Emoticon-Utterances in a Chat-Room Environment:

Comparing the communication patterns of teenagers and over 50-year old users

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tutkielmani vertailee kahden eri ikäryhmän – yli 50-vuotiaiden ja alle 20-vuotiaiden teinien – kommunikaatiokäyttäytymistä ja erityisesti hymiöiden käyttöä chat-huoneympäristössä. Päähuomioni keskittyy siihen, miten ja kuinka usein hymiöitä käytetään itsenäisinä kommunikaatiovälineinä yleisesti, ja toisaalta siihen, miten näiden kahden eri ikäryhmän kommunikoiminen eroaa toisistaan.

Teknologinen kehitys ja sen mukanaan tuomat erilaiset toinen toistaan kehittyneemmät sosiaaliset mediapalvelut luovat keskustelijoille kasvavia paineita kommunikoida yhä nopeammin ja tehokkaammin: esimerkiksi Twitter tarjoaa käyttäjilleen vain 140 merkkiä ajatustensa ja kokemustensa jakamiseen. Näin ollen erilaisista lyhenteistä ja erityisesti juuri hymiöistä on tullut lähivuosina huomattavasti aiempaa tarpeellisempia kommunikaatiovälineitä, eikä niiden käyttöä tai ylipäätään tietokonevälitteistä viestintää ole yksinkertaisesti tutkittu tarpeeksi.

Tutkimukseni teoriapohjana toimii sekä vanhempi tietokonevälitteisen viestinnän ominaispiirteitä käsittelevä ja toisaalta hymiöiden käyttöön liittyvä tutkimus (erityisesti Wolf, 2000; Lo, 2008; Herring, 1999; Dresner & Herring, 2010 ja Park, 2007), mutta toisaalta oma tutkimukseni keskittyy hyvin erilaisiin yksityiskohtiin, ja pohjautuu näin ollen pääasiassa kommunikaatioteoriaan ja erityisesti vuoronvaihtelun periaatteisiin (Oreström, 1983; Yngve, 1970; Tottie, 1991; Argyle, 1988). On kuitenkin tärkeää huomioida, että kyseinen teoriapohja liittyy pääsääntöisesti puhuttuun kieleen, joten olen muokannut vuoronvaihtelun kategorisointia paremmin omiin tarkoitukseeni ja chat-huoneympäristöön sopivammaksi.

Olen kerännyt materiaalini kahtena eri ajankohtana syksyllä 2012 ja syksyllä 2015 icq.com -sivuston tarjoamien chat-huoneiden kautta. Vuoden 2012 pilottitutkimus sisälsi 1334 lausumaa teinien huoneesta ja 1266 50+ -huoneesta, ja vuoden 2015 laajempi tutkimus vastaavasti 1845 ja 2217. Analyysini osoittaa, että valittujen ikäluokkien kommunikaatiokäyttäytymisessä on huomattavia eroja, sekä yleisellä tasolla, että kolmen vuoden ajanjakson aikana. Ensinnäkin nuoret käyttävät huomattavasti enemmän hymiöitä itsenäisinä kommunikaatiovälineinä, kun taas vanhemmat eivät käytä niitä juuri ollenkaan itsenäisesti, vain ainoastaan lauseiden yhteydessä. Toisaalta vanhemmat keskustelijat käyttävät lähestulkoon pelkästään perinteistä *:)*-hymynaamaa, ja nuoret vastaavasti varioivat käyttöään huomattavasti enemmän.

Toisaalta eri ikäluokkien kommunikaatiokäyttäytymisessä on havaittavissa mielenkiintoisia trendejä: nuorten hymiöiden käyttö on kolmen vuoden aikana vähentynyt, ja vanhempien vastaavasti lisääntynyt huomattavasti. Voidaankin olettaa, että Dresner & Herringin (2010) näkemys siitä, että hymiöt ovat evolutiivisia, pitää todella paikkansa: nuorten hymiöiden käyttö vaikuttaa pääasiassa olevan kytköksissä trendeihin. Uudenlaiset, innovatiivisemmat tavat viestiä syrjäyttävät hyvinkin nopeasti vanhemmat, ja näin ollen perinteiset hymiöt ja ylipäätään chat-huoneistot jäävät vähitellen syrjään, kun nuoret siirtyvät käyttämään uusia sosiaalisen median palveluita ja emojeja, joita voidaan pitää hymiöiden uutena, kehittyneempänä muotona, joka tarjoaa mahdollisuuden laajempaan ja värikkäämpään viestintään.

Ajankohtaisen tutkimuksen tuottamisen vaikeutena on teknologian ja esimerkiksi Internetin nopea kehitys ja leviäminen 2000-luvulla: tutkijoiden on yksinkertaisesti vaikea pysyä menossa mukana. Oman tutkimukseni päällimmäinen tarkoitus on ensinnäkin tuoda esille entistä laajemmin hymiöiden käyttöön liittyviä mahdollisuuksia ja niiden käyttötarkoituksia, ja toisaalta osoittaa, miten suuria eroja eri ikäluokkien kommunikaatiokäyttäytymisessä on. Lisäksi haluan ennen kaikkea luoda pohjaa myöhemmälle, laajemmalle tutkimukselle.

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Emoticons, turn-taking, communication patterns, channel expansion theory, Computer-Mediated Communication, trend-setting, social media, utterance

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The development of communication technology

Communication in the modern world is becoming more fast-paced every day, which can clearly be seen in the development of online communication technology. As the World Wide Web was launched in 1990 and the Internet spread throughout the world, a whole new communication channel opened up with enormous possibilities (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008: 5). The new interaction media of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) quickly became extremely popular, starting with simple asynchronous communication channels like e-mail and bulletin boards, leading up to the development of faster-paced and easier-to-access synchronous channels at the end of the 1990s. Asynchronous message-exchange means that the message is sent and received at two different times, as e-mail services or discussion groups require users to log on and open the message to be able to read it, and this process can take minutes, hours or even days, whereas synchronous communication happens simultaneously: in a chat-room the message is sent at the click of a button, and posted on the screens of every participant almost instantly (Barnes, 2003: 35).

Online chatrooms and Instant messaging programs like ICQ ('I seek you') and the former MSN Messenger – which was eventually replaced by Skype in 2013 - quickly revolutionized both online and worldwide communication in general starting from the end of the 90s, but in the recent years they have been slowly becoming out-dated and made way for even bigger, easier-to-access mobile applications and social networks. Services like Facebook not only offer a way of simultaneous communication via a built-in instant messenger, both on a one-to-one and one-to-many level (Baron, 2004: 398), but also offer a new way to contact and connect to people all across the world. Another social networking service, Twitter, brings modern communication to a whole new level of efficiency: users are limited to sharing their thoughts and experiences within a maximum of only 140 characters, which is shorter than a single SMS message.

As the communication media develop, communicators are also forced to adapt and to adopt new communication strategies and tools. Efficiency is becoming ever more important, as time itself is becoming more and more valuable and space is becoming limited. Park (2007: 145) mentions that new, CMC related conventions include new types of abbreviations, acronyms, and shorthand strategies such as *btw* for *by the way*, and these are all designed to increase typing speed and therefore communication efficiency. Another

great example of a modern communication tool especially suited for the purposes of CMC and text message is the emoticon, which will be the primary focus of this paper. Park (2007: 150-151) calls emoticons "a communication device" developed by online users that is prevalent across different CMC genres. Essentially combinations of letters and symbols are used to replicate facial expressions to serve a variety of communication functions across a multitude of communication channels. Emoticons were originally text-based, but the rise of smartphones such as Apple's iPhone has led to the international spread of emojis, graphic symbols that portray a much larger variety of objects, animals, places and not just facial expressions.

Emojis can, however, be considered a sort of natural development of emoticons; as communication technology develops, so do the communication tools themselves. This idea is supported by the view of Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 27), as they point out that in CMC and in language use in general communicators build their messages through picking and choosing from "all the available variants that their linguistic system has to offer and draw from the entire stylistic repertoire of the language that exists at a given point in time", so we can consider emoticons and emojis a development of both language and the communication media or systems used to convey the messages. Garrison et al. (2011: 114) even mention that we should consider emoticons as "evolutionary", just like natural language.

The first documented use of an emoticon to express mood was in 1982, when the Carnegie Mellon professor Scott Fahlman proposed the use of a character sequence to mark jokes in a message board:

> 19-Sep-82 11:44 Scott E Fahlman :-)
> From: Scott E Fahlman <Fahlman at Cmu-20c>
>
> I propose that the following character sequence for joke markers:
>
> :-)
>
> Read it sideways. Actually, it is probably more economical to mark
> things that are NOT jokes, given current trends. For this, use
>
> :-((Garrison et al. 2011: 114) (Skovholt, 20014: 780) (Dresner & Herring, 2010: 249)

Essentially the post was an individual's attempt to compensate for the lack of nonverbal cues in a medium, and this eventually lead to the creative use of a variety of symbol and letter sequences in CMC that we now call emoticons. Fahlman most definitely was not the

first person ever to use an emoticon, but this can nevertheless be seen as the starting point of the development.

1.2 Justifying the study

Emoticons, much like the whole field of Computer-mediated communication, have been studied quite in-depth in the recent years, but obviously not thoroughly enough, as CMC has developed extremely fast over the last two decades, and the Internet has spread through the entire world and brought a constant stream of new online communication devices, applications and services with it. Krohn (2004: 326) pointed out that CMC is "in its infancy", and that it is in many ways in the hands of the younger generations to decide its path. Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 27) even mentioned that their study is "likely already behind the times" at the time of its publication, simply because CMC is developing at such a fast pace on so many different levels. For these reasons further research is definitely needed simply to gain more knowledge about the development and nature of CMC: even if this study will be outdated at the time of publication, it will provide a useful base for future research.

Understanding how emoticons work and what has been done in previous studies is an important starting point. Lo (2008: 595-597) showed that emoticons, much like facial expressions, guide the receiver of the message to "correctly understand the level and direction of emotion, attitude, and attention expression". The study essentially analysed how adding emoticons to plain text affected the receiver's perception of the texts, proving that emoticons are, in fact, very much like nonverbal communication cues like tone or facial expressions in the sense that they greatly affect the way a message is perceived. Menchik & Xiaoli (2008: 361) echo this view, as they note that emoticons are frequently used to "refine the meaning and tenor that a sender would like to convey", essentially providing additional information and adding details to the message.

Even though the most popular emoticons and emojis are globally used, Yuki et al. (2007) point out that both the use of actual facial expressions and emoticons is still greatly affected by the cultural context of the communicator; Japanese and American communicators not only use different kinds of emoticons, but also interpret them differently. Wolf (2000: 831-832) also states that men and women use emoticons in a different way, especially in a gender-specific communication situation. These notions are based on somewhat older research, and as smartphones and their emoticons and emoji-lists spread through the world, their use could potentially standardize further surprisingly fast.

However, as the use of emoticons currently seems to be greatly affected by the personal characteristics of the communicators, I needed to choose a communication environment that is not gender or culture specific in any way, and I will also take into account the age of the communicators as I assess my findings, comparing how the use of emoticon-utterances varies between and within different age-groups.

The data for this study consists of two separate datasets; a pilot study that was conducted in the autumn of 2012, and a slightly larger dataset that was collected in the autumn of 2015. The two datasets were recorded from the online chat-rooms offered by ICQ.com. ICQ is one of the most well-established Instant messaging services, as it was the first stand-alone instant messenger and had over 100 million registered users at its peak in 2001 (Wikipedia, 2015). I chose this particular website because it is well-known, free to use, easy to access, popular, and most importantly because the website offers general topic chat-rooms for different age-groups, which makes analysing the potential effect of age on the use of emoticons a viable possibility in the first place.

The purpose of this paper is to further examine the characteristics of emoticons and their functions in an online chatroom environment, focusing mainly on if and how emoticons are used as independent communication tools. Firstly, utterances consisting of nothing more than a single or multiple emoticons are distinguished from the data. These items will be called **emoticon-utterances,** and each one of them will be numbered and their communicational functions analysed and categorized. The categorization and the background theory related to it will be explained in the next section of this paper with examples provided for clarity. The main focus will be on emoticon-utterances, but I will also take a brief look at how commonly the three most well-known emoticon archetypes – the smile, the wink and the frown, as mentioned in Danet et al. (1997) – are used in general, simply to provide a better overview.

