

**"But these days, it's as if our punctuation is on steroids"  
Punctuation Techniques in CMC Language**

Ida Vahtera  
University of Tampere  
Faculty of Communication Sciences  
Master's Programme in English Language and Literature  
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Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman aiheena on välimerkkitekniikoiden käyttö internetkielessä. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaisia välimerkkejä internetissä käytetään ja minkälaisia pragmaattisia funktioita niillä on kieliopillisten funktioidensa lisäksi. Analyysin pohjana käytetään Tarasovan (2016) kehittämää kuuden välimerkkitekniikan mallia. Tutkimus linkittyy aiempaan internetkielen tutkimukseen ja tavoitteena on, että tutkimus voisi vastata tarpeeseen luokitella erilaisia funktioita, joita välimerkeillä on internetkielessä.

Tutkimuksen aineistoksi kerättiin kommenttiketjuja Reddit.com-verkkosivustolta ja kommenttiketjujen viestit lajiteltiin Tarasovan mallin mukaisesti kuuteen kategoriaan. Aineisto koostui n. 2000 kommentista, joista n. 11 prosenttia sisälsi mallin mukaisia välimerkkitekniikoita. Nämä kommentit analysoitiin yksitellen ja niitä käytetään tutkimuksessa runsaasti esimerkkeinä.

Tutkimuksessa havaittiin, että välimerkkitekniikoita käytetään internetkielessä suhteellisen vähän. Yleisimmät tekniikat aineiston perusteella ovat ”paketointi” (*parceling*), ”epäileminen” (*doubling*) ja ”ihailu” (*admiration*). Aineistosta löydettiin esimerkkejä myös ”välimerkkien synergiasta” (*synergy of punctuation marks*). Sen sijaan kahdesta viimeisestä kategoriasta, ”välimerkin etäännyttäminen lauseen viimeisestä kirjaimesta” (*distancing the punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement*) ja ”välimerkkien funktionaalinen ja positionaalinen sijoittaminen” (*functional and positional modification of punctuation marks*) löytyi vähän tai ei ollenkaan esimerkkejä.

Välimerkkitekniikoita käytetään tutkimuksen mukaan mm. tunteiden ja asenteiden ilmaisemiseen, viestin sisällön korostamiseen sekä huumorin välittäjänä. Jotkin tekniikat yhdistyvät selvästi negatiiviseen kommentointiin (esim. ”huuto- ja kysymysmerkkien synergia”), mutta toisten (esim. ”ihailu”) avulla rakennetaan yhteisöllisyyttä nettikeskusteluissa. Tarasovan kuuden tekniikan lisäksi aineistosta löytyi seitsemäs välimerkkitekniikka: kolmen pisteen (*ellipsis dots*) käyttö luomaan *funktionaalinen tauko*, jonka avulla voidaan ilmaista esim. hämmennystä, erimielisyyttä ja myös huumoria. Tutkimus osoittaa, että välimerkeillä voidaan vaikuttaa yhteisöllisyyden ja dialogisuuden luomiseen internet-keskusteluissa, ja tulevaisuudessa niitä tutkimalla voitaisiin etsiä ratkaisuja esimerkiksi vihapuheen vähentämiseksi internetissä.

Avainsanat: internetkieli, välimerkit, välimerkkitekniikat, emotionaalinen välimerkitys

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# 1 Introduction

The internet is and has been for quite a long time a fruitful source for studying language use and variation. The language of the internet is typically innovative and it is a good platform and a starting point for changes in language. Some innovative features of the language of the internet have been studied more than others, and punctuation is one of them. Nevertheless, there is still a need to examine and to conventionalize the different functions that punctuation marks can have in the internet. The purpose of this study is to examine punctuation marks used in the internet and the data comes from text posts in the social news aggregation and discussion website Reddit.com.

I will study the different kinds of punctuation techniques used in the discussions in Reddit and how and why they are used. My research belongs to the field of *computer-mediated communication* (CMC), also called *electronically-mediated communication* (EMC), and the subfield of *internet linguistics* (Crystal, 2011). CMC research has previously focused e.g. on email and listserv, cooperative groups, or message interpretation, and the studies of CMC language have analyzed features like abbreviations, acronyms, and punctuation (Squires 2007, 4). The language used in instant messaging (IM) is an emerging field of study and that is where this study also belongs to, as the text posts in Reddit.com are also an example of IM language.

Punctuation in CMC language has been studied extensively already. E.g. Crystal (2011) has shown that punctuation marks in the internet have new kinds of functions besides their grammatical functions and they can be used for pragmatic purposes, such as to express the writer's emotions. For example, according to Crystal (2011, 62-63), studies show that the exclamation mark functions to increase the emotional intensity of the message. This is usually done by increasing the number of exclamation marks (eg. *fantastic!!!!*) (ibid.). According to Tarasova (2016, 1), many linguists agree that the internet creates a new cultural institution that sets the rules

for communication in today's world and at the same time "offers a big range of new kinds of communicative interaction between people" (ibid.). In her study, Tarasova states that the different functions of punctuation marks in CMC language need to be specified.

This study aims at answering the emerging need of classifying and specifying certain features and transformations in CMC language, in this case concerning punctuation. As the basis for the study, I will use Tarasova's (2016) research article about different kinds of punctuation techniques found in CMC language. In her research, she created a model to classify six different punctuation techniques found in "net texts," as she collectively calls blogs, social nets, forums, and instant messages: 1) parceling, 2) doubting, 3) admiration, 4) synergy of punctuation marks, 5) distancing a punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement, and 6) positional and functional modification of punctuation marks. The aim of the study is to examine whether Tarasova's classification could be used as a model for further research and how it could perhaps be modified. This study could then contribute to the research of punctuation in CMC language and its possible effects on our everyday written and spoken language. My research questions are:

- 1) What kind of punctuation techniques are used in CMC language?
- 2) What kind of functions do they have?

The hypothesis of the study is that the six techniques found by Tarasova are used in CMC language for pragmatic functions such as expressing emotions and opinions and creating a dialogue between the participants of the conversation. This study aims at contributing to the need of researching the new tendencies and transformations taking place in CMC language. I will analyze the subsystem created by Tarasova to find out whether it could be used in further research of punctuation marks and their functions in CMC language.

The analysis will use data from discussion threads in Reddit.com. The posts in the discussion threads were collected and classified according to the six-part subsystem found by Tarasova and then the posts were analyzed in more detail to find out the functions and motives behind their use. The focus is on what kind of punctuation techniques are found in CMC language and what kind of pragmatic functions they have.

The study begins with an examination of the previous research in the field of CMC language with a special focus on studies made of punctuation marks. The section 3 presents the data and methods used in this study, introducing the discussion threads in Reddit that were used as examples and the methods used to analyze the text posts. The section 4 presents the results of the analysis and all the techniques found in the data will be examined one by one with the help of example posts and earlier research. The final sections of the thesis will discuss and evaluate the results and their possible outcomes, and suggest some directions for further research.

## 2 Theoretical Background

Researchers have found the internet to be an enormously prolific source for studying language use and variation, and in the field of CMC there has been many studies on e.g. asynchronous versus synchronous language use (e.g. Crystal 2001, 11), message interpretation, and linguistic features of CMC language, such as emoticons, abbreviations and acronyms, and punctuation. The next chapters will present previous research made on CMC language with an extra focus on punctuation.

CMC typically refers to computer-based software platforms such as emails, listservs and blogs. According to Baron, CMC “can be thought of as a kind of linguistic centaur, incorporating features from both traditional writing and face-to-face discourse but ending up being more than a simple amalgam of the two” (2003, 23). However, with the increasing use of mobile devices and with that, increasing use of text messages and instant messages, there is a need for a broader term to concern both the computer-based and the mobile phone-based technologies, as it is possible and actually very common to use all of the above-mentioned types of communication with both computers and mobile devices. A suitable term for this is electronically-mediated communication (EMC) (Baron & Ling 2011, 47-8). Some researchers also talk about computer-mediated discourse and computer-mediated discourse analysis (Herring 2003), which focuses on the study of CMC language.

One might say that you cannot really talk about internet linguistics without mentioning David Crystal. Crystal has been studying language of the internet extensively and he coined the term *Netspeak* meaning “a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet, and encountered in e-mail, chat group, virtual world and World Wide Web, arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive” (2001, 18). He is a pioneer in studying



linguistic features typical to internet language, but his term Netspeak is not the only one used for internet language. *CMC language*, *internet language*, and *online language* among others have been used to describe this phenomenon. The present study employs the term “CMC language,” meaning a language containing the features mentioned by Crystal (ibid.): a language that has unique features of its own and is used in e.g. e-mail and chat groups, and that is conveyed electronically. The term *instant messaging (IM) language* will also be used as a specific type of CMC language.

IM is a form of one-to-one CMC that was first bound to computers but with technological developments such as smart phones, it has become a common form of communication with all devices. According to Varnhagen et al. (2010, 720), IM is a synchronous form of communication between two or more people and it is used via specialized internet applications (e.g. Windows Live Messenger (MSN)), in an online game or virtual world (e.g. World of Warcraft Instant Messenger), or through social networking site like Facebook. In this thesis the focus is on the social news and content aggregation web site *Reddit.com*. Its main idea is to be an open platform where users can submit content, such as links, videos or photos, and the other users vote the content up or down and discuss it. These discussion threads are an interesting platform also for linguistic studies and will be discussed more in chapter 2.3.

Compared to text messages, IMs do not have a limit for the length of the message, which results in cutting a message into smaller parts (Baron & Ling 2007, 291-2). When one would like to include as much information as possible to a text message because longer messages cost more money, an IM can be cut to as many parts as wanted. Nevertheless, IMs contain shortened forms the same way text messages do. This is due to the fact that typing is slower and results in more errors than speaking (Herring 1999). Possibly to overcome these obstacles, people have developed ways to shorten their messages with abbreviations and acronyms (Werry 1996, 53). Punctuation

marks can be used as “short cuts” to speed communication in IM language (Varnhagen et al. 2010, 725). In addition, punctuation marks are used as pragmatic devices to express emotions, for “emotion punctuation” (ibid.). For this purpose, people use graphic pragmatic devices such as “smileys” and emojis. Like e.g. Crystal (2011) has said, punctuation marks are also a very popular tool for expressing emotions, and this is called emotive punctuation (Thaler, quoted in Chazarenc 2007, 8). This will be discussed more in chapter 2.2.

## **2.1 CMC cues**

When studying CMC language, the researchers have often compared it with written and spoken discourses to pin down what kind of a language we are dealing with. A groundbreaking study by Yates (1996) compared computer conferencing data from corpora of written and spoken language. His study found that CMC language has features of both written and oral discourse, and similar findings have been made by others. CMC language is nevertheless been considered resembling speech, with its speech-like pronouns and modals (Yates 1996, 37). While the majority of CMC language is still written, the users of the internet and especially IM have commented that written language on the internet resembles more speech than writing (Baron 2003, 4). This notion can be analyzed further by examining the basic distinctions between written and spoken language.

