

# Yesterday, today and tomorrow – To the discourse of social networks

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**Abstract:** The paper is a description of computer-mediated discourse (Computer-Mediated Discourse, CMD) and offers insight into the history of social media, specifically social networking. Their origins are in communication via mobile phones so. "Text messaging", which gradually passed into the chat (through web portals – a webchat and instantmessaging programs – ICQ, Skype) to create a compact unit in the form of social network, now known mainly through Facebook. The second line, which we follow in this description, is a view of language development and investigation of this type of discourse, stabilizing terms associated with CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) and CMD, while the outline of current and future trends in computer-mediated communication.

**Key words:** Communication, Computer-Mediated Communication, Computer-Mediated Discourse, Discourse, Facebook, Chat, Social Network, Web 2.0

## 1 Introduction – theoretical background

In our contribution we try to outline the origins of social networks, one form of social media described by Mayfield (2008)<sup>1</sup>, their discursive nature and reflection in the language setting. Mediated electronic communication, which is more or less the essence of social network has its origin in communicating with mobile phones (called "text messaging"). "Texting" via SMS moved later to the webchats and instant messaging programs that, after the appropriate conditions were set, transferred to the internet in complex of social networks. Communication 'arc' ends, for now, with a return to cell phones, where social networks operate in the form of applications. This progress follow, of course, experts in language communication, therefore on technological level we layer a language point of view with the intention to describe existing and outline potential directions of development of social networks.

## 2 The beginnings of social networks and their research

While world researchers of electronically mediated communication (compare Baron, 1984; Reid, 1991; Herring, 1999, Crystal 2005) evaluated the language, communication and pragmatic aspects and social impacts of electronic communication, the Slovak linguistic community, as well as in the pragmatic turnover, "received echo (...) of change" (Ondrejovič, 1995, p. 9) with a delay. Mainly linguistic, stylistic and technical characteristics of new phenomena – blog, web pages and mostly webchats were examined (see Findra, 1997; Wachtarczyková, 1998; Patráš, 2006). To the foreground of language research got comparing the parameters "private – public", "written – oral", "normative – nonnormative", although Patráš (2004) outlines culturological aspects of computer-mediated communication. In 2001, Crystal (p. 6 – 19) in the first edition of his book *Language and the Internet* categorizes the content, the individual components of the Internet, describing them as "Internet situations", but excluding from this concept the term

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<sup>1</sup> Mayfield differentiates these types of social media: social networks (Facebook, Myspace), blogs, wikis (eg. Wikipedia), podcasts (iTunes from Apple), forums, content communities (Youtube, Flickr) a mikroblogs (Twitter).

“Computer-Mediated Communication” (CMC), which includes all types of online "text": forums, online chats, e-mails, virtual role-playing games, instant messaging programs and so on (CMC emphasises the aspect of dialogue, therefore web pages don't belong there, as primarily monologic internet situations – see more: Herring, 2001, p. 15, Note 1):<sup>2</sup>

- a) World Wide Web (WWW)
- b) Blog (eg. [www.blog.sme.sk](http://www.blog.sme.sk))
- c) E-mail
- d) Chat (synchronous and asynchronous – forums)
- e) Instant Messaging (IM – communication programs like ICQ, Messenger, Skype)
- f) Multi-User Dungeon (MUD – synchronic text game, sometime in the 3-D environment, for example Second Life).

We extended his conception in 2009 (Mochňacká, 2009) with:

- g) computer games played online
- h) asynchronous version of MUD, based on the principles of RPG games (role-playing game, eg. Atlantis)
- i) and new Internet communication situation (we call it by analogy to the theory of Crystal) – Multi-Situation domain.