Secondly, I will compare the differences in emoticon usage between two age-groups: 50+ year olds and teens. The reasons for choosing these specific age-groups will be discussed in section 3. Next the development of emoticons will be analysed, comparing how their functions and characteristics have been described and analysed in previous research to how they are being used in the chatroom environment of my own two datasets. If emoticons truly are “evolutionary”, we can expect their usage and even their functions to vary or change over time, just like language itself is constantly evolving. Analysing the potential differences in the communication patterns between the two datasets grants us a

glimpse into the development of emoticons within a single communication channel over a three-year period. At the end of the Analysis section, I will also take a look at potential differences in emoticon variety, comparing the age-groups and datasets to one another to see if the emoticons have changed in shape and form during the timespan between the recordings.

The main reason for choosing emoticons as the topic of this study is because they are simply extremely relevant and interesting communication tools in the constantly changing modern world. Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 27) called CMC a potential "expansive, new linguistic renaissance": a new venue that allows people to use language and all of its features much more freely than anything else before it. According to Smith (2003: 39), CMC discourse is a hybrid that combines features from both oral and written language, but also has unique features that partly depend on the specific communication channel, or in other words, which genre of CMC is in question. The interesting thing is, not only does CMC draw features from oral and written language, but these CMC-specific features or communication tools are also spreading into the English language. For example, even the Oxford English Dictionary has acknowledged several CMC-related abbreviations, such as *LOL* ('laughing out loud'), *OMG* ('oh my god') and *FYI* ('for your information'), as parts of the official language in the recent years. They even recognize why these shorter forms are useful, mentioning that they "they help to say more in media where there is a limit to a number of characters one may use in a single message" (OED.com, 2011) mentioning Twitter as a specific example. I will also take a brief look at the use of *lol* in the analysis section, to establish whether its use is related to emoticon usage in any way, and simply to better understand the communication channel itself.

It is obvious, then, that both CMC and emoticons more specifically affect the English language as a whole as they spread through the world. As modern communication becomes ever more tied to electronics, it seems likely that this effect will just become greater over time. If communication technology keeps shaping online discourse into an even more time and space restricted, efficient state, the importance of emoticons and especially emojis in CMC will just keep increasing. Even today, as will be further elaborated in section 4, surprisingly elaborate online conversations are already held using nothing but emojis to communicate. As smartphones and their selections of emoticons and emojis spread through the world, the use of emoticons and emojis will become more standardized, and perhaps could even provide the world a new kind of - extremely basic and simple, of course - lingua franca.

The next section will provide the theoretical framework of the study, introducing key concepts and theories through a use of examples and discussing references. In section 3 the choice of data is first justified for the purposes of this study and then described. Section 3 also introduces and discusses the methods of analysis, which are then followed by the quantitative findings and results in section 4.1. The actual analysis process is thoroughly described in sections 4.2-4.6, which also contain the discussion of the results achieved in the study. The description of the analysis process is further elaborated by the use of several examples. Section 5 then contains the discussion of the results and study on a more general level, evaluating the obtained results, and section 6 provides a short conclusion including pointers for future research.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Turn-taking

To understand how exactly CMC and especially chat-room conversations work, we have to first understand the starting point: how people communicate in general, and more specifically, how people take turns in conversations. Stivers et al. (2009: 10587) explain that turn-taking is a system that coordinates human interaction by regulating who is to speak and when. Stevanovic & Peräkylä (2015: 450) explain the fundamental idea of turn-taking:

> the principle of one participant talking at a time allows humans to communicate complex thoughts and intentions. In conversation, social actions (e.g., proposals, offers, and invitations) and their responses (e.g., acceptances and rejections) are organized in terms of successive turns at talk.

Herring (1999) further explains that an ideal conversation occurs with minimal gap and no overlap between speakers, and "that participants will take turns speaking in an orderly fashion; thus in dyadic exchanges, one person speaks, the other responds". The basic idea, then, is that at least in an ideal situation, speakers alternate turns perfectly with nearly no gap and overlap, and every turn serves a purpose in the conversation and moves it forward.

Similarly, Oreström (1983: 23) divides all utterances into two main function categories: the aforementioned **speaking turns** or **communication turns,** and **back-channels**. Yngve (1970: 568, as cited in Täljeblad-Steiner 2005) defines a back-channel item as a short utterance that is used by the speaker not in turn, and Oreström further defines the purpose of these items to function as providing feedback to the speaker in turn,

signalling that the "message has been received, understood, agreed to and/or has caused a certain effect" (Oreström 1983: 24). Similarly, Tottie (1991: 255, as cited in Täljeblad-Steiner 2005) states that "Backchannels are the sounds (and gestures) made in conversation by the current non-speaker, which grease the wheels of conversation but constitute no claim to take over the turn". A back-channel item can thus be defined as a short utterance that does not make a claim for the turn or convey any new information, but functions to display the communicator's emotion, attitude and attention, exactly the same way Argyle (1988, as cited in Lo 2008: 596) defines the functions of nonverbal communication cues. Yule (1996: 75) further confirms this, as he mentions that:

> within an extended turn, however, speakers still expect their conversational partners to indicate that they are listening. There are many different ways of doing this, including head nods, smiles, and other facial expressions and gestures, but the most common vocal indications are called…backchannels.

Secondly, Öreström (1983: 23) defines a speaking turn as "a concept that conveys new information and expands the topic". Using these two definitions I will consider any utterance, including emoticon-utterances, a speaking turn if it clearly makes a claim to take over the conversational turn and/or if the utterance clearly conveys new information. I will elaborate these two points with examples that are hypothetical, but situations like these definitely occur frequently in my personal SMS or CMC conversations:

Example 2.1:

Communicator 1: :D:D:D:D:D
Communicator 2: What?
Communicator 1: You won't believe what just happened!
Communicator 2: Tell me!

Example 2.2:
Communicator 1: Hey honey. How are you?

Communicator 2: :(

Communicator 1: What's wrong, dear?

In example 2.1, communicator 1 starts off the conversation using an utterance filled with emoticons. The speaker is clearly trying to attract the attention of communicator 2, and at the same time making a claim to hold the conversational turn after communicator 2 has reacted. Communicator 1 is essentially letting the other person know that he or she has something interesting to say. In example 2.2 communicator 2 uses an utterance with only an emoticon, a sad face, to answer the question of communicator 1. Even though no actual words are used, the message is quite clear: something is wrong. Thus the utterance clearly

conveys new information. In both examples the emoticon-utterances can clearly be regarded as speaking turns. In the next section I will further highlight how the system of turn-taking works quite differently in a CMC environment, and even more so in a multi-person chat-room compared to face-to-face conversation. Secondly, I will further analyze how the categorization of utterances could serve the purposes of CMC and this study more accurately.

I will use one last example to clarify that I will not make a distinction between an extended turn and a completely new turn in the analysis process:

> Example 2.3:
> Communicator 1: Today is the best day of my life.
> Communicator 1: :(
> Communicator 2: What's wrong, dear?

Comparing this to Example 2.1 and 2.2, we can see that the communicator using the emoticon-utterance is already holding the speaking turn, instead of making a claim for it or answering a question. The function of the emoticon is to provide additional information, in this case letting communicator 2 know that the previous sentence was actually said in a sarcastic tone, and that the communicator is actually having a bad day. For the sake of clarity, we will consider the emoticon-utterance in the example simply a speaking turn, even though it is more specifically an extension of an already existing turn. This simplification makes the analysis process easier, especially due to the characteristics of an online-chatroom, which will be further discussed in the next section, that constantly break face-to-face turn-taking patterns because messages tend to be extremely short and the communication environment hectic and filled with overlap.

2.2 Chat-room as a genre

As was previously mentioned, the two-fold division of utterances is designed to suit the purposes of face-to-face communication, and therefore is not entirely suited for the purposes of this study. It is therefore important to establish how CMC as a field differs from face-to-face communication and what are the main characteristics of a chat-room as a CMC genre. First of all, turn-taking works very differently in CMC, as different CMC platforms do not follow the same communication "rules" as face-to-face conversations: Herring (1999) points out that CMC regularly breaks the fundamental rules of regular

conversation as it "exhibits numerous violations of both the "no gap, no overlap" principle and the principle of orderly turn alternation". Especially in asynchronous CMC there might be considerable time between sending and receiving messages, but even in a synchronous environment such as a chat-room, system lag may cause delay (ibid.). Park (2007: 134) also mentions that CMC users lack contextual cues, meaning both prosodic features such as pitch and intonation, as well as nonverbal signs such as gestures and facial expressions, and these could provide vital information about both the speaker's in turn and the message itself: attitude, mental state, emotion and so on.

Let us take a step back and consider what CMC actually is and how wide apart different genres within it actually are. According to Barnes (2003: 4) the term *Computer-Mediated Communication* is used today to refer to a wide range of technologies used for the purposes of human communication and information sharing. Thurlow et al. (2004: 31) point out that CMC is an ever-developing field that consists of multiple sub-genres that are constantly changing, essentially meaning that even different CMC channels can be extremely different from one another. The fundamental purpose of CMC is to offer communicators a way to "bridge time and space to develop interpersonal relationships" (Barnes 2003: 36), but different CMC genres do this in different ways and through different levels of interaction. Smith (2003: 39) describes CMC a mixture of both written and spoken language, with a set of unique characteristics depending on the platform in question:

> Among those characteristics similar to spoken language is the real-time nature of the communication, the ability to provide stress to words and phrases (via italics or bolding), the use of the first person, and the clear informality found in CMC discourse. Characteristics of CMC resembling writing include the lack of intonation, the permanent record of the discourse, the lexical density, and the use of punctuation and textual formatting in messages. Computer-mediated communication possesses many unique characteristics as well. For example, learners, when communicating in a CMC environment, make use of simplified registers, including shorter sentences, abbreviations, simplified syntax, the acceptance of surface errors, and the use of symbols and emoticons to express emotion. Furthermore, openings and closings in discourse have been reported to be largely optional in CMC. Moreover, turn-taking includes many more overlaps than in face-to-face exchanges.

When defining the characteristics of different genres of CMC, the two most important characteristic of chat-room as a genre that very much set it apart from most other online genres, are firstly the possibility of synchronous message exchange and secondly its highly interactive nature. I would also like to point out that Instant messaging services and chat-rooms share nearly all the same characteristics, except for the fact that in an IM platform such as ICQ or Facebook Messenger, the users generally know each other and have access

to “friend lists” (or “buddy list”, as they are called in Barnes, 2003: 8) where they choose who to contact, and conversations are often one-on-one (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008: 5), whereas in a chat-room the users can be completely unknown to one another and the communication is usually multiple-party interaction (Park, 2007: 143), although as mentioned by Paolillo & Zelenkauskaite (2013: 109), chat may involve only two participants, “with large chats sometimes having hundreds”. All of this is relevant mainly because much of the previous research has targeted specifically IM, but can be applied to chat-rooms to a great extent as well. The communication channel examined in this study is a fully text-based chat-room, providing interactive, synchronous Internet correspondence that occurs in nearly real-time (Barnes 2003: 35): messages appear on the screens of all participants with a simple click of the Enter key.

Even though the synchronous and interactive nature of a chat-room somewhat mimics a face-to-face communication situation, an important difference between these forms of communication, for the purposes of this study in particular, is that the turn-taking patterns are very different. Yule (1996: 72) mentions that in an ideal situation, a face-to-face conversation would basically consist of “participants taking turns, and only one participant speaking at any time. Smooth transitions from one speaker to the next seem to be valued.” Even though disruptions and interruptions occasionally occur in a face-to-face conversation, the communication setup is much more chaotic in an online chat-room. Crystal (2001: 153) points out that in a face-to-face conversation overlap is very rare and interruptions typically either succeed or end up completely ignored, whereas in a real-time chat the conversation can proceed in a “mixture of sequence, simultaneity, and overlap”. The communicators are constantly making choices whether to react to something or not, and the interaction sequence can become very difficult to follow (ibid.).

Overlap is the main issue making turn-taking in CMC so complicated. According to Stevanovic & Peräkylä (2015: 450), positive affection and other kind of experience sharing often occurs out-of-turn in a face-to-face conversation, meaning that both speech and non-verbal cues such as facial expressions are used by the speaker not in turn regularly to display an emotional stance towards the topic or an action, and this might even affect the stance of the speaker in turn. However, as Herring (1999) mentions, “temporal overlap in display of turns is not an option in one-way CMC, since one-way systems force messages into a strict linear order”. Nearly all forms of CMC are one-way,

meaning that communicators can only see the messages once they are sent, not while they are typing them. However, as Herring (ibid.) also points out, "overlap of *exchanges* is rampant", as multiple conversations can overlap one another, which is a problem also highlighted by Park (2007: 143), as he mentions that the communication channel "especially in a group setting, affords simultaneous and multipleparty interaction with multiple topics". This can make it extremely difficult to even define which communicators are actually holding the speaking turn, particularly in a chat-room environment with a high number of participants.

