Electronic Discourse in Fiction: Role, Function, Significance

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Many of the texts generated in computer-mediated communication display a specific set of linguistic features, which together with certain unique communicative conventions of the Internet are considered to be a manifestation of a new type of discourse, electronic or computer discourse. The systematic character of linguistic characteristics of electronic writing and the consistency of their presence in various types of texts produced in computer-mediated communication make electronic discourse a unique and rather conspicuous language phenomenon. Thanks to this distinguishable nature electronic discourse is employed in fiction and performs in fictional narrative various functions, such as speech characterization, conventional reality representation, and so on. The paper analyzes the roles and functions of electronic discourse in two novels, "Microserfs" by Douglas Coupland (1995) and "Londonstani" by Gautam Malkani (2006), and raises the question whether the difference in the use of electronic discourse in these fictional narratives is accounted for by the specific artistic purposes of the writers or it is a testimony of a more general linguistic development, a genesis of a new language of the technocratic epoch as a whole.

Introduction

Electronic discourse is a specific form of language, which is employed in the text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) formats, such as e-mail, text-chat (IRC, MSN Messenger, MOOs and other chatting systems), forums, bulletin boards, and Short Message Service (SMS). The messages are written and read on the screen, but the general verbal behavior of communicants resembles oral interaction, with message exchange being mostly fast, spontaneous, and informal. The absence of the direct auditory interaction between the participants of communication, which distinguishes electronic communication from "normal" oral interchange, is substituted in electronic discourse with ingenious refurbishing of the whole arsenal of linguistic devices of the written mode and effective utilization of the technological potential of the new electronic medium of communication. A unique combination of oral and written features in electronic discourse is reflected in such its aliases as *written speech*, *spoken writing*, *hybrid*, *Nu English*, and others. Until recently, electronic discourse was considered a property of electronic communication, born out of its needs and serving its purposes. However, there is an increasing occurrence of many generic features of electronic language in other, non-electronic types of texts, such as fiction and academic writing. The objective of this article is to outline the linguistic profile of electronic discourse and to analyze the functions and purposes of a similar language in fiction, specifically in two novels, spaced by a decade, *Microserfs* by Douglas Coupland (1995) and *Londonstani* by Gautam Malkani (2006).

Linguistic Peculiarities of Electronic Discourse

The dual nature of electronic discourse accounts for three discursive drives, which shape electronic discourse and explain most of its distinctive characteristics. These are economy of writing, or the need to write quickly and briefly (Murray, 1990), linguistic relaxation, or casual attitude to spelling, punctuation and grammar rules (Averianova, 2006), and the need to convey semiotically certain contextual and paralinguistic cues of oral communication, such as prosody, emotion, physical reaction, and so on. Supporting and reinforcing each other the three drives define the linguistic profile of electronic discourse, which is characterized by the following unique features.

The first of them is diverse and active abbreviation, which is represented by initialisms (*AFK* "away from keyboard", *BBL* "be back later", *BTW* "by the way"), acronyms (*BAK* "back at the keyboard", *BIBO* "beer in, beer out", *FISH* "First in, still here"), clippings (*Pic* "Digital picture", *Peeps* "People", rents "Parents", *B-friend* "boy friend"), and homophonic coinages. The latter, a true "progeny" of electronic discourse, is a remarkable type of abbreviation, when a part of a word or phrase is substituted by an identical or similar in pronunciation letter or numeral, for example, *CUL8ER* "see you later", *CYA* "see you", *2u2* "To you too", *UC* "you see", *ez* "easy", *Y* "why", *IC* "I see", and others. These abbreviations are quite numerous and are especially popular in chatting and SMS writing where the economy of writing is essential.

Simplified, curtailed syntax is another feature that writing in CMC has acquired in its replication of spoken discourse. Omission of the sentence subject is the most commonly occurring phenomenon, for example, "*Need 2 go*", "*Dont see what ya mean*", "*can handle heat in day but likes it to cool off at night*", "*been watchin ya*". Incomplete and fragmented sentences, as well as contractions (dont, whats) indicate the spontaneous nature of speech (Nunan, 1993). Syntactically truncated sentences, as it is seen from the examples above, also display careless spelling and punctuation, characteristic of economical and relaxed writing.