More frequent and popular name is a "social network".<sup>3</sup> This Internet communication situation arose on the platform of the second generation web (Web 2.0),<sup>4</sup> the phenomenon of electronic discourse, which appeared in 2004, but, however, as described by Zbiejczuk (2007, p. 6), in the Czech Republic (and even later in Slovakia) it's „spoken“ about it since 2006. Web 2.0 platform made initially static content of websites more dynamic and allowed users to change it themselves. Social networks used the connection of various components of CMC (forum, e-mail, chat) into one communication situation. The new environment with a synergistic effect fulfills famous theorem: entirety is more than the sum of its parts. The reaction of users is that they let themselves voluntarily to be a part of an environment in which work profiles, statuses, comments, groups combined with forums, blogs, web pages of institutions, applications, games and so on. The main "vehicle", an element that connects the mass of social and purely informative, becomes the **user profile** (a with a profile photo and name/nickname), which is more or less complex reflection of participant, his identity, work and social activities. In profile, emerges also another sign of social networks, manifestation of a "social action" – **status** – what is something like a micro-blogging and **I like** button, which is the social action associated with

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<sup>2</sup> The first professional journal devoted to the CMC is Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication ([jcmc.indiana.edu](http://jcmc.indiana.edu)), one of the oldest web-based journal, having been published quarterly since June 1995. As first in our area used the term „Computer-Mediated Communication“ P. Bajan (1999).

<sup>3</sup> Jeff Kunins, Group Program Manager for social networking across Windows Live Messenger says, that IM services (instant messaging) really were the original social networks. ([http://windowsteamblog.com/windows\\_live/b/windowslive/archive/2010/02/09/windows-live-messenger-a-short-history.aspx](http://windowsteamblog.com/windows_live/b/windowslive/archive/2010/02/09/windows-live-messenger-a-short-history.aspx)).

<sup>4</sup> As stated in complex work of A. Zbiejczuk about web 2.0, the basic features are the „... change of communication model (the onset of many-to-many), content created by end users (wikisystems), reputation systems, blurring boundaries of author/reader, or „demassification“ process, along with focus on long tail and other properties“ (Zbiejczuk, 2007, p. 7)

user's appreciation. With hyperlinks on profiles of other people – friends or acquaintances, it creates a virtual global village, with the possibility to **share content**.<sup>5</sup> „Hyperlinking“ in web 2.0 setting is also possible with social indexing or folksonomy, content categorization (Kabát, 2011, p. 40), at which keywords (**tags**) are assigned to the same content by users themselves. To this content, according to certain algorithms, another related content is assigned, creating a cluster of signs – visual appearance of such a cluster is called a **tag cloud**, with tags distinguished by color, size or font by importance and frequency of use:



Illustration no. 1 – “Tag cloud” of ideas connected to social media (<http://www.fotolia.com/id/38557881>)

The first representatives of social networks with characteristic features described above are Myspace, hi5 (both emerged in 2003), then Facebook (2004). In Slovakia in 2009, from former chat portal Pokec.sk (in 1997 it was originally founded as a dating site Zoznamka.sk) by gradual addition of a services<sup>6</sup> and making design too similar to Facebook design<sup>7</sup> grew up most visited Slovak social network with more than 400 thousand users. Although earlier, in 2005, domain oriented on young people, Birdz.sk, changed on a community portal (adding a services Webky – profiles, Blog, Forum, Photo Album). Visual representation of social media and thus social networks according to frequency of use and importance for Slovak „webizens“ offered in 2010 Wachtarczyková in the contribution to the zoning of virtual Slovak language (Wachtarczyková, 2010, p. 25):

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5 Although content sharing by multiple users has been possible also in Windows.

[Http://www.microsofttranslator.com/BV.aspx?](http://www.microsofttranslator.com/BV.aspx?ref=CSSKB&lo=SS&from=en&to=sk&a=http://support.microsoft.com/kb/301198/en-us?fr=1)

[ref=CSSKB&lo=SS&from=en&to=sk&a=http://support.microsoft.com/kb/301198/en-us?fr=1](http://support.microsoft.com/kb/301198/en-us?fr=1).

6 [Http://onas.azet.sk/o-firme/historia/](http://onas.azet.sk/o-firme/historia/).