Written and spoken text can be divided, for example, by the participants involved in the discourse. Written text is one-sided because the writer generally cannot know who their audience will be, and the fact that writing can exist even for long periods of time makes it possible to reach wide audiences. This urges the writer to impress the reader by using certain known attributes of traditional writing, such as formal tone and decontextualization (considering something in isolation from its context) (Baron 2003, 6). Compared to writing, face-to-face speech is often

dialogic although there might be multiple participants. Nevertheless, the speaker knows who the participants are and can get direct feedback from them. According to Baron (2003, 6), “[t]he nature of participation in traditional writing versus face-to-face spoken discourse will prove important for understanding the kind of natural language used on the Internet.”

Even though CMC language is seen resembling spoken language, there is an important difference between them: CMC language lacks simultaneous feedback. According to Crystal (2011, 22), in spoken conversation we get feedback from our listeners, such as nods, tag questions, facial expressions etc. In CMC interaction this feedback is generally absent and it results in misperceptions that a message is cold, unfriendly or abrupt (Crystal 2011, 22):

Addressing someone on the Internet is a bit like having a telephone conversation in which a listener is giving us no reactions at all: it is an uncomfortable and unnatural situation, and in the absence of such feedback our own language becomes more awkward than it might otherwise be.

This problem of the lack of feedback could be seen as one explanation to why people have developed ways to communicate their reactions and feelings in CMC interactions through other means, also via punctuation. These are also called *CMC cues* (Vandergriff 2013, 2). Werry (1996, quoted in Nishimura 2016, 106) calls these “paralinguistic and prosodic cues,” which he says are one of the major properties of Internet Relay Chat (IRC). Werry found out that participants of CMC communication use innovative and creative strategies to imitate the style of face-to-face communication.

Online forums, including Reddit, are visual and the users have to rely on visual strategies to facilitate the conversation. These strategies, which help adapt to the visual form of the conversation, use resources from both oral and written discourse to create a specific register for online chat (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam 2003, 714). Chat conversation is less synchronous than

spoken discourse because the writer has to compose their message before sending it, messages are posted sequentially although they may be typed at the same time, and the order of the messages is determined by hardware constraints and server speeds. The consequence of this is a short delay between writing the message and the appearance on the screen, and therefore there is a need to adapt to this asynchronicity (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam 2003, 715). One way to do this is to use punctuation: with different kinds of punctuation strategies, the users can e.g. direct their message to certain users or to draw attention to their own message.

Vandergriff (2013, 2) talks about CMC cues, including nonstandard/multiple punctuation (“...”, “!!!”), lexical surrogates (“hmmm”) and emoticons (“:-”). The CMC cues have often been regarded as representing nonverbal cues of oral interaction (Vandergriff 2013, 2), and some conventions like emoticons have indeed been developed to express humour and irony in text to replace facial expressions and other nonverbal cues of face-to-face conversation (Hancock 2004, 450). Nevertheless, researchers have recently suspected the notion that emoticons can translate nonverbal cues to text-based communication, e.g. Hancock (2004, 450) argues that emoticons lack “range and nuance.” Vandergriff (2013, 1) argues that “little is known about the functional range of emoticons, let alone other CMC cues, such as nonstandard punctuation, especially ellipsis, exclamation and question marks,” which may play an even larger role than emoticons in some contexts (Hancock 2004, 461).

Some researchers (e.g. Kiesler, Siegel & McGuire 1984) have argued that the lack of nonverbal cues makes CMC language impersonal and it cannot convey the writer’s feelings or help build personal connections. Kiesler et al. (1984) were worried about the underdeveloped norms and etiquette in using CMC language and its effects on its users. “Messages are depersonalized, inviting stronger or more uninhibited text and more assertiveness in return. It might be especially

hard to communicate liking or intimacy without writing unusually positive text” (Kiesler et al. 1984, 1125). However, there are studies showing that CMC language users are capable of adapting to the medium. For example, the social information processing (SIP) theory of CMC (Walther 1992) argues that faced with the lack of non-verbal cues, writers in the internet adapt to use the cues available in CMC, such as content and linguistic strategies and chronemic and typographic cues (Tidwell & Walther 2002, 319).

Carey (1980) argued that there are five categories of nonverbal cues in CMC: vocal spelling, lexical surrogates, spatial arrays, manipulation of grammatical markers, and minus features (quoted in Riordan & Kreuz 2010, 1806). Vocal spelling (e.g. “weeeeelllllll”) and lexical surrogates (e.g. “mhmm”) use nonstandard spelling to imitate intonation and tone. Spatial arrays include emoticons and they are usually keyboard characters used to represent non-verbal cues like facial expressions. Manipulated grammar markers mean for example added punctuation marks and capital letters, such as *!!!* to express attitude. Minus features mean the absence of something grammatical, such as lack of capitalization in the beginning of a sentence (Riordan & Kreuz 2010, 1806). These kind of cues are used relatively frequently, perhaps due to the fact that technology which we use daily has become more pervasive (Riordan & Kreuz 2010, 1807). “The increasing use of these nonverbal cues in CMC permits an exploration of the amount and kind of cues being used, further demonstrating how rich CMC can be to its users” (ibid.). In the next chapter, the focus will be on punctuation marks and how they are used as CMC cues.

## **2.2 Punctuation in CMC language**

Punctuation in CMC language deviates from grammatical rules and recommendations and it has its own distinctive characteristics. In chat conversations and e-mails, punctuation marks are few

or entirely missing. According to Crystal, punctuation marks depend on their users; some use them when they have to, some use them to avoid ambiguity and some leave them out completely to increase typing speed or because they do not notice the possible ambiguity (2001, 89). Other factors that affect using punctuation marks could be ignorance of the standard usage, not bothering to use the traditional marks, or lacking the keyboard skills to use them. Sometimes people leave out punctuation marks just by mistake, sometimes they do it because others do it too, and sometimes they want to create a special effect. The reason could be one of these, or a mixture of several different factors (Crystal 2011, 62).

Instead of traditional punctuation marks, people use different kinds of symbols, such as the *hashtag* (#). Traditional punctuation marks can also be used in new ways, such as ellipsis dots (...) in any number, repeated hyphens (---) or repeated commas (,,,) to express pause (Crystal 2001, 89). Nevertheless, even though leaving out traditional punctuation in e.g. Twitter would seem relatively easy and a good way to save characters, Crystal (2011, 45) notices that in Twitter, traditional punctuation conventions are generally respected (in his sample, 74 per cent of the tweets had final punctuation; either conventional, like a period, a question mark or an exclamation mark, or unconventional, like the abbreviation *lol* (“laughing out loud”) or an emoticon). Therefore, punctuation has not disappeared entirely in CMC language but has taken new forms.

Writers online often use punctuation marks to express emotions. Multiple punctuation marks, like “!!!” or “??!” are used to express emotions and attitudes that cannot be shown in the text. This kind of punctuation is called emotive punctuation (e.g. Thaler, quoted in Chazarenc 2007, 8). Bennett (2015) notes that additional punctuation marks are added into existing marks to soften them. It seems that sometimes the plain single exclamation mark is not enough to convey

the feelings we want to convey and adding extra punctuation makes the message stronger, as Bennett (2015, 1) points out:

But these days, it's as if our punctuation is on steroids. It's not just that each of us is more delicately choosing our characters, knowing that an exclamation point or a colon carries more weight in our 140-character world. Or even that our punctuation suddenly feels like hyperbole (right?!?!?!?!?) because we've lost all audible tone.

To show emotions, people have also started to use emoticons instead of traditional punctuation marks. Besides feelings, they can convey the writer's emotional position and indicate how the message should be understood e.g. in case of irony (Chazarenc 2007, 8-9). Emoticons are also a good way to show that you are not angry or dissatisfied even if you use a period to finish your sentence, as a period can nowadays sometimes seem rude or aggressive (Crair, 2013). In CMC language, Jackson (2016, 2) argues that using no punctuation at all is "normal and trendy" whereas correct punctuation, such as ending your sentence with a period, seems aggressive and blunt. According to her, the reason for this is that the "[c]urrent generations are accustomed to dressing everything to high-heaven with Emojis and excessive sporadic exclamations" (Jackson 2016, 2).

Studies (e.g. Herring 1993) have found that men and women tend to use language in different ways in the internet as well as offline. In the internet, men's language is more aggressive, they make more challenges, insults and sexual references, and they use assertions, self-promotion and rhetorical questions more than women (Herring & Martinson 2004, 427). Women use more hedges, expressions of emotion, representations of smiling and laughter, and supportive language (ibid.). The expressions of emotions, which are seen as more feminine language, have been studied for example by examining emoticons. Witmer and Katzman (1997) studied emoticons and smiley faces which they referred to with the term "graphic accents" (GAs) (Kinsey, quoted in Witmer & Katzman 1997). They used GAs generically to refer to "emotional, artistic, and directional

devices” (ibid.) which according to them were potential gender markers in CMC language. In their study they found out that to some extent, GAs were used more often by women in CMC language. The use of emoticons primarily by women suggests that “the aesthetic quality... and (possibly) expression of emotion translates to the computer-mediated environment” (Witmer & Katzman 1997). According to this study, the GAs function as cues to express emotions and through that also as gender markers. Besides emotions, GAs and punctuation marks can be used to convey politeness and respect to others.

CMC cues can be seen as so efficiently expressing emotions and meanings in online conversations that they are taking space from actual words in conveying feelings. At least Jackson (2016, 2) argues that even though our language is highly evolved, in the internet people resort to using emojis instead of words, and they decorate the simplest of sentences with large amounts of exclamation and question marks (ibid.). According to her, people use multiple punctuation marks and avoid using a single, grammatical period in their sentences because of fear of hurting other people’s feelings. Bennett (2015, 2) also acknowledges that the use of a simple period seems aggressive, and also that if there is too few exclamation or question marks in a message to your friend it may seem cold (ibid.):

"Girlfriends" may be a key word there, as women are more likely to use emotive punctuation than men are. Yet lately I've tried to rein my own effusiveness in, going as far as to insert additional punctuation into existing punctuation in an effort to soften the marks themselves.

So punctuation marks in CMC language seem to be developing into tools of softening your message and making sure that the recipient does not take offence of what you are writing. This idea of softening your message with a bunch of punctuation marks will be discussed in the later chapters, but next we will turn to punctuation techniques in CMC language.



There have been studies about different and new kinds of punctuation marks found online, but there is still little research on conventionalizing different ways in which punctuation marks are used in CMC language. Tarasova (2016) created a subsystem of punctuation techniques in CMC language. In her analysis, the material came from texts of blogs, social nets, forums, and instant messages, which she calls collectively *net texts*. In her linguistic analysis, she found out that in net texts written in Tatar, Russian and English, punctuation marks have a new functional potential and they convey emotions and feelings of the writers to their written speech.

In her study she noticed that certain punctuation marks are, on the one hand, used grammatically and following the recommendations. On the other hand, punctuation marks have new specific features that violate grammatical norms. Based on her material she formed a subsystem of punctuation techniques that “contribute to explicit expression of emotional and evaluative attitude of the author to a definite statement and help the reader comprehend some possible suggestive meaning in it” (Tarasova 2016, 3). Tarasova’s techniques are 1) parceling, 2) doubting, 3) admiration, 4) synergy of punctuation marks, 5) distancing a punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement, and 6) positional and functional modification of punctuation marks. I will briefly explain the techniques with the help of examples from Tarasova’s study (in brackets).

