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## **STYLIZED QUOTATIONS AS PARODIC PRACTICE IN TEENAGE DATING BLOGS: STYLIZING PATTERNS, QUOTATIVE MARKING AND LANGUAGE-IDEOLOGICAL MEANINGS**

### **Abstract**

The linguistic practices in young people's computer-mediated communication (CMC) have attracted great interest both in linguistic scholarship and in public discourse, and are expected to exert the richest influences on language in the new millennium. Nevertheless, youth's own perspectives on language and technology are rarely explored in their own right, beyond sensationalist popular descriptions of a "whatever generation" (Baron 2002) oblivious to the rules of language when communicating online. The present paper draws attention to this gap, by focusing on one specific phenomenon – the parodic stylization of teenagers' language online by teenagers themselves, found to be a common practice in personal blogs written by American youth. The first part of the paper focuses on the pragmatic features of stylizations and their quotative marking, extending insights into quotation marking as one major ongoing change in all varieties of English (Tagliamonte 2016); the second part presents a discursive analysis of the stances and social ideologies indexed by the teenagers' stylizations. Overall, the findings highlight great metalinguistic awareness in an online context where it was little expected, and strongly challenge the view of youth CMC as linguistically "whateverist".

**Keywords:** youth CMC, stylization, quotative marking, language ideologies, personal blogs

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## 1. Introduction

The topic of young people's computer-mediated interactions and their influence on language has become popular in linguistic scholarship just as in public discourse. Linguists' specific interest in youth is not surprising, as technologically-influenced youth culture is often expected to exert the richest influences on (English) language in the new millennium (Bucholtz 2000). In fact, at the turn of the century, youth language online became a major focus of broader language ideological debates. In the English-speaking world at least, young people's online language has been sensationally exoticized by the mass media, described as a threat to standard English and even to human relationships and the social and moral order (Herring 2008). Even in scholarly circles, young people have been described as the "whatever generation" (Baron 2002) when it comes to language use, a generation oblivious to the rules of language when communicating online, whose linguistic practices have been scrutinized as having an unprecedented impact on language. Still, while the need to shift to more ethnographically grounded "user-related" approaches has hence been rightly acknowledged (Thurlow & Mroczek 2011, Androutsopoulos 2010, 2011) youth perspectives on their own new-media language remain almost unaddressed in linguistic and computer-mediated communication (CMC) scholarship. The fact that they do often exhibit an explicit stance was pointed out in a few earlier studies (Jones & Schieffelin 2009, Herring 2008, Bogetić 2016), where clear examples of youth's own metalinguistic practice within online discourse can be seen, but these are to date rarely explored in their own right.

The present paper addresses this gap, highlighting the need for understanding young people's own perspectives on their language, with their own metalinguistic practices being a valuable and insufficiently exploited source. Specifically, however, I illustrate these points with a look at metalinguistic comments in personal blogs written by American teenagers, with a particular focus on one phenomenon found to be very common in the data and little researched in this context – young people's parodic stylization of young people's talk. Stylization is seen as a specific type of metapragmatic commentary, a mock quotation whereby the writers position themselves in relation to imaginary 'others' and their perceived language use. The paper focuses both on the pragmatic features of stylizations along with quotative marking, as well as on the social ideologies that they index.

The findings highlight great metalinguistic awareness in an online context where it is perhaps little expected, and strongly challenge the view of youth CMC as linguistically “whateverist”.

## **2. Stylization**

### **2.1. Stylization as symbolic practice**

The concept of stylization has been developed and studied from various perspectives in the past few decades. Originally, it was associated with the literary criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1981; see also Vološinov 1973). For Bakhtin, stylization is a clear example supporting his widely cited claim that “our speech ... is filled with others’ words, with varying degrees of otherness” (Bakhtin 1986: 89). However, as Coupland (2001) shows, the effects of stylization can be realized, and analyzed, much more locally than Bakhtin suggested: in specific communicative contexts and at specific linguistic/semiotic levels. In sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, this more local focus on stylization and style got a more prominent place following the Labovian work on stylistic variation (Labov 1972). In variationist sociolinguistics, styles were defined on a scale of formality and informality: the more formal the situation, the more prestige variants are used by speakers.