One more property of electronic discourse, irregular capitalization, also serves the need to write quickly and economically. After all, the normative conventions of using capital letters are observed only in writing and are irrelevant for the spoken discourse. But the electronic variant of the latter has developed its own conventions of capitalization to serve another discursive requirement of CMC – to compensate for the lack of prosodic and non-verbal context cues present in any naturally occurring interaction. Thus, texts typed with lower-case letters only are typical for quick, casual and informal writing, but they also can "indicate chatting and whispering, whereas upper-case letters are employed for shouting" (Muniandy, 2003). Besides this, upper and lower-case letters and their combinations are often used to express emphasis: "*why NOBODY answer???*"

Two other ways to convey the writer's state of mind semiotically are emoticons and explicit statements about the mood, intonation and nonverbal behavior of the sender. Such statements entail "placing a word or a phrase within angle brackets (such as *<smile>*, *<grin>* and *<frown>*) or asterisks (**smile**), or simply declaring "*I'm kidding!*" or "*I'm serious*" (Jonsson, 1998). Emoticons achieve the same communicative effect by quite ingenious use of keyboard signs and their combinations, e.g., :-) stands for "smile", :-O for "surprise, shock", :-* for "kiss", :-D for "laughing", :'-(for "crying" etc.

The unique linguistic features of electronic discourse manifest its spoken, oral nature and form its distinctive verbal culture. They are typically present in most of the texts generated in CMC. The following abstracts from e-mail correspondence can be good examples of some of them: "*... I dont feel this 2B nice but hope U find better decision l8R. I'm looking forward to ur letr!! TTYL!!! :-) KIT!!:-)*" (personal communication, August 2, 2006) or "*missed u today .... :(.....btw, was hoping u wud sit beside me...wanted to see how it feels to hav u beside,thinking we r friends n doing class together :D:D:D!!!* (*Facebook*, *Wall-*

to-Wall).

In CMC chatting, message exchange is almost spontaneous and bears much stronger resemblance to oral interaction than e-mail. Higher degree of orality in chatting puts greater demand on the discursive drives mentioned above and accounts for a stronger presence of electronic discourse markers in chat texts, e.g.:

> \<dark_dante\> go 2 bed
> \<dark_dante\> RIGHT NOW YOUNG MAN!
> \<Jodada\> can't do it
> \<Jodada\> since i live alone i feel that i can b my own parent now
> \<Jodada\> nice try tho lol
> \<BumbleB\> lol
> \<Vickim\> I'm off 2 watch a movie - see you all again
> \<dark_dante\> hehehe
> * Vickim waves goodbye (Jonsson, 1998).

Besides homophonic substitutes and abbreviations, lack of punctuation, unconventional orthography and capitalization (normative use of upper-case writing is neglected for "I" but employed instead for rendering shouting), the text also displays verbalization of participants' communicative behavior, such as signaling exit from the chat and laughing (*hehehe, lol* "laughing out loud").

Text-messaging in SMS, or texting, employs similar strategies of shorthand writing, where the economy of writing is pushed almost to the extremes of comprehension due to the technical restrictions and financial considerations of the medium. Small-size screen and keyboard and the 160-character message limit promote the need to generate extremely short condensed messages, for example: "*il b kmg dar 2 mor 2 c S cz I need 2 giv her dr buk kmg wif P vl meet 2 k g'n8*". Converted to normative writing it reads: "I'll be coming there tomorrow to see S, because I need to give her the book. Coming with P. We'll meet too ok? Good night" (Smriti, 2007).

The objective of texting is to use the fewest number of characters needed to convey a comprehensible message. So the degree to which texting ignores spelling, punctuation and grammar gave rise to its understanding as a special SMS discourse. Indeed, texting is more engaged in condensing whole phrases than other CMC formats and has generated specific abbreviations of its own: *SWYRT* "so what do you think?", *YYSW* "yeah, yeah, sure, whatever", *BHME@2* "I will be home at 2 o'clock". However, since there is no principal difference of SMS texting from the language used in other CMC texts, it is logical to consider texting as a variant of electronic discourse.

Though the display of peculiarities of electronic language varies from one CMC format to another – from extremely condensed texting and completely relaxed chatting to rather formal and normative official e-mail writing – the compilation of the linguistic characteristics mentioned above comprises the distinct profile of electronic discourse. It normally can be registered with different degree of intensity in any computer-mediated communication and is quite recognizable as a peculiar entity in other, non-electronic, texts such as fiction.