Parceling means singling out a part of a statement, often a part of a sentence, in order to heighten its expressiveness (*and waiting when she will go to her, and will no longer haunt me! me and my appetite !!!*). Doubting is demonstration of doubt when reasoning or choosing words that is accompanied by a question-answering process or rhetorical questions addressed to the author himself or to the recipient of the message (*What creatures are the most dangerous to people and cause the largest number of deaths? Wolves? Tigers? Lions? Sharks? No. The most dangerous are mosquitoes.*). Admiration technique involves the demonstration of rapture and elation by the

author that is encoded by an exclamation mark in the printed speech (*Great pictures !! And they are really cool !!! Well done !! Guys, be as happy as in the photo !!;*)).

The technique 4, synergy of punctuation marks, means using several punctuation marks (usually question marks, exclamation marks, or both together) to add to the expressiveness and efficacy of the message (*You hear me???*). The technique 5, distancing of the punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement, is usually used to make the statement more categorical by creating a gap, a short pause, for the reader to reflect and to understand the meaning of the message (*Love is not a toy from my childhood !*). The technique 6 is functional and positional modification of punctuation marks, which means arranging of the punctuation marks in a certain way, e.g. putting question marks both before and after a question to create a graphic emphasis for the message (*??? Do Canadian Colleges accept ACT score ???*).

### **2.3 Research on Reddit.com**

Reddit is a social news and content aggregation web site, known as “the front page of the Internet”. It is an open platform where its users (redditors) sign up for pseudonymous accounts and submit content, e.g. links, videos, and photos, and the other users vote the content up or down and discuss it. Reddit is composed of many subreddits i.e. sub-communities that are dedicated to a certain topic or purpose. They are marked with the prefix /r/, which takes you directly to the page of a specific subreddit. The user who starts a subreddit is called OP, meaning the Original Poster (Mills 2017, 2-3). In 2005, Reddit was primarily founded as a link-sharing site but there are also sections meant only for discussion (Gilbert 2013, 803).

Research on Reddit has focused for example on collective intelligence (Mills 2017), “social navigation” and voting (Gilbert 2013), and self-referential communities (P. Singer, F. Flöck, C.

Meinhart, E. Zeitfogel & M. Strohmaier 2014). According to Tsou (2016), there has still been very few studies on the actual content of the comment threads in Reddit. In his study, he analyzed text readability, emoticon usage, and domain linkage in Reddit. For the purpose of this study, Tsou's findings of emoticon usage in Reddit comment threads are the most interesting. He counted the amount of emoticons in subreddits concerning certain topics, and found out that subreddits classified as "health/food" had a lot of emoticons, whereas subreddits of "politics/history" and "news" had fewer emoticons. He argued that this might relate to the fact that many "health/food" subreddit comments concerned dieting, and emoticons were used to encourage others or possibly to reflect the writer's own experiences with dieting. The "health/food" subreddits also had the highest score of the usage of positive emoticons, which indicates that encouraging and motivating others by using emoticons has a big role in solidifying the community.

Along with content analysis, there has also been few studies on the language use in Reddit comment threads. Noguti's study (2016) analyzed the relationships between language of the content communities, such as parts of speech, and user engagement. She analyzed 12,000 posts from Reddit, collecting the parts of speech. They were electronically classified and counted and then with the help of statistical models, she examined the relationships between them and user engagement. Her findings were as follows (Noguti 2016, 695):

The number of adjectives and nouns, adverbs, pronouns, punctuation (exclamation marks, quotation marks and ellipses), question marks, advisory words (should, shall, must and have to) and complexity indicators that appear in content community posts' titles relate to post popularity (scores: number of favourable minus unfavourable votes) and number of comments. However, these relationships vary according to the category, for example, text-based categories (e.g. *Politics* and *World News*) vs image-based ones (e.g. *Pictures*).

Noguti argues that with digital media development the power of consumers grows, as people online can decide what to read and who to interact with. Because of this, it is more and more important

for the communicator to make their message more engaging, and this engagement demands effective use of parts of speech in the message. Noguti's study focuses on user engagement from a marketing perspective, but user engagement plays a role also for any social media network user who wants to reach larger audiences, get more comments and e.g. gain upvotes in Reddit. Punctuation plays a part in this, too.

Punctuation marks in Reddit have not been widely researched yet. However, Albritton (2015) argues that punctuation marks in Reddit discussion threads have a wide range of different functions and they are used to convey emotional and relational meaning. He argues that punctuation marks have a powerful impact on speech acts in Reddit. In his study, he concludes that “[p]unctuation marks can, in performing their clarifying and socioemotional functions, help to ensure that messages are forthright and conscientious” (2015, 316-7). According to his study, punctuation marks in CMC language can, when put to their “socioemotional purposes” (ibid.), have an impact on how people show and receive empathy in CMC discourse. This emotional function of punctuation marks is an important starting point also to the present study.

### 3 Data and Methods

The aim of this study is to contribute to the need of researching new tendencies and transformations in CMC language, in this case by examining the functions of punctuation marks. I will examine whether Tarasova's (2016) subsystem of punctuation techniques could be used as a basis for further studies of pragmatic functions of punctuation marks. In this section I will present the methods of this study and introduce the data used in the study. The research questions that I will answer are:

- 1) What kind of punctuation techniques are used in CMC language?
- 2) What kind of functions do they have?

The study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data of the study consists of 2,049 posts collected from Reddit.com. The posts were first collected and categorized into the six categories formed by Tarasova, and this collection produced a small amount of data for a quantitative analysis of the actual number of example posts where these punctuation techniques were used. But as the sample is small and the analysis of numbers only cannot answer the needs of this research, the most important part of the analysis is qualitative; the examples in the categories were thoroughly examined and the focus was to see what kind of punctuation techniques people use in CMC language, and most importantly, why.

The 2,049 posts were collected from Reddit during five days in April, June and September 2017. The 6 discussion threads that the posts were collected from were selected randomly, the aim was just to have as long discussion threads as possible to make the collection quicker. All the comments from the selected threads were copied and pasted into a long list and then classified into a table. At first, I made a test analysis with 312 posts from Reddit just to see whether I could find examples that fitted Tarasova's subsystem of punctuation techniques. The results showed that there

were indeed examples that matched with Tarasova's model, at least of her techniques 1, 2 and 3 (parceling, doubting and admiration).

After the test analysis, I collected more examples and finished with 2,049 example posts. I ended up with that number because first of all, collecting and classifying the examples by hand was a slow process and analyzing the contents of each message for the classification was not always straightforward. Second of all, the findings from the 2,049 examples correlated with the examples of the test analysis of approx. 300 messages, so I concluded that the results would not differ greatly even if the sample was bigger. Before starting the analysis, I excluded from the sample all the posts that only contained a URL link to e.g. another page or a video, as the aim was to study the messages that contained actual CMC language written by the users.

Next, I started to analyze the posts and classify them according to which punctuation techniques were used in them. If a post contained more than one technique, it was listed in all suitable groups. This was often the case with posts that contained e.g. synergy of exclamation marks (!!!) which was used to convey admiration: *I just love it!!!* and thus it was put into both of those groups. The example posts were analyzed in their original form, meaning that if a post was divided into different lines using the line break, it is presented in the same way in the analysis. The reason for this is that the line break is arguably an interesting development of its own in CMC language and can have an impact on the phenomenon found out by e.g. Baron and Ling (2007, 295) of people leaving out the sentence-final punctuation mark in their IMs.

I went through all the posts in order to see if I could find examples of Tarasova's six punctuation techniques. All in all, the big tendency in the example posts seemed to be the lack of punctuation; punctuation marks in CMC language are often omitted altogether (Crystal 2011, 62), as discussed earlier in section 2. Of the posts that contained punctuation marks, I found 226

examples of the punctuation techniques of Tarasova, meaning that only 11.03 per cent of the sample contained them. Although the percentage was quite small, it was a suitable number of examples for my study and my resources. At least the first four categories (parceling, doubting, admiration, synergy of punctuation marks) seemed to apply to my data, so there was a sufficient amount of examples for the study. The findings can be seen from Table 1 in section 4.

To answer research question 1, I will present the findings from my data and examine in detail what kind of punctuation techniques are used in CMC language. I will use plenty of example posts from my sample to back up the analysis. I will also analyze the findings I made from the sample that did not accord with Tarasova's six categories and explain why this might be the case. Based on the findings, I will argue for a seventh category outside Tarasova's model: using ellipsis dots to create a functional pause. To answer research question 2, I will present example posts from each of the categories and, with the help of earlier research on punctuation in CMC language, analyze what pragmatic functions punctuation marks have in them. Tarasova found out that punctuation marks in CMC language have new kinds of functions besides their grammatical functions, e.g. with punctuation marks you can express emotions and attitudes. I will base my analysis on her findings, but I will also make arguments based on my own results.

The example posts are from six discussion threads in Reddit, collected on five different days in 2017. The posts were selected basing on the length of the discussion threads and the idea was to choose as long threads as possible to facilitate the collection. The first discussion thread is from 10 April 2017 from a subreddit called "me irl" that commented a screenshot posted by a user. The screenshot was of a message received from "Mom", saying "I took months to form your heart, do not let anybody break it in fifteen seconds." The second example discussion thread was collected on 11 April 2017, from a subreddit that commented a video where a dog was playing with the

shadow of a pen, and the subreddit is called “When your best friend is kinda dumb, but you love them anyway.” The third example subreddit (collected on 20 June 2017) is called “You know your homemade presents are a success when...” and it is about a video where a couple of kids are playing inside huge woolen socks.

The fourth subreddit is from 26 June 2017, called “My gift wrap lined up perfectly,” and there is a photo of a nicely wrapped gift. The fifth example subreddit was collected in 16 September 2017 and it is called “This squirrel’s escape technique.” The comments are made about a video where a squirrel is zigzagging its way to escape a cat. The sixth and last example subreddit, called “The tallest palm tree in the neighborhood,” was collected also on 16 September 2017. It features a photo of an extremely tall palm tree, which location and origin the commenters are trying to guess.

In Reddit, the users are writing comments behind pseudonyms, so the results of the data gathering are anonymous. Reddit is a public website, where anyone can join the conversations or just read them without subscribing. The comments were collected in a certain point of time, and there is a possibility that some comments in the subreddits have been removed from the site or edited in other ways since the collection was made. The example posts that I found from the six discussion threads can be found from the Appendix.