Over time, more ‘multidimensional’ (Cameron 2000) approaches to stylization have been developed. Alan Bell made a great contribution to the study of style with his ‘audience design’ theory (Bell 1984), in which he showed that stylistic variation derives from and mirrors interspeaker variation. More specifically, Bell draws on accommodation theory (Giles & Smith 1979) and argues that stylistic choices are essentially the speakers’ response to their audience, typically involving convergence towards the addressee’s way of speaking. However, Bell also identified a different kind of style shift that he termed ‘initiative’, in which speakers make creative use of language that converges not to the addressee, but to an absent reference group. This kind speaking in the voice of third parties “as if this is me,” or “as if I owned this voice” (Coupland 2001) has been most thoroughly analyzed in Ben Rampton’s work (Rampton 1995, 2010, 2011, 2017) on language crossing. Rampton uses the term language crossing for styling the language of an absent reference group, when the speaker

is not an accepted member of this group. For instance, Rampton analyzes interactions of teenagers from the UK who deliberately and playfully use Asian or Creole English to project a comic persona (e.g. **stop movin dat ting aroun** [giggle], Rampton 2010: 13). Such crossing evidently involves some kind of movement across social boundaries, and always projects identities of ‘others’, often those constructed as in some way inferior. The speakers are not speaking in their own voices, but deliberately adopting the voice of another, although the assessment of whether the utterance is playful or really one’s own can often be left deliberately unclear (Coupland 2001).

It is this view of style as ‘bricolage’ (Eckert 1996), where speakers recombine linguistic resources to project particular personas, that has been behind much influential work on “styling” (e.g. Cameron 2000; Coupland 2001; Sultana et al. 2013, Eckert & Rickford 2001, Rampton 2017). However, the concept of “stylization” has come to be seen as denoting a more specific set of discursive constructions than styling itself (Coupland 2001). As Coupland has discussed in detail, stylization is crucially a deliberate performance, a symbolic practice in which personas, identities and genres other than those current in the speech event are projected. In Jaspers’ (2011: 499) terms, stylization can be seen as “verbal cartoons, eye-catching sketches of linguistic material that are lifted out from their usual surroundings and inserted into the current proceedings to suggest one is not speaking as oneself or as would be expected”. Importantly, apart from being performative, stylization is always reflexive and knowing; it invites attention to its own modality, and requires an enculturated audience.

In addition, stylization is imbricated in social ideologies and power. It brings with itself stereotyped semiotic and ideological values associated with other groups and social contexts, and instigates processes of social comparison and evaluation. For instance, Hill cites an utterance of American English speakers’ “let’s crack a few **cervezas**”<sup>1</sup>, where the utterance’s pragmatic meaning is modified from “let’s go have a few beers” to something along the lines of “on this occasion we will be relaxed about alcohol, the way we believe that Mexicans are relaxed about alcohol” (2009: 42). It is through shared understanding of the indexical link between the sign **cerveza** and the drunken Mexican stereotype that Latino stereotypes are co-constructed in this instance. In the US context, this framework has been extended to examine the ways mock practices (re)produce negative

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<sup>1</sup> Beers (Spanish).

stereotypes about e.g. African Americans (Bucholtz 2002, Reyes 2005) or Latinos (Barrett 2006), pointing to stigmatization of nonstandard linguistic varieties that go hand in hand with white supremacist ideologies.

Formally, stylizations as mock quotations are introduced via different quotatives. They have been studied from the grammatical and pragmatic perspective, as part of the research on quoted language that has been found to be undergoing changes in form in the past few decades in all varieties of English (e.g. Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2004, Buchstaller 2013, Tagliamonte 2016). Stylizations as mock quotations, as all quotations in spontaneous language use, typically co-occur with some quotative markers on their right and left periphery. On the left, they tend to be introduced by quotative expressions such as verbs (e.g. *say, tell, ask*), discourse markers (e.g. *like*) or the “zero” quotative (where no quotative marker is used). In addition to explicit markers, the separation of quoted and non-quoted material in stylization is often facilitated by other devices mimicking the original situation, such as interjections or discourse markers, adding authenticity to the quoted utterances. Still, while quoted (offline) speech has received the most attention, there is less research on quoted writing, much less specifically on writing online, or specifically in mimetic stylized utterances.

In the present analysis I am interested in stylization from two perspectives: the formal quotative integration into the texts, and its meaning as a symbolic and ideological practice. The stylization of teenage online language by teenagers themselves has to the best of my knowledge been practically unstudied so far (though see Staehr 2015); on the other hand, the stylization of youth talk, especially in adult popular discourse, has been recognized as a pervasive popular practice (Thurlow 2006), and deserves brief mention.

## **2.2. Stylizing youth talk**

The stylization of young people's talk, and young people's computer-mediated communication in particular, has become a common practice in popular and media discourses. Through stylized examples of an imagined 'youth talk' the media exoticize technologically mediated interactions, presenting them as a distinct form of communication barely comprehensible to adults (Squires 2010). A few researchers, however, have pointed out that these stylizations tend to reflect only adult perspectives, often involving

cumbersome language not likely to be used by young people in online communication at all.