7 See more: Vozárová, 2007.

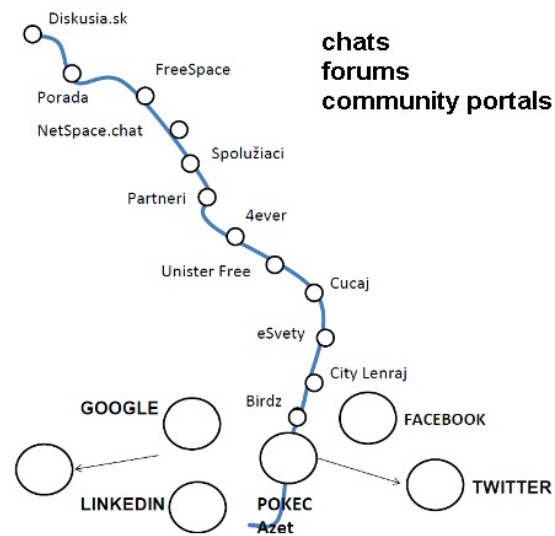


Illustration no. 2 – Virtual topography and zoning of Slovak language: discussion line; J. Wachtarczyková (2010)

The size of the names and „stops“ for a virtual discussion line corresponds to statistical data (<http://online.aimmonitor.sk>) and the situation has not change since then – Pokec and Facebook are still mostly used communication portals, to other portals belong lower numbers of visitors, even in comparison with only information portals.<sup>8</sup> Initially content oriented communities, like Youtube, Picasa and Flickr in an effort to attract more users and to adapt to new trends are starting to use elements of social networking – profile, profile photo, sharing, „I like“ button.<sup>9</sup> These changes constantly increases power of the Internet as a social medium and its properties, supported by the existence of Web 2.0, are: participation, openness (to participation and feedback), conversation (so-called communication „many to many“), and community and connectedness (to other sites and people).<sup>10</sup> Responding to these changes, observing the influence of the Internet on interpersonal communication, researchers are exposing the unwanted consequences: social disinhibition (one of the symptoms is, by Bajan, flaming – sending crude and insulting messages; Bajan, 1999), breaking the barriers leading to abnormal behaviour (Vybiral, 2005), possible dissociation of personality (Šmahel, 2003), abuse of anonymity (see Stone, in Kendrick, 1996) and so on. There is therefore no doubt that in terms of language perception of electronic communication we must, of course, in addition to the traditional structuralist view, accept also the reflection of the impact of Internet on the process of creation and reception of messages, which reflects to the social reality of participants (Herring, 2001, p. 622 – 623). Therefore at present Slovak academic community we can speak about establishment at first unknown, denied or non-preferred term „Computer-Mediated Communication“ or

8 [Http://www.zive.sk/profesiask-stupla-takmer-o-stvrtinu-nedari-sa-len-porovnavacom-cien-navstevnost/sc-4-a-299487/default.aspx](http://www.zive.sk/profesiask-stupla-takmer-o-stvrtinu-nedari-sa-len-porovnavacom-cien-navstevnost/sc-4-a-299487/default.aspx).

9 Google owns Youtube and Picasa, and thus compensates for the competition of social networks, Flickr, in turn, allows access to its portal with login from Google or Facebook.

10 [Http://www.icrossing.co.uk/fileadmin/uploads/eBooks/What\\_is\\_Social\\_Media\\_iCrossing\\_ebook](http://www.icrossing.co.uk/fileadmin/uploads/eBooks/What_is_Social_Media_iCrossing_ebook).