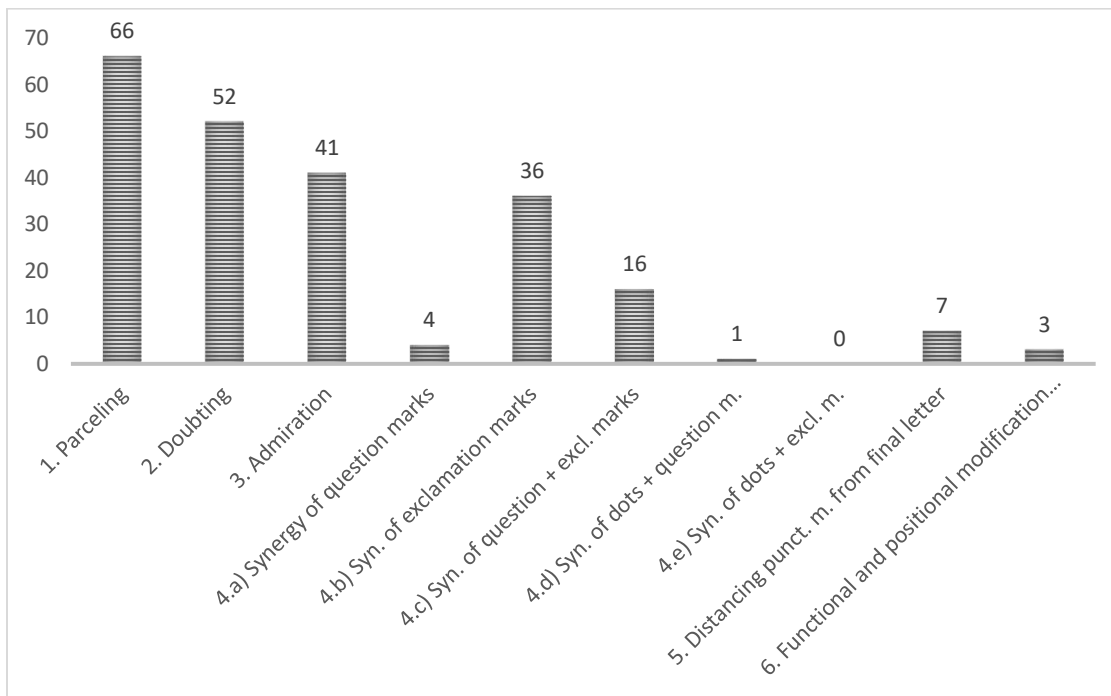
## 4 Punctuation techniques in Reddit.com

This section introduces the findings from the data and the analysis made of them. Table 1 shows the results of the data collection. The sample contains 2,049 posts from 6 Reddit discussion threads, of which 226 posts contained Tarasova's punctuation techniques. It means that only around 11 per cent of the posts had these techniques, but nevertheless it shows that they are used in Reddit discussion threads.

**Table 1: Punctuation techniques in the data**

Technique	Examples (N=2049)
1. Parceling	66
2. Doubting	52
3. Admiration	41
4.a) Synergy of question marks	4
4.b) Synergy of exclamation marks	36
4.c) Synergy of question + exclamation marks	16
4.d) Synergy of dots + question marks	1
4.e) Synergy of dots + exclamation marks	0
5. Distancing punctuation mark from the final letter	7
6. Functional and positional modification of punctuation marks	3
	<b>226 (11.03 %)</b>

This study finds that especially the first four techniques (parceling, doubting, admiration and synergy of punctuation marks) are used in the data collected from Reddit. The most used of these techniques is clearly parceling with 66 posts containing it. Doubting and synergy of punctuation marks were also present in the data, especially synergy of exclamation marks. The techniques 5 and 6 were almost totally absent in the data, but especially for technique 6 this could be explained by noting that Tarasova used Russian and Tatar languages besides English in her study and these



**Figure 1: Distribution of the punctuation techniques in the data (n=226)**

languages have different conventions in net texts (more of this in section 4.6). In the following sections these techniques and their possible functions are examined in detail.

#### 4.1 Parceling

Parceling is the most used of the punctuation techniques found in the data with 66 posts containing it. According to Tarasova (2016, 3), parceling means singling out a particular point in the statement to add emphasis and expressiveness. In the data, parceling is mostly done by using periods, but exclamation marks can also be found. Using periods or exclamation marks create a different tone to the statement and they serve for different functions.

Most of the parceled sentences in the data are parceled using periods. A typical example is a two-sentence post where both of the sentences are punctuated with a sentence-final period. Often

the first sentence is a longer one explaining something and the following sentence is a shorter comment for the first.

1. *President Bush the second said that on air, go watch it on youtube. Very worth. (6)<sup>1</sup>*
2. *First time to check hypothesises, second time to confirm results. Scientist doggo. (9)*
3. *Not if you factor in the rehab. That shit is expensive. (15)*
4. *You literally judged a book by its cover. You're not supposed to do that. (21)*

In examples like these, the latter sentence is often a laconic comment that emphasizes what is said in the first sentence. It is often persuasive or reassuring, trying to get the other users to see the point of the sentence. The parceling technique is also a kind of a recap technique that enables the writer to summarize their message, like in the example 2. The singled out statement that follows the first is often declaratory, so its function is to demonstrate the message of the first sentence.

Exclamation marks are also used to parcel a statement. They show more emotions than those statements that are parceled with a period. When period seems to be used for laconic and declaratory commenting, exclamation marks demonstrate emotions and also irony.

5. *I disagree, but I'm sure you're really pretty and intelligent in real life! You'll accomplish literally everything! (1)*
6. *But... But... Generic white baby with flowery headband! Save the children! (2)*
7. *This makes so much sense! That was actually quite wise of him! (7)*

The example 6 shows that this technique can also be used to convey irony and also to amuse. The irony of the message can be deduced from the word choice “generic white baby,” which has a

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers in the brackets refer to the number of the example in the Appendix.

negative ring to it even though the message could be read as defending children. The word choice, combined with the classic exclamation “Save the children!” creates the irony. The example 5 could also be an ironic comment instead of a praise, but this would need a closer look at the context of the message. All in all, in Reddit conversations negative commenting and teasing other users seems to be more common than purely positive comments, as will be discussed later.

Like already stated, parceling is used for expressiveness. As the examples show, the statements can express the opinions of the writer, highlight the main point of their comment, and also create an ironic or amusing effect. Parceling constructions are often used to express the writer’s feelings and emotions. In Tarasova’s analysis, parceling is used to single out a part of a statement to heighten its expressiveness and this division of the statement into parts has an “aim of emotional and semantic actualization of significant units, such as allocation of parts of the picture, the most important information, expression of semanticogrammatical relations between phrases, etc” (2016, 3). Basing on Tarasova’s analysis, the present study finds two main functions that the parceling technique is used for; 1) to express emotions and opinions, and 2) to highlight the most important information. Besides these two, there were other functions that will be discussed separately.

#### **4.1.1 Expressing emotions and opinions**

Expressing emotions and opinions seems to be the most common function of the parceling technique. This supports the argument that in IM language, punctuation marks are used for “emotion punctuation,” thus making them pragmatic devices in IM language (Varnhagen et al. 2010, 725). In the data, the technique was used to express mostly admiration, criticism, and opinions of e.g. movies, videos or other users’ actions.

Admiration is also one of Tarasova's punctuation techniques and in her subsystem it means punctuating admiring and elevating phrases with one or more exclamation marks. In the data of this study, admiration was also found as one function of the parceling technique. Here are some examples of admiration by parceling:

8. *I see what you did there son. I like it. (42)*
9. *Look at how much that cat's tail helped with balance and movement. They're both incredible. (49)*
10. *Now think about the fact that that's a FAT cat. Cats are truly, truly amazing (60)*

Compared to admiration by using exclamation marks, admiration by parceling is more laconic and it has a different tone to it. Admiration by parceled sentences is more subtle than with exclamation marks (compare: 54. *That was an insane jump!!*). Exclamation marks are explicit visual cues for admiring emotions, whereas parceled admiration requires more from the reader. CMC cues like multiple exclamation marks represent nonverbal cues of oral interaction (Vandergriff 2013, 2), but the parceling technique does not offer the same kind of clear signs to help interpreting the message. Thus the reader has to rely on the content of the message, and this makes parceling a more subtle technique to express emotions in net texts.

Parceling is also used to express negative feelings and critique of the topics in the conversation and of other users, although in the data of this study, parceling is more used to express positive feelings and admiration. Here are some examples of negative parceling:

11. *Or OP spent hours reverse engineering the wrapping process to get the perfect picture for Reddit. And still failed. (25)*
12. *These fucking things get posted once a week. IT'S NO LONGER INTERESTING. (30)*

*13. Not really, cats are mass murderers towards birds and other animals. They're objectively a shitty pet. (31)*

The reason for this could be that positive messages in general are important in the interaction between subreddit users. At least Tsou (2016) argued that in certain subreddits, the positive and encouraging language used in them had a big role in solidifying the community.

As mentioned above, parceling is a good way to make laconic comments. By separating a part of the sentence, you can also in a way “put your foot down” and finish your argument in a decisive and final manner. Here are some examples of parceling used to express opinions:

*14. Yeah but 4\$ for shipping! It's a steal bro (18)*

*15. Most local fauna are massively over populated thanks to humans killing off their predators.*

*Deer, raccoon, opossum, squirrel, rabbit, gopher - in north America all of these species are hugely over populated.*

*Let the cat hunt. (36)*

*16. I have actually heard that the drivers of Ford Fiesta's are very agile. Its quite a peculiar coincidence. (41)*

#### **4.1.2 Highlighting the most important part**

The parceling technique is also used for highlighting the most important part of the message.

Separating a part of the statement with a period creates an emphasis to the latter phrase.

*17. Second time he learned though, he didn't bash his nose. Cuz hes a good boy! (8)*

*18. First time to check hypothesises, second time to confirm results. Scientist doggo. (9)*

*19. So there's no excuse for "spoilers". Your own fault. (33)*

*20. Look, we get it. You h8t cats. (64)*

This technique comes close to expression of opinions analyzed in the previous section. At least in examples like 17, the added phrase *Cuz hes a good boy!* is also an opinion of the writer. Nevertheless, in this case parceling serves more to recap and to highlight the argument made in the first phrase. Because the dog did not make the same mistake twice, the second phrase highlights that the dog is “a good boy.”

In CMC language, when you lack the verbal cues like waving your arms or changing the tone of your voice, you have to find other ways to get others to understand the most important point of your message. Parceling is a good visual CMC cue to make your most important point a separate unit in the text. If there is only a word or two in the second, parceled, phrase, your eye seems to catch it easier than a longer sentence. Tarasova did not mention the length of the statements in her article, but the findings of this study indicate that the length of the separated statement seems to be an important visual cue. In the 66 examples of parceling found in the data, the pattern is usually the same: the first sentences of the statement seem to be longer than the parceled final statement.

#### **4.1.3 Other functions of parceling**

One function of parceling is, according to Tarasova, “allocation of parts of the picture.” This technique means adding something relevant to the previous phrase by separating it with a period or an exclamation mark.

