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# I Accidentally This Thesis Because East: The Influence of the Internet on Spoken Language in Eastspeak

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**I ACCIDENTALLY THIS THESIS BECAUSE EAST: THE INFLUENCE OF THE INTERNET  
ON SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN EASTSPEAK**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the variety of English spoken in East Dorm at Harvey Mudd College. It describes aspects of the syntax and phonology of Eastspeak, focusing in particular on how Eastspeak has been influenced by the language of the internet. This includes tendencies toward brevity and language play, as well as the use of specific constructions used on the internet, and playful pronunciations that are influenced by creative misspellings used online. Specific Eastspeak phenomena discussed include conversion, deletion, and unusual determiner and quantifier use.

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# 1. Introduction

“The first question I asked ... was whether the 'electronic revolution' was bringing about a linguistic revolution. The evidence suggests that it is. The phenomenon of Netspeak is going to 'change the way we think' about language in a fundamental way, because it is a linguistic singularity – a genuine new medium.”

(Crystal 2006, 272)

Over the last several years, the internet has become an increasingly large part of many people's lives. In adapting to this new technology, we have developed a new form of language, called Netspeak.

One community where the internet and its language are particularly important is Harvey Mudd College's East Dorm. The East community uses a variety of English, known as Eastspeak, which shows strong influences from Netspeak in its syntax and phonology.

Section 1.1 of this thesis will provide background on East and Eastspeak, and section 1.2 describes my methodologies and data. Section 2 gives an overview of the literature on Netspeak and its relevance to Eastspeak. In section 3, I discuss various aspects of the syntax of Eastspeak—conversion in 3.1, deletion in 3.2, use of determiners in 3.3, meme constructions in 3.4, and miscellaneous syntactic examples in 3.5. Section 4 describes the phonology of Eastspeak, including æ-reduction in 4.1 and orthography-based phonological changes in 4.2. Section 5 concludes the thesis.

## 1.1 East Dorm and Language

Harvey Mudd College (known as 'HMC' or 'Mudd' for short) is a small, private college in Claremont, California, and a member of the Claremont University Consortium. HMC

describes itself as “one of the premier engineering, science and mathematics colleges in the United States,” but also as a liberal arts college (“About Harvey Mudd College”). 99% of students live on campus, in one of eight residence halls; the oldest of these is East Dorm (“Fast Facts”).

While each dorm has its own culture and personality, East arguably has the closest and most insular community. While HMC as a whole is widely considered a nerd school, East has a reputation as the nerdiest dorm, often associated with board and video games and with internet and meme culture. It also has a very high concentration of computer science majors.

One feature of the East community is a distinctive variety of English, known as Eastspeak—the grammar of Eastspeak (specifically its syntax and phonology) is the topic of this thesis. Eastspeak has many similarities to the language varieties spoken by some larger, related populations; some of what I consider Eastspeak could easily be spoken by other college students, for example, especially by ones who would identify as nerdy or internet-savvy, and perhaps by other populations as well. However, some parts of the Eastspeak grammar are, to the best of my knowledge, unique to the East community, at least in their exact form. Eastspeak also more commonly utilizes highly innovative grammar than might be expected from similar speakers who are not members of the East community.

Members of the East Dorm community are known as Easties. While many Easties live in East Dorm, the community also includes some students who live in other HMC dorms, and even a few students from other colleges in the Claremont Consortium. Because East is a two-story building, community members who do not live in the dorm are often referred to as Third-Floor Easties. People who regularly spend time in the dorm lounge, eat meals at the dining hall table that has been unofficially designated 'East Table,' or otherwise participate in dorm activities are typically considered members of the community.

I am one such Third-Floor Eastie. While I am officially a student at Scripps College, I have been involved in the community in the ways described above since my first semester of college. Thus, I am writing this as a member of the community I am describing, and a speaker of Eastspeak.

## 1.2 Methods and Data

The data provided in this thesis are things that have been spoken out loud by Easties to other Easties. I first began collecting this data over a period of a few weeks in April and May 2014; at that time, I was working with a fellow Eastie, Emma Meersman, and she and I both wrote down utterances that we heard. In the 2014-2015 school year I continued to record Eastspeak data, this time on my own. All of these data are utterances that either of us happened to hear in a naturalistic context while spending time with Easties. Because we are both members of the East community and speakers of Eastspeak, we included things that we ourselves said, as long as they were said naturally.

While much of Eastspeak is distinctly East-specific, most of what Easties say is simply regular English. Many utterances lie somewhere in between: perhaps they are not quite what one would expect to hear in mainstream English, but they may be similar to what some nerdy college students not in the East community might say, for example. Thus, determining what utterances to include in my data for this project was necessarily subjective—I simply wrote down anything I heard in the appropriate context that struck me as typical of Eastspeak, but not typical of mainstream English.

All data have been reported without information identifying the speaker. In cases where individual's names appeared in syntactic examples, I replaced the names with pseudonyms. The only place where real names appear with my data are in a few phonological examples, where the relevant data was an altered pronunciation of an Eastie's first name or commonly-used nickname. In these cases, changing the names would not have been possible; real names are thus reported in section 4 with the consent

of the people to whom they refer.

My primary interest was the grammar of Eastspeak—the syntax and pronunciations. Much of Eastspeak is also distinctive for its specific lexical items, and these are often what members of the community first thought of when they learned that I was studying Eastspeak. However, I considered the specific lexicon of Eastspeak to be outside the scope of this thesis, and did not include data that would have been considered Eastspeak for purely lexical reasons.

## 2. Internet Language

Over the last few decades, as the internet has become an increasingly large part of our lives, linguists have of course begun studying language use on the internet, and discussing how it fits into our understanding of language as a whole.

Much of this research has concerned where computer-mediated communication (CMC) fits into the traditional dichotomy between (oral) speech and writing: while text-based CMC appears on the surface to be a type of writing, much of Netspeak displays many similarities to speech, including similar time constraints and transience (Crystal 2006, 32). While many authors have referred to Netspeak as “written speech” (e.g. Elmer-Dewitt 1994 quoted in Crystal 2006, Lefler 2011), Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore call it a hybrid register, which “resembles both speech and writing, yet is neither” (1991, 10). Crystal goes even further, concluding that Netspeak is a completely new medium, fundamentally different from both speech and writing (272).