Crispin Thurlow (2006, 2007) offers many examples of stylization in his analysis of newspaper portrayals of youth CMC. He states that humorous stylization of text messaging or text messaging language practices is an almost genre-defining feature of the articles in his corpus. Almost a third of the articles use some example of text messaging or instant messaging style in their headlines (for instance, “**Gd sAv R grAshz QE2 Gd sAv R nObl QE2 Gd sAv D QE2**”<sup>2</sup>). In-text examples are either given with ‘translations’ or a glossary, typically thrown in without any quotative marking. Thurlow shows that this type of stylized language forms part of an oppositional rhetoric, where youth online talk is constantly set in opposition to ‘proper’ language. However, the authenticity of all these adult examples is of course disputable; in many cases, as Thurlow shows, journalists seem to have made up their own exaggerated examples, which would actually seem counterintuitive to most young texters. As such, Thurlow concludes, these stylized utterances given in the media are likely to feed existing adult mythologies about the impenetrability of young people’s communication in general.

Further examples of popular stylizations of youth language in CMC are given by Jones and Schieffelin (2009), in their analysis of AT&T mobile commercials in the United States. At the heart of these commercials is the influence of youth texting on language, presented through a parodic series of stylized teenagers’ speech resembling text messages, suggesting young people have lost all communicative competence in standard conversational English. In one of the commercials, for instance, a teenage girl asks her mother “**W-U?**”, and a subtitle provides the translation of the messaging initialism: “What’s up?” The mother answers that she is angry about her cell phone bill, to which the girl responds with a series of further CMC abbreviations (“**O-M-G! I-N-B-D**”<sup>3</sup>), and says who she is texting (“**I-D-K, my B-F-F Jill?**”, with the subtitle: I don’t know, my best friend forever, Jill.).” By analyzing further similar commercial examples, Jones and Schieffelin show how the media maximally exoticize text messaging, by focusing on unfamiliar and exaggerated forms, abstracted away from

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<sup>2</sup> “God save our gracious Queen. God save our noble Queen. God save the Queen” (British national anthem).

<sup>3</sup> “Oh my God! It’s no big deal!”

the social context and conventional language practices from which those messages emerge.

In all the studied examples, stylization evokes a specific ideological persona of the teen. Slobe (2018) analyzes a more specific, parodic stylization of the US white girl by middle-aged white women, concerned with the way that girls' language sounds, and intent on saving them from it. Their stylizations, Slobe shows, rest on exaggerated linguistic and especially phonetic qualities, and problematize them as sounding infantile and unprofessional, constructed as emblematic of the US white girl today. The mock mimesis is made stronger through the absence of any quotative marking, and a contrast between the mocked teen girl language and "proper" adult language.

Outside of the anglophone context, Staehr's (2015) work on metalinguistic and stylistic practices among Danish youth interacting on Facebook offers a rare description of stylization on the part of young people themselves. Stylization is used by the observed teenagers to bring about stereotypical associations of Danishness, and also to present stereotypical use of the spoken "street language" of youth. In addition, interestingly, Staehr here offers examples of youth styling adults, specifically, styling what they see as old-fashioned language associated with the elderly. Altogether, Staehr demonstrates how this situated use of linguistic features is connected to stereotypical categories, with sociolinguistic stereotypes being actively re-interpreted by the adolescents.

The process of styling youth appears to have become a common discursive strategy in discussions about language, as well as a part of the social construction of youth CMC. The practice is closely related to another major ideological process – the enregisterment (Agha 2003, 2007) of internet language as a uniform, distinct variety of language (to be discussed in more detail in 4.2.3). In the process of stylization, youth internet language essentially emerges as a variety that is differentiable within a language as a specific register (Agha 2003). As adult practice, stylization of youth taps into the existing tendencies in sociology and psychology where youth is "continually being represented as different, Other, strange, exotic and transitory—by and for adults." (Griffin 2013: 25). However, the fact that young people themselves, as I will show below, participate in stylization practices of their own demographic, highlights new dimensions of language ideology, indexicality and enregisterment, while challenging some dominant assumptions about youth and CMC communication.