21. *You are technically correct. Which is the best kind of correct. :-) (3)*
22. *President Bush the second said that on air, go watch it on youtube. Very worth. (6)*
23. *Spoken like someone who knows how to crochet. Typical. (19)*
24. *So serpentine is effective against ground units but not air units. Noted. (35)*
25. *I'm pretty confident that I could serpentine my way past a gunman shooting at me, and punch him right in the face. That is how effective it is. (40)*

This function of the parceling technique is a little bit more obscure and more difficult to define than the first two functions. The example phrases are also much more diverse than in the other functions, and they come close to them. For example, example 21 and 22 here are also opinions of the writer. My choice here was to categorize those phrases that had an emotional emphasis in them to the first technique, “expressing emotions and opinions,” and to this “allocation of parts of the picture” I tried to leave the more neutral phrases that did not focus on the opinion of the writer. This is also very close to the function 2, highlighting the most important part, but they were distinguished by the argument that highlighting the most important part makes an emphasis to the second part of the statement, and allocation of parts of the picture seems to emphasize the preceding sentence.

This technique functions to put greater emphasis on the message of the preceding phrase. We can look more closely at example 24: *So serpentine is effective against ground units but not air units. Noted.* Here the writer is ironically commenting what another user said about the video where the squirrel ran a zigzag course to escape the cat. The writer is in a way summarizing what the other user said, and by adding *Noted.* after the sentence he/she is adding an emphasis on the message. At the same time, the writer is conveying that he/she is not altogether convinced about the claim but there is a sort of a condescending tone in the added phrase. This function adds



emphasis on the message, and the reasons for emphasis vary; it can be e.g. for irony (as in example 24) or for affirmation (22. *President Bush the second said that on air, go watch it on youtube. Very worth.*). The irony of the example 24 will be discussed more in the following chapters.

To summarize, parceling is a good technique to make your message more expressive (emotions and opinions), to highlight your main point, and to add something relevant to the message you are trying to convey. It also has potential for humorous functions, like irony or jokes. This can be seen e.g. in the following examples:

26. *But... But... Generic white baby with flowery headband! Save the children! (2)*

27. *I never forget a pussy. cat. (48)*

28. *Riiiiight.*

*You dump bodies. We know. (45)*

The most popular function of parceling in the study is to add to the expressiveness of the message; parceling is used to make the message more emotional and more visible to other users. This was also the main function of parceling in Tarasova's study. In her analysis, Tarasova did not specifically mention parceling as a tool for creating humorous effect or using it to convey irony in net texts. In this study, this function was nevertheless found in a few occasions, although it was not the most common function of parceling. In Reddit conversations, people sometimes use language to demonstrate their intelligence and this is done by commenting negatively and teasing others, as will be discussed in coming sections, and also showing creativity and cleverness with humorous or ironical comments. Parceling seems to be a good tool for this, as the period that divides the parceled sentence can be used to represent a pause in spoken discourse. With the pause, one can create a humorous effect, as in example 27. *I never forget a pussy. cat.* In example 28.

*Riiiiight. You dump bodies. We know.* parceling is used to create a spoken discourse-like humorous effect. The humour is created with parceled sentences and the multiple use of letters in the phrase *Riiiiight*.

The example 26. *But... But... Generic white baby with flowery headband! Save the children!* that was discussed earlier is an example where a classic, ironical comment “Save the children!” is added to point out to the reader, that the author of the message is not serious but they are indicating that the issue in question is slightly ridiculous. These kind of classical comments that emerge in CMC can also be called *one-liners*: “A one-liner is a short sentence with comic effects and an interesting linguistic structure: simple syntax, deliberate use of rhetoric devices (e.g. alliteration, rhyme), and frequent use of creative language constructions meant to attract the readers attention” (Mihalcea and Strapparava 2005, 1). There are some examples of these much-used comments or one-liners amongst the examples of parceling in the data, e.g. *So serpentine is effective against ground units but not air units. Noted. (35)* and *Came here for this. Well-played. (38)* These one-liners (*Noted*, *Well-played* and *Save the children!*) are probably familiar to all frequent users of discussion forums and they work well for parceling because their humorous potential is already established and recognized amongst the users.

## 4.2 Doubting

The second technique in Tarasova’s model is doubting, which was found in 52 instances in this data. The doubting technique means a process in which the writer asks a question and then answers it. It can also mean asking rhetorical questions addressed to the author him/herself or to the reader of the statement.

29. *How does someone get their heart broken in 15 seconds? Sounds like they can't handle rejection. (67)*

30. *Yeah but how long were they together before he asked that question? longer than 15 seconds i hope. (68)*

31. *What's night crawlers? Because it sounds like a game where you dress up as worms. (73)*

32. *Are there places that sell big googly eyes? Like softball sized? Edit: Silly me of course there are. (79)*

33. *What is it?*

*It's a bike, isn't it? (90)*

According to Tarasova (2016, 3), doubting is an effective way to express yourself and create a contact between the author and the recipient. It is a way to engage in a virtual dialogue with the author him/herself or with the recipients. All the examples above demonstrate this dialogue-seeking nature of the technique.

Another feature associated with this technique is, according to Tarasova, the pursuit of creativity typical in internet communication and net texts. The doubting technique seems to be often used for teasing and poking the other participants of the conversation and to convey a playful tone. Although in earlier studies CMC is perceived as a more work-related medium because of the lack of nonverbal cues, e.g. the use of emoticons have helped it develop into a creative and playful medium (Hsieh & Tseng 2017, 406). Playfulness has a crucial role in online platforms as it helps build social connections between the users and overcome the lack of nonverbal cues that seems to make the medium impersonal (ibid.). Here the example 33 represents this pursuit of playfulness: 33. *What is it? It's a bike, isn't it?* It is clearly a playful remark, as the author is commenting a photo showing a rather small gift box that could not possibly contain a bike. Example 32 makes the playfulness even more evident with an added response by the author, confirming he/she is

joking: 32. *Are there places that sell big googly eyes? Like softball sized? Edit: Silly me of course there are.*

According to Tarasova (2016, 3), the pursuit of creativity leads to the author trying by all means “to draw the reader's attention to his/her statement and to create a favorable virtual image of him/herself, demonstrating the originality of his/her way of thinking.” This use of the doubting technique can also be found in the data of this study, e.g. in these examples:

34. *How does someone get their heart broken in 15 seconds? Sounds like they can't handle rejection. (67)*

35. *There's a dog in this gif?*

*Nah, I'm not even gonna play like that. This dog is cute as hell. (70)*

36. *Related to Mr. Peanutbutter? He's pretty smart by Labrador island standards. (72)*

37. *So...did all his daughters and sons hookup with each other and have babies? I didn't see anyone else at the hospital or funeral. (76)*

38. *Was her name Stacy? You know what to do. (111)*

These examples are meant to be witty and to demonstrate the cleverness and attentiveness of the writer. E.g. in examples 36 and 38 the writers are using intertextual references to show off their ability for creative and playful thinking. In example 37, the writer is pointing out something they feel has gone unnoticed by the other users.

On the other hand, doubting is also used in a more negative way to question other people's judgment and establish a sort of superior opinion. Example 34. *How does someone get their heart broken in 15 seconds? Sounds like they can't handle rejection.* is an example where doubting does not seek playfulness or social connection, except maybe with other users who think that the heart-break in question is exaggerated. Other examples of this function include e.g:

39. *In a way, though, isn't it like buying a big toy and only having the kid play with the box? Using an Apple Pencil as a shadow puppet? (71)*
40. *\$760 for some googly eyes? I don't think so. (80)*
41. *Is this supposed to be funny? Good luck with dying alone. (92)*
42. *PERFECTLY? I would not choose the words "lined up perfectly". (88)*
43. *Little dumb fucks think they are so important don't they? As if anything bigger than them is aiming to get them. Pfft (96)*

In the data, the doubting technique is also used for actual information-seeking, dialogical conversation. So besides commenting other users in encouraging or (more often in this data) negative ways, doubting is also used for actual interactive conversation:

44. *And I'm actually curious, how much money does it cost to start playing realistically? I'm going to guess and say maybe 1-2k? (78)*
45. *How about birds? Many species have declined a lot. (95)*
46. *And have any autonomous vehicles killed any squirrels or rabbits? I doubt any company would release that information. (97)*
47. *St. Cloud, where? FL? CA? AZ? I'm just guessing here. (113)*
48. *I wonder what its roots look like underground. Are they proportionally deeper due to its height? Come to think of it, I've never seen palm roots in general before (118)*

In the data, the doubting technique is still most used to make negative remarks of other users' comments. In Tarasova's analysis, doubting was most used for demonstration of doubt and for the pursuit of creativity. In this study, the doubting technique was indeed used for demonstration of doubt, but in particular in a negative way: doubting seems to be used to shoot down the ideas of other commenters (e.g. 41. *Is this supposed to be funny? Good luck with dying alone.*), to question the validity of their comments (e.g. 42. *PERFECTLY? I would not choose the words "lined up*

*perfectly".) and to criticize something outside the reddit conversation (e.g. 43. Little dumb fucks think they are so important don't they? As if anything bigger than them is aiming to get them. Pfft).*

The next section will deal with a more positive punctuation technique, admiration.

### 4.3 Admiration

Admiration is a technique that is used to demonstrate delight and fascination and it is indicated by exclamation marks in any number in CMC language. According to Tarasova (2016, 4), this technique is widely popular among Russian, Tatar and English users of online forums. In the data, admiration was the third most popular punctuation technique with 41 examples.

*49. When it's face hits the wall...D'AAWWWWWW! (129)*

*50. They're really cool 😊 Well done !! (131)*

*51. I just love it!!! (140)*

*52. This is so visually pleasing! Great wrap job! (145)*

*53. That was an insane jump!! (148)*

*54. I see what you did there son. I like it. (42)*

*55. Look at how much that cat's tail helped with balance and movement. They're both incredible. (49)*

In the research of Varnhagen et al. (2010), they examined the “new language” in the IMs of adolescents. One of their categories for the new language taxonomy was the use of certain language features as pragmatic devices, and one of these devices was what they called emotion punctuation. In their study, they found that it was popular for adolescents to use extraneous punctuation for emphasis (e.g., !!!!!) (Varnhagen et al. 2010, 725).

The admiration technique is an important factor in building unity and solidarity in a CMC language community. As mentioned earlier, Tsou (2016) argues that encouraging and motivating others by using emoticons in Reddit has a big role in solidifying a certain subreddit community. The admiration technique works the same way, and admiration by exclamation marks is also accompanied by emoticons a few times in the data of this study to make the message even more explicitly positive:

56. *No, no, it's not fake. You matter to everyone, and everyone loves you!* 😊❤️ (120)

57. *They're really cool* 😊 *Well done !!* (131)

58. *I hope one day I get a gift wrapped in that paper! So cute* <3 (143)

Besides the use of exclamation marks and added emoticons, Tarasova (2016, 4) notes that admiration is made explicit by the use of expressive lexical means, such as *Well done* and *So cute* in these examples.

The admiration technique shows that even though parceling and especially doubting seem to be used to express negative emotions and to sneer at other people, punctuation marks in Reddit conversation threads can also have very positive and encouraging functions. As mentioned earlier, in this study admiration was also conveyed sometimes with the parceling technique, e.g. in examples 54. *I see what you did there son. I like it.* and 55. *Look at how much that cat's tail helped with balance and movement. They're both incredible.* Still, it seems that admiration is mostly expressed using exclamation marks in any number. In a study by Crystal (2011, 63), exclamation marks were found to function as markers for friendly interaction such as thanking, or to emphasize a statement. According to him, exclamation marks function to show support rather than

emotionality. In this study, the exclamation marks used for techniques 3 and 4 were found to function mainly to express emotions of the writer. This will be discussed more in section 4.4.2.