Park (2007: 143) goes as far as describing a large chat setting as "chaotic", and Herring (1999) confirms this, as she mentions that unrelated messages often intervene with the responses to a particular initial message, and the more there are participants, the worse the issue becomes, which then results both in multiple responses to a single initiating message, and single messages responding to more than one initial messages. However, I do not see this as a problem per se, but more importantly a fundamental feature of synchronous CMC and something that needs to be considered when the data is analysed and the utterances are being categorized. Herring (1999) also mentions that even though the turn-taking system of CMC may seem dysfunctional, it definitely has its merits as well:

> In speech, it is not feasible for everyone to talk at the same time because participants cannot simultaneously produce utterances and process the utterances of others. In CMC, however, everyone's contributions are recorded as text on the screen, available to be read and reread as necessary until they have been fully processed.

Even though back-channelling is perhaps less efficient in CMC compared to face-to-face conversation due to a lack of contextual cues, it is still an important part of online communication, as users "develop rapport by signaling their understanding or misunderstanding through back channel mechanisms" (Park, 2007: 134). For these reasons I will adjust the previously mentioned division of utterances slightly to better suit the purposes of CMC and this study in Section 3.2.

2.3 Emoticons

The basic structure of emoticons is one of their few characteristics researchers fully agree upon: emoticons are "pseudolinguistic sequences of punctuation marks that depict an image of a face" (Menchik & Xiaoli, 2008: 343), "a visual representation constructed through the use of a series of typographic symbols" (Garrison et al. 2011:112-113), or "a

facial expression represented by a combination of punctuation mark, letters or other characters, that viewed from the side resembles a facial expression or, more rarely, gestures" (Amaghlobeli, 2012: 348). Emoticons are entirely text-based, and as communication technology, programs and applications develop, text-based emoticons are slowly being replaced by more graphic versions, pictograms (☺) and most recently, emojis. As Amaghlobeli (2012: 348) mentions, some software, such as Microsoft Word, automatically convert typographic emoticons into graphic ones, pictograms, as they are considered to be more expressive. This study is entirely focused on a text-based chat-room environment and the use of emoticons within, but it is obvious that pictograms and emojis can be used to serve the same kind of functions that emoticons can, emojis just offer a much larger scale of expression as they are not restricted by textual elements or confined to just mimicking facial expression.

Amaghlobeli (2012: 349) has analysed the structure of emoticons in great detail, mentioning that an emoticon consists of

> two, three or four graphemes corresponding to the zones of the human face described by Ekman. Semantically more changed and thus more variable are the eyes and the mouth. Two other zones, the nose and eyebrows, can be added or omitted. In addition to these four basic graphemes, emoticons may include additional zones, such as tears, hair, saliva, teeth, tongue, etc. The eyes are often encoded by a colon, but they can also be found as a semicolon, equal sign (=), the numeral eight (8), the letter B, a percent sign (%), etc.

These views are heavily supported by the simple fact that earlier research of emoticons lists emoticons with a nose-element as the most popular ones; Danet et al. (1997) mention that the most well-known emoticons are "a smile, wink, and frown, respectively: :-) ;-) :-(" and the study of Walther & D'Addario (2001: 335) listed the same three emoticons as the most prevalent, but as we will see in the next sections, in present day chat-room conversations the nose has almost completely fallen out of use.

The term *emoticon* itself is somewhat controversial, as they were originally considered to be just emotion icons, meant "for the expression of emotion, or for marking one's intent as non-serious" (Danet et al. 1997). David Crystal (2001: 39) identified emoticon's shortcomings: "It is plain that they are a potentially helpful but extremely crude way of capturing some of the basic features of facial expression, but their semantic role is limited". The idea that emoticons are used simply to express feelings and emotions (Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998: 201), however, has raised quite a bit of controversy and seems simplistic at best, as mentioned by Dresner & Herring (2010: 250-253). They also

mention that even though emoticons serve a function that is performed daily through nontextual means in face-to-face communication, "the term emoticon misrepresents this function", as the primary function of emoticons is often not conveying emotions, but rather pragmatic meanings.

Garrison et al. (2011: 113) also counter Crystal's argument, pointing out that facial expressions and language in general are prone to be ambiguous and easy to misinterpret, just like emoticons:

> the notion that emoticons are "crude" representations of facial expression may indicate a partiality toward face-to-face interactions as a more exact way of understanding the meaning of facial expressions than the emoticon can provide". These assumptions quickly crumble when everyday communicators consider a miscommunication found in an e-mail or a possible misreading of a friendly smile as flirtation (or a flirtatious smile as friendliness). Practitioners of language understand that even in ideal written or face-to-face interactions, language and facial expressions can be ambiguous.

Dresner and Herring (2010: 253) go as far as saying that "it may be useful, perhaps, to consider the emoticon as evolutionary—much like natural language", and they mention sarcasm as a prime example of the functional scope emoticons can actually have, other than being just markers of emotion. Derks et al. (2007: 843) support this view, mentioning that emoticons can be used to "enhance the exchange of social information", essentially by providing additional information beyond just the textual elements. Consider the differences in tone in the next example:

Example 2.4

Communicator1: We are going to the zoo today.
Communicator2: Oh, great!

Example 2.5

Communicator1: We are going to the zoo today.
Communicator2: Oh, great.

Example 2.6

Communicator1: We are going to the zoo today.
Communicator2: Oh, great =)

Example 2.7

Communicator1: We are going to the zoo today.
Communicator2: Oh, great :/

The first pair of examples is borrowed from Dresner & Herring (2010: 253), as they point out that emoticons can be used just like punctuation to provide clues about the linguistic

content of the message, in this case, sarcasm. In Example 2.4, the punctuation mark makes the speaker second-in-turn to seem enthusiastic, whereas in Example 2.5, it can imply exactly the opposite effect. The same is true for the hypothetical examples 2.6 and 2.7, using emoticons instead of punctuation marks. Therefore, emoticons clearly do not always serve the purpose of emotive expression.

Skovholt et al. (2014: 791-792) also acknowledge the use of emoticons to mimic the communicator's facial expressions and, supporting the views of Dresner & Herring (2010), their usage as markers of irony and humour. However, they also point out in their study that emoticons also have a function that has not been acknowledged in previous studies: hedges. Emoticons both soften face-threatening speech acts and hedge positive speech acts; essentially they can be used to "soften directive speech such as requests, corrections, rejections and complaints" and "strengthen such speech acts as thanks, greetings, wishes and appraisals". As an example they mention that if work-place related requests are accompanied with emoticons, they seem less demanding or imposing when received by peers or subordinates, making the use of emoticons essentially a positive politeness strategy. This view is mirrored by Park (2007: 137), as he mentions that discourse markers, which emoticons can function as, may be used to "mitigate the force of an upcoming utterance such as a disagreement". Emoticons can work as solidarity markers in a similar fashion, if they are used by superiors to appear more personal or even friendly, and especially less authoritative (ibid). Even though emoticons often serve these aforementioned purposes as part of sentences, emoticon-utterances can, of course, also be used for the same functions.

Amaghlobeli (2012: 352) analyses the possibilities of emoticon use in great detail, listing their possible functions as follows:

> Addition of para-verbal elements to the message (when the verbal plane of the text does not contain information about non-verbal elements)
>
> Redundancy (Direct denotative correspondence between emoticons and verbal components, when emoticons express the same emotion as the verbal plane):
>
> Antiphrasis (when emoticons are used to contradict or annul the verbally expressed meaning)
>
> Entire turn
>
> Syntactic marker (often serving as punctuation)

Garrison et al. (2011: 114-115) support these views, as they mention that "The emoticon has begun to not simply serve as a paralinguistic device in IM discourse but as something

more rhetorically motivated and increasingly semiotically charged" and Provine et al. (2007: 302:303) agree with the idea that emoticons are actually far more complex than early research seems to suggest, and that they definitely have the potential to be much more than a "crude stand-in for missing facial features". For the purposes of this study, the main focus will be, as previously mentioned, on how emoticons act as independent communication tools, or to put it differently, when emoticons are used as the "entire turn" as listed by Amaghlobeli (2012: 352). As Garrison et al. (2011: 121) noticed in their study that emoticons do, in fact, occasionally appear ""Alone" as a complete utterance in and of itself", but that it has not been mentioned in research prior to their study, and that this "finding pushes against notions in existing research of the emoticon as exclusive and idiosyncratic". The fact that very little research has focused on or even mentioned emoticons as independent communication tools is simply more justification for conducting this study as a whole.

3. DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Selecting & collecting the data

As was previously mentioned, I chose a popular online chat-room, ICQ.com, as the source for my data. Thurlow et al. (2004:31-32) point out that the Internet is a collection of different kinds of communication technologies, and thus the type of online medium greatly affects the nature of the communication itself. Asynchronous online communication is often highly regulated, as in the case of forums, where short conversational turns are not allowed as communicators are discouraged from "spamming". This basically means disrupting the discussion at hand with short messages that bring no new information to the discussion, or simply comments that are repetitive and often off-topic (Barnes 2004: 252). Herring (1999) also confirms this, mentioning that "it is widely considered a breach of 'netiquette' to send messages that contain no significant original content" in asynchronous CMC. Thus synchronous messaging was the natural choice for this study's purposes, as the main focus will be on pretty much the shortest meaningful messages possible, emoticon-utterances.

The choice of a specific communication channel is more problematic, however; studies have shown that men and women use emoticons differently, especially in a gender-specific group of communicators (Wolf, 2000: 831-832), and channel expansion

theory (Lo, 2008: 595) states that the level of Internet communication experience determines the capability of conveying messages, meaning that communicators with little experience may not be able to use emoticons to support their messages in the desired way, or perhaps at all. I ended up choosing specifically online chat because the other major easy-to-access synchronous channel would have been IM, and Instant Messenger conversations are often extremely private and cannot be accessed or monitored as easily as a public chat-room.

There were several valid reasons for choosing this specific chat-room provider. Firstly, ICQ is a well-known and popular instant-messaging program that was developed in the 90s, and the website providing these chat-rooms was built around this service. It was, subsequently, the most popular active chat-room I could easily find online, as it came up in the first hits on a Google-search for a chat-room. Furthermore, I wanted to choose a neutral-topic communication channel that is not gender or culture specific, to establish a broad overview of different kinds of communicators. ICQ.com provides general-topic English chat-rooms for different age-groups, which serves the purposes of this paper perfectly. I have chosen to analyze and compare two specific age-groups: teens and 50+. These are the opposite ends of a spectrum when it comes to the different age-group related rooms that ICQ provides, leaving 20+ and 30+ chat-rooms in between.

I decided to choose these two rooms to analyze how the use of emoticon-utterances correlates with the age of the communicators, as these two groups are as far apart from each other as possible age-wise. I originally looked at the 20+ age-group as well, but realized quickly that most of the communicators in the channel were on the younger side of the 20-29 spectrum and had very similar communication styles to those of the teens. The communicators will be anonymous and under unrecognizable screen names, and thus I will not even attempt to take into account any of their other personal characteristics in the study. This also makes it possible to use examples taken from the data throughout the paper, as there is no moral conflict as all the communicators are protected by their screennames, and if any potentially harmful personal information would nevertheless be found in the data, it will be censored appropriately. My goal is only to create an overview about the general use of emoticon-utterances within the different age-groups and to analyze how the different functions of these utterances relate to each other.

I started the data collection with a pilot study, collecting data over a timespan of approximately a month between the 20th of September and the 26th of October in 2012 in approximately 8 recordings per room. I recorded a total of 1334 utterances and just over 7300 words from the Teen chat-room, and a total of 1266 utterances and just over 9700 words from the 50+ chat-room. I collected a second, larger set of data between the 13th of October and the 30th of November in 2015. The second set consisted of 2217 utterances from the 50+ room and 1845 utterances from the Teen room, and the data was collected in 17 separate recordings for the 50+ room and 19 for the Teens. The data was recorded in multiple sets to provide a better overview of the chat-rooms, and to avoid the results being skewed by individual communicators. I collected as much data as possible before ICQ.com finally closed its chat-rooms completely on the first of December. Over the past few years the chat-rooms had slowly been losing popularity, and in the end were also poorly moderated and full of bot-related spam.