### 3. Data and method

The data were collected on two occasions (2013 and 2016) as part of related studies addressing youth linguistic practices in personal blogs, taken from a popular teenage website Mylol.com. The motivation behind this work was my observation, while studying the linguistic practices in personal blogging in general, of the surprising frequency with which the bloggers directly assessed their peers' internet language, engaging in metalinguistic characterizations of such language. For the purpose of the present analysis, from the initial random sample I created a sub-corpus of 133 blog posts that in some form mention "language" (about 40% of the random sample; all written by different authors); out of these, a total of 116 blog posts was retained for analysis, limited to those written by U.S. youth, with writers aged 13-19 (words total: 16,312).

Mylol.net is a social networking website aimed at teenagers. The site advertises as currently "the #1 teen<sup>4</sup> dating site in the US, Australia, UK and Canada". While mainly functioning as a dating site, Mylol.com offers a variety of other content, with a prominent place given to personal blogs. The blogs deal with everyday themes, often related to love problems and (un)fortunate searches for a partner on the site itself. Blogs contain links to user profiles; they are interactive, allowing viewers to post comments, though this option often remains unused on the site. Site users often use more of its aspects, such as blogging, interacting with other bloggers and chatting in chatrooms. More recently, the site appears to be converging toward mobile use, but the blogs and similar segments more compatible with desktop interfaces do not seem to be losing popularity. At the time of writing, the site had more than 300,000 users total.

Examples of stylization were collected in a separate Excel file, together with surrounding context. The analysis of stylization in the blogs is informed by the discourse-analytic approach, with some quantification given for illustration. It presents basic facts to do with frequency and length, then turns to types of quotation markers drawn upon, extending insights on quotations markers in online English, and finally presents a discursive analysis of the posts. I follow Coupland (2001) and Jaspers (2011) in seeing stylization as a symbolic practice projecting identities other than those current in the speech event. It must be acknowledged that

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<sup>4</sup> Though it allows profiles for users up to 29 years of age; users in their twenties are nevertheless rare.



the material used is undoubtedly partial and not taken to represent views of all teenagers; conversely, it emphasizes the importance of considering the multiplicity of youth identities and CMC contexts, rather than a homogenizing view of “digital youth”. The broader aim is to draw attention to adolescents’ styling practices, which challenge some prevailing views of youth, language and technology.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Stylization: form and numbers

The analysis reveals that in nearly half of the blogs in the analyzed corpus (53 blog posts, or 44%) stylization is present, sometimes with more than one instance in a single post – 62 instances of stylization in total; 59 of these are clearly to do with other young people’s language use in the blog posts or online more broadly, as seen in context or the accompanying commentary<sup>5</sup>. The findings show that stylization is a prominent metalinguistic strategy employed by the blog writers. The ubiquity of parodic re-enactments and concerns over language is surprising both given the type of discourse (dating site posts) and the existing lay and scholarly beliefs on teenagers’ language attitudes.

The majority of stylized utterances include multiword segments or full sentences.

single word	multiword (phrases and sentence segments)	whole sentence	two+ -sentence stretches	Total
6	43	11	2	62

Table 1. Stylization length

In the blogs analyzed, stylization is often marked by the explicit introduction through quotative markers. A variety of quotatives are used for this purpose, for example:

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<sup>5</sup> The remaining three are brief comments whose meaning/function is somewhat less evident.

- (1) *say* No, I definitely don't reply to those who *say* **mssg me w pics pls.**
- (2) *be like* And they *are like* **brrrrr boi dats it.**
- (3)  $\emptyset$  (*zero quotative – no overt marker used*) So tired of all this. **Yo supp u**, and all that fake bum talk.

The overall distribution of quotative forms is shown in Table 2.

Quot.	%	N
<i>be like</i>	58.1	36
<i>be all</i>	16.1	10
$\emptyset$	11.3	7
<i>go</i>	6.5	4
<i>say</i>	4.8	3
<i>other</i> <sup>6</sup>	3.2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>62</b>

Table 2. Quotative forms by frequency

The findings from online language use are comparable to the existing data from offline speech (Martinez 2014, Barbieri 2009) and offline writing (Sams 2009). More broadly, looking at the findings from the present online data and earlier offline data, differences are interesting to observe compared to the findings from mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, showing the quotative system has evolved – for most of the history of English the inventory was the same (*say*, *think*, and the zero quotative, cf. Buchstaller 2013), but it is now changing primarily in teen talk, and diffusing to other age groups (Tagliamonte 2016).