In the data, admiration was expressed both with a grammatical exclamation mark and the plural use of exclamation marks. As argued by e.g. Varnhagen et. al (2010, 725), also in this study exclamation marks were added to the message to create emphasis and to soften the message (Bennett 2015). The data sample of this study contains 41 examples of admiration, of which 33 were punctuated with a single exclamation mark and 8 with plural exclamation marks. This shows that using one grammatical punctuation mark can still be enough to carry the positive message. For comparison, here are examples of both types of use of exclamation marks:

With one exclamation mark:

59. *When it's face hits the wall...D'AAWWWWWW! (129)*

60. *Ugh I LOVE when that happens! (142)*

61. *Wow. He cuts better than Steph Curry on the court! (156)*

With plural exclamation marks:

62. *Lmao!! I am OCD about wrapping presents. Great job!! (146)*

63. *thats fucking incredible!! (153)*

64. *Wow!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (155)*

Adding extra punctuation seems to create a greater emphasis and make the message more “audible” in CMC language where we have “lost all audible tone” (Bennett 2015, 1). Then again, in examples where there is only one exclamation mark, the writer has sometimes used other ways to create



emotional emphasis. In the examples 59 and 60, the writer has capitalized the part of the message they want to emphasize and the capitalization makes the message louder.

Capitalization is another feature of CMC language that works to imitate non-verbal cues, and messages written entirely in capital letters are considered “shouting” (Crystal 2011, 64) or at least a bit aggressive. Because there is a strong tendency to use lower-case letters everywhere in the internet, using capitalization sends a strongly marked message (ibid.). Here in examples 59 and 60 capitalization is also marking shouting, but instead of negative purposes it is sending a positive message. This audibility created by using multiple exclamation marks, and question marks, will be discussed more in the next section which introduces the fourth technique of this study, the synergy of punctuation marks.

#### **4.4 Synergy of punctuation marks**

This technique means using several punctuation marks where you would grammatically use only one. According to Tarasova (2016, 4), using many punctuation marks instead of one makes an important difference in the expressiveness of the message. The synergistic effect of question marks, exclamation marks and dots “should be recognized as the most productive in increasing the expressiveness of a net text” (Tarasova 2016, 4). The following subsections will introduce each technique separately and shed light to the claim of the increased expressiveness.

##### **4.4.1 Synergy of question marks**

The synergy of question marks, meaning putting several question marks instead of one to a question, functions to add emotions and attitudes to a written question. It is an effective CMC cue

and it expresses much more than just the content of the question. Let us look at the examples found in the data:

65. *Where did you get this wrap???* (160)
66. *Can he play WR at seattle??* (161)
67. *Southern New York?? Uh Staten Island?*  
(162)
68. *How??* (163)

By increasing the number of question marks, the author also increases the emotion and motivation behind the question. Increasing the marks can function to signify a need or urgency as in example 65. *Where did you get this wrap???* where the writer seems to desperately want to buy the same wrapping paper as in the photo. This technique can also be used to express amazement at how something could be done (example 68) or at someone stating a fact that is incorrect in the author's opinion: 67. *Southern New York?? Uh Staten Island?* Using multiple question marks works as a CMC cue to add audibility to the message and in fact, works the opposite way than the aforementioned "softening" effect: e.g. in example 67. *Southern New York?? Uh Staten Island?* the writer uses multiple question marks to make clear how ridiculous the other user is being. Also, the example 65. *Where did you get this wrap???* seems aggressive with the multiple question marks, although here the "shouting" effect is not meant to have a negative connotation.

Examples of this technique were surprisingly few in the data, as the only ones found were the four examples presented. In using IM language, one seems to come by this technique quite often as it is a very easy way to add informality and spoken-language likeness to your message. One reason for the low number of these examples could be that the synergy of question marks is not perceived as necessary and perhaps questions are not as emotional as for example

exclamations. In the data, synergy of exclamation marks was found in 36 examples, and synergy of question and exclamation marks in 16 examples, compared to four examples of synergy of question marks. The synergy of exclamation marks seems to be a more popular technique in the light of these numbers, and they seem to work better in making the message more expressive than question marks. In the next two subsections the synergy of exclamation marks is discussed in more detail.

#### 4.4.2 Synergy of exclamation marks

Using multiple exclamation marks is a very expressive technique in CMC language and it functions to convey the writer's emotions as well as attitudes. It creates a great emphasis to the message (Varnhagen et al. 2010, 725). In the data of this study, there were 36 examples of synergy of exclamation marks, making this the fourth most used technique of the study. The synergy of exclamation marks functions often to express admiration and positive praise, like in examples 69. *Awwwwwww!!!* and 73. *Terrific camera work!!*. In this sense, the synergy of exclamation marks as a technique comes close to the admiration technique. Here are some examples of this technique:

69. *Awwwwwww!!! (164)*
70. *someone tell plato to tell that dog the truth!!! (165)*
71. *Darkness falls!!!! And majik begins.. (169)*
72. *I want to be shark!!! I want one! I want one! (171)*
73. *Terrific camera work!! (196)*

According to Tarasova (2016, 4), the synergy of exclamation marks conveys a range of different emotional reactions, in her study for example fascination, surprise and delight. This

expressiveness was increased by the use of “additional connotations of “praise”, “wish” and “adoration”.” (ibid.) Her analysis showed that “the more exclamation marks are involved in the technique, the stronger is the expressive nature of the printed speech” (2016, 4). This relates to the admiration technique examined in section 4.3, where it was noted that the plurality of the exclamation marks seemed to add to the expressiveness of the message. Nevertheless, using capitalization and additional lexical connotations such as *Well done* or *Terrific camera work* can also increase the expressiveness of a message punctuated with only one exclamation mark, as seen in section 4.3.

Besides conveying different emotional reactions, this study finds that the synergy of exclamation marks has other functions as well. A popular way to use synergy of exclamation marks seems to be to add colour to narrated speech. In a couple of examples, exclamation marks were added when the writer was imagining what somebody else would say, or sort of “covering” an event like a news story:

74. *""V-formation! V-formation!""*

*""I'M BY MYSELF!!"" (185)*

75. *Squirrel: Holy shit, holy shit! What the fuck is going on!! Ahhhhhhhhhh! (187)*

76. *Cat: I've gotta move like zagger, I've gotta move like zagger!! (188)*

77. *"He jukes left! Right! Left! Right! Le... oh no!! He's dropped the ball and stopped to dig a tiny hole just a yard from the endzone!" (189)*

78. *That squirrel is me playing Metal Gear Solid.*

*Guards: ""holy shit!!! I am gonna kill you!!! I am gonna fuck you... Huh... Must be my imagination."" (197)*

It seems that the synergy of exclamation marks is a technique that allows you to better describe some action taking place. It works to intensify the message and to better describe the action taking place in the real world, or in the writer's imagination, as in example 78. The synergy of exclamation marks adds audibility to the message and indeed makes it more expressive.

The synergy of exclamation marks, as well as the admiration technique, shows that exclamation marks are quite a powerful tool in CMC language, as Tarasova argues (2016, 4). In the small sample of the study, the admiration technique and the synergy of exclamation marks had a total of 77 examples, and additional 16 examples of synergy of exclamation and question marks. This study finds that using exclamation marks is a good way of expressing emotions in CMC language, and as seen with the admiration technique, also a way of showing support, as Crystal (2011, 63) argues. He says that in CMC language, exclamation marks indicate supportiveness more often than emotionality.

#### **4.4.3 Synergy of question marks and exclamation marks**

This technique is often used to express very extreme emotions and when simple question or exclamation marks do not seem to be enough. Example 82 is a good example of this extremity; with the combination of multiple question and exclamation marks added with capital letters, the message seems to be screamed at you right from the screen. The function is often to express great opposition (example 82, where the writer questions the other comments that say the gift wrap is lining up perfectly) or mistrust to something what is being said (example 80). Example 83 is interesting in that the message does not even require words. The author expresses their surprise or objection using only punctuation marks and relying on that they will be enough to deliver the message.

79. *Where's our God damn bible!?!? (202)*

80. *So you're saying it will also keep my dick warm!?!? Keeps getting better and better. (204)*

81. *Why is no one talking about the bee pattern!?! (205)*

82. *PERFECT!?!?!?!?! (209)*

83. *! ??? (213)*

Tarasova (2016, 5) finds that this technique is mostly used to express negative emotions. In her study, it expressed mostly irritation, fear or anger. In this study there were only 16 examples of this technique and the functions were not as clear. Some of the examples are clearly expressing negative emotions, such as 84, where the writer does not agree that some other user's message is important enough for front page. In 85, the writer does not agree with the others about the "perfect" wrapping of a gift, and in 86 the writer is questioning another user's motives entirely.

84. *Odd....this is front page worthy?!?!? 🤔 (208)*

85. *PERFECT!?!?!?!?! (209)*

86. *Why you have to be mad?! (210)*

Besides a few examples of expressing negative emotions, the synergy of exclamation and question marks do not seem to have a certain pattern but it functions for several different purposes. In the data, this technique is most often used for expressing negative feelings like anger or mistrust, or disbelief and surprise.

#### **4.4.4 Synergy of dots and question marks**

In Tarasova's study, the synergy of dots and question marks is often used to convey doubt, mistrust or irony. Dots used together with question marks or exclamation marks complicate "their implicit

semantic connotations and emotional load” (Tarasova 2016, 5). For example, Tarasova presents two sentences to compare:

*Your husband "goes to work", but what he's busy, if no orders? Strolling through the office? /*

*Your husband "leaves for work", but what is he busy with, if there are no orders? Roams about in the office?.. [8] (2016, 5)*

Tarasova argues that in both sentences, the question mark is a request for information, but in the second sentence the dots imply a pause of silence. This pause indicates that the author is expressing doubt about what they are writing. Another example (in Tatar) from Tarasova’s study suggests that dots and question marks also function to convey mistrust and irony:

*Kaida, kichan, kem belen besga izmenili?..) = Where, when, whom were we cheated by?..) [6] (2016, 5)*

Tarasova argues that here the dots represent mistrust and irony, and it can be seen from the dual use of brackets which in Russian and Tatar net texts has a new function of expressing smile or laughter. She argues that the author is expressing amusement to the preceding phrase and it seems absurd to them.

In the data of this study, there was only one example of synergy of dots and question marks:

*87. I love how he leaves his snout smooshed against the wall for a few seconds like. "Hm. This didn't work. Why didn't this work?..." (216)*

This example does not fit any functions mentioned by Tarasova, as it does not convey doubt, irony or mistrust. Here the synergy of dots and a question mark works to express humour. The contents of the sentence are the assumed thoughts of a dog wondering why it could not catch the shadow of a pen.