The recorded chat-rooms used to have a counter for all the users joining the rooms, both guests and registered members, and in the first dataset the rooms averaged over 200 participants in the Teen room and over 150 in the 50+ room, but at the time the second set was recorded, those counters had stopped working. However, those numbers are quite arbitrary, as the channels are filled with bots and observers like myself, and it is therefore the number of actual active communicators within the chat-rooms that is essential information. From the recordings it can clearly be observed that especially during non-peak hours the chat-rooms were almost completely empty in the second data set, and only active to the same extent as in the first data set in the evenings, whereas especially the 50+ room was active almost at all times back in 2012. Most of the second dataset has therefore been recorded at times when the chat-rooms are equally active just to make the data more comparable.

3.2 Categorization

As was mentioned in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, the two-way division of utterances into speaking-turns and back-channels is quite simplistic and mainly suited for the purposes of face-to-face communication. If we take another look at the examples previously introduced in section 2.1, we can see that the functions of the three utterances are actually quite different, even though they are all speaking turns by our definition:

Example 2.1:

Communicator 1: :D:D:D:D:D
Communicator 2: What?
Communicator 1: You won't believe what just happened!
Communicator 2: Tell me!

Example 2.2:
Communicator 1: Hey honey. How are you?
Communicator 2: :(
Communicator 1: What's wrong, dear?

Example 2.3:
Communicator 1: Today is the best day of my life.
Communicator 1: :(
Communicator 2: What's wrong, dear?

in example 2.1, the emoticon-utterance is clearly trying to attract the attention of communicator 2, whereas in example 2.2 the emoticon-utterance is used to answer a question as a new, independent turn, and in 2.3 the communicator is already holding the speaking turn, using the emoticon-utterance to provide further information and add emphasis. Speaking turn seems like too vague of a definition for functions so different. I will therefore divide the category of **speaking turns** into two adjacent function groups: **attention-seeking turns** (elaborated in 2.1) and **information-providing turns** (elaborated in 2.2 and 2.3).

From these examples we can further analyze the characteristics of the three categories: firstly, back-channeling emoticon-utterances are used independently by a speaker not holding the conversational turn to provide immediate feedback; attention-seeking turns make a claim to take over and/or hold the turn and are thus most likely to be followed immediately by another speaking turn by the same communicator; information-providing turns are either used independently to answer questions or immediately after a speaking turn to further emphasize the words and to express mood and attitude. These characteristics enable us to categorize emoticon-utterances rather straight-forwardly, especially because every utterance can and has to only serve one of these functions, which means that if an emoticon-utterance does not fulfil the characteristics of a back-channeling item, it has to be a speaking turn, and if the speaking turn does not contain any new information, it can only be an attention-seeking turn and so on. We should also keep in mind that broken utterances that serve no actual purpose are quite common due to spelling

mistakes (Park, 2007: 139) and misclicks, but I will classify any utterance with a recognizable emoticon as a functional utterance.

I will further elaborate the entire categorization process with the use of actual examples taken from the data:

Example 3.1
<Thomas16> KNOCK KNOCK
<ShadowKnight> NO
<Blake> pvt me pls?
<Kumqu[a]tL[a]dy> COME IN
<ShadowKnight> SHUT UP
<ShadowKnight> XD (u. 868-869 data 1, Teens)

Example 3.2
<Kumqu[a]tL[a]dy> omg i am
<Kumqu[a]tL[a]dy> -_-
<Kumqu[a]tL[a]dy> i usually only do that irl (u. 841-843 data 1, Teens)

We can start the analysis with a simple question: who is holding the conversational turn before and after the emoticon-utterance? In the first two examples, we can clearly observe that the communicator using the emoticon is also the one holding the turn: the emoticon-utterance is there simply to provide emphasis and to provide additional information. In the first instance, the user *ShadowKnight* is telling another user – or multiple users - to be quiet in an extremely rude manner, but then adds a laughing emoticon-utterance *XD* to indicate that he is, in fact, joking. In the second example another user has just pointed out that K*umqu[a]tL[a]dy* is talking to herself, and she uses the emoticon utterance -_- for added emphasis, name to signify discontent with herself. Therefore, by definition, we can deduce that these two are communicational turns, and more precisely information-providing turns. Let us consider two more examples where the emoticon-utterance is not used by the communicator holding the conversational turn:

Example 3.3
<Guest5084> what is up with you and are babies???
<Tina_17> :D
<LadyFluffyWuffy> merpity derpity.
<LadyFluffyWuffy> MY BABIES

<LadyFluffyWuffy> ARE MY
<LadyFluffyWuffy> PRECIOUS (u. 665-666 data 1, Teens)

Example 3.4
<^Katniss^> i once talked with someone who said he was 71 gt;.gt;
<^Katniss^> lol
<Shooting_Star> ....
<Shooting_Star> I talked to a 66 year old man.
<becoolBR> me too katniss
<Shooting_Star> He said he was old enough to be my grandpa
<^Katniss^> xD (u. 191-197 data 1, Teens)

In these examples we can clearly observe from the context that the emoticon-utterances are in fact used by two communicators that are addressing the speaker in turn. In the first case in 3.3, the user *Tina_17* uses the emoticon to signal her amusement towards the user *Guest5084* that has just asked a question from a third user, and afterwards does not proceed to try to take over the turn. Therefore, we can deduce that the emoticon-utterance is simply used for back-channeling. The second example in 3.4 is exactly the same: the user *Shooting_Star* has taken over the conversational turn, and the user ^*Katniss*^ uses the emoticon *xD* to signify her amusement, and as she makes no attempt to take over the conversational turn, the utterance is simply there to provide feedback. Thus these two examples can clearly be classified as back-channels. Next we will briefly talk about the most problematic of the function categories for the purposes of this study.

Example 3.5
<LadyFluffyWuffy> **._.**
<LadyFluffyWuffy> He broke my babies. (u. 640-641 data 1, Teens)

In the last example, the user *LadyFluffyWuffy* starts the conversation with these two utterances, as these are her first messages at least in the recorded logs, and is therefore not addressing another user. Thus we can draw the conclusion that she is in fact making a claim for the conversational turn with the first utterance, and then proceeds to take over it in the second one. The emoticon-utterance is used simply to attract the attention of the other users, and can therefore easily be categorized as a communication turn, and furthermore, an attention-seeking turn. However, attention-seeking turns are extremely problematic in a multi-person chat-room environment. When a communicator attempts to use an attention-seeking emoticon-utterance, the receivers have three options: either they interpret it correctly and give the turn up, interpret it correctly but choose to ignore it or

misinterpret it and thus ignore it. Even though an emoticon-utterance may be intended to be an attention-seeking turn, the claim will most likely fail in a multi-user communication situation, simply because there is so many overlapping conversations going on at the same time (Anderson et al. 2010).

Turn-taking rules are just not followed in the same way as in face-to-face conversations, and as Herring (1999) mentions, adjacency pairs are regularly disrupted: making a claim for a speaking turn is essentially a request or a demand that is supposed to be followed by a reaction, but in many cases in a chat-room this simply will not happen. As is evident from the data, attention-seeking turns are pretty much nonexistent in a multi-person chat-room environment. This will be discussed further in the analysis section, but nevertheless, even though attention-seeking turns are not effective in a chat-room, the function category itself is entirely useful. It is much easier to attract someone's attention in a one-on-one communication situation, as was already shown back in example 2.1. For example, in a IM conversation between two users emoticons and emojis would most definitely prove to be highly effective conversation starters and attention-seekers.

3.3 Reliability of the data

In a sample recording of the second dataset I compared the activity in the two chatrooms on the 27th of October 2015, a Tuesday, at 8 p.m. In 15 minutes, 9 participants sent a total of 28 messages in the Teen room, and in the following 15 minutes the conversation died out entirely. However, in the same 30 minutes in the 50+ room, 26 participants sent a total of 398 messages. The numbers show a clear difference in activity in the two rooms, and even though it is only a small sample of the data, these numbers seem to reflect the situation in the rooms throughout the second data-gathering period; even at peak-hours the teen room was quite inactive, especially compared to the first data set that had similar activity in both rooms during the evenings, whereas the 50+ room has stayed extremely active during peak periods, but in the mornings and even around 12 p.m the rooms were mostly empty, therefore almost the entire data has been collected during the active evening hours. The importance and possible causes of activity and inactivity will be discussed further in the analysis section of the paper.

In both datasets the peak-hour conversations are often dominated by a set of "regulars", communicators that can be frequently seen taking part in the conversations

throughout the data, and even seem to know each other to some extent, referring to each other by screen names and greeting one another:

Example 3.7
<Chevalier> karenlisa, hi and welcome
<karenlisa> hugs, justin
<humminbird> hi ColoradoGal
<Greywolf49> sets up teepee
<Mrs_Clyde> hiya karenlisa :)) huggssss (u. 938-942 data 1, 50+)

This is very important to note, because even though one could argue that anyone can freely join the chat-rooms despite the intended age group -setting, having an established user base makes it extremely plausible to assume that the large majority of the active communicators in the channels are in fact the appropriate age. This fact makes the data much more reliable. Furthermore, even though the chat-rooms are not properly moderated, joining the "wrong" room is frowned upon by the community of speakers quite heavily, as the main purpose of having these age groups in place is allowing people to find others of their own age to talk to. Here's an example to further elaborate this (the user *fem25* left the channel immediately after this exchange):

Example 3.8
<fem-25> hi
<DirtyDave> fem-25, in a 50's room?
<DirtyDave> whats wrong with this picture??? (u. 2099-2101 data 2, 50+)

It is important to point out that the data has been revised and is not entirely in its original form. The chat-room itself sends automated welcome-messages to all users, and all of these have been removed from the data. The rooms were suffering from a large number of automated bot messages during the second data gathering period that were advertising new chat-rooms for users after ICQ.com closes, and as these were most likely just fake phishing websites, all the regular users ignored them and therefore I have also removed them from the data, because they took a very large portion of the total messages and served no actual communicational purpose whatsoever. However, possible typos, misclicks, repetition or even website advertising by active users has not been removed, as they are to a large extent a natural part of CMC, and also meaningful for the conversation at hand. These points will be further elaborated via the use of examples in the next section.

The entire recording process was done completely manually, by copying and pasting chat-logs into a word file and numbering each utterance. The revision was also done manually, one utterance at a time, most importantly because it seemed like the only way to record and revise the chat-logs in a way that nothing of value would be left out: a computer program could have done all of the work much more efficiently, but would also risk deleting or ignoring something important. The main goal was to keep the logs authentic by ignoring user-related errors, as mentioned, but at the same time recognizing and removing obvious bot messages. After recording the chat-logs and revising them, each utterance was numbered, and in the second dataset each recording session is also separated from one another for clarity.

I have analyzed the data in two separate parts: starting with a quantitative analysis I searched the whole data for utterances consisting of only emoticon/s, high-lighting each emoticon utterance as well as numbering them. Any kind of recognizable combination of letters and symbols that emulates a facial expression has been considered an emoticon. Possible misspelled emoticons have been ignored, and this will be discussed further in the next section. A complete table of all the emoticon-utterances used in the two datasets will be provided in the Analysis section. Secondly, I have analyzed the functions of all the emoticon-utterances; whether or not the emoticon-utterance has been used as a back-channeling item or if it serves as an actual conversational turn and lastly, if it serves as an information-providing turn or an attention-seeking turn.

The next step is considering how the different function groups relate to each other: their frequency in general and compared to one another. I have attempted to analyze all findings as in-depth as possible, further emphasizing and clarifying the analysis process by providing examples and tables. All examples in the analysis section have been taken from the data in their original form, and are followed by an utterance number and a notion on which dataset they are taken from. The quantitative part of the study is followed by thorough analysis of the possible reasons causing different-aged communicators to use emoticons in different ways, looking for some kind of communication patterns explaining these differences, as well as considering other, sociolinguistic reasons.

Any major differences between the two datasets are also analyzed, mostly focusing on the Teen-chatroom, because as mentioned, over the three-year timespan between the two recordings, the communication habits of this group seems to have changed considerably. Lastly, the different types and forms of emoticon-utterances used in

the data are briefly looked at, also considering the dataset they show up in, trying to establish if the variation of emoticons has stayed the same or changed over time and what the most commonly used emoticon-utterances are. I will also search the entire datasets for the three most common emoticon archetypes, the 'smiley' *:)*, 'wink' *;)*, and 'frown' *: (* (Danet et al. 1997, Walther & D'Addario 2001: 335), to find out if the use of these emoticons inside utterances is in line with the use of emoticon-utterances in the chat-rooms.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Quantitative findings

Originally the idea was to focus solely on the differences between the two age-groups, but as will be further discussed in this section, I quickly noticed significant differences in the communication patterns of the teens between the two datasets as well. Therefore, the analysis will be focused on both what has changed within the rooms during the timeframe of three years, and also on the fundamental differences between the two age-groups' communication styles and emoticon-utterance usage, and the possible causes to these changes and differences.