The new quotative *be like* stands out as the top marker by frequency. The finding is in line with the predictions that for mimetic, expressive content in particular, this quotative will grow in use (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2004). Over time, *be like* has risen from an emergent phase in the 1990s (Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999) to accounting for around 50% of all

<sup>6</sup> The category includes the quotatives occurring in only one instance (specifically: *write*, *think*).

quotatives in the 2000s (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2004: 501); while there has subsequently been less research on its contemporary use, the present findings suggest further expansion. Also, contrary to earlier research (Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999, Buchstaller & D'Arcy 2009), *be like* does not seem constrained by grammatical person (used in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person subjects) or tense, which suggests its further grammatical diffusion within the quotative cohort. Functionally, it is important again to bear in mind that the examples studied here represent the mimetic, voiced enactment of 'mocked other' personas; this nevertheless remains in line with initial findings on expressive quotes as being the main environment for the occurrence of *be like* (Romaine & Lange 1991).

The formal marking of others' speech in the youth stylizations allows a glimpse into the other comparatively new quotative markers in English, within the context of expressive, stylized quotes. Quotative *be all*, for example, remains underresearched in the sociolinguistic literature, though existing findings suggest it is already well established in many variants of English (e.g. Rickford et al. 2007, Blackwell & Tree 2012). The present data show that this quotative newcomer, so far mostly observed in spoken language use, is widespread in written, online American English as well, at least in the age group studied. It is suitable for marking the mimetic quotative content, but more limited than *be like*, occurring solely in 3<sup>rd</sup> person, present tense contexts in the data. Similarly, the quotative *go* is found four times in the corpus, but only in 3<sup>rd</sup> person, present tense contexts, suggesting its grammatical expansion and diffusion are still limited. Finally, some new quotatives recently found to be on the rise are absent from the corpus. Specifically, Cheshire et al. (2011) have identified a new quotative, *this is* followed by a personal pronoun in its oblique form, e.g. in *this is me*, *this is him*, as spreading in youth language. Its complete absence from the corpus, despite numerous quotative and stylizing contexts, suggests that the variant is still limited to British (youth) English; it may also be dispreferred in mimetic contexts such as stylization (the examples in Cheshire et al. do suggest it is used in non-expressive, factual retellings of others' words, though much more data are needed).

The traditional quotative *say* is comparatively less frequent, though it does occur three times and does not seem constrained by grammatical factors; this further supports the findings that the use of quotative *say* is decreasing in colloquial English, but not vanishing (Tagliamonte 2016). Finally, a proportion of stylized utterances (third in terms of frequency) are actually inserted without any quotative markers, as in:

(4) **Like i said b4 i wnt to know u & find sum 1 dat i cud trust & just talk to.** Personally, this just gives me the creeps. How will you talk to me if I can barely understand what you are saying?

The reading of such examples as stylized utterances rests on the clear distinction between their orthography and the orthography of the rest of the text, which implies no need for further demarcating the “me” from the “not me”; they are still typically referenced through deictics (*this*), personal pronouns (*you*), often with general extenders (e.g. ... *and stuff, and that, blah blah*), and a metacommentary preceding or following the utterance. Many of such metacommentaries (as in 4) involve hypercorrect spelling and punctuation, along with careful use of complex grammatical structures. In the example given, punctuation through quotation marks is absent, though many zero-quotative as well as other stylizations include marking through punctuation as well.

All the quotatives observed introduce the same pragmatic content, that of stylized mock quotations. The strong preference for *be like*, in particular, is likely to be related to its general expansion in U.S. (youth) English, rather than the stylizing content it marks. Overall, discursive analysis of the examples does not reveal differences in positioning or content among the different types of quotative marking used.

Further, stylization represents a specific type of quotative content, and needs to be understood in the local discursive and social context. In the rest of this paper, its social and ideological meanings in teenagers’ personal blogs are explored in more detail.

#### **4.2. The ideological aspects of stylization**

The majority of stylizations in the corpus are to do with the youth’s perceptions of others’ language on the internet. Specifically, the use of internet language is consistently linked with the more personal (negative) characteristics of the writers, evoking a few specific social personae. As further illustrated in the metacommentaries surrounding stylizations, they repeatedly revolve around three themes: lack of intelligence, female promiscuity, and incomprehensibility.

#### 4.2.1. Lack of intelligence, immaturity and going nowhere in life

The major repeated association between the stylized language use and the post writers involves lack of intelligence (for illustration, *dumb* is the single most common adjective in the corpus, typically used in the comments following the stylized utterance):

(5) JackMan<sup>7</sup>

What's with everyone going **msg me pls**? Not only are you begging like a total loser, but you write in this baby lingo showing you're another dumb kid with no writing skills and no prospects.