As this was the only example of synergy of dots and question marks, it does not seem to be a very prominent technique, at least not in English CMC language. Another reason for this could be that the sample size of this study was too small to include more of the use of this technique. This will be debated later on in the Discussion chapter.

#### **4.4.5 Synergy of dots and exclamation marks**

According to Tarasova, the main function of synergy of dots and exclamation marks is to express mixed emotions. She also argues that using these two together can create an ambivalent effect, “i.e. create and express contrary emotive states in/of the reader and writer” (2016, 5). In her example “*Happy Birthday!!.. you have such wonderful weather, so I hope you are out enjoying this awesome sunshine.*” (ibid.) the exclamation marks convey positive emotions of congratulating the recipient, and the dots mark a short pause and incompleteness of the sentence, leading to the well wishes following the first statement.

In another example of Tarasova’s, exclamation marks convey the author’s “resistance” to the statement: “*Some time it's better why should anyone stay in an unlove relationship!!..*” (2016, 5). The dots here mean a pause of silence that, according to Tarasova, expresses the uncertainty of the author about their statement and leaves the recipient of the message free to interpret it by themselves. Tarasova argues that the synergy of dots and question marks or exclamation marks is an effective method to express emotions and it makes it possible to convey hidden meanings that would be incomprehensible if some of the elements was missing.

This study did not find any examples of synergy of dots and exclamation marks. The reason for this might be the relatively small sample of CMC language used as the data. Both categories, synergy of dots and question marks and dots and exclamation marks, were thus almost entirely



missing from my data. However, in chapter 4.7 I will present some findings of the functions of ellipsis dots used by themselves that were not included in the categorization of functions by Tarasova.

#### **4.5 Distancing punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement**

Distancing the punctuation mark from the final letter of statement means separating the punctuation mark from the sentence with a space. Tarasova found examples of these in her analysis and she argued that they were not a misprint, but they had a pragmatic function. For example, she took a phrase: *Love is not a toy from my childhood !* (2016, 6), where she argues that the pause between the exclamation mark and the phrase functions to make a short pause for the reflection of the message. It allows the reader to read and understand the meaning the author is trying to convey and “see the emotional and evaluative attitude of the author to the statement” (2016, 6).

In the data of this study, there were seven sentences with a gap between the sentence and the final punctuation mark:

88. *The best kind of games .* (217)

89. *they actually come alive !! :p* (218)

90. *They're really cool 😊 Well done !!* (219)

91. *Aww thank you !* (220)

92. *How did you not realize that taking the picture ?* (221)

93. *Man, I wish I was the one taking this video !* (222)

94. *Juking at maximum .* (223)

As these sentences with a gap between the punctuation mark and the final letter of the statement were so few in the data, it can at least be said that it does not seem to be a very popular punctuation technique. For some of these example sentences it is very hard to analyze whether the author has made a deliberate choice to leave a gap between the sentence and the final punctuation mark. Not knowing more about Tarasova's methods of separating the misprints from the gaps made for pragmatic purposes, this following analysis is based solely on my own observations.

Arguably, the example 92. *How did you not realize that taking the picture ?* is most likely representing the function Tarasova found. The gap is giving the reader time to realize the emotion that the writer is trying to convey, which in this case seems to be doubt or mistrust. The gap between the final word and the question mark resemble the effect made by combining ellipsis dots with a question mark. As discussed in the chapter 4.4.4, the synergy of ellipsis dots and a question mark often function to convey doubt or mistrust, and here the gap seems to function in a similar way. Also, the example 93. *Man, I wish I was the one taking this video !* could be analyzed to function in a similar way than the synergy of dots and exclamation marks discussed in the chapter 4.4.5. In the example 93, the gap is telling the reader about the mixed emotions of the writer; they are admiring the video, but at the same time feeling jealous that they are not participating in the work. According to Bennett (2015, 1), leaving a space between the message and final exclamation marks softens the marks and make the message less intense, e.g. instead of writing "*Can't wait!!*" she would write "*Can't wait !*" The example 90. *They're really cool 😊 Well done !!* the gap could have this softening function, backed up by the first phrase (*They're really cool*) not having any punctuation at all. The writer may have used the gap to avoid seeming too eager.

#### 4.6 Functional and positional modification of punctuation marks

Tarasova's final category of punctuation techniques is what she calls functional and positional modification of punctuation marks. She argues that in net texts, punctuation marks can be modified to acquire new functions. Her example is the use of parentheses in Russian and Tatar net texts. According to her, the parentheses have first started to function on their own, and not as a pair, and secondly, they have gained a new emotional function resembling that of emoticons'. The emotion depends on whether the parentheses are closing or opening, for example in this sentence they function to mean a negative emotion: *I have nothing lost everything in place, so I did not win* (((( (2016, 6).

Positional modification of punctuation marks means putting a punctuation mark to a grammatically wrong place, e.g. in the beginning of the sentence. According to Tarasova (2016, 6), this technique works as an emotional colouring of the message and also brings elements of spoken language to the written text, making the message more expressive. This is seen for example in Tarasova's example sentence: *??? Do Canadian Colleges accept ACT score ???* (2016, 6)

The data of this study does not contain any examples of functional modification of punctuation marks. In the examples that were collected, punctuation marks were used in a traditional way in that sense, that even though they had pragmatic functions as well as grammatical, there were no new innovations or revolutionary modification of punctuation marks (parentheses or any other marks). Based on the data, it seems that at least the use of parentheses in the place of emoticons is, at least for now, seen mostly in other languages (Tatar and Russian) and not in English CMC language.

There were three examples of positional modification of punctuation marks in the data:

95. *!redditsilver* (224)

96. *! m 😊😊😊😊* (225)

97. *? Maybe yours don't. Most wild things will eat most processed human food. I've definitely seen a bunch of squirrels consume a bologna sandwich. Pigs are the worst though, they'll eat a pen-mate they watched killed and cooked in front of them.* (226)

These examples are a bit different from the example phrase of Tarasova. In Tarasova's example, the question marks positioned in the beginning and end of the sentence were meant for emotional colouring and adding the expressiveness. Here, the example 97 does not seem to function for either of those purposes. It is more a statement and an expression of doubt to something that has been said earlier. The question mark at the beginning of the sentence functions to express mistrust and doubt, and its purpose is not to add colour to the message. In the example 96, the positional modification of the exclamation mark is arguably adding emotionality to the message that consists almost entirely of emoticons. The exclamation mark emphasizes the laughter conveyed by the emoticons and makes the message more audible. In doing so, it also brings elements of spoken discourse to the message.

In the example 95, the exclamation mark in the beginning of the message seems to work for getting attention or sort of "flagging" the message, so in a way it works for emphasizing the message, as Tarasova argues. On the other hand, Crystal (2011, 65) notes that CMC language innovations sometimes borrow inspiration from programming languages, where the initial exclamation mark expresses negation (e.g. *!interesting = not interesting*). In this case, the example 95 can also be an example of this, if the meaning of the writer is to answer that the subreddit called *redditsilver* is a wrong answer. Tarasova does not mention this possibility in her study, but it might be a factor that influences or prompts the use of the initial exclamation mark.

All in all, the examples of functional and positional modification of punctuation marks were very few in the data. This can be explained partly by language differences, as Tarasova used also Russian and Tatar in her study, and perhaps also by the small size of the sample.

#### **4.7 Outside Tarasova's subsystem: ellipsis dots as a punctuation technique**

During the collection of punctuation techniques from the data sample, I started to take notice of a punctuation mark that is not mentioned in Tarasova's study, but seemed to emerge quite often and resemble a punctuation technique of its own: ellipsis dots. Tarasova includes ellipsis dots in the synergy of punctuation marks technique, where it is combined with an exclamation mark or a question mark, functioning to convey e.g. doubt, mistrust or mixed emotions, as discussed in section 4.4. However, I argue that using ellipsis dots in any number, not combined with any other punctuation mark, is also quite a distinctive punctuation technique in CMC language, as it is used for expressing attitudes and emotions, e.g. confusion and disagreement, and to create emphasis by representing a pause or silence in spoken discourse. In the data, there were 130 example phrases where ellipsis dots were used as a punctuation technique.

Ellipsis dots, also called ellipsis marks, are a very much researched punctuation mark in CMC language. The mark consists of three consecutive periods which in traditional English writing are usually used to indicate omission of texts in quotations (Crystal, 2011). However, the development of language in the internet has changed its usage and ellipsis dots are used excessively as a typographic strategy in CMC language (Herring, 2012). Ellipsis dots in CMC language can be used e.g. to hint disagreement, convey confusion and to delay responding (Ong, 2011). Simpson (2005) argues that they function to represent what would be pauses and silences in spoken discourse, and they also indicate "trailing away" at the end of the turn/sentence. In the data, there

were examples of these functions of ellipsis dots. There were also examples showing that ellipsis dots can be used to create a greater emphasis to the phrase that follows.

Hinting disagreement:

*98. Your definition of perfect is different than mine... (66)*

*99. Odd....this is front page worthy?!?!? (73)*

*100. It lined up well but not perfectly... I can still see the seam. (74)*

Conveying confusion:

*101. You lost me...uh oh (5)*

*102. I'm sorry, charming...taint-man? (26)*

*103. this has to be sped up...right? (101)*

Delaying responding:

*104. Based on what I've heard from people with cats... One head. And it would look proud as hell. (76)*

*105. Depends really... 1k-2k will probably get you an army in a good spot. But you will eventually want more armies or make your first on bigger. So it keeps going up. I have last time I put time into counting how much retail it would be I am sitting at \$5k probs more now. Not including the paints and carrying cases and shelves to put said armies on. (33)*

Representing pauses and silences:

*106. They did the math.....wrong (77)*

*107. Hey, I understood that reference...now I'm annoyed. (79)*

*108. Damn...Fat cat has some awesome footwork, though! (93)*

“Trailing away:”

*109. Yeah, I think I meant to put that instead, but I've had quite a lot of cider this afternoon... (2)*

*110. Aw I thought my dog was the only one to try to eat a shadow before! Granted, it was her own..... (18)*

*111. I watched the episode yesterday... (83)*

Creating emphasis

*112. or... hear me out... pokemon is a simpler game. (37)*

*113. Believe it or not, most babies have even worse grammar than that. They are like... so dumb. (6)*

*114. "Darkness falls...and magic stirs! As we become...creatures of the night!!!" (30)*

Ellipsis dots, in any number, have varied range of functions and as a punctuation technique, it appears in the data more often than the other techniques (130 examples). Tarasova does not include it in her subsystem, although it seems to be a useful technique for making your message more expressive and gives you tools for different kinds of effects (e.g. for representing a pause or a silence in written discourse). Ellipsis dots could be argued to form a punctuation technique of its own: *creating a functional pause*. This function comes close to some other techniques, such as distancing the punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement, as it also creates a pause for the reader to reflect the message. By using ellipsis dots, one can bring their message closer to spoken discourse, because it creates elements of spoken dialogue, like pauses and trailing away in the end of the sentence.