Given the increasing pervasiveness of Netspeak in many of our lives—and especially the lives of many younger adults, such as college students—it is hardly surprising that this new medium of communication may begin to influence other aspects of language. Interestingly, despite the common conclusion that Netspeak is similar to but distinct from both speech and writing, many more authors have addressed the possibility of Netspeak changing written language than it having a similar effect on spoken language (e.g. Baron 2008). To my knowledge, the only literature that considers the possibility of Netspeak influencing spoken language as any more than a hypothetical future scenario focuses solely on lexical borrowings, particularly acronyms such as *lol* (Baron 2008, 179-180; Greiffenstern 2010). In sections 3 and 4 of this thesis, I will argue that Netspeak can have an effect on the syntax and phonology of spoken language.

In particular, section 3 discusses the syntax of Eastspeak, which shows effects of Netspeak's tendencies toward brevity and language play, as well as some specific constructions used in internet memes. The brevity of Netspeak, described in Thompsen and Ahn (1992, 5) as “the omission of nonessential linguistic elements,” arose as a response to time constraints on computer-mediated communication; Ferrara, Brunner, and Whitemore (1991) thus describe Netspeak as a “reduced register,” similar to the note-taking register, in which elements such as copulas are often deleted if context allows them to be disposable. Over time, this principle of economy has become not only a practical value in Netspeak, but also a sociolinguistic aspect of many Netspeak dialects, as observed by Crystal (196). This tendency has spread to Eastspeak as well, where, as I discuss in section 3.2, elements such as verbs are frequently omitted from sentences, as long as their meaning is recoverable from context. The conversion discussed in 3.1 and many of the miscellaneous syntactic examples in 3.5 are also based, to some degree, in a desire for economy.

More generally, Netspeak values linguistic creativity and language play. Crystal describes the use of language play as a way to indicate informality and establish rapport in internet communication (44), quoting internet style guides such as *Wired Style*, which recommends linguistic inventiveness and irreverence to grammatical conventions (Crystal, 80-81; Hale and Scanlon, 9, 15). More descriptively, Crystal observes that language play is common in online communities, particularly chatgroups and virtual worlds (e.g. 175-7, 197). This value, too, has found its way into the East community; a great deal of Eastspeak has a playful element, and much of it seems to be creative simply for the sake of being creative. This is apparent from my data presented throughout this thesis, but perhaps especially in sections 3.5 and 4.2.

The most obvious way that Eastspeak grammar has been shaped by the language of the internet is in the use of certain grammatical constructions that are associated with memes, such as dogespeak (McCulloch 2014). These constructions are discussed in section 3.4.

In section 4, I argue that the tendency to playfully alter the spellings of words in Netspeak translates in spoken Eastspeak to altered pronunciations that are underlyingly based in orthography rather than in traditional phonology.

## 3. Syntax

### 3.1 Conversion

One very common aspect of Eastspeak syntax is conversion, defined by Bauer (1983, 227) as “the use of a form which is regarded as being basically of one form class as though it were a member of a different form class, without any concomitant change of form.” While conversion is common in English in general, conversion in Eastspeak is even more productive, and stands out to those familiar with Eastspeak as one of its distinctive features.

As in mainstream English, much of Eastspeak conversion is that of nouns into verbs, known as denominal verbs. In 3.1.1, I discuss previous literature on denominal verbs, and show how the denominal verbs in Eastspeak differ from those found in mainstream adult English—in particular, how Easties are far more inclined than mainstream English speakers to produce verbs out of a noun that would be a direct object in the non-converted version of the sentence. In 3.1.2, I briefly discuss examples of Eastspeak conversion other than the noun-to-verb type.

#### **3.1.1 Denominal Verbs**

Clark & Clark (1979) collected more than 1300 denominal verbs from a variety of sources, which they then classified by the case role that the parent noun—the noun which becomes the verb—plays in a paraphrase of the sentence. Using this system, they identify nine categories of denominal verbs, including a miscellaneous category.

1. The first category consists of locatum verbs, in which the parent nouns “are in the objective case in clauses that describe the location of one thing with respect to another” (769).

Clark & Clark represent this category with the following sentence and paraphrase:

- (1) Jane blanketed the bed.
- (2) Jane did something to cause it to come about that [the bed had one or more blankets on it].

For my purposes, the style of paraphrase shown in (2) is unnecessarily wordy and potentially confusing. I will therefore instead use my own, less formal paraphrases, which more closely resemble standard English, while still making it clear what role the parent noun plays in the paraphrase. For example, instead of (2), I would give the paraphrase in

(3):

- (3) Jane put blankets on the bed.

The key point here is that the sentence with a denominal verb—in this case (1)—can be rewritten in (2) or (3) so that the parent noun, *blanket(s)*, is still used as a noun. In the case of this type of sentence, that noun represents a direct object which is being put somewhere, or a 'locatum.'

Eastpeak locatum verbs do not appear to differ from those used in mainstream English.

2. For location verbs, the parent nouns are in the locative case—in other words, they represent a location (772). Clark & Clark's example is given in (4), with my paraphrase in (5):

- (4) Kenneth kenneled the dog.
- (5) Kenneth put the dog in the kennel.

My Eastpeak data contains a few examples of location verbs. The reason that (6-10) stand out as nonstandard may be that while most of the location verbs described by Clark

& Clark are transitive, these are intransitive:

- (6) Are we dinnering now?  
'Are we going to dinner now?'
- (7) Are we Cooping?  
'Are we going to the Coop?'<sup>1</sup>
- (8) Are you fooding?  
'Are you going into the dining hall [to get food]?'
- (9) You still wanna Jay's?  
'[Do] you still want to go to Jay's?'<sup>2</sup>
- (10) [I kind of want to dessert crepe] but I don't want to line.  
'...but I don't want to wait in line.'

The above are similar in structure to Clark & Clark's example:

- (11) The diver surfaced  
'The diver rose to the surface.'