(6) Tam

**Cmn jst pics nw**. Sooooo.....You hate vowels or your IQ doesn't allow a proper sentence?

Associations with a lack of intelligence often go hand in hand with immaturity and poor prospects in adult life, echoing internalized adult ideologies on youth and language already widely documented in American and British public discourses (e.g. Squires 2010). The post below sums up these major associations in a longer metacommentary, taking an equally sarcastic stance.

(7) JasonS

The fuck is wrong with everyone today not knowing how to spell? I mean, are you just THAT fucking lazy that you can't press 3 keys to spell out you? Then there's those people that think it's "cute" to spell like a fucking 4 year old. Guess what? It's NOT fucking cute it just pisses people off and makes you look like a god damn retard. Quit making up these god damn ridiculous words like fucking "**lurve**" What the hell is a "**lurve**"? [...] I hate to break it to you all, but even though you may think that spelling in these ways is "cool" or convenient, it will get you nowhere in life but a shitty fucking job paying minimum wage with no hours.

While the contrast between the stylizations of others' writing and own posts, emphasized by using hypercorrect spelling, punctuation and grammar is common, the foul language is one aspect of a colloquial tone often preserved, adding to the forceful and adversarial position.

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<sup>7</sup> The pseudonyms have been anonymized throughout.

#### 4.2.2. The gender dimension: *Dumb sluts and shallow bimbos*

The beginning of SomeGirl's blog illustrates another common pattern in the blogs:

(8) SomeGirl

I'm as bad as those shallow bimbos... D: You know, the ones that say "txt me cute guy wit abz". [...]

Here, the use of CMC abbreviations is directly linked with "shallow bimbos", through a stylized example of sexualized messages. Descriptions like *shallow bimbos*, *sluts*, *slutty bitches* etc. are common in the blogs; the mocked internet language is associated with dumb girls far more often than dumb boys, though a larger corpus would be needed for further quantitative comparisons.

The relation between promiscuity of girls and sloppy language use is echoed in many of the ads. In the previous example, this association can be inferred from the content of stylized utterances. Associations with "sluts", however, are often more explicit:

(9) May

Not your typical girl here, and I'm proud of it. If you're looking for dumb half-literate sluts sending nude pics being all **heya boyz xxx** you're wasting your time. [...]

(10) Tom

Another slutty "**effing quite**" 8-year old all "**luv xx**" and I quit. What's wrong with you girls? Ever heard of proper writing? Or morals, and age-appropriate behaviour?

In parallel with a "slut shaming" focus on *morals* and *age-appropriate behaviour*, language is here the symbol of the criticized girlhood; in boys' messages stylizations usually provide examples to support their dissatisfaction and critical stance (e.g. on *morals* or *age-appropriate behaviour* in 10), while in girls' messages they provide a point of distancing from these imaginary other girls (again usually emphasized through hyper-correct spelling and punctuation). Further commentary typically includes references to both the girls' sexualized behaviour and their linguistic choices and aptitude (*half-literate sluts, ever heard of proper writing?*). The stylized internet language is thus indexical of a specific girl persona that the authors repeatedly distance themselves from.

An interesting occurrence is attaching to the stylized utterance an imagined, but highly ideologized vocal quality in the US – the “creaky voice”. The imagined voice quality is attached to several stylized examples of internet writing, usually with a brief metacommentary:

(11) Aron

Half the girls here are just like **heya sup yall**, that fake slutty creak roaring from their posts

(12) NN

Tired of all of you being like **u r li a boy a cud be mah**. I can hear a creaky voice muttering meaningless syllables, makes me wonder what I am even looking for here.

Comments of this type all come from the later period in the corpus, and can be seen as reflecting the recent explosion of US media coverage about creaky voice quality, often referred to as the ‘vocal fry’. In the past five or six years, both academics and laypeople have taken to the media to report an alleged increase in the use of creaky voice in teenage girls (Slobe 2016, 2018). Central to this emerging discourse are anxieties about the potential link between the use of creak and an inability to function as competent adult women, especially in the workplace (Anderson et al. 2014); the moral panic around it has become so widespread that some doctors have even proposed parents seek medical intervention to ‘fix’ their daughters’ voices, despite the lack of any biological risks of creaky voice (Slobe 2016). The creaky voice style echoed in the teenagers’ mock stylizations of writing taps into the wider adult hyper-representations of girlhood in the US, along with all the major associations linked to internet language in the blogs – lack of intelligence, immaturity and promiscuity.

As noted, comments such as the above come from girls as often as from boys, clearly echoing the adult anxieties on both sexuality and language. Rather than seeing these as boy-girl enmities or female competition, their similarity to documented adult popular discourses points to internalized gender-based values, which get refracted through the symbolics of language in the youth CMC context. It can be noted that boys’ promiscuity is never mentioned or linked to the mocked language use.