„Electronic-Conditioned Communication (eg. Patráš, 2009), as well as the evaluation of CMC as mostly social (inter)action. With this „turn“ is also related the acceptance of the term discourse,<sup>11</sup> which can collectively „cover“ all kinds of „text“ – from instant messaging or blogs to social networks.<sup>12</sup> CMC discourse can be understood as „... element of the structure including the rules of communication according to each participant in pursuance of their social status, which itself is not given, but through discourse created (participants don't have the same starting point position, note B. M.)“ (Bočák, 2009, p. 5). Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD) is generally seen from linguistic point of view, that means, that in the Internet environment, the textual and visual communication, coding and decoding of messages is done by conventionalised processes that rely on the type of Internet communication situation, the author and the addressee, but also of the immediate situational context. This view, however, does not exclude the pragmatic aspect of communication, which is social action – the „conventionality“, related to social practices (the way how something is done in a society) and discursive practices (the way how things are attributed to names and meanings, Bočák, 2008, p. 26) started to develop in the early days of electronic communication through cell phones. Just a simple emoticon is a compositional element in CMC (it separates or closes utterances, acts as a punctuation) and also carries the emotional and social information of the consignees, who has certain communication plan. As well as nick – internet name, an essential element of instant messaging, somehow reflects the personality of participant, it is a tool for self-expression, but, at the same time we must look at it as on a tool of situating self into a position, reciprocally touching the positions of others (more about positioning theory: Bočák, 2008), and it has an effect on the process of creating and receiving the message by our addressee. Computer-Mediated Discourse we can visually represent by simple diagram showing all primary dialogic Internet communication situations according to frequency of use, which are connected to the CMC code:

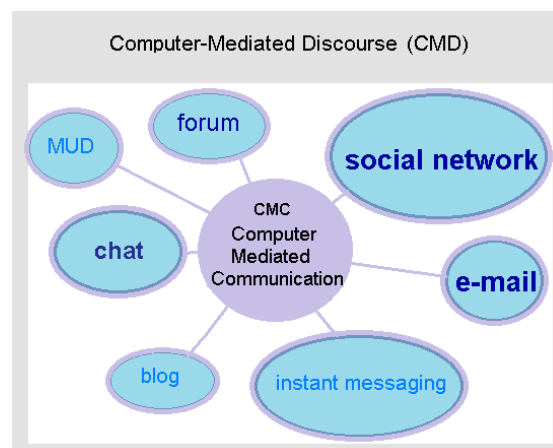


Illustration no. 3 – Visualisation of Computer-Mediated Discourse

11 Noted by Bočák (2009, s. 23 ), term „discourse“ became „... primary tool of criticism of the limitations of structuralistic paradigm of linguistics to study language from within.“

12 Lawley as first uses the term discourse in connection with CMC (Lawley, 1992), few years before pioneer in the field of CMC – Susan C. Herring (see Herring, 2001).

CMC discourse now characterizes two main trends:

- **tendency to invariant, stable and conventionalised in communication:** steady form in terms of content and type of communication situation
- **tendency to variant, inventive and experimental in communication:** on the lexical level continuously accepting new words (mostly from English), creating occasionalisms, on the social level way of self-expression, experiment with identity, gender...

Composition level		SYNCHRONOUS DIALOGUES	ASYNCHRONOUS DIALOGUES
TURN	form	turn separated into utterances with interruptions within turn dominates phatic function	compact turn without interruptions within turn dominates reference function
		repair turns realised with asterisk before turn	
TURN-TAKING	formal and content continuity of turns	addressivity quoting	
			linking (following turns by automatic answer - symbol "Re:")
	disruption of formal and content continuity	lexical repetition, repetition by pronouns flaming (rude, vulgar messages), trolling (provocative messages), flooding (a chatroom/forum with text or emoticons)	
			offtopic
Language level			
ORTHOGRAPHIC	form	substitution of consonants (v - w/f/u, k - q, ch - x, š - sh, j - y) substitution of vocals (á - aa, í - ii, ú - oo/uu, é - ee, ó - oo, i - j) combination of capitals and small letters, combination of graphemes with numbers and other characters without diacritics and punctuation, separating words with dots	
LEXICAL	form + content	Anglicisms, international expressions, slang, vulgar, dialect words, occasional words acronyms, abbreviated words, derivation and process of domestication of words	
STYLISTIC	form + content	"age style of young", colloquial style	
Visual level			
	form + content	emoticons (animated/static), animations	
		videos, memes (videos, comics, demotivation posters)	