Electronic Discourse in *Micsroserfs* (D. Coupland, 1995)

The rapid growth of the Internet and expansion of related to it services in the nineties radically changed the way people communicate, with electronic writing increasingly replacing spoken conversation or traditional letter exchange. The peculiarities of the language, which started to evolve out of the needs of computer-mediated communication, were noticed by scientists as early as 1984, when Baron published an

article addressing the effects of "computer-mediated communication as a force in language change" (Baron, 1984). In fiction, electronic language as a means of conventionalized representation and characterization appeared for the first time in 1995 in the novel *Microserfs* by Douglas Coupland. The author of the legendary *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1990) admitted in one interview that he switched his attention to a new American subculture, the generation of young employees of computer super-giants like Microsoft and Apple, when he realized that "90 per cent of people in the States now work directly around a PC. That's like a billion person-hours a day spent, and yet none of the stories we tell, or the books we write, take place in an office. There's just so much of the human soul and imagination in that strange environment now. I'm amazed we don't see 50 books a week on office life" (Johnstone, 1998).

Set in the early 1990s, the epistolary novel *Microserfs* captures the state of technology before *Windows* 95 and predicts the dot-com bubble of the late 1990s. The narrator Daniel Underwood in his PC-generated diary relates how he and his friends, young (26-30-year-old) employees of Microsoft, gradually realize the absurdity and cruelty of their serfdom, round-the-clock coding, testing and bug-fighting under the relentless control of the omnipresent Lord/God/Father Bill Gates. They decide to run away to California and start their own company only to find out quite soon that Microsoft is just one of many slave-owners and their serfdom is rooted in the whole monoculture of advanced technologies essentially alien to anything human.

The sincerity and authenticity of narration are significantly enhanced by the presence of electronic discourse in the novel, which is already evident at the beginning of the story when Daniel introduces himself and presents his "dream categories" in the typical for electronic writing bulleted format:

> I am danielu@microsoft.com. If my life was a game of *Jeopardy!* my seven dream categories would be:
> - Tandy products
> - Trash TV of the late '70s and early '80s
> - The history of Apple
> - Career anxieties
> - Tabloids
> - Plant life of the Pacific Northwest
> - Jell-O 1-2-3 (Coupland, 1996, p. 3).

Numbered and bulleted lists were introduced into the domain of writing by e-mail, the innovation highly praised by Crystal for being "immensely readable" and contributing to the "clarity of the message on the screen" (Crystal, 2001, p. 110). In *Microserfs*, bulleted lists are multifunctional as Coupland successfully employs them for describing people, places or items sold at a collective garage sale:

> I looked around and noticed that if you took all of the living things on the Microsoft Campus, separated them into piles, and analyzed the biomass, it would come to:
> - 38% Kentucky bluegrass
> - 19% human beings
> - .003% Bill
> - 8% Douglas and balsam fir
> - 7% Western red cedar
> - 5% hemlock
> - 23% other: crows, birch, insects, worms, microbes, nerd aquarium fish, decorator plants in the lobbies··· (p. 39).

E-mail communication plays an important role in the life of the characters. According to Dan, he and his friends are e-mail addicts: "Everybody at Microsoft is an addict. The future of e-mail usage is being pioneered right here" (p. 21). The protagonists are in constant e-mail communication with each other, even sitting in the same or adjacent room, so in the text there are many instances of their correspondence. Generally, the latter complies with conventions of electronic writing, such as careless spelling and punctuation and expression of emphasis by means of non-normative typography. But the degree of linguistic relaxation, which accounts for these features, varies with different characters. Daniel, for instance, follows the rules of normative writing. His e-mail messages and diary are devoid of spelling mistakes, even those parts, which present subconscious sets of words and phrases generated by Dan's mind numbed by endless coding. The example above shows one of Dan's few grammatical lapses (*was* instead of *were*). The same cannot be said about his e-mail pal Abe, whose messages display missing apostrophes, careless spelling and punctuation: "If you feed catfish nothing but left-over grain mash they endup becoming white-meat filet units with no discernible flavor (marine or otherwise) of their own? Thus they beocome whatever coating you apply to them. They're the most postmodern creatiures on earth⋯ metaphores for characters on Melrose Place⋯or for coders with NO LIFE" (p.128).

Faulty grammar and orthography in this and other electronic messages can be attributed singularly to the effect of linguistic relaxation rather than ignorance of normative language usage as all protagonists are intellectuals with three-digit IQs and some of them (Michael, for instance) know up to 2,000 digits of π. This conclusion can be supported by Dan's reaction to a short (three lines only) message from Michael, the most gifted programmer of the group and their leader: "This is a particularly long message for Michael whose e-mail tends to be about three words long, normally. A carriage return, punctuation marks and everything!" (p.149).