As previously mentioned, in the first dataset a total of 1334 utterances and just over 7300 words was recorded from the Teen chat-room, and a total of 1266 utterances and just over 9700 words from the 50+ chat-room. From these numbers alone we can make an interesting observation: the average length of utterances was quite different in the two rooms. The average utterance length was approximately 5.48 words in the Teen chat-room and as high as 7.71 words in the 50+ chat-room. However, in the second dataset a total number of 2217 utterances was recorded from the 50+ room, and 1845 from the Teen-room. The total word counts for these rooms were 15,425 and 12,825, resulting in an average utterance length of 6.95 for both rooms, meaning that especially the Teen-room's average utterance length has drastically changed, and this will be further discussed in a later section. It should be noted that the total number of words also contains the screen names of the communicators, which means the average length of utterances is actually even lower, but as the two rooms have the same required minimum and maximum number

of letters for an applicable screen name, these factors will not be taken into account in the analysis.

As has been mentioned, the data has been revised and automated messages from the server itself, such as the welcome-message, as well as bot-related spam have been removed from the data. The high amount of spam is most likely a very important factor in the decline of the chat-rooms' popularity in the second data-set, as the automated messages can be difficult to block out for a new user, even though it is possible. However, possible spam by active communicators has not been removed from the data, and all kinds of typos, misclicks, corrections and double-messages have also been left untouched, as these are a natural part of instant messaging (Park, 2007: 139), although if these broken utterances were removed from the data, the portion of emoticon-utterances would subsequently be larger. The following set of examples taken from the data will further emphasize this point:

Example 4.1
<torontoman47> hi
<torontoman47> hi (u. 1831-1832 data 2, Teens)

Example 4.2
<Guest_742> or
<Guest_742> õàõà
<Guest_742> æ (u. 1288-1290 data 1, Teens)

Example 4.3
*Lowolf hands katalex coupon for 10 % off on wiper blades (u. 175 data 2, 50+)

Example 4.4
*Man-In-Sydney [is currently playing] Passenger - Let Her Go- pillow-pet.mp3 [4m:14][7.759155mb][256 Kbps][48 Khz][Stereo] (u. 210 Data 1, 50+)

The first example is simply a double-message, which could be caused by server delay or a user-related error. Example 4.2 is a fine example of broken utterances with no actual meaning, most likely related to misclicks, as the user in question was an active communicator in the channel. In example 4.3, we can see how the users also have an option of posting songs they are currently listening, or even posting different kinds of activities they are currently taking part in (4.4), and even though these are not actual chat messages per se, they can still serve a communicational purpose and are therefore considered utterances, and thus have not been removed.

We must also take into account that only recognizable combinations of letters and symbols clearly emulating facial expressions were considered emoticons, which results in a number of possibly misspelled emoticon-utterances being rejected from the data. Here are a few examples taken from the data of possible misspelled emoticons that were not counted:

Example 4.5:
<Kumqu[a]tL[a]dy> (z (u. 880 data 1, Teens)

Example 4.6:
<Guest34110> -. (u. 99 data 1, Teens)

Example 4.7:
Shooting_Star> .-. (u. 368 data 1, Teens)

Example 4.8
<RedRocks> Aa Noahlyn thnaks]
<RedRocks>] (u. 431-432 data 2, 50+)

The *(z* could be a rare case of an emoticon, or a misspelled one. The -. could be an emoticon that is missing the second eye (-.-), and similarly the *]* could potentially have been the mouth of an emoticon (:]). However, these instances were not counted as emoticon-utterances for two reasons: they are not recognizable emoticons, meaning they could just be misclicks, and secondly, none of them serve a communicational function, as they are all completely ignored by the other users.

The use of emoticon-utterances varied greatly between the age-groups, but also between the two datasets. In the first dataset, out of the 1334 utterances of the Teen room a total of 112 were emoticon-utterances, whereas only 3 emoticon-utterances were found in the 1266 utterances of the 50+ room. Percentage-wise this means approximately a share of 8.40% of the Teen room's total utterances, and 0.24% of the 50+ room's total utterances were emoticon-utterances. In the second dataset, out of the recorded 2217 utterances of the 50+ room, only 4 were emoticon-utterances, whereas from the 1845 utterances of the Teen-room, a total of 48 were emoticon-utterances. Percentage-wise this means that approximately 0.18% of utterances in the 50+ room were emoticon-utterances, and 2.60% in the Teen-room. See Table 1 for clarity.

	Data 1		Data 2	
	50+	Teens	Teens	50+
E-utterances	3	112	48	4
Total utterances	1266	1334	1845	2217
% of total	2.40 %	8.40 %	2.60 %	0.18 %

Table 1

We can conclude that the data clearly shows that emoticon-utterances are, in fact, used in a chat-room environment quite commonly as independent communication tools, emoticon-utterances forming a total of 115 utterances out of the total of 2,600, resulting in approximately 4.42% of the total in the first dataset, and 52 out of a total of 4,062, which accounts for approximately 1.28%, in the second dataset. The results clearly show, however, that there is a large difference in the use of emoticon-utterances between the two age-groups: the older users hardly ever use emoticon-utterances, and this finding is extremely consistent in both datasets, as the numbers are close to identical and the use is nearly non-existent, as the emoticon-utterances only form a total of 0.24% and 0.18% of all the utterances in the chat-room, respectively. On the other hand, the teenage-users are consistently using a much greater number of emoticon-utterances than the older communicators, but there exists a wide gap in the usage between the two datasets. In the first dataset a grand total of 8.40% of all utterances are emoticon-utterances, whereas in the second set the number is only 2.60%.

A number of different factors need to be considered to better understand and explain these differences. In the next sections I will first analyze the differences between the two datasets, mainly focusing on the teen-room as the two datasets were extremely consistent when it comes to the older group. Secondly I will analyze the different factors behind the difference in emoticon use between the two age-groups, and lastly I will analyze all the emoticon-utterances used in the datasets, categorizing them based on their communication functions and also briefly discussing the most commonly used emoticon-types and any possible communicational patterns related to their usage.

4.2 Analysis of Activity & Dataset Differences

As has been mentioned, the two datasets were recorded between 20th of September and the 26th of October in 2012 and between the 13th of October and the 30th of November in 2015. During this period the 50+ room has stayed extremely active at peak hours, and we can see from the data that some regular, active communicators have stayed active during this three-year time span: for example, the user *cherokee_woman* has sent a total of 29 messages in both datasets, and since the screenname is quite unique, it is extremely likely the same person. This phenomenon does not occur in the Teen-room, however, partly due to the fact that many of the users would be over 20 years old by now and therefore would join the 20+ chat-room instead. The Teen-room also seems to have quieted down during these three years: first and foremost, the amount of messages per hour has slowed down quite a bit, which also seems to result in longer average messages, as the average utterance length has risen from 5,48 to 6,95. These two factors are likely linked together, because as the conversation is less hectic, users have more time to respond to messages and thus type longer utterances.

We can also take an arbitrary sample from the two datasets to further analyze the activity of the chat-room: 150 utterances taken from both sets between the numbers 560-709, contain messages sent by 24 different communicators in the first dataset, and only 17 different communicators in the second. There are simply much less active communicators in the channel during the second data gathering period, which is explained by a number of factors. One of the main reasons for the drop in activity is most likely the fact that the chat-rooms were at all times filled with spambots that filled the chat with "welcome-messages" and links to shady websites. However, the 50+ communicators seemed to be more resilient to the spammers and frequently advised each other and especially new users on how to block the messages from the chat-window:

Example 4.9

<TexCharlie> I am tring to figure out how to get rid of Mike

<missouri_woman> type "/ignore Mikel" (u. 2048-2051 Data 2, 50+)

Example 4.10

<noahlyn> nicki from the / copy and pastegt;gt;gt; /ignore D0ACA4.E4B667.17E71A.419B8E (u. 1894 Data 2, 50+)

Similar explicit conversations, surprisingly, were not found in the Teen-data at all. Another important reason is simply the popularization of new social media applications: for example, the online mobile photo-sharing and social network, Instagram, gained over 200 million users between the years 2012-2014 (Wikipedia). Similarly, the popularity of the video messaging application Snapchat has skyrocketed in the last two years. Online chat-rooms have simply been falling out of style with the rise of smartphones, mobile applications and new social networks. If someone wants to meet new people or talk to their existing acquaintances, IM applications, Facebook, online dating services or mobile applications like Tinder are simply easier to access and more popular.

All these factors affect the popularity of online chat-rooms in general, but most importantly, it affects the younger population, as the applications are first and foremost designed for the younger generation. Statistics show that 55% of Internet users between the ages of 18 and 29 used Instagram in the United States, whereas between the ages of 50-64 this number was only 11%, not to mention that there is obviously also a greater number of adolescent Internet users in general: according to a survey, 96% of the first age-group are using the Internet in the United States, whereas the number is only 81% in the 50-64 group and as low as 58% in the 65+ group (Statista.com, 2015). Adolescents and young adults seems to be much more comfortable using the Internet and the social media applications, yet the data of this study unequivocally shows that the 50+ age-group is much more active when it comes to communication in an online chat-room, and this clearly is not a coincidence. The younger generation is slowly leaving online chat-rooms behind, and with them leaving, at least ICQ.com decided to close down their chat-room services completely. This is most likely a trend that will see online chat-rooms slowly disappear completely.

These factors partly also explain why the use of emoticon-utterances has slowed down amongst the teens, as when the communicators are typing longer messages on a lower frequency, the need for fast-paced back-channeling or communication turns also diminishes. Emoticon-utterances could be seen as a communication tool for fast-paced, active conversation, and if the communication is slow, they are simply not needed to the same extent. On the other hand, Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 13) studied the use of the abbreviation *LOL* (for "laughing out loud") in Instant Messaging, and concluded that "perhaps as a result of habituation to the IM environment, it seems that adolescents quickly outgrow at least some of the IM forms", as they noticed that adolescents aged 15-16 used the abbreviation much more commonly than ages 19-20. Perhaps, then, we could consider

the lower frequency of emoticon-utterances found in the second dataset a situation of adolescents, to some extent, outgrowing the use of emoticon-utterances. IM and chat-rooms are extremely similar communication environments, and perhaps emoticon use or emoticon-utterance use is simply dropping out of fashion, similar to chat-room usage in general. This point will be further discussed in section 4.5.

4.3 Analysis of Age Groups

The results clearly show a large gap in the use of emoticon-utterances between the two age groups: teens use emoticon-utterances quite frequently in both datasets, and the 50+ group nearly never. If we consider how the chat-room environment functions, it is obvious that even real time CMC, such as a chat-room, violates traditional face-to-face turn-taking patterns, because the communication channel posts the comments of the speakers in the order in which they are received by the server, which often results in overlapping turns or even conversations (Wood & Smith, 2005: 13-14). Smith (2003: 39) further emphasizes this point, mentioning that overlaps in CMC are much more frequent than in face-to-face communication, "largely due to a short time delay (even in synchronous CMC)" and because only one message at a time may be posted in a CMC interface. However, surprisingly enough, the 50+ room was the much more active one, which would make communicating as effectively as possible seem even more tempting due to more overlap and messages-per-minute, yet the older communicators simply chose not to use emoticon-utterances.