It appears, then, that Easties may simply use this subtype of location verbs more productively than most English speakers (and especially when referring to food).

Another of my location examples likely stood out because the 'location' described was a virtual one:

- (12) I can overheardatmudd it.  
'I can put it (the quote) on (the blog called) overheardatmudd.'

This broadening of what can be considered a location—and treated as one in everyday

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1 The Coop is a place to buy food on campus.

2 Jay's is short for Jay's Place, another place to buy food on campus.

language—is one of the effects of an increasing acceptance of the online world, both in Eastspeak and in our broader society.

3. The third category of denominal verb consists of duration verbs. These have parent nouns which denote a stretch of time, in prepositional phrases with prepositions like *for* (773), as in:

- (13) Julia summered in Paris.
- (14) Julia was in Paris for a summer.

These apparently make up a relatively small portion of English's denominal verbs, and Eastspeak seems to use them no differently.

4. Agent verbs, with parent nouns in the agentive case, as in:

- (15) John butchered the cow.
- (16) John did to the cow what one would expect a butcher to do (to a cow).

My data contains several examples of agent verbs:

- (17) I understand this is an unusual Abigailing of my grill.  
'I understand that Abigail (the addressee) is being unusually up in my grill (in the figurative sense).'
- (18) Oh yeah, you can linguist this.  
'Oh yeah, you can analyze this from the perspective of a linguist.'
- (19) I was going to walk so then I could zombie.  
'I was going to walk so then I could play as a zombie [in Humans vs. Zombies].'
- (20) I'm doing very poorly at Robining.  
'I'm doing very poorly at playing as the character Robin (in a video game).'
- (21) A: I have to be a person today.

'I have to be responsible/get things done today (like a person would).'

B: What things do you have to person today?

'What things do you have to do today?'

(22) I'm trying to unicorn at people and it's not working.

'I'm trying to act like (?) a unicorn at people (by using a piece of a broken piñata as a horn) and it's not working.'

(23) Has he become more encouraging or have you grown more confident in your ability to physicist?

'Has he become more encouraging or have you grown more confident in your ability be a physicist?'

5. The fifth category proposed by Clark & Clark is experiencer verbs, in which the parent nouns are experiencers. These are very rare in Clark & Clark's data, with only three examples: *witness the accident*, *boycott the store*, and *badger the officials*. I find their data insufficient to support this as a category: *witness the accident* could easily be classified as an agent verb (Clark & Clark classify it as experiencer based on the very subtle distinction that “witnesses do not watch accidents, but see them”), while *boycott* and *badger* fit into a broader category of object verbs that I will propose later on.

6. In goal verbs, the parent nouns are in the goal case:

(24) Edward powdered the aspirin.

(25) Edward caused the aspirin to become powder.

(26)

I have collected one example of a goal verb, shown in (26):

(26) A: What happened to the couches?

B: We boated them.

'We made them into a (couch)boat.<sup>13</sup>

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3 A couchboat is the boat-like structure created by pushing together two couches that are facing each

This stands out as Eastspeak due to its reference to the concept of a couchboat (which, although not unique to East, is also not part of the common ground in most other communities), and perhaps especially so due to the clipping of *couchboat(ed)* into just *boated*.

7. In source verbs, the parent nouns are in the source case. This also describes only three tokens in Clark & Clark's data: *piece the quilt together*, *word the sentence*, and *letter the sign*. I have no examples of these in my own data.

8. Instrument verbs are the most common type of denominal verb in Clark & Clark's data. In these, the parent nouns denote instruments:

- (27) John bicycled into town.
- (28) John used a bicycle to go into town.

My data contain two instrument verbs:

- (29) It works in both directions if the number you're remaindering by is prime.  
'It works in both directions if the number you're taking the remainder by is prime.'
- (30) We couldn't figure out what the right resolution was until we trial-and-error-ed it.  
'We couldn't figure out what the right resolution was until we used trial-and-error (on it).'

This classification of (29) is questionable, as this verb is an unusual type that appears not to fit neatly into any categorization. However, I believe that it is best described as instrumental because the verb essentially means 'using the remainder operation.'

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other.

9. Finally, Clark & Clark present a miscellaneous category, which is further broken down into several subcategories. These include meals:

- (31) Jeff lunched on a hotdog and a coke.
- (32) Jeff ate a lunch of a hotdog and a coke.<sup>4</sup>

Crops:

- (33) Roger hayed the top field.
- (34) Roger harvested hay from the top field.

Parts:

- (35) The car rear-ended the van.
- (36) The car did to the rear-end of the van what one would expect (a car to do to a rear-end).

Elements:

- (37) It is raining.
- (38) It is doing what one would expect rain to do.

And, finally, “Other,” which contains only one item:

- (39) We housed your wife's steak.
- (40) We put your wife's steak 'on the house.'

The authors note that several of the verbs in the miscellaneous category have parent

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<sup>4</sup> In this case I have used Clark & Clark's paraphrase rather than my own, as they chose to use a less formal one for this example.

nouns in the objective case: meals, parts, and elements are explicitly acknowledged as being objective, while the crops category is described as similar to locatum verbs—which are, themselves, a type of objective verbs. As stated above, I argue that two of their three examples of so-called “experiencer verbs” are also objective. Still, the authors decline to list “object verbs” among their types, on the grounds that these specific uses are “much more restricted” than such a category name would suggest (780).