A noteworthy feature, which distinguishes electronic correspondence of Coupland's characters from the average informal e-mail messaging of nowadays, is relatively minimized presence of such linguistic markers of electronic discourse as emoticons or other symbols of rendering emotion or mood of the message, except occasional use of upper-case writing for expressing emphasis (like in Abe's message quoted above). The only emoticon in the novel was used by Daniel's mother, who became paralyzed after a stroke and had to use a computer to communicate. The shorthand she was using is another instance of electronic discourse in the novel. The difficulty of using the keyboard compelled her to resort to the utmost economy of writing which electronic discourse provides: "I lk my bdy", "dan ct ur hair", "gr8ly tired". In her messages, the linguistic peculiarities of electronic discourse are much more prominent than in computer texts produced by other protagonists.

It should be noted that since both instances of electronic discourse in *Microserfs* – e-mail and Mrs. Underwood's writing – refer to the texts, which are computer generated and strictly speaking belong to CMC, the use of electronic discourse in these segments of the text is not surprising. A more compelling case is the presence of features of electronic discourse in the narrative part of the novel, composed as a diary. There are abbreviations (*th@*, *'fess* "confess"), use of capitalization for expressing emphasis ("There are all these little things that he does that just add up to ANNOYING"), curtailed syntax ("Rained all day (32 mm according to Bug). Read a volume of Inside Mac. Drove over to Boeing Surplus and bought some zinc and some laminated air-safety cards"), and others. But their occurrence is mostly occasional until Daniel decides to sample a new compressing code based on a song by Prince and rewrites a part of his diary: "*It wuz good 2 C hr & 4 once not hav hr yellng @ me 2 stop B-ng a noosanss. We'v wrkd mayB 10 officz apart 4 half a yEr, + we'v nevr once rEly talkd 2 Ech uthr* ⋯ It was good to see her and for once to not have her yelling at me to stop being a nuisance. We've worked maybe ten offices apart for half a year, and we've never once really talked to each other" (pp. 16-17).

Here narrative transforms into something similar to texting, the language, which some years later

will become the predominant form of SMS messaging. In this novel, it is still an experiment with the compressing code invented by one of Dan's friends. It is similar to another research of the text undertaken by Michael, who was inking out all of the vowels on his restaurant menu, "testing the legibility of the text in the absence of information" (p. 109). Inserting this kind of writing, which is very similar to what we now recognize as texting, Coupland probably tried to show how incredibly shallow and messed up the life of his characters was, with coding and programming being the main, if not the only, axis of it. These young people are so absorbed by the world of technology that even personal diaries and restaurant menus become an object of yet another programming experiment. This conclusion may be supported by what Coupland himself said about the atmosphere in Microsoft: "These people are so locked into the world, by default some sort of transcendence is located elsewhere, and obviously machines become the totem they imbue with sacred properties, wishes, hopes, goals, desires, dreams. That sounds like 1940s SF, but it's become the world" (McClellan, 1995).

On the other hand, with this kind of writing, Coupland may have presented his vision of the future CMC language, texting in particular. After all, there is already one innovation attributed to *Microserfs* – the formatting of Dan's PowerBook journal is now linked to what emerged a decade later as the blog format (*Microserfs*, Wikipedia). The dynamics of this foresight is clearly shown in Dan's fascination with his mother's computer writing: "Here it is: Mom speaking like a license plate ⋯ like the lyrics to a Prince song ⋯ like a page without vowels ⋯ like encryption. All my messing around with words last year and now, well ⋯ it's real life" (p. 370). And indeed, the language, which was still at its genesis in Coupland's book, became the predominant way the other novel was written ten years later.

Electronic Discourse in *Londonstani* (G. Malkani, 2006)

Currently, CMC, especially SMS messaging, has become an extremely popular, if not the dominant way of communication with young people all over the world. With computers and mobile phones being indispensable attributes of modern youth culture, it is not surprising that electronic discourse, employed in these modes of communication in the form of texting, has also found its reflection in literary works for teenage readers and about teenage culture.

Londonstani by Gautam Malkani (2006) can serve as one example of such fictional narrative. This is a story about a small gang of four young Asians struggling to distinguish themselves from their parents' culture and establish their niche in contemporary London. The quest for identity of four *desis* (their own word for "homeboy", or Indian Brit), which goes through alienation from their parents, constant boost and display of masculinity, stealing, lying, fighting *goras* (white guys) and so on, is described through the eyes of clumsy and insecure Jas, who pays for his initiation into the gang with worshipful admiration of his peers.