Thurlow et al. (2004: 32) point out that communication on the Internet is heavily influenced by contextual factors, such as the topic; how experienced the communicators are in online communication, and what their general attitude towards CMC is. It is apparent from the data that some very serious conversational topics, such as terrorism and even death, were indeed discussed in the 50+ group, which partly discourages the use of emoticons. Derks et al. (2008: 99) further emphasize this point, stating that emoticons are used more often in a positive context than in a negative one. Here are a few examples of very serious topics discussed in the 50+ room to further elaborate:

Example 4.11
<Doris^^^> Australia have lots of guns in ppls hands still

<TallChef> ....on kid?...one death?....look at this country...shootings every hour (u. 103-104 data 2, 50+)

Example 4.12
<keka> yellowcat did
<Beau> she died?
<Blinky> yep yellow has cancer (u. 1043-1045 data 1, 50+)

As the average utterance lengths were almost identical in the two rooms, but the 50+ room's communicators barely used emoticon-utterances at all, it leaves an interesting question: what kind of conversational tools do they use, if not emoticons? The average utterance length is so short, that the users are clearly not communicating exclusively via full sentences. Going through the data it is apparent that the 50+ room users are actually using a very large amount of abbreviations and acronyms to serve the same purposes emoticon-utterances could be used for, and mainly the acronym *LOL* (laughing out loud). A quick search through the data shows a total number of 126 instances of the acronym in the 50+ room in the first dataset, and a total of 252 in the second, and many of these are independent utterances. Another set of examples is used to further elaborate the use:

Example 4.13
<Witchepoo2u> I sure Ts can handle what comes along
<Witchepoo2u> lol (u 255-256 data 2, 50+)

Example 4.14
<Farmgirl1> no purrfect I was checking my soup
<Farmgirl1> lolol (u 356-357 data 2, 50+)

Example 4.15
<SuthnBelle66> yeah you bettah before standing
<Lowolf> lol (u 892-893 data2, 50+)

In the first two examples, the abbreviation is used as an information-providing turn, to add emphasis to the previous message. The third example in 4.15 is a clear case of back-channelling. Only 77 instances of the acronym can be found in the first set of the Teen data, and 133 in the second. The popularity of this abbreviation is also an important factor in explaining the difference in the use of emoticon-utterances between the two age-groups, as they can be used to serve the same functions independently, as shown in the previous examples.

However, it is extremely interesting that Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 13) mentioned in their study of adolescent acronym usage in an IM environment that "the use of lol declines systematically according to age, with the younger individuals using it the most" and speculated the main reason for this is the longer exposure to IM. From our data we can conclude that the use of the acronym is not related to age at all, but partly linked to exposure to and familiarity with CMC. Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 13) also mention that "perhaps as a result of habituation to the IM environment, it seems that adolescents quickly outgrow at least some of the IM forms". Based on these two ideas, then, we can deduce that the older communicators are starting to use the acronym more and more as they become more familiar with the acronym itself and the communication channel, and this is supported by Channel expansion theory (Lo: 2008: 595) which emphasizes the importance of experience in CMC, stating that communicators actively develop their communication skills as they gain more experience, resulting in a better performance which then makes conveying messages, personality and attitude much easier over time.

However, the teenage chat-users are using less acronyms than their older counterparts, and more emoticon-utterances. Why? The younger communicators have been exposed to emoticons, the acronym *lol* and even CMC for most if not all of their lives, via commercials, SMS messages and the development of communication technology in general, and are thus more familiar with both of them. It is their choice to use emoticon-utterances over the acronym *lol*. It seems plausible to assume that this choice is simply due to the fact that the younger population is clearly the one setting new communicational trends, and emoticon-utterances are simply an example of a new trend that the older communicators have not adopted yet.

Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 24-25) asked the following question about IM:

> Moreover, our results corroborate earlier CMC research in demonstrating that language use in IM is part of a much broader contemporary trend toward more informal language generally... Yet, the variety of English used in the IM corpora we have studied here is neither a caricature of real language nor some kind of basilectal lowlife. But the question is—what is it?

IM and chat-rooms have a great deal in common, and they are both a hybrid form that combine elements and characteristics of both written and oral language. Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 27) call IM a venue in teenagers are free to use all of the features of language without being restricted by "language police", such as teachers, parents or editors. It seems plausible that this point could be extended to not only IM, but any synchronous form of CMC: as we have previously mentioned, asynchronous CMC is often highly regulated, but

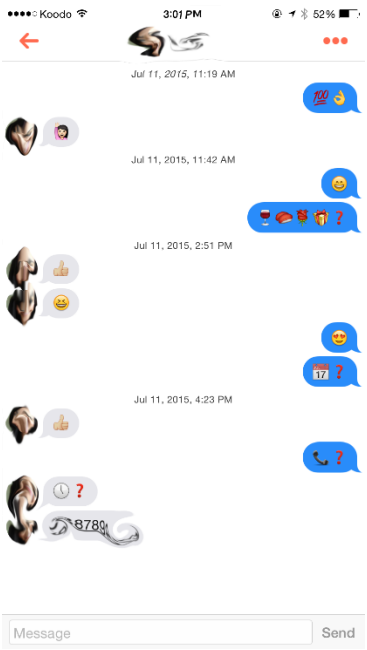
chat-rooms definitely are not. Perhaps, then, this linguistic freedom, or lack of it, is one of the explaining factors in the differences between the two rooms: there is no language police in the teen-room, allowing them to freely experiment with language use, but perhaps the perceived peer pressure from other adults discourages experimentation and therefore even the use of emoticon-utterances in the 50+ room.

Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 27) go as far as calling CMC a potential new linguistic renaissance. Perhaps what we are actually dealing with is, in fact, related to not only technological development, but also language change. Kerswill (2007: 184-186) mention that older children are the first to establish new linguistic patterns and do most of the sociolinguistic work when new dialects are formed. They define dialects as "varieties that differ also in terms of grammar and vocabulary" (as opposed to accents that only differ in terms of pronunciation). If, then, CMC and especially synchronous CMC, is a venue where an individual can use language more freely and "draw from the entire stylistic repertoire of the language that exists at a given point in time" (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008: 27), CMC could be seen as a dialect of the English language, as it lacks the grammar rules of normal written English and has plenty of unique features, such as the use of characteristic CMC-related forms, like abbreviations - *lol, wtf, omg, btw, brb* to mention a few - and emoticons.

Therefore, we could also argue that teens are actually the front-runners of the development of CMC, and the older communicators are simply following their lead, but at a much slower pace. Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 27) acknowledged that their study is likely already behind the times at the time of publication, as communication technology, CMC and even language itself constantly fluctuates and changes. They talked about the acronym *lol* as language use typical to adolescents, much like Baron (2004: 411) calls it "an acronym that has even found its way into spoken usage among some college students", but as we can see, the acronym clearly is not used by just kids or teenagers anymore. Interestingly enough, even the Oxford English Dictionary has acknowledged *lol* and some other common initialisms – as the OED calls them, although *lol* can be both an acronym or an initialism depending on the user (however, because of personal preference it is referred to as an acronym in this paper) - as official parts of English language (oed.com, 2011). It seems like the older generation is becoming familiar with the usage of the acronym *lol* and it has gained popularity between the two datasets, whereas emoticon-utterances are a newer phenomenon to the older population and extremely rare, but still something that the teens have used frequently for several years.

It seems like the communication patterns of the teens are moving to a more neutral direction, but only time will tell what the next step is. If online chat-rooms die out and the communication becomes more and more smart-phone based, emojis are likely going to play an important part in it. Numerous conversations consisting of nothing but emojis have been posted on different sites on the Internet, mostly coming from the online dating application Tinder:

Example 4.16



(Elite Daily, 2015)

Two communicators are matched with each other via the mobile dating application, followed by the two greeting one another, exchanging compliments, setting up a date and exchanging phone-numbers in a quick fashion communicating completely via emojis. As smart-phones like the IPhone offer an established list of emojis all around the world, the language of emojis could eventually become globally understood and accepted, at least in well-developed countries. The large potential of emojis will be further discussed in the next sections.

Obviously familiarity with emoticons also affects the general attitude of the different generations towards emoticon use. A popular online blog (Sloshspot, 2010) expressed the feelings of many adults in a post stating that grown men should never use emoticons, because they make the communicators seem childish and unprofessional. Provine et al. (2007: 305) support this view, as they point out that even language scholars from a variety of different views - including psychology, neuroscience and sociolinguistics – describe emoticons as "an unnecessary and unwelcome intrusion into a well-crafted

text". As Garrison et al. (2011: 112-113) note, the negativity often seems to stem from the ambiguity of emoticons, as Crystal (2001: 39) called them "crude" and their use "limited". This negative attitude towards emoticon use could partly explain the reason behind the extremely small number of emoticon-utterances in the 50+ chat-logs. However, it must be also noted that these are somewhat outdated sources, and the atmosphere towards emoticon use is most likely already very different from what it was back in 2010, as will be further discussed in section 4.6.

Another important point is that most of the emoticon-utterances in the Teen-room appear in clusters: for example, the 3rd and 19th recordings contain 0 emoticon-utterances, whereas the 4th recording contains 7 in a total of only 117 utterances. In this single data-set, emoticon-utterances form a total of almost 6% of the utterances. It seems likely that at least among the younger communicators, a single usage of an emoticon-utterance can launch a kind of chain reaction, which is also supported by the fact that Skovholt et al. (2014: 791-792) mentioned emoticons can be used as solidarity markers, so emoticon-utterance chains could be a sign of some kind of bonding between the communicators. Furthermore, Stevanovic & Peräkylä (2015: 450) point out that "the literature on "emotional contagion" suggests that humans have an automatic tendency to mimick other people's non-verbal emotional expressions, which affects the emotional experience of the mimicking person", and that two communicator's interactional "moves" are connected and share a causal relationship. Perhaps we can go as far as assuming that if people are likely to mimic non-verbal emotional expressions in face-to-face conversation, it is likely happening to some extent in CMC environments as well, which obviously affects emoticon and emoticon-utterance use greatly.

Obviously using emoticon-utterances is, to a great extent, a personal choice, which is also one of the reasons they appear in clusters: the emoticon-utterance chain needs someone to start it. A prime example of the importance of personal preference when it comes to emoticon-utterances is the user *neesha*, a regular of the Teen-room. She uses a staggering number of 17 emoticon-utterances in 6 different recording sets, which is over 35% of the room's total. One could argue that this particular communicator somewhat skews the results of this study, as she affects the results in a major way, but even if we leave out those 6 datasets, the wide gap between the two age-groups still remains. More importantly this communicator's existence underlines the nature of emoticon use on a

general level: the use of emoticons, and especially emoticon-utterances, is most importantly a question of personal preference, but the attitude towards their use is greatly affected by the communicator's age and the communication environment. This study shows that in an age-specific communication environment, the age of the communicator and the frequency of emoticon-utterance use are inversely proportional. There were no users in the 50+ rooms that used more than one emoticon-utterance in either dataset.

4.4 Analysis of Functions

The next step is categorizing all of the emoticon-utterances found in the two datasets based on their communication functions, firstly dividing them into either back-channels or speaking turns, and then further dividing speaking turns into information-providing or attention-seeking turns. As I mentioned in the previous section, the categorization process itself is quite simple, mainly because the most problematic function group – attention seeking speaking turn – is nearly nonexistent in a multi-person chat-room environment. I will start off by elaborating once more the analysis process itself with an example from the data, to further consider the differences between back-channels and speaking turns:

Example 4.17
<albertagal> hugs Aa
<_^Aa> Oh .. Other room :))
<Suzy> wow Aa ...the huggings never stop for you!
<**Suzy**> **:P** (u. 449-452 data 2, 50+)

In this example, the user *_^Aa* has just joined the channel, and the other participants acknowledge him by saying hello and "hugging" him. The user *Suzy* points out, jokingly, that the hugging never stops for this particular individual. An emoticon-utterance is used after the comment to further emphasize the tone of the first comment, essentially adding new information to make it clear that the speaker – who also holds the speaking turn and therefore is not responding to anyone else – is not serious, but joking. Thus the emoticon-utterance can clearly be categorized as an information-providing speaking turn. Here's another example from the same data set involving a similar communication situation:

Example 4.18

<^Athena50^> hi again CaptTom....

…
<Witchepoo2u> Wb Capt Tom
…
<CaptTom> Athena! hi and hugs!!
…
<^**Athena50**^> **:)** (u. 1576-1583 data 2, 50+)

Parts of the conversation are omitted as they are not important for the categorization. In this example, a communicator, *CaptTom*, re-joins the chat-room and is greeted by the user ^*Athena50*^. After *CaptTom* acknowledges this greeting cheerfully, ^*Athena50*^ responds with an emoticon-utterance. The smiley-face is clearly a backchannel, because the communicator does not hold the speaking turn or make a claim to it, but is merely used to show affection and acknowledge the greeting of the other communicator. This is supported by the fact that the communicator using the emoticon-utterance does not follow the emoticon-utterance up with a speaking turn, thus it is clearly not intended to seek attention or make a claim to hold the speaking turn.