### 4.2.3. Enregisterment, adult language ideologies: A distinct, incomprehensible variety

Another association that underlies the mock stylizations analyzed is the incomprehensibility of internet language used by the teens. All of the above examples can be seen to illustrate one overarching process – the enregisterment (Agha, 2003, 2007) of youth online language as a distinct variety of language. In Agha’s terms, enregisterment is a process whereby “a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms” (Agha 2003:231), one that is ideologically linked to specific social personae. In several existing studies, similar enregisterment of *Netspeak* as a unique, barely intelligible variety ideologically associated with teenagers has been found (e.g. Thurlow 2007, Squires 2010). However, the present data reveal associations of internet language not with youth, but with a subsection of “other” less intelligent youth, and authors often make a point of distancing themselves from these “dumb teenagers” whose language is barely comprehensible:

(13) JX

**Gimme luv and I will luv 4ever.** Wait, what?! No, this doesn’t mean you’re romantic, but another dumb teenager babbling in chatspeak that people won’t even understand. [...]

(14) Miles

Okay this one ruined my morning. “**Im’a’take you to new planets, worlds you ne’er knew existed...**” You skipped class when you learned about apostrophes? They serve a purpose, apart from butchering perfectly clear words, you know. English should LOOK like English.

The author presents chatspeak as a variety in its own right, one that is not even understandable to everyone (though his own example is rather typical and almost looks dated). This form of language is directly described as belonging not to all youth, but to *dumb teenagers* (cf. 4.2.1). The idea of unintelligibility and “babbling” closely resembles language ideologies found in popular adult discourses (Thurlow 2006). This type of language is often, as in many of the above examples, placed in opposition to “good English” or “proper language”, sometimes to the point that authors refuse to communicate with others using internet language features:



(15) Fiona

Answers:

Q: **Whatcha doin then?**

A: **Im sowwy**.. I only understand proper grammar:(

(16) soz

To **hiya h sup** I can only say Pardon?, I only bother to reply to messages in English.

The first example is an excerpt of a post in which the author lists the most common questions she's been asked to chat or blog about. Stylizing the language of some of her peers, Fiona sets this type of language use in opposition to *proper grammar*. Her sarcastic use of baby-like language further contributes to the association of this type of writing with childishness and immaturity. The second example similarly involves a rejection of communication with the post writers that use CMC contractions, constructed as a variety not belonging to *messages in English*.

The enregisterment of the variety allows for its parodic reconstruction, with users expected to be able to read the humorous and 'not real' use. However, misunderstandings can occur, as (17) complains about in her blog:

(17) idonteven

C'mon, guys. Are you all really this oblivious? I realize sarcasm is poorly displayed on the internet. But there are just some instances were [sic] it should be just.. OBVIOUS. "**Aye boiz hmu if u wnt a deep lovin women to exchnge dirty txts wit! We can Kik if thts cool #YOLOJESUSSWAG**" What kind of tit would actually read that bunch of jargon, process it, then think to themself 'Wow, **this babe is talking srs bsns!** [...]

In similar distinctions between youth internet language and "proper language", oneself and others, issues of authenticity are also often brought up more explicitly.

(18) Max

The only problem is, that to find a legitimately REAL person sustaining life on this site, I have to swim through the hundreds of derps that can't even spell the word 'gorgeous' correctly. [...] I shouldn't have to waste a good sum of my time trying to understand what you're trying to tell me through your gibberish-

like words and mismatched phrases. The whole, **U send n00dz?**  
BS is really annoying. [...]

The stylized phrase indicates annoyance with the sexualized messages of other site users, but the complaints in the preceding text are exclusively language-focused. Those who use improper, “gibberish-like” language are described as not even being real people one can communicate with. Stressing the difficulty to understand netspeak echoes existing adult views on youth CMC as a specific, impenetrable variety of language.

Squires (2010) identified several ideological themes which lie at the core of enregistering internet language from an adult perspective: linguistic correctness, a distinction between “real life” and life happening online, technology-driven language change, social acceptability, and language protectionism. All of these themes clearly resonate in the present corpus. However, the ideological mechanisms behind the process of enregisterment in this community are not a direct mirror of those among adults – rather than associating Nestpeak with a homogenous group of today’s “Thumb Generation”, the bloggers here create ideological links with a specific, different subgroup of teenagers seen as superficial, unintelligent and lazy. Youth stylizations of the enregistered Netspeak form a metapragmatic activity whose meanings can only be understood in context, and whose ideological meanings are actively created by the participants themselves.