Interestingly, it seems that objective verbs are more common and less restrained in child speech than in typical adult speech. Clark (1982) notes that many denominal verbs innovated by children can be classified as “characteristic activity verbs,” which “denote the characteristic activity done *by* or *to* the particular entity denoted by the parent noun” (412). She notes here that this class is rare, or even nonexistent, in adult speech, with the only potential examples being element verbs such as *rain* and *snow*. Her examples of *act done to* verbs found in child speech include:

- (41) (to mother preparing to brush his hair) Don't hair me.
  - (42) (eating soup) I'm souping.
  - (43) (hearing his father using the vacuum cleaner in the hall) Daddy's rugging down the hall.
  - (44) (during a card game, wanting to cut the deck) It's my turn to deck the cards.
- (413)

Neither Clark & Clark (1979) nor Clark (1982) provide a theoretical explanation for the lack of objective verbs in typical adult speech beyond the specific types described. Rimell (2012) points this out, suggesting that it is a flaw in Clark & Clark's theory. She gives several example sentences, each with a denominal verb whose parent noun is intended as an object of a verb. She presents all of these as infelicitous:

(45)

- a. #Mary was appling at lunch today.  
intended: 'eating apple(s)' (consumption)
- b. #Susan was beering a lot last week.  
intended: 'drinking beer' (consumption)
- c. #Pat was booking all afternoon.  
intended: 'reading/writing book(s)' (consumption/creation)
- d. #Julie was housing last year.  
intended: 'building house(s)' (creation)
- e. #Beth has been portraiting.  
intended: 'painting portrait(s)' (creation)
- f. #The wreckers were stationing.  
intended: 'destroying the station' (consumption)
- g. #The orchestra symphonied in tremendous fashion for an hour.  
intended: 'played a symphony' (consumption)
- h. #Amy has finished lawning and now she's ready to come inside.  
intended: 'mowing the lawn' (other incremental theme)
- i. #The cleaner was chairing.  
intended: 'cleaning the chairs' (other incremental theme)

(Rimell 2012, 46)

In fact, these data shed light on a distinction between mainstream English and Eastspeak. At least (45a, b, c, e, g) are clearly felicitous in Eastspeak, and any of the others could also be acceptable given a context in which the intended meaning is sufficiently salient.

In fact, object verbs are very common in Eastspeak, making up by far the largest part of my data on denominal verbs. Of course, this data is not representative of all East speech, but of Eastspeak utterances that stood out to me as unlike regular English. Thus, the fact that most of the given denominal verbs are object verbs does not mean that this is the most common type of denominal verb used by Easties; it does, however, mean that these

are used noticeably more in Eastspeak than in regular adult language, where they are extremely rare (Clark & Clark 1979, Clark 1982). On the other hand, because this type of verb is so common in Eastspeak, it is likely that I noticed and included in my data far fewer of these than I heard during the period of time that I was collecting data.

One significant subcategory of the object verbs I found in Eastspeak is those whose parent nouns are school assignments (or the names of classes, used to refer to assignments):

- (46) Have you CSed yet?  
'Have you done the CS homework yet?'
- (47) I'm planning on thesising.  
'I'm planning on doing thesis [as opposed to clinic, the other possibility].'
- (48) A: I've been E4ing. In the E4 room.  
'I've been doing [work for the class] E4. In the E4 room.'  
B: You can E4 anywhere!  
'You can do [work for] E4 anywhere!'
- (49) I have to get back to essaying.  
'I have to get back to writing my essay.'
- (50) What are you papering about?  
'What are you writing a paper about?'
- (51) Sometimes you just want to thesis.  
'Sometimes you just want to [do/write] thesis.'
- (52) I don't even know how to CS.  
'I don't even know how to do the CS assignment.'

The frequency of this type of verb is hardly surprising, given that East is a college environment where homework is a frequent topic of conversation.

A second subcategory is verbs whose parent nouns are food (another frequent topic

among college students, especially because much of East conversation occurs in the dining hall):

- (53) That's not how you lollipop.  
'That's now how you eat a lollipop.'
- (54) I should food.  
'I should get/eat food.'
- (55) A: But you can't dairy, either.  
'But you can't eat dairy, either.'  
B: I can cheese!  
'I can eat cheese!'
- (56) I kind of want to dessert crepe [but I don't want to line].<sup>5</sup>  
'I kind of want to get a dessert crepe...'

A third large category of object verbs is ones that can be best paraphrased with the verb 'use.' Because of this, it might be possible to analyze these instead as instrument verbs; however, they did not fit well into the category of instrument verbs provided by Clark & Clark, in part because in my data these are all intransitive (as are my other object verbs), while Clark & Clark's instrument verbs are overwhelmingly transitive.

- (57) I just lightninged.  
'I just used lightning [in Mario Kart].'
- (58) Are you Goat-Simulatoring?  
'Are you using/playing Goat Simulator<sup>6</sup>?'
- (59) Henry's linuxing and Luke is linuxing.  
'Henry's using linux and Luke is using linux.'

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<sup>5</sup> This use of *line* is not objective and will be addressed in a later section.

<sup>6</sup> A video game in which the player controls a goat.

- (60) There were definitely people who were lapping in here and then went out to water.<sup>7</sup>  
 'There were definitely people who were using laptops in here and then went out to play with water.'
- (61) It's good for people like me who don't Reddit.  
 'It's good for people like me who don't use Reddit.'
- (62) I don't Amazon enough for that to be entertaining at all.  
 'I don't use Amazon enough for that to be entertaining at all.'
- (63) You probably want to napkin.  
 'You probably want to use a napkin.'

There are also several examples of object verbs that do not fit any of these subcategories:

- (64) [Person A starts taking off Person B's watch]  
 B: What are you doing?  
 A: Surgery.  
 B: Why are you surgerying?  
 'Why are you doing/performing surgery?'
- (65) Undisciplined Art. You, like, art.  
 [Describing a class called Undisciplined Art] 'You, like, do art.'
- (66) Do people tend to accidentally basketball?  
 'Do people tend to accidentally play basketball?'
- (67) How do we pages?  
 [Said while creating an online survey] 'How do we make pages/split this into pages?'
- (68) Can we Employee?<sup>8</sup>  
 'Can we call "Employee of the Month"?''

<sup>7</sup> This meaning of *water* was salient because a 'Pool Party' event was happening outside at the time.

<sup>8</sup> This was said during ITR games, an occasional activity at Harvey Mudd College where students fight each other with duct-tape daggers in the basement complex of their academic building late at night. For reasons that are now opaque, 'Employee of the Month' is a phrase called near the end of a game to tell the few remaining players to assemble in the foyer so that the game will end more quickly.

- (69) Who can vending machine? I need help. Jack, can you help me vending machine?  
'Who can make the vending machine accept bills? I need help. Jack, can you help me make the vending machine accept bills?'<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, object verbs in Eastspeak are much more common, and used for a broader range of purposes, than they are in the more mainstream version of adult English described by Clark & Clark and by Rimell.