While there is much controversy about the novel, its originality and authenticity, all critics agree "it does have an original linguistic content previously unrecorded in fiction" (Watt, 2007, p. 77). *Londonstani* is written in a peculiar language, which is a mixture of slang, texting, Punjabi, Hindi and rap. Though conspicuously exaggerated this demotic "linguistic pastiche gives the novel its breathless energy, pace, and character - and provides much of its humor and irony" (p. 78). The predominant language technique used by the author to render the dialect of the gang is essentially similar to texting, and this is understandable. The protagonists are constantly calling and messaging each other and they make little money by unblocking and reconfiguring stolen mobile phones, so SMS communication is something they are well familiar with. The SMS messages they exchange are all written in a typical for Instant Messaging informal shorthand, for example: "Gr8 mums turns psycho. Nd ur hlp", "Chill b a man" (Malkani, 2006, p. 251).

But what makes *Londonstani* different from other contemporary novels that use electronic discourse to

quote e-mail or cell-phone messages is that texting is the dominant component of the language of the novel and is consistently used in rendering the direct speech of the young people: "U a Paki jus like me. Even tho u b listenin to U2 or someshit. Are u 2 scared 2 look at us? ... U 2 embarass'd to b a desi? ... bet'chyu can't even speak yo mother tongue, innit ..." (pp. 21-22)

Hardjid, the violent ringleader and enforcer, is the most articulate in this type of language, which other members faithfully try to imitate. The narrator Jas, the most intelligent and perceptive of them, emphasizes the role of this lingo in their milieu right at the beginning of the novel:

> The three of us spoke in sync like we belonged to some tutty boy band, the kind who sing the chorus like it's some blonde American cheerleader routine. Hardjit, Hardjit, he's our man, if he can't bruck-up goras, no one can. Ravi then delivers his standard solo routine: - Yeh, blud, safe, innit.
> - Hear wat my bredren b sayin, sala kutta? Come out wid dat shit again n I'ma knock u so hard u'll b shittin out yo mouth 4 real, innit, goes Hardjit, with an eloquence an conviction that made me green with envy (p. 3).

Direct speech of characters is consistently presented this way throughout the novel with similar to texting homophonic substitutes, abbreviations, contractions, lack of punctuation and unconventional orthography. Rendering of reported speech also employs comparable to texting writing: "The most ridiculous thing bout workin out with Hardjit was suddenly he'd come over like a teacher, using double the number a words normal people normly knew I asked him why one time an all I got in reply was, U gots 2 get yo'self a voluminous vocabulary 2 proply do dis shit. Honest to God, that's what he said. An so, for a couple a hours, Hardjit'd become a geek" (p. 184).

Careless spelling, grammar and syntax, typical for some formats of electronic discourse, are also present in the narration but to a lesser degree as Jas comes from a comparatively affluent middle class family and had good academic standing at school before he has got involved with Hardjit's gang. Still, there is a certain spill-over of texting he is using to render the band's lingo into the narrative part of his story, which is evident in such contractions and intentional orthographic slips, as *cos* "because", *stead* "instead", *nite* "night", *bout* "about", *fone* "phone", *outta* "out of", *huggin*, *gettin*, and so on. This regress from normative writing seems somewhat incongruous with the narrator's developed vocabulary, which comprises such bookish words as *linguistic prowess*, *debating dexterity*, *redeem*, *androids*, *sex-in-the abstract symbolism*, and others. The author's drawing on sociolinguistic conventions of different social strata, however, contributes to deeper characterization of Jas's confused personality and his strive to straddle very different worlds. Watt offers another explanation of this dissonance of the narrator's obvious wisdom and powers of observation and his linguistic decline: "It is almost impossible not to see Malkani pulling the strings of his wise desified alter ego who appears a bit like a South Asian gangsta version of Bridget Jones" (Watt, 2007, p. 78).