## 5. Discussion

The analysis has shown that stylization works as a specific type of parodic quotation, which merits attention both in terms of language form and the social meanings it indexes. From the perspective of quotative marking, the analysis has brought some new insights into the present-decade quotatives in youth American English, as well as into quotative marking in online written discourse, which has been comparatively less researched so far. The findings generally confirm further expansion of the relatively novel informal quotatives such as *be like* or *be all* (cf. Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2009, Buchstaller 2015) and a decline of traditional quotatives such as *say*. The findings must be interpreted within the context of mimetic re-enactments created by teenage authors and directed at a teenage readership. As the changes in the quotative system continue to progress, more nuanced studies will be needed, taking into consideration the contextual, pragmatic and interpersonal factors involved.

More specifically, the analysis has shown stylization to be, somewhat surprisingly (it has not been flagged as particularly salient in youth language research so far), a prominent metalinguistic strategy employed by the teenage blog writers. The mock practice echoes existing adult ideologies on teen language already documented, through associations with a lack of intelligence, lack of life prospects, and incomprehensibility. The gender dimension is strong and can in part be seen as indexical of the broader sexual and gender ideologies that operate in dating-oriented youth interactions, but also as tied to dynamics of (perceived) youth language use – after all, teenage girls are at the forefront of linguistic innovation (Labov 2001) as well as at the forefront of lingua-cultural stereotypization (Bucholtz 2004, Slobe 2018), particularly documented in the US. Still, the symbolic meanings of language and gender are locally constructed in this context, intertwined with teen concerns of self-image, likeability and sexuality in specific ways.

A broader point emerging from the discursive analysis of the stylizations is that metalanguage, or talk about talk, is in itself worthy of linguists' attention. This very acknowledgement can be seen as significant for CMC research, especially since the metalinguistic construction of internet language is still one of the least discussed dimensions of computer-mediated discourse (Herring 2011). It is hoped that the present study contributes to the emerging discussion on language attitudes and metalinguistic awareness in CMC, particularly when it comes to the often misleading hype about youth, language and technology, which can be altered only through direct critical engagement with the beliefs that produce it. Overall, the analysis has aimed to highlight that developing a critical understanding of young people's own metalanguage is another much needed, and so far much neglected, direction for CMC research.

While tying in with popular adult discourses, the described processes of enregisterment and metalinguistic commentary pose a challenge to existing views on networked youth's "linguistic whateverism". From a sociolinguistic perspective, they show that young people variously and actively appropriate linguistic resources, rather than being passive victims of social changes with little metalinguistic awareness. In the field of CMC, this calls for acknowledging the diversity of youth responses to technology and rejecting the technological determinism inherent in the views of an agentless "thumb-generation". Again, understanding the role of youth CMC in language change also requires paying closer attention to young people's own contextualized practices, viewpoints and ideologies.

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СТИЛИЗОВАНО ЦИТИРАЊЕ КАО ПАРОДИЈСКА ПРАКСА У ЛИЧНИМ  
БЛОГОВИМА ТИНЕЈДЦЕРА: ОБЛИЦИ СТИЛИЗАЦИЈЕ, МАРКЕРИ  
ЦИТИРАЊА И ЈЕЗИЧКО-ИДЕОЛОШКА ЗНАЧЕЊА

**Сажетак**

Језик младих у комуникацији посредством нових технологија навелико привлачи пажњу и у лингвистичкој науци и у јавном дискурсу, будући да се очекује да ће донети највећи утицај на језик у новом миленијуму. Са друге стране, начин на који млади сами приступају језику и технологији ретко се испитује даље од сензационалистичкох описа *генерације штагод* (“whatever generation”, Baron 2002) која је у интеракцијама на интернету незаинтересована за језичка правила. У раду се скреће пажња на овај недостатак, кроз анализу једне појаве – пародијске стилизације тинејџерског језика на интернету од стране тинејџера самих, учестале у анализираном корпусу личних блогова младих из САД. Први део рада бави се прагматичким одликама стилизације те маркерима цитирања, пружајући нове увиде у облике обележавања цитирања као једног аспекта језичке промене тренутно актуелне у свим варијететима енглеског језика (Tagliamonte 2016); други део рада чини дискурсна анализа ставова и друштвених идеологија исказаних у стилизацијама тинејџера. Свеукупно, налази упућују на високу метајезичку свест у комуникацији на интернету и у супротности су са схватањима о дигиталној комуникацији младих као језичког „штагодизма”.

**Кључне речи:** стилизација, маркери цитирања, језичке идеологије, језик младих на интернету, лични блогови