### 3.1.2 Other Conversion Types

While denominal verbs make up most of the conversion found in Eastspeak, other types of conversion are certainly also possible, such as noun-to-adjective:

- (70) A: Not science enough.  
'Not scientific enough.'  
B: What would be the science way?  
'What would be the scientific way?'
- (71) You look so sleep.  
'You look so sleepy.'
- (72) It's so pixels.  
'It's so pixellated (i.e. low resolution).'

And adjective-to-verb:

- (73) Nocturnaling  
'Being nocturnal'

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<sup>9</sup> The vending machine in East lounge is rather old and notoriously reluctant to accept bills; a few members of the community, including the addressee, are known for having mastered the art of using it.

(74) We can four-person the couch.

'We can make this couch into a four-person couch (i.e. one with four people on it).'

### 3.2 Deletion

One of the major values of Netspeak is brevity, including the deletion of certain syntactic elements (Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore 1991; Thompsen and Ahn 1992). This tendency for deletion also appears in Eastspeak.

In Netspeak, verbs can sometimes be omitted, particularly copulas (Thompsen and Ahn 1992). Similarly, in Eastspeak, verbs can sometimes be deleted as long as the meaning is clear from context, either within the sentence itself, or from other linguistic or non-linguistic context. Examples of verb deletion in Eastspeak include:

(75) Were we 105 later?

'Were we doing/going to do [homework for] 105<sup>10</sup> later?'

(76) A: Are you HvZ?

'Are you playing/going to play HvZ<sup>11</sup>?'

B: I am HvZ.

'I am going to play HvZ.'

The above examples are particularly helpful in that they demonstrate that verb deletion exists in Eastspeak, as a distinct process from the conversion described in the previous section. This is apparent from the lack of verbal inflection in these sentences, which would have appeared had they been instances of conversion.

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10 i.e. the class CS105.

11 Humans vs. Zombies

In other cases, a verb is deleted leaving an object that is a DP, rather than just a noun. In some of these, like in many of the instances of noun-to-verb conversion, the meaning of the deleted verb can be recovered from the sentence alone:

- (77) Did I just [go] the wrong way?
- (78) We should [play] a game.
- (79) Should I [get] more tea?
- (80) I can't [use] words.

In other cases, the meaning is clear only with context:

- (81) However you [pronounce] that.  
(After speaker had difficulty pronouncing a word.)
- (82) How do you even [brush] this?  
(Speaker was playing with the addressee's hair.)
- (83) Can you [move] me to a place, like behind me?  
(Speaker and addressee were playing a board game.)
- (84) I don't know how to [use] things.  
(Speaker was indicating that they did not know how to use the dorm's gaming equipment.)
- (85) I can attempt to [help you with the] thing.
- (86) A: Why does he [=Nathan] even have swipe to EDC?  
B: Why does Nathan?  
'Why does Nathan do anything?'

Other examples of verb deletion include:

- (87) I know, I can direction.  
'I know, I understand directions.'

- (88) I can't words.  
 'I can't use words!'/'I can't think of the words to say what I'm trying to say.'
- (89) Why does the internet not [work]?
- (90) This light is not [working]. Oh, I see why this light is not [working].
- (91) What studies do you want to [do/study] independently?<sup>12</sup>
- (92) Let's just [do it] here.
- (93) Can we just [have/be on] perpetual break?
- (94) Are we [getting] hot food?

Many of these sentences were spoken with a pause indicating the location of the missing verb, as is common in cases of deletion (Cooper & Paccia-Cooper 1980). In (89) and (90), though, the deleted verb was sentence-final, so such a pause was not possible.

In addition to verb deletion, I recorded two examples of what appears to be VP-ellipsis in nonstandard (non-gapping) contexts:

- (95) Is there food? There do.  
 'Is there food? There is.'
- (96) How do?  
 'How are you?'

One additional observation that can be made about the data in this section is that a large number of the utterances involving verb deletion or nonstandard VP-ellipsis are questions, and even more are somehow question-like, such as responses to questions (as in (95)) or implied questions or statements of lack of knowledge (as in (84), (85), (86), (90)). It is not apparent to me why this should be the case; explaining this could be a topic for future research.

Verbs are not the only syntactic elements that are disposable in Netspeak and Eastspeak.

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<sup>12</sup> i.e. What things do you want to study in an independent study?

Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore (19) also discuss the deletion of unstressed subject pronouns, as in:

- (97) Ø need hotel reservations for 2 in London, august 24 to august 27, moderate price range.
- (98) Ø want a reservation at a hotel in the center of London.

EastSpeak also shows some deletion of unstressed subject pronouns:

- (99) Why is loud?  
'Why is it loud?'

EastSpeak also sometimes deletes tense/aspect markers:

- (100) What you do?  
'What are you doing?'
- (101) Are you leave? Don't be leave.  
'Are you leaving? Don't be leaving.'

Often, more than one type of syntactic element is deleted in one sentence, such as subject and tense:

- (102) Frequency with which swear.  
'Frequency with which one swears.'
- (103) But what if cheaper?  
'But what if it were cheaper?'

In (104), both a verb and prepositions are deleted:

(104) Does anyone know how to the network Windows these days?

'Does anyone know how to get on the network on Windows these days?'

In (105), verb deletion is combined with what could be analyzed as either deletion of the determiner *a* or noun-to-adjective conversion of *couch*:

(105) Can I somewhere that's couch?

'Can I sit somewhere that's a couch?'

### 3.3 Determiners and Quantification

Another trait of Eastspeak is non-standard use of determiners and quantifiers.

#### **3.3.1 Determiner Addition and Deletion**

In a couple cases, the definite determiner *the* was used with proper nouns, which are not usually accompanied by determiners in English:

(106) Do you all want to eat the Blue Fan<sup>13</sup>?

(107) A: You get zero of the sympathies from the Gabriel.

B: Does anyone get any of the sympathies from the Gabriel?

In (108) and (109), however, the expected determiner is absent:

(108) I'm sure there'll be [a] dinner bus<sup>14</sup> soon.

