).

The *en* plural of *oxen* is found in words ending in *-x* (*boxen* for *boxes*).

Word-class conversion is important, usually from noun to verb: *to mouse*, *to geek out* (talk technically), *to 404* (*be unable to find a page*).

Abbreviations have been also one of Netspeak features. Acronyms are very common.

Examples:

BBS – bulletin board system

BCC – blind carbon copy

DNS – domain name system

FAQ – frequently asked questions

HTML – hypertext markup language

ISP – Internet server provider

URL – uniform resource locator

Letter-plus-number combinations are quite common: W3C (World Wide Web Consortium), P3P (Platform for Privacy Preferences), *Go2Net*. Chatgroups and virtual worlds have their own abbreviations and it is possible to find them also in e-mails and Web pages.

# Some abbreviations

afaik – as far I know

afk - away from keyboard

asap - as soon as possible

a/s/l - age, sex, location

atw - at the weekend

awhfy - are we having fun yet?

bbfn – bye bye for now

bbl – be back later

bcnu – be seeing you

b4 – before

bfd – big fucking deal

bg – big grin

brb – be right back

btw – by the way  
cfc – call for comments  
cfv – call for votes  
cm – call me  
cu/cya – see you  
cul/cul8r – see you later  
dk – don't know  
dur? – do you remember  
eod – end of discussion  
f? – friends?  
fotcl – falling off the chair laughing

f2f – face to face

fwiw – for what it's worth

fya – for your amusement

fyi – for your information

g – grin

gal – get a life

gd&r – grinning ducking and running (Implies that my post will result in something being thrown at me)

gmta – great minds think alike

the new mobile phones, with tiny screens, have motivated new abbreviations and the acronyms are not limited to words but can be extended to sentences:

AYSOS – are you stupid or something?

CID – consider it done

CIO – check it out

GTG – get to go

WDYS – what did you say?

Individual words can be reduced to few letters:

PLS – please

THX/TX – thanks

WE – whatever

Some are like rebuses, to find the meaning you should use the sound value of the letter or numbers (B4N – bye for now)

An important feature of Netspeak is also distinctive graphology (special fonts and styles, italics, boldface). All orthographic features have been affected. It must be considered the random use of capital letters. There is a strong tendency to use lower-case everywhere.

People seem to apply the “save a keystroke” principle, whole sentences are usually written without capitals or punctuation.

The fact that people use always lower-case letters means that any use of capitalization is a strongly marked form of communication.

Messages wholly in capitals are considered to be “shouting”, while words in capitals (or with asterisks or spaces) add extra emphasis.

But there are contexts where capitals need to be recognized.

Domain names in Web addresses are lower-case but path-names, after the slash, are case-sensitive.

A typical feature of Netspeak is the way two capitals are used, one initial, one medial (*DreamWorks, GeoCities, HotWired, NorthernLights*). This is called *bicapitalization, intercaps, incaps, midcaps*.

Spelling practice is also distinctive. Us spelling is more common than British, partly for reasons of economy (it is usually one character shorter than British one – *colour* - *color*).

There are some new spelling conventions, such as the replacement of plural –s by –z to refer to pirated versions of software (*filez*, *downloadz*, *tunez*).

Non-standard spellings are used without any problem in conversational settings. Spelling errors in an e-mail are not assumed to be an indication of lack of education. Many non-standard spellings reflect pronunciation, such as *kay, sokay* for *it's OK*.

Emotional expressions make use of varying numbers of vowels and consonants.

Some variant spellings have become virtually standard, such as *phreak* for *freak*.

Some spellings are restricted to particular groups of users, such as the *-y* spelling (from *byte*) introduced into some expressions for bit blocks of different sizes (*nybble*, in computer parlance, 4 bits or a mixture of 4 1's and 0's. Derived from IBM's term for 8 bits = 1 byte. A nybble is 1/2 byte).

The dollar sign sometimes replaces the *S* the pound sign may replace the *L*.

Teenagers introduced several deviant spellings, such as *kool* for *cool*, the replacement of a lower-case *o* by a zero, or percentage sign (*c%*).

This kind of jargon has been dubbed *leeguage* in honour of Pamela Anderson Lee's bosom that is constructed just like this language.

The absence of punctuation is another important feature of Netspeak, because it is the most important means a language has for bringing writing into direct contact with speech. But the use of punctuation depends on people, some users are very careful in writing an e-mail while others do not use punctuation at all. On the other hand, there is an increased use of symbols.

It is possible to find an unusual combination of punctuation marks, such as dots in any number or hyphens. Emphasis can result in exaggerated or random use of punctuation (*!!!!!!!!!!*, *£\$£\$%*).

There are also symbols borrowed from programming languages, such as an initial exclamation mark to express negation or an arrow to express location (*dc ← holyhead*).

Underbars are usually expressed to underline something.

A potential contrastivity seems to emerge in the use of some pairs. Examples:

This is a *\*very\** important point.

This is a *\*very\** *\*important\** *\*point\**.

The second sentence is more emphatic.

Anyway asterisks are developing other different functions and meanings.

Some people use also the caret (^) in different ways. It is possible to find any piece of programming notation in a conversation.

Sometimes the angle brackets, used in HTML in pairs to indicate the beginning and end of a command, can be seen in a conversation to convey an ironic meaning to the sentence.

<moan> I've got an interview tomorrow <moan>

The most typical feature of Netspeak is found in graphology and the lexicon, where it is usually easy to introduce innovation.

Grammatical variation is less frequent and if it occurs, it is restricted to particular group of users. An example is the verb reduplication.

A verb is written twice in immediate succession to express pleasure or exasperated reactions or just as an indication that the conversation is ended.

Another example is the use of the symbol  $P$  (from the programming language LISP) sometimes added at the end of a word to turn the sentence into a yes/no question.

*GlobeP – are you going to the Globe?*

the answer could be  $T$  or  $NIL$

but again this kind of language is distinctive of a particular group of users and cannot be extended to the Internet users in general.

In conclusion, Crystal believes that the lexicographical distinctiveness already described, along with the general characteristics of the medium, provide a solid basis for considering Netspeak as a genuine language variety.