In the first dataset, out of the 112 emoticon-utterances used in the Teen chat-room, 61 or approximately 54.5% consisted of back-channels, 48 or 42.9% information-providing turns and only 3 were potential attention-seeking turns. In the 50+ room two information-providing emoticon-utterance were used, and one back-channel. In the second dataset, out of the four recorded emoticon-utterances of the 50+ room, three were categorized as information providing speaking turns, and 1 was categorized as a back-channel. Out of the 48 recorded emoticon-utterances of the Teen-room, 21 were categorized as back-channels and 26 as information-providing turns. In the second set there is only one instance of an emoticon-utterance that could be categorized as an attention-seeking turn:

Example 4.19
<zombie14> u jelly?
<zombie14> i can share brainzz
<katrina> no no
<katrina> u can have them
<zombie14> :(
<zombie14> sad
<katrina> dont be sad (u. 1282-1286 data 2, Teens)

In this example, the emoticon-utterance can be seen to have two different functions, depending on the interpretation. Firstly, the user *katrina* is holding the speaking turn, and the emoticon-utterance works as a back-channel, signalling disappointment. However, it could also be seen as an attention-seeking turn as it makes a claim to hold the speaking turn, and is followed by an information providing speaking turn. This is an example of the possible problems related to the categorization process, as it is somewhat subjective. However, this particular emoticon-utterance would clearly be considered a back-channel, because it has all the characteristics of one, and furthermore, the utterance actually fails to gain attention, as the user receives no reaction and is forced to further highlight his feelings in words after using the emoticon.

Nevertheless, our findings in both datasets clearly show the inefficiency of attention-seeking turns in an online chat-room environment: the more active speakers there are, the harder it is to claim the speaking turn, and a mere emoticon is in most cases simply not enough to grasp the attention of others. Even in this example of a possible attention-seeking turn, the conversation is briefly being held by only two participants. Potential intended attention-seeking turns may end up being categorized as back-channels simply because they fail to make a claim for the conversational turn, as in most cases the receiver will simply not recognize the claim or choose to ignore it, due to the fast-paced nature of the communication channel. In a two-way conversation via SMS, for example, attention-seeking turns would be much more effective, and therefore I do consider the three-way categorization accurate, just not very effective for this particular medium.

Out of the grand total of 167 emoticon-utterances, 84 were categorized as back-channels, which means slightly over 50%, and even between the two datasets the numbers were quite consistent. As Thurlow et al. (2004:32) point out, the type of channel and the mode of communication greatly influence the communication itself, and cconsidering the fast-paced nature of an online chat-room environment, back-channels are essentially forced to be extremely short. Emoticon-utterances are still a somewhat popular back-channel item among the younger age group, even though they seem to be losing popularity, whereas the 50+ chat-room uses almost exclusively abbreviations and words or sentences as back-channels. I will once more elaborate the use of emoticon-utterances as back-channels with a few examples:

Example 4.20
<Miakins> Shut up, bitch
<suna> x) (u. 1103-1104 data 1, Teens)

Example 4.21
<sydney> Ur funny
<CanadianGuy> :) (u 1196-1197 data 1, Teens)

Example 4.22
<cheeseburger> sandra, :)
<sandraukGuest> ;] (u 7-8 data 1, Teens)

In these examples, the communicators using the emoticon-utterances are not holding or making a claim to hold the conversational turns, they are merely acknowledging another communicator or giving immediate feedback to someone else. In example 4.20, the communicator *suna* expresses her amusement towards the words of her friend, *Miakins*. It is apparent from the chat-logs that the two communicators know each other and are essentially joking around together. In example 4.21, the user *CanadianGuy* acknowledges the kind words of another communicator using an emoticon-utterance. In example 4.22 the two communicators are essentially acknowledging each other's existence in a kindly manner. All three examples are cases of emoticon-utterances used to let the speaker in turn know that the "message has been received, understood, agreed to and/or caused a certain effect" (Oreström 1983:24), and can thus clearly be categorized as back-channels.

A total of 79 emoticon-utterances were categorized as information providing turns, slightly over 47% of the total number of 167. These utterances were mainly used to further emphasize a point made in a previous utterance, or in some cases to mark sarcasm and/or humor. A study by Derks et al. (2008: 101) supports this view, as it points out that emoticons are, in general, most used for "the expression of emotion, for strengthening the verbal part of a message, and for expressing humor". The study also notes that these purposes correlate with the functions of nonverbal emotional expression in face-to-face communication. Therefore, it is not surprising to find such a large number of information-providing emoticon-utterances; the communicators are commonly attempting to mimic nonverbal cues with their use of emoticon-utterances.

These points are further emphasized by Lo (2008: 597), as he points out that most communicators cannot in fact accurately perceive the correct emotion, attitude and

attention intents from plain text, but when emoticons are added, they "allow receivers to correctly understand the level and direction of emotion, attitude, and attention expression". Information-providing emoticon-utterances clearly form an important communication tool that supports the expression of these emotions, attitudes and attentions in a very limited space. It is therefore not surprising at all that the most common use of information-providing emoticon-utterances is, as I will elaborate in the next set of examples, to act as a marker of a specific tone of speech, be it sarcastic, surprised or serious:

Example 4.23

<ColoradoGal> I am 39 ... will be forever

<ColoradoGal> :) (u. 1982-1983 data 2, 50+)

Example 4.24

<neesha> Im not russian i said.

<neesha> -.- (u. 367-368 data 2, Teens)

Example 4.25

<Guest8570> i have a US passport

<waytogo721> idc

<waytogo721> o.o **(**u. 1636-1638 data 1, Teens)

In all three examples, the communicator using the emoticon-utterance is holding the conversational turn, and the emoticon is added to convey attitude/emotion and to provide additional information. In example 8.1, the communicator adds an emoticon-utterance after claiming to be 39 years old forever, adding an even more humorous tone to her already nonsensical words. In example 8.2, the user *neesha* is using an emoticon-utterance to further emphasize her discontent after another communicator has suggested she is Russian. In example 8.3, the emoticon-utterance is used similarly to add emphasis: there is an ongoing argument, and the user *waytogo721* remarks that he does not care about what the other communicator is saying, and uses an emoticon-utterance to mimic the rolling of eyes to mark discontent. All three examples are clearly conversational turns, as as they are sequences that "convey new information and expand the topic" (Öreström 1983:23, as cited in Täljeblad-Steiner 2005).

4.5 Analysis of Emoticons

Danet et al. (1997) mention that the most well-known emoticons are "a smile, wink, and frown, respectively: :-) ;-) :-(" and the study of Walther & D'Addario (2001: 335) listed the same three emoticons as the most prevalent. The evolutionary nature of emoticons, however, becomes quite clear when we take a look at the variety of emoticon-utterances used in the datasets of this study. In the first dataset, 17 different emoticon-types were found to be used as independent utterances, with considerable variation in some of the spellings. Interestingly only two instances of the "traditional" smileys that contain a nose depicted by a dash were found in the data, and furthermore, all of those instances were in the 50+ room.:

Example 4.26

:-) (u. 441 data 1, 50+)

;-) (u. 1245 data 1, 50+)

In addition to these two, one instance of the wink *;))* was found was used in the first dataset of the 50+ room (u. 458). In the second dataset, only three years later, the 50+ users had dropped the nose-element and only used the smiley *:)* three times and one instance of *:P*. This could definitely be seen as yet another piece of evidence suggesting that the CMC-related communication patterns of these communicators are constantly evolving, with the older users seemingly lagging behind and the younger communicators being the "trend-setters" of the new media. See Table 2 for details.

Table 2

Emoticons	**Data 1**		**Data2**	
	50+	**Teens**	**Teens**	**50+**
-_-, -.-, ._.		**11**	**3**	
:3, 3:		**9**	**2**	
:), :], :}, :-)	**1**	**8**	**5**	**3**
o.o, O.o, 0.0, o_o		**33**	**4**	
c;		**2**		
xD		**24**	**6**	
O:)		**1**		
x.x		**1**		
;), ;-), ;)), ;]	**2**	**1**	**1**	
:P		**9**	**8**	**1**
:O, o:		**3**	**2**	
:D		**5**	**10**	
:l		**1**		

e_e		**1**		
;x		**1**		
:/		**1**	**1**	
;(		**1**		
:********			**1**	
x),			**1**	
;0)			**1**	
:(			**1**	
C:			**1**	
Cx			**1**	
Total	**3**	**112**	**48**	**4**

Even more interesting is the fact that none of the emoticons previously listed by Danet et al. (1997) were among the three most common ones in the first dataset, as the three most commonly used emoticon-utterances were all quite unconventional. The emoticon *o.o* and its several variants (*o.0, Oo, O_O, o-o* etc.*)* was found 33 times in the first dataset, the second most common emoticon-utterance being *XD* and its variant *xD* with 24 instances, and thirdly -_- with its variants (-.-, ._.) with 11 instances. The regular smiley *:)* was only found 6 times, or 8 if we count its variants *:]* and *:}*. The second dataset similarly contained 16 different emoticon-utterances, *:D* being the most popular one with 10 instances, followed by *:P* with 9 and the smiley with 8. Furthermore, the wink and frown mentioned by Danet et al. (1997) are practically nonexistent in both datasets, as there is only one instance of *;)* in the first dataset and one instance of *;]* in the second one, and similarly one *;(* in the first set and one *:(* in the second. However, a few more unconventional variations can also be found, but they are equally rarely used, namely *c;* (2 instances), :/ (2 instances) *;x* (1 instance) and *;0)* (1 instance).

These results seem to further confirm that emoticon-utterances do in fact have a tendency to appear in clusters, and that the use of a popular emoticon-utterance can be somewhat "contagious", as in the first dataset between the utterances 1033-1164 six different varieties of the emoticon-utterance *o.o* are used 14 times in total, by four different communicators. These views are supported by the previously mentioned idea of emotional contagion, as Stevanovic & Peräkylä (2015: 450) mention that communicators have a natural tendency to mimic each other's emotional expressions. On the other hand, there were several instances of very unconventional emoticons that were not picked up by other speakers, and the communicator using them did so only once: *e_e, ;x, :I, Cx, C:, ;0), x.x* and *O:)* were each used only once in the datasets. It seems like the use of emoticon-utterances is perhaps even more social than one might think, as the data clearly suggests

that the use of an emoticon-utterance is often validated by other communicators replying with the same or a similar emoticon-utterance in the very near future, and more importantly, if this kind of validation is not received, the communicators drop these more unique or personal types of emoticons instantly afterwards.

The emoticons *o.o, XD, :D* and -_- were frequently used in both datasets. In situations when the regular smiley is not enough, *:D* and *XD* are used to further emphasize the humorous effect. Here's an example emphasizing the difference in tone:

Example 4.27

<achraf> I guess neesha has armpits fetish
<neesha> XD (u 549-550 data 2, Teens)

In this example the user *achraf* is making a joke about the other communicator's supposed "armpit fetish", and the joke is greeted by the emoticon-equivalent of laughter, as the emoticon depicts a face with crossed eyes and a mouth wide in laughter. If the communicator was to use the smiley in this situation, the tone difference would be noticeable, perhaps even suggesting a displeased reaction instead of an amused one. However, the other two emoticons are more ambiguous, with *o.o* most often used similarly to *:o* as a marker of surprise or shock, whereas -_- is mostly used to express discontent. These two are especially interesting for the reason that they are not sideways like all the other emoticons used in the data. Dresner & Herring (2010: 249-250) mention that sideways emoticons originated and are used in Western culture contexts, while other kinds of signs are usually specific to other cultures, and as an example they mention that emoticons that are viewed "straight on" are commonly used in Japanese communication. Rezabek & Cochenour (1998: 201) even include the part "sideways" in their definition of an emoticon.

This popularization of an emoticon-type in an English-speaking global chat-room previously deemed culture-specific to Japanese communication contexts seems to be a clear indication of some sort of CMC-related language contact. The Japanese-styled emoticons have clearly started mixing up with the Western ones, providing even further proof about the evolutionary nature of emoticons and CMC in general. Leith (2007: 117-125) talks about how languages are shaped by repeated contact with other languages, resulting in different features, such as vocabulary, spreading from one language to another. This is clearly happening with emoticon usage, and similarly with other CMC-related vocabulary, as English abbreviations are finding their way into other languages as well,

both in written and spoken forms. For example, the Finnish tabloid Iltasanomat reported in an online article that the Finnish youth are using the abbreviations *LOL* and *OMG* regularly in their spoken communication (Iltasanomat.fi, 2015). The article also further underlines the importance of English as an online lingua franca, and points out how it thus affects other languages and Anglicisms are becoming more and more popular. Clearly the Internet is a prime example of languages and language varieties constantly being in contact and slowly melding one another, and English obviously plays a large part in all of it.