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13 'Blue Fin' is the name of a restaurant near campus; its pronunciation as 'Blue Fan' here is discussed in 4.1.

14 The word 'bus,' in the East lexicon, can be used to refer to a group of people walking somewhere together; thus, a 'dinner bus' would be a group of people walking to dinner.

(109) How is [the] lounge<sup>15</sup>?

### 3.3.2 Quantifiers

EastSpeak also sometimes uses different quantifiers than would be expected. This includes many instances that may be seen as cases of conversion—either major conversion between two different parts of speech, or minor conversion within one, such as conversion of a mass noun to a count noun. However, I have chosen to treat these separately from the conversion instances in 3.1.2 because there are enough cases of unusual quantification to merit their own section, and it is not entirely clear that any of them are conversion rather than simply creative quantification.

In (110), the abstract noun *hours* is used figuratively with *pile of*, which typically only describes concrete nouns that can be piled:

(110) Physics lab. I've spent, like, the last pile of hours working on it and I've gotten nothing done.

In (111-112), quantifiers that normally combine only with plural or mass nouns are used with singular count nouns:

(111) A: Do we have enough car?

B: We have enough car.

(112) Yeah, we have a lot of plant.

The determiner *a* is normally only used with singular count nouns, and the phrase *a million* with plural ones; in (113-114), however, each of these is used with a mass noun:

(113) Ah, you acquired a food.

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<sup>15</sup> Used, as often, to refer collectively to the people in the lounge.

(114) You've been spending, like, a million time.

While *food* and *time* can each sometimes be treated as count nouns, meaning something like 'type of food' and 'instance,' both of the sentences above use the nouns in their regular count-noun interpretations.

In (115), a quantifier phrase that is typically used only with a plural noun is instead used with a mass noun:

(115) You've been spending like a million time.

In (116-117), too, quantifiers used only with plural nouns in mainstream English are combined with unexpected words—a comparative adjective and an adjective which has been pluralized as a noun:

(116) A: This puzzle is, like, eight easier.

B: Eight whole easier.

(117) How many drunks are you?

In (118), the DP *a dick* is quantified as if it were an adjective:

(118) Drunk Martin was pretty a dick.

In (119), *up* is modified by *how*, as if it were quantifiable:

(119) Would anyone go up? How up would they go?

Finally, in (120), *hurry*, which is rarely used as a noun except in phrases like *in a hurry*, is quantified by *as much* as if it were a mass noun:

- (120) As much hurry as you want to restaurant.  
'Hurry as much as you want to the restaurant.'

### 3.4 Meme Constructions

Perhaps the most straightforward way that Eastspeak syntax is influenced by Netspeak is in the use of specific constructions associated with internet memes.

#### **3.4.1 Doge**

In Fall 2013, the doge meme was created and became popular across the internet. While typically associated with visual cues such as a picture of a shiba inu and brightly-colored comic sans, perhaps the primary defining feature of this meme is its grammar, which, as Gretchen McCulloch (2014b) points out, is recognizably 'doge' even without the visual cues. This grammar, as McCulloch explains, consists mainly of two-word phrases, of which the first word is one of the modifiers 'so,' 'such,' 'many,' 'much,' or 'very,' and the second is usually some open-class word which would not follow the first in standard English. Doge grammar also contains some one-word phrases, most often 'wow,' but sometimes others such as 'amaze' and 'excite.'

While many internet users are aware of doge grammar, most restrict its use to written communication, or very rarely speak it out loud. In East, however, the meme started showing up in spoken speech very soon after it appeared on the internet. Some examples of doge utterances used by Easties are given below<sup>16</sup>:

- (121) Such bizarre.  
(122) So danger.  
(123) Wow. Such math.

<sup>16</sup> Presented in comic sans because those familiar with dogespeak feel that it is better represented in comic sans than in more formal fonts.

(124) *Very puppy. Wow.*

(125) *Such egress.*

(126) *Many skill. Such skill.*

(127) *Such cheese.*

(128) *A: So spirit.*

*B: Wow.*

### **3.4.2 Accidentally + DP**

Another meme construction occasionally used in Eastspeak is the 'accidentally + DP' construction, as in the prototypical example 'I accidentally the whole thing.' Syntactically, this appears to be a special case of verb gapping as discussed in 1.3. However, while in most gapping the meaning of the missing verb is intended to be recoverable from context, the 'accidentally' construct creates humor through the ambiguity caused by the missing verb ("I Accidentally"). Below are two examples of this construction in Eastspeak:

(129) *I accidentally my alarm clock, so I missed brunch.*

(130) *Oh, I accidentally their crew.*

(131) *I accidentally my CS70 midterm in pen.*

In (129), the first clause is ambiguous—there are many things that one could accidentally do to an alarm clock, such as forget to set it, set it on a day one did not intend to use it, or turn it off without waking up. In this case, however, the speaker chooses to partially resolve the ambiguity in the second part of the sentence for the sake of communication, indicating that the mistake was one that caused her to oversleep.

In (130), which was produced while the speaker was playing a video game, the meaning is in fact unclear from the utterance. Perhaps it would have been comprehensible to a

hearer familiar with the game, but I was not and am unable to recover the meaning.

### 3.4.3 'Because,' 'While,' and 'When'

Yet another recent phenomenon in internet and spoken language is a new use of 'because'—and, to a lesser extent, some other subordinating conjunctions. While no fully satisfactory analysis of this phenomenon has been produced, McCulloch (2014a) argues against the popular claim that 'because' has become a preposition, and instead suggests that these words can now take “things that can be interjected” as complements.

In Eastspeak, this new use of 'because' is fairly common, especially with nouns as in (132-135). As described above, it can also be used with other complements such as interjections, as in (136):

(132) Maybe it was just because mug.

(133) Because Hoch or because spinach?

(134) A: Why is it dark in here?

B: Because reasons.

(135) A: It's funny because Mormons though.

B: Lots of things are funny because Mormons.

(136) Just unintentionally hiding because oops, accidentally finals.