Illustration no. 5 – Invariant characteristics of Computer-Mediated Communication  
(see more: Mochňacká, 2011)

When in 2010 Wacharczyková is thinking about the map of Slovak internet, in the introduction she wonders, whether any verbal communication boundaries exist, and if, how do they look? Her answer is: „More adequate is to consider the emergence of new qualities in language as a result of the interaction of three types of systems – language, social, technical and technological, thus technically and socially conditioned phenomenon. Language reflects the social changes and technological advances and vice versa – not language changes generate the transformations of language.“ (Wacharczyková, 2010, p. 16 – 17) Computer-Mediated Discourse is therefore inseparable from the society and technology development. Is it possible to estimate, predict its further development? Baumgärtel comments on the issue by note (Baumgärtel in Čosić, 2001, p. 159 By Zbiejczuk, 2007, p. 5) „I am writing about net art the last three years and begin to worry that most of what I wrote is gone.“ This finding has timeless character, in the time of Internet even more obvious. As instantmessaging programs went through its „rise and fall“, social networks may be overcome also – or they find place in other types of media. Oláh (2012)<sup>13</sup> says, that year 2012 has an attributes „social“, „local“ and

13 [Http://www.ruonline.sk/socialne-media-a-ich-blizka-buducnost/](http://www.ruonline.sk/socialne-media-a-ich-blizka-buducnost/).

„mobile“ and all these properties are in the current technological innovations – tablets and smartphones. Another trend is growing social intelligence – power of social media and their impact on life of people, and also companies that communicate through social networks.

### 3 Is history repeating itself?

„Social networking is by Oliver Gertz as Google six years ago. Fascinating, but unpredictable“ (Czwitkovics – Vozárová, 2010). How will it look when Web 3.0 is available? Its onset is estimated in 2015, along with the Semantic Web. Semantic web distribute any stored information so that the computer can understand, what the stored data mean. This will be associated with the development of artificial intelligence, which will use these data.<sup>14</sup> One another possible way is (Kabát, 2011, p. 41) more intensive overlapping of reality and virtuality, current example is 3-D virtual shopping mall Kinset.com or Japanese phenomenon of Hatsune Miku – vocaloid (vocal android) singing synthesizer with appearance of 16-year-old girl. This music software<sup>15</sup> of Crypton Future Media has become so popular that it appeared in several popcultural artefacts: 2-D animated videos on Youtube and parallel Japanese portal Nico Nico Douga, in manga series, computer games and finally as a 3-D hologram which sells out live concerts.<sup>16</sup>



Illustration no. 4 – 3-D hologram of vocaloid Hatsune Miku during live concert in Tokyo

Computer-Mediated Discourse is not homogeneous, homogeneity can be assumed only after applying the same criteria, common standards of communication, what is far distant future. According to anticipated technological changes we suppose that most changes will be connected with the visual level (emoticons, animations, images, new memes, changes in graphics and design) and since electronic communication more or less directly reflects the current state of language, language changes will be most obvious in the vocabulary (as in the most open

14 [Http://webtrends.about.com/od/web20/a/what-is-web-30.htm](http://webtrends.about.com/od/web20/a/what-is-web-30.htm).

15 The software simply pastes the text and melody and vocaloid will sing a song in Japanese or English.

16 [Http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2010/11/japanese-pop-star-takes-the-stage-as-a-3-d-hologram.html](http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2010/11/japanese-pop-star-takes-the-stage-as-a-3-d-hologram.html).

language system). From the social point of view will continue the specialisation into community, to the needs of individual subcultures (as suggested by example of „Feminine Facebook“ – Pinterest<sup>17</sup> portal in 2009).

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<sup>17</sup> [Http://www.itnews.sk/spravy/internet/2012-03-09/c147247-pinterest-webova-stranka-roka-2012](http://www.itnews.sk/spravy/internet/2012-03-09/c147247-pinterest-webova-stranka-roka-2012).



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