4.6 Analysis of the Three Emoticon Archetypes

In this section I will briefly look into and discuss the frequency of the three most common emoticons, as established by Danet et al. (1997) and Walther & D'Addario (2001: 335): the 'smiley', the 'winkey' and the 'frown'. It should be taken into consideration that these uses will also include the emoticon-utterances as well as every other emoticon as well. I will not factor in every possible typographical form of these archetypes, just the most common ones: *:)* and *:-)* for the smiley, *;)* and *;-)* for the winkey and *:(*, *:-(* for the frown. In the Teens-room, the smiley-face is used a total of 28 times in the first dataset, and only 13 in the second dataset. The winkey is used 6 times and the frown 0 times in the first set, and in the second set there can be found a total of 4 winkeys and 2 frowns. Not a single one of these emoticons had the nose element, further emphasizing how the emoticons have developed and the nose-element has fallen out of style.

As can be expected, the results for the 50+ room are very different. In the first dataset, there is a total of 39 smileys, 4 of them with the nose-element, 5 winkeys, 1 of them with the nose-element and 2 frowns, 1 of them with a nose. In the second dataset, there is a staggering total of 112 smileys, 3 of them with a nose, 6 winkeys and 4 frowns, none of them with a nose. See Table 3 for summary:

Table 3

Emoticon	**Dataset 1**		**Dataset 2**	
	50+	**Teens**	**Teens**	**50+**
:), :-)	**39**	**28**	**13**	**112**
;), ;-)	**5**	**6**	**4**	**6**
:(, :-(	**2**	**0**	**2**	**4**
Total	**46**	**34**	**19**	**122**

We can make a few interesting conclusions from these results. Firstly, it is now apparent that the shape of emoticons has greatly changed over time, just like their usage has changed. The trend-setting teens have dropped the nose-element from their emoticons completely, and the 50+ users seem to be slowly following suit. As has been previously mentioned, the teenagers have also slowed down their use of emoticon-utterances by quite a bit over the timespan of 3 years, and this trend seems to apply to their general use of emoticons as well. The younger age-group has also moved from the "traditional" emoticon archetypes towards more creative types, such as *xD*, which is just as common as the smiley-face in the Teen-room in the 2nd dataset, whereas it does not appear a single time in the 50+ chat-logs. However, the way emoticon use seems to be developing, it would be plausible to expect the 50+ users slowly start adopting the non-conventional emoticons in the near future.

The extremely high frequency of emoticon use in the 50+ room could be seen as slightly surprising or even contradictory, but let us first take a closer look at the numbers. I will focus on simply analyzing the usage of the smiley-face, because the other two archetypes are nearly non-existent in both rooms and both datasets. First of all, the first dataset contained a total of 39 smileys in the 50+ room, compared to 28 in the Teens-room. In the second dataset, on the other hand, the gap widened immensely, with 13 smileys in the Teens-room and 112 in the 50+. As mentioned previously, the emoticon usage of the teens is shifting towards new emoticon types and gradually decreasing at the same time, therefore explaining the comparably lower numbers of the Teens-room as well as the declining usage in general.

The large number of smileys used in the 50+ room can be explained by comparing the trend to that of the acronym *LOL* previously discussed in section 4. The acronym was originally considered only an adolescent phenomenon, but nevertheless slowly became popular amongst the older communicators, and the acronym's frequency of occurrence doubled between the two datasets. Similarly, it can be assumed that the older communicators have previously had a rather negative attitude towards emoticon usage in general, highlighted by the blogpost of Sloshspot (2010) which stated that grown men should never use emoticons. However, in a similar fashion to the acronym *lol*, the older communicators have slowly followed the younger trend-setters, and began using the so-called conventional emoticons – mostly the smiley – whereas the younger communicators are already starting to replace them with completely new forms. The smiley was somewhat popular among the older communicators in the first dataset with 39 occurrences, but this

number nearly tripled in the second dataset, clearly marking a change in the communicational patterns of the 50+ room.

We can conclude from these results that the 50+ users have in fact started to actively use the more conventional emoticons, but are thus far completely ignoring the new trends, such as the emoticons *xD* and *o.o*, which younger communicators have started to favor. We can also draw the conclusion that the use of emoticon-utterances could be seen as another similar trend, as no previous research considered it common to use emoticons as independent communication tools. Thus we can deduce that they are simply not a part of the older communicators' toolkit yet, as only a few emoticon-utterances could be found in the 50+ room's chat-logs.

5. DISCUSSION

On the basis of the analyzed data we can conclude that emoticon-utterances are in fact commonly used in a chat-room environment to serve a number of functions: firstly, as back-channeling items to provide immediate feedback to the speaker in turn, and secondly as actual conversational turns, by either extending an existing turn with additional information, or completely independently. These conversational turns can then, in terms of convenience, be further divided into two separate groups: attention-seeking turns, which are mainly used to attract the attention of other communicators and to claim the speaking turn, and information-providing turns. They can either answer questions independently or be used to support previous turns, providing additional information about, for example, about the attitude or tone of the speaker, much in the same way nonverbal communication cues do in face-to-face communication.

From the data gathered we can draw the conclusion that in a chat-room environment with multiple participants, emoticon-utterances are mainly used to either provide new information as conversational turns, or as back-channeling items. Attention-seeking turns, on the other hand, are basically non-existent due to their inefficiency in a multi-person communication channel with constantly overlapping discussions, but would most likely be much more common in a one-on-one conversation. Even though the actual categorization process is somewhat subjective, the findings are reliable due to the mutually exclusive characteristics of the two most common types of emoticon-utterances. Firstly,

back-channeling items are used independently to provide feedback to the speaker in turn, and secondly, information-providing utterances are always used by the speaker already holding the turn or by a speaker claiming the turn. Their most common usage is immediately after an utterance to provide further information (marking tone, humor, sarcasm etc.) or to add emphasis. Attention-seeking turns are problematic to recognize and categorize, but as they are nearly non-existent in the data, the category itself is not very relevant for the purposes of this study.

An important finding of this study is the difference in the use of emoticon-utterances between the two age-groups. Teens use emoticon-utterances much more frequently in general, even though there are clear individual differences in the usage even among the younger users, and the emoticon usage of the teens has clearly diminished within the three-year timespan between the two recordings. Instead of emoticon-utterances, the older communicators seem to favor abbreviations like *LOL* for 'laughing out loud', which has gained a lot of popularity amongst the older communicators between the two datasets. The older communicators use the abbreviation both independently and in sentences regularly.

At first this development seemed likely to be related to exposure with both emoticons and the electronic media and therefore linked to Channel-expansion theory (Lo, 2008: 595), as younger communicators are more familiar with emoticons and thus more likely to use them. However, at the end of the previous section we took a brief look at the three emoticon archetypes that were mentioned to be the most well-known and popular in several pieces of previous research: the smiley, the winkey and the frown *(:), ;)* and *:(*). First of all, among both age-groups, only the smiley has stayed prevalent, and it was apparent that the 50+ group actually uses this archetype much more frequently than the younger communicators, just not as independent emoticon-utterances. Furthermore, the use of the smiley has greatly increased in the 50+ room in the second dataset. Emoticon usage seems, therefore, more than anything linked to language change and trends: the younger communicators, the teens, set the way many CMC tools like emoticons and acronyms are used, and rather quickly move on to more interesting, unconventional uses.

The usage of the acronym *lol* was deemed an adolescent phenomenon in previous research (Baron (2004: 411, Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008: 13), yet currently the 50+ communicators have adopted it as a core part of their communicational toolkit, and the younger population uses it much less frequently compared to their older counterparts. Similarly, emoticons have been considered inappropriate to be used by adults, as in the

example of the blogpost of Sloshspot (2010) discussed in 4.6, but are now clearly becoming more popular among the 50+ users. The teens, however, have started to move on from the traditional smiley-face towards more creative emoticons, such as *xD, o.o* and -_-, all three of which the older group has not adopted the usage of at all, yet.

Milroy and Milroy (1985) provide interesting generalizations related to language change, that are particularly useful for the purposes of this study and applicable to our data. First of all, they mention that personal channels of communication – such as IM or online chat – are much more influential than mass media channels when it comes to adopting new language innovations (ibid: 30). This fact further underlines the importance of this study. Furthermore, according to social network theory (ibid: 57-58), in a closely-knit group of people communicators rarely adopt speech forms that are outside the group norms, and instead opt for solidarity. This point partly explains the lack of innovation in the 50+ room, as the users seem to be on much closer terms with one another compared to the younger communicators, and therefore peer pressure is greater. On the other hand, Milroy and Milroy (1985: 110-112) also mention that in several studies adolescents have been noted to actively deviate from standard forms and innovating with language in order to create and project their own social identity. West Indian children, for example, begin using creole in their early teens simply "as a means of expressing group solidarity and identity" (112). We can directly link the findings of these studies to the idea previously mentioned by Tagliamonte & Denis (2008: 27) of CMC – or even more so in the case of an age-specific chat-room – providing teens with a venue with no language police and the freedom to innovate.

These points make it reasonable to assume that the use of emoticon-utterances can be considered a trend similar to the acronym *lol*: the younger population has used and still use them fairly frequently, but between the two datasets the emoticon-utterance usage of the adolescent communicators has clearly decreased. It would be interesting to see if the 50+ group would slowly start to adopt more emoticon-utterances in their conversations similarly to acronyms and smileys, and even broaden their general emoticon usage to cover newer types and variations. It would also be interesting to look at how the communication patterns of the younger group continue to develop, but further research in this specific area of CMC will prove extremely difficult, because as has been mentioned, chat-room as a genre has been going out of fashion for several years, as it is simply becoming an outdated, inefficient channel of communication.

The evolutionary nature of CMC and even emoticons, originally brought up by Garrison et al (2011: 114), is perhaps the most important point explored in this study. It seems clear, based on the results, that CMC develops very similarly to language in general, simply much faster, but that CMC can also directly affect the whole English language, with the popularization of different genre-specific phenomena, such as several acronyms that have made their way into the OED. The development of communication technology in the resent years and the popularity of different social media applications and services is also another explaining factor in the changing communication patterns of the teens: emoticons, as well as online chat in general, are slowly becoming outdated with the spread of emojis in smartphone applications and even social networks like Facebook. A completely text-based chat service simply does not offer the same communicational tools as an iPhone, and obviously is not as easy to access either.

Clearly more research in the field of CMC is greatly needed, as communication technology is constantly changing and evolving, and communicators have to constantly adapt as they strive to communicate efficiently in the fast-paced life of the 21st century. The main purpose of this study is to offer an interesting direction for future research, which is needed to simply acknowledge just how great the existing differences in the communication patterns of different age-groups truly are, and how fast these patterns are changing. Even though the findings of this study are, of course, somewhat subjective and not entirely accurate due to the nature of the Internet in general – anyone can join the chat-rooms and pretend to be whoever they want to, which means that people can join the inappropriate age-group rooms if they choose to –, this study provides an overview and a starting point for further research. Furthermore, this partially unreliable nature can simply be seen as a unique characteristic of CMC channels. All in all, the differences found in the use of emoticon-utterances within the age groups are so remarkable and the data large enough to assure us that the results cannot be random, but are in fact important. The role emoticon-utterances play as a communication tool in CMC is also unquestionable.

6. CONCLUSION

The fast-paced development of communication technology is directly linked to the development of CMC, and require constant adaptation from the users. Communicators are essentially forced into adopting new ways and tools of communicating efficiently, and the different channels of CMC offer great and important research opportunities. This study

focused on a very specific and nowadays fairly unpopular communication channel, chat-rooms. Nevertheless, we can conclude that emoticons are an important communication tool, used both independently and in sentences to serve a variety of functions. We have also established that as CMC has developed at an extremely fast pace, emoticons have similarly evolved, obtaining a much wider range of functions and forms that has been acknowledged in any previous research. Younger communicators can be considered the definite trend-setters of CMC, as they are the first to adopt new forms as a part of their communicational toolkit, whereas the older communicators slowly follow their lead with a more cautious approach. The teens have shown a tendency to experiment with new kinds of emoticon types, whereas the 50+ group is only using well-established forms.

Emojis are definitely going to be the most interesting starting point for future research, as they are an extremely new development and are spreading globally extremely fast, with fairly standardized emoji-lists provided by smartphones and different social media applications. This also brings forth an intriguing question: as communicators become more and more familiar with emoticons and emojis in everyday life, will the older population start adapting to these new communication tools and channels faster than before? Emojis will most definitely influence the way people communicate online greatly, and they could potentially even offer a way of communicating on a global level: as we saw in the examples in section 3 and 4.3, entire conversations consisting of nothing more than emojis are already being held quite frequently on different social media platforms. Emojis could potentially evolve into the next lingua franca, even if it would be a very simplistic one.

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