Interestingly, one example uses an adjective as a complement of a 'because' phrase, but does so with the preposition 'of,' which is usually left out of this construction:

(137) I'm not sure if that's just because of bad.

As predicted by McCulloch, Easties also use interjective complements with subordinating conjunctions other than 'because,' particularly 'while' and 'when':

(138) Not something I should do while thesis.

(139) Studying while Game of Thrones?

(140) That's what happens when humidity.

### 3.5 Miscellaneous Syntactic and Morphological Data

The previous few sections described common syntactic patterns I was able to find in my data. However, much of Eastspeak is less consistent. As in online communities, members of East can gain prestige and index their East identities by using highly creative language; the data in this section exemplify this facet of Eastspeak: speakers value creativity and, often, brevity, and that as long as they provide enough information for listeners to recover their meaning in context, they can more or less bend the rules of grammar however they want.

Below each sentence I have provided an approximate paraphrase of the intended meaning; however, because these are often context-dependent (and I may or may not have full knowledge of the nuances of the context in which they were spoken) or simply vague, they should be considered only as loose paraphrases which may differ slightly from the meaning that was intended when they were spoken in context.

One phenomenon occurring twice in these data involves switching a verb with part or all of its direct object, before tense morphology is applied (as we can see from (141)):

(141) I've boarded the bring game.

'I've brought the board game.'

(142) Somebody should door the open.

'Somebody should open the door.'

Another involves replacing one argument of a sentence with a copy of a word which appeared earlier:

- (143) What kind of music do you music?  
'What kind of music do you listen to?'
- (144) Can I boing your boing?  
'Can I boing your hair?'

Both of the above could be described as cases of conversion—noun-to-verb conversion in (143) and verb-to-noun in (144). However, I have listed them separately because this doubling phenomenon is remarkable on its own.

Sentence (145) shows object incorporation:

- (145) Are you going to attempt to job-acquire?  
'Are you going to attempt to acquire a job?'

In (146), part of the object DP, *60*, is converted to a verb; however, this differs from the object denominal verbs discussed in 3.1.1 in that the main object noun, *final*, remains as an object.

- (146) Have you 60ed<sup>17</sup> the final?  
'Have you taken the (CS)60 final?'

In a few examples, the number of words is greatly reduced; however, because each of these could probably be paraphrased in multiple ways, it is difficult to unambiguously identify exactly what words or morphemes are deleted:

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<sup>17</sup> Pronounced as 'sixtied'

(147) Why is your hat?

'Why are you wearing that hat?'

(148) A: How do random.

B: How does random.

'How do we make this random (?)'

(These were spoken approximately simultaneously)

(149) How physics this?

'How can this be explained with physics?'

In (150), the speaker applies the plural form *are* to the singular noun *lounge*, perhaps playing on the noun's plural-like meaning in this context—a collective term for people in the lounge.

(150) Hi lounge! How are lounge?

'Hi lounge! How are you, the people in the lounge?'

In (151), the principle of brevity is violated in favor of creativity, attaching an unnecessary preposition and determiner to the word *soon*:

(151) A: Anyone wanna go to dinner?

B: In the soon.

'Soon.'

A few examples also contain non-standard derivational morphology:

(152) Have you homework 4sded ([fo:ɪzdɪd]) for Analysis?

'Have you done homework 4 for Analysis?'

(153) I was the mathiest.

'I did a lot of math.'

(154) A: What happened to couchboat?

B: Oh yeah, couch unboated.

'Oh yeah, the couchboat was un-done.'

Finally, in (155), the word *navigation* is apparently reanalyzed into a verb *nav* and object *gation*, with a verbal inflectional suffix and a determiner added in between:

(155) Nav-ing the gation.

'Navigating'

## 4. Phonology

In addition to creative syntax, Easties sometimes playfully alter the pronunciations of words, mostly by changing vowels. These optional phonological processes tend to fit into one of two categories: the reduction of certain vowels to [æ], discussed in 4.1, and various changes based on orthography, discussed in 4.2. Of course, in the spirit of creativity and innovation, vowels can also occasionally be changed in seemingly arbitrary ways that do not fit into either of these general categories, as shown in Table 1:

Original Word	Standard Pronunciation	Eastspeak Pronunciation
Scripps	skɪps	skɪʊps
chips	tʃɪps	tʃɪps
hedgehog	hɛdʒhɒg	hɛdʒhɛg

**Table 1: Miscellaneous Phonological Changes**

### 4.1 æ-Reduction

One phonological process in Eastspeak is the occasional optional substitution of [æ] for any of the vowels /ɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɛ/, /ʌ/, and /ɑ/--essentially, all unrounded vowels except /i/. Examples are given in Table 2 on the next page.

Some of these, particularly [bæbi], [wæt], [frændz] and [pokimænz], exist outside of East on the internet or in non-East spoken slang. Easties may have taken examples such as these and generalized them to create this process. One well-known example of the use of <babby> (presumably the written analogue of [bæbi]), along with another shift from <e> /ɛ/ to <a> [æ], appears in the well-known *Yahoo! Answers* post “how is babby formed / how girl get pragnent” (“How is Babby Formed?”). Similarly, [wæt] is a spoken version of <wat>, a common online variant of *what* (“Wat”), [frændz] is used in Netspeak as <frands> or <frandz> (“Frاند”), as is [pokimænz] <pokemans> (“Pokemans”).