Malkani's use of conventions of electronic discourse, and texting in particular, is also quite remarkable in a broad linguistic context: electronic discourse has developed because of the need to adjust computer writing to speaking; now non-electronic writing uses electronic discourse to represent speaking. However, a more careful look at the author's technique of speech representation by means of linguistic gadgets of electronic discourse shows that his approach is not that straightforward. On the one hand, numerous contractions, truncated syntax and orthographic distortions contribute to the auditory perception of the accent and rhythm of the protagonists' rap-like street-speak, for instance: "Ahh, blud, now you shut yo mouth, goes Ravi. – Jus cos I ain't wantin to get wid her, it don't mean dat girl ain't da fittest lady in da hood. At da end a da day, she did win Miss Hounslow two years in a row, innit" (Malkani, 2006, p. 49). On the other hand, such linguistic markers of texting as homophonic coinages, as in "*u'll jus have 2 find one*",

"*we gots 2 give dese fones back 2 Danvir*", "*why call on a family favour 4*?", "*b4 we left*", *u* "*you*", etc., and some of spelling errors (such as *nite*, *fone*, *shud* "should") do not render any special auditory effect and are typical for electronic discourse examples of economical and relaxed writing.

One possible explanation of the writer's purpose in resorting to this kind of writing can be derived from understanding the role of texting in the context of teenage culture as a means of identity formation. Döring (2002) believes that typical for SMS messaging abbreviations and acronyms fulfill a collective identity function, based on a special shared knowledge. The ability to understand and use personalized language short forms derived from this knowledge is a prerequisite for and an indicator of group affiliation. Döring also notes that contractions and reductions in texting are not always necessitated by the lack of space but rather the desire to produce secret messages, which can only be understood by the group members. A similar tendency is observed in e-mail correspondence of teenagers, where educators notice that young people create new abbreviations mostly with the purpose of maintaining a certain jargon nonsensical for outsiders, adults and parents in particular (*Cyber-bullying*). This all allows texting to serve the function of a certain discursive norm within a certain discursive community with the help of which each participant "establishes cultural competency in the eyes of the other" (Gee, 2006, p. 21).

It seems equally probable that the dialect fixed by the author in the book for his protagonists to maintain their group identity also helps Malkani himself to establish a more intimate rapport with his teenage readers. The recognizable by any teenager texting component of this dialect has the potential to offer an increased experience of psychosocial nearness between the text author and text reader (Döring, 2002), the function carried out by any texting where correspondents have shared rules of communication.

Conclusion

Electronic discourse is characterized by a particular kind of language used in computer-mediated communication. The linguistic features of electronic discourse are generated by the communicative needs of the medium and therefore are distinctive enough to be recognized as a specific discursive entity in other kinds of texts, not related to CMC. This characteristic of electronic discourse is employed by fiction for various purposes, such as imitation of discourse outside fiction (for example, inserted in the narration e-mail and SMS messages) or rendering the dialect of a particular occupational or social group. Since a novel is a polysystemic text it is "drawing its structure from a variety of systems of codes", and some of the latter are basically non-literary codes (Fowler, 1979, pp. 126-127). One of such codes "with established social values outside the institution of prose fiction" (ibid.) is electronic discourse and, as such, it is responsible for important structural features of Coupland's and Malkani's novels.

The comparison of the two novels where the language of electronic discourse has been used brings forth another interesting observation. The writers have different assessment of comprehensibility of electronic discourse in their novels and have different expectations of the ability of their readers to understand it. Thus, when Coupland is compressing the text in his protagonist's diary he supplies the reader with complete "translation" in normative writing, or rather, the compressed text follows the "normal" one. Malkani, on the other hand, never does it in his novel. Though he has provided an eight-page glossary at the end of the book, which explains some of the slang, Hindi, Urdu, or Punjabi words, it is not helpful when dealing with texting. And though sometimes his text can get quite illegible, as in the following example, no transliteration is furnished: "Fuckin ansa me, u dirty gora. Or is it dat yo glasses r so smash'd up u can't count? Shud've gone 2 Specsavers, innit. How many a us bredren b here?" (Malkani, 2006, p. 5).

Is it because of the different artistic intentions the two writers may have regarding the use of electronic discourse in their novels? Or is it because Malkani's readers are much more familiar with electronic discourse than those of Coupland, for whom a decade earlier its rules of compression were still a novelty?

Both explanations seem plausible and supportive of each other. Together with the whole domain of CMC, electronic discourse has grown from the means of communication of a limited circle of computer geeks to a communicative vehicle of billions computer and mobile phone users. This linguistic development has naturally found its reflection in fictional narrative, and it won't be a big exaggeration to relate to both books a quote from Fowler, where he states that "the novel has become the major medium for technical innovation in European and American literature, and the innovations are generally directly expressed in linguistic creativity" (p. 4). Probably, it is left for yet another novel to explore whether electronic discourse is a short-lived fashion of the teenage culture or a new lingo of the "wired" generation.

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