Original Word (Standard Orthography)	Standard Pronunciation	æ-Reduced Pronunciation	Reduced Vowel
Blue Fin <sup>18</sup>	blufin	blufæn	ɪ
shrimp	ʃɪmp	ʃɹæmp	ɪ
stink	stɪŋk	stæŋk	ɪ
chips	tʃɪps	tʃæps	ɪ
baby	beɪbi	bæbi	eɪ
snake	sneɪk	snæk	eɪ
Brick Break <sup>19</sup>	bɹɪk breɪk	bɹɪk bræk	eɪ
Paige	peɪdʒ	pædʒ	eɪ
Faith	feɪθ	fæθ	eɪ
JT	dʒeɪti	dʒæti	eɪ
plates	pleɪts	plæts	eɪ
table	teɪbəl	tæbəl	eɪ
date	deɪt	dæt	eɪ
space	speɪs	spæs	eɪ
friends	fɹɛndz	fɹændz	ɛ
Emma	ɛmə	æmə	ɛ
what	wɒt	wæt	ʌ
timesuck <sup>20</sup>	taɪmsʌk	tɪmsæk	ʌ
puzzle	pʌzəl	pæzəl	ʌ
fluffy	flʌfi	flæfi	ʌ
Pokémon	pokɪmən	pokimænz	ɑ
wopr <sup>21</sup>	wɒpɹ	wæpɹ	ɑ
vodka	vɒdkə	vædkə	ɑ
Johnathan	dʒənəθɪn	dʒænəθɪn	ɑ
chocolate	tʃɒklət	tʃæklət	ɑ

**Table 2: æ-Reduction**

18 A restaurant near campus.

19 A Pokémon move.

20 A suite in East. This token also displays a separate vowel change in the first syllable, which will be addressed in the next section.

21 A server used by Mudders to share files.

## 4.2 Orthography-Based Phonology

The other common way of changing pronunciations in Eastspeak involves pronunciations based on playing with the spelling of a word by doubling single letters, singling double letters, deleting letters, choosing a different reading of a vowel than would normally be used in the word, and switching the order of letters.

Note that looking at these changes only in terms of sounds shows no particular overall pattern. My analysis of these sound changes as based in awareness of spelling explains the data more consistently than a purely sound-based analysis could.

Table 3 shows pronunciations that result from treating single letters as if they were doubled:

Standard Spelling	Eastspeak Spelling	Standard Pronunciation	Eastspeak Pronunciation	Sound Change
frosh	froosh	fɹɑʃ	fɹuʃ	ɑ → u
goggles	googles	gagəlz	gugəlz	ɑ → u

**Table 3: Doubling Single Letters**

The data in Table 4 illustrates the opposite phenomenon—treating double letters as though there were only one instance of them:

Standard Spelling	Eastspeak Spelling	Standard Pronunciation	Eastspeak Pronunciation	Sound Change
Google	Goggle	gugəl	gagəl	u → ɑ
happen(ing) <sup>22</sup>	hapen(ing)	hæpən(ɪŋ)	heɪpən(ɪŋ)	æ → eɪ
Google Glass	Gaggle Gloss <sup>23</sup>	gugəl glæs	gægəl glas	u → ɑ

**Table 4: Singling Double Letters**

<sup>22</sup> I have heard this in both 'hapen' and 'hapening' forms

<sup>23</sup> This example also involves switching vowels between the two words, which will be discussed later; the relevant part here is that the 'oo' in 'Google' changes to 'o' in 'Gloss'

Table 5 shows pronunciations that result from deleting a letter of a word, in most cases a silent <e>:

Standard Spelling	EastSpeak Spelling	Standard Pronunciation	EastSpeak Pronunciation	Sound Change
bleached	beached	blitʃt	bitʃt	l → Ø
discrete	discret	diskrit	diskrɛt	i → ɛ
quote	quot	kwot	kwat	o → a
timesuck	timsack	tɑɪmsʌk	tɪmsæk	aɪ → ɪ
lounge	longe	lɑʊndʒ	lɑndʒ	ɑʊ → a

**Table 5: Deleting Letters**

Sometimes, Easties play on the ambiguity of English spelling, choosing to pronounce sounds in ways that are non-standard, but which could be consistent with their spelling:

Spelling	Standard Pronunciation	EastSpeak Pronunciation	Sound Change
double	dʌbəl	dubəl	ʌ → u
paintbrush	peɪntbrʌʃ	peɪntbrʊʃ	ʌ → u
Tumblr	tʌmblə	tumblə	ʌ → u
Jandor <sup>24</sup>	hændɔː	dʒændɔː	h → dʒ

**Table 6: Alternate Pronunciations of Standard Spelling**

In the first three of these cases, the speaker chooses to pronounce the vowel, spelled <ou> or <u>, with the [u] sound, rather than the [ʌ] sound normally used in the word. In the last, the grapheme <j> is pronounced with [dʒ] as it commonly is in English, rather than the correct [h] sound.

<sup>24</sup> Original spelling is 'Jandro.' For metathesis of the last two letters, see Table 7

The final orthography-based way that Easties change pronunciations is by switching letters in a word or phrase, as in the instances in the table below:

Standard Spelling	EastSpeak Spelling	Standard Pronunciation	EastSpeak Pronunciation
Emma	Amme	ɛmə	æmɛ
Google Glass	Gaggle Gloss	gugəl glæs	gægəl glas
Jandro	Jandor	hændrɔ	hændɔr
frosh	forsh	fɹɔʃ	fɔrʃ
Unobears	Unobreas	unobɛɹz	unobɹiz

**Table 7: Metathesis**

In another particularly innovative case, the phrase *plz wat* 'please wait' is both inflected as a verb and pronounced as it is spelled:

(156) I am plz wat-ing ([pʊlz wætɪŋ]).

'I am "please wait"-ing.'

These orthography-based pronunciation changes are a particularly surprising aspect of EastSpeak. Perhaps more than any other data presented in this thesis, this represents a blurring of the boundaries between the traditional categories of spoken and written language, with spelling—which could be considered the phonology of Netspeak—influencing the phonology of speech.

## 5. Conclusion

In recent years, linguists have written a great deal about the new form of language arising on the internet. While some of this literature has touched on the possibility of spoken language being influenced by Netspeak, this has so far only been explored at the lexical level. In this thesis, I have shown that the syntax and phonology of spoken English are also beginning to show effects of the internet—including the incorporation of memes into speech, a new kind of phonological change that is based in orthography, and a general tendency toward playfulness and brevity at the expense of established conventions.

So far, these changes have not, to my knowledge, been documented outside this particular community; however, internet-influenced speech is becoming increasingly common among the current generation of young adults, and will likely continue to become more pervasive in everyday speech as the internet and associated technologies become more ubiquitous in our lives. I hope that future researchers will continue to not only study this new mode of communication on its own as it evolves, but to consider the ways it interacts with other forms of speech.

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