As appears to be the case for many other techniques, ellipsis dots can also be used to create a humorous effect, as seen e.g. in example 113. *Believe it or not, most babies have even worse*

*grammar than that. They are like... so dumb. or 109. Yeah, I think I meant to put that instead, but I've had quite a lot of cider this afternoon...* This technique shows the pervasive tendency behind all the punctuation techniques analyzed in the study; CMC language is creative in nature, and new innovations in punctuation often stem from playfulness and the will to amuse others through language use.



## 5 Discussion

This study found that all in all, Reddit users do not use the punctuation techniques introduced by Tarasova (2016) very often. In the sample of 2,049 Reddit posts, only around 11 per cent (226) of the posts contained the punctuation techniques: 1) parceling, 2) doubting, 3) admiration, 4) synergy of punctuation marks, 5) distancing the punctuation marks from the final letter of the statement, and 6) functional and positional modification of punctuation marks. Of these techniques, parceling was the most used (66 examples) followed by doubting (52 examples) and admiration (41 examples).

To answer the first research question of what kind of punctuation techniques are used in CMC language, I collected a sample of 2,049 posts from discussion threads in Reddit and analyzed whether they contained examples of Tarasova's subsystem of six punctuation techniques. I found out that only 11.03 per cent of the posts contained these techniques, but nevertheless they seemed to be used for the functions argued by Tarasova. I found examples of all of the six categories, although for some techniques the number of examples was very small. The most used techniques were parceling, doubting and admiration. Besides the six punctuation techniques, I argue for a seventh technique that I found examples of: ellipsis dots as a punctuation technique for creating a functional pause.

For the second research question of what kind of functions the techniques have, the examples of the punctuation techniques were analyzed and compared with the findings made by Tarasova. The punctuation techniques were found to function in many cases in the ways that Tarasova describes; with punctuation techniques, one can e.g. express emotions and attitudes and to emphasize important parts in their message and thus create a certain effect. Besides the functions mentioned by Tarasova, this study found some others as well.

Parceling (= separating a word or a phrase by using a period) functions to express emotions and opinions and to highlight an important part of the message. It is also used for adding something relevant to the preceding phrase. Besides these functions mentioned by Tarasova, this study found that parceling can be used to create a humorous or ironical effect. Parceling was definitely the most difficult punctuation technique to detect and to analyze, as there were many example cases in the data that had to be considered and reconsidered as belonging to this group. The collecting of data was done consistently as to take into account the main conditions of the parceling technique: the parceled phrase had to have a certain relationship with the preceding phrase (e.g. highlighting the important part, adding something relevant to it) and the parceled phrase was often short and pithy.

Doubting, so asking one or several questions addressed to the reader or sometimes to the author him/herself, is a tool for creating a dialogue between the participants of the conversation. As Tarasova argued, this technique is a good demonstration of creativity and playfulness that is typical for CMC language as this technique allows the author to demonstrate their wits and to playfully tease others. My findings were that besides these functions, on the one hand doubting is also a way to negatively question other people's judgment, and on the other hand it is used to engage in an information-seeking dialogue with other users.

The admiration technique, using exclamation marks in any number combined to a positive comment or a praise, is used to express fascination and delight and to compliment other users. I argue that this helps build the feeling of solidarity between subreddit users, because as argued by Tsou (2016), members of a subreddit community use language actively to encourage and motivate others. This is a good example of a positive punctuation technique, as many other techniques are used for negative commenting, e.g. the synergy of exclamation and question marks.

The synergy of punctuation marks (technique 4) is arguably the most productive technique in adding the expressiveness of CMC language (Tarasova 2016, 4). The synergy of question marks (e.g. ???) functions to emphasize the message and to increase the emotion and motivation behind the question. Examples of this technique were surprisingly few in the data (4 examples) and it could be argued that question marks by themselves do not have as great an emotional load as exclamation marks. The synergy of exclamation marks (e.g. !!!) is the most popular variation of this technique with 36 examples. It conveys a range of emotional reactions, e.g. admiration, surprise and delight, as argued also by Tarasova. Besides this function, the present study found that the synergy of exclamation mark functions also to add colour to narrated speech and to make it resemble spoken discourse. The synergy of question marks and exclamation marks (e.g. !?!) is used for conveying very extreme emotions, mainly great opposition or mistrust towards something, as also argued by Tarasova. It is a technique connected most often with negative emotions and it is found in 16 examples in the data.

The synergy of dots and question marks was found in only one example, so this study did not find it a very prominent punctuation technique. However, the reason for the lack of examples could also be the small size of the data sample. Tarasova argues that this technique is used to express doubt, mistrust and irony. The small size of the sample could also have an effect on the lack of examples of the synergy of dots and exclamation marks, which Tarasova finds to be a technique for expressing mixed emotions. To summarize, this study found the synergy of exclamation marks and the synergy of exclamation and question marks to be the two most used variants of this technique, and for the other variants there were few or no examples.

The fifth technique examined was distancing the punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement. This technique was found in seven examples, so it does not seem to be used that

extensively. According to Tarasova, this technique creates a pause for the reader to reflect the message and to relate to the emotions of the writer. Analyzing the examples was complicated, as it was hard to see in some cases whether the gap between the punctuation mark and the final letter was a typo or whether it was used deliberately as a technique. In some examples, the gap seemed to have the function mentioned by Tarasova, and this study found that the technique can be used to express mixed emotions, and also to soften the message. Nevertheless, the small amount of examples indicates that this technique is not widely used.

The last technique in Tarasova's subsystem is functional and positional modification of punctuation marks, meaning creating new functions to existing punctuation marks or changing their function by placing them in a non-grammatical position in the text. This study found no examples of the functional modification of punctuation marks. Tarasova introduced an example from Russian, where the parentheses have acquired new functions as expressing positive or negative feelings. This kind of a function does not show in English CMC language according to the present study, and in the data there were no examples of different kinds of functional modifications. But as the CMC language is constantly evolving, new functions to existing marks are likely to occur and this technique is a useful tool for analysis in the future.

The positional modification of punctuation marks was found in three examples, although it can be argued that they might not have been proper examples of this technique. Tarasova argues that this technique is mostly used for emotional colouring of the message, and this was arguably the case in one of the examples. In the example post *!redditsilver* (224) there could be seen a possible influence of programming languages where the initial exclamation mark means negation (Crystal 2011, 65). With only these few unclear examples, and no examples at all of functional modification, this study does not find the last technique a significant one in establishing a

subsystem for punctuation marks in CMC language. Nevertheless, for example the functional modification happening in Russian CMC language (parentheses used as emoticons) is, according to Tarasova, a new phenomenon, and it might develop quickly also in English CMC language for parentheses or some other punctuation mark.

This study found another punctuation technique outside Tarasova's subsystem. This technique is using ellipsis dots for creating a functional pause. Ellipsis dots were found in 130 examples in the data and as a punctuation technique it has various functions: hinting disagreement, conveying confusion, delaying responding, representing pauses and silences, trailing away in the end of the sentence, and creating emphasis. Ellipsis dots can also be used to create a humorous effect. Tarasova does not include the use of ellipsis dots in her subsystem, but she combines them with question and exclamation marks in the synergy of punctuation marks technique. The ellipsis dots are arguably very expressive also without a combination with another punctuation mark and according to this study, they are used more often than the other punctuation techniques. An idea for further research could be to include ellipsis dots as a technique for creating a functional pause in the subsystem of punctuation techniques, and examine a larger data set of CMC language with that model. The technique could also be studied and refined to find out whether ellipsis dots as a punctuation technique have also other functions than found in this study.

The restrictions of this study were perhaps the methods used in the data collection. I decided to collect a small corpus from Reddit discussion threads to get actual, current language used in the internet, and I collected and analyzed them manually instead of finding an existing corpus of CMC language. I considered using a corpus tool, such as AntConc, to help with the analysis, but I concluded that the examples I was looking for were too difficult to find with the tool. For example, to find all the examples of parceling, it would not have been enough just to try to collect all the

phrases with periods in them, as all of them would not have been automatically examples of parceling. As I decided to collect the examples manually, I also concluded to keep the sample quite small, and that might have had an effect on the results showing small numbers of punctuation techniques. It might also have affected the accuracy of the results; the method made the analysis very slow and possibly resulted in mistakes.

The purpose of the study was to test Tarasova's subsystem of punctuation techniques in CMC language and to see if it could be used as a model for future studies in the research area. With some modifications, it can be used to analyze what kinds of developments are taking place in the language of the internet, and what might be coming next. For example, the functional modification of punctuation marks might well cause the transformation of traditional punctuation marks in the future. The development of hashtag into an important metadata tag in social networks is a good example of the changes that might occur. Also, it is worth to notice the effects that programming languages can have, as seen in the case of positioning an exclamation mark in the beginning of a phrase.

In the research of CMC language, this study can help establish a functional model to classify an important feature of CMC language, punctuation marks. The results could be compared to earlier research made on punctuation marks in CMC language, and also in the language outside the internet, and these findings could help analyze how punctuation marks change over time. These results could also be useful in finding a way to make online discussions more tolerating and hate-free, if the punctuation marks' potential for expressing empathy and solidarity (Albritton 2015) is acknowledged and used to battle the other tendency of punctuation techniques, the negative commenting of others.

Tarasova's research concerned English, Russian and Tatar CMC languages. In her research, there did not seem to be many differences between the uses of the techniques in different languages. This study found that at least the technique of functional modification of punctuation marks did not seem to apply in the exact same way in English and Russian languages (the use of parentheses to express emotions). However, I argue that the study could be reproduced also in other languages and there would probably be similar findings, such as admiration conveyed through exclamation marks or doubting to create a dialogue in online discussions. The study could be reproduced using language in Reddit discussion threads as the content there is pseudonymous and publicly available to anybody without the need to subscribe as a user.

To further develop the study, the Reddit discussion threads could be collected into a larger corpus which could then be analyzed more closely with the help of corpus tools. It might be possible to find some punctuation techniques, such as the synergy of punctuation marks, by using corpus tools, even though detecting the parceling technique might still need a manual analysis. With a larger corpus and more efficient collecting methods, the frequency of these punctuation techniques could be perhaps stated more precisely and their development in the future analyzed in more detail.

## 6 Conclusion

This study examined punctuation techniques used in CMC language, basing the analysis on the subsystem of punctuation techniques introduced by Tarasova (2016). She found that in net texts, which she collectively calls texts from blogs, social nets, forums and instant messages, there are six types of punctuation techniques used: 1) parceling, 2) doubting, 3) admiration, 4) synergy of punctuation marks, 5) distancing a punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement, and 6) positional and functional modification of punctuation marks. She argues that punctuation marks used in CMC language have pragmatic functions to convey the emotions and feelings of the writer. The aim of this study was to analyze the subsystem of the six techniques and examine if it could be used as a basis for further studies of pragmatic functions of punctuation marks in CMC language.

The data for the study was collected from a popular news and content aggregation web site called Reddit.com, also known as “the front page of the Internet.” I collected 2,049 example posts from six discussion threads and analyzed them manually to see if they contained the punctuation techniques introduced by Tarasova. The analysis found that 226 posts (11.03 per cent) contained these techniques, and they were classified into the six categories. The three most used techniques in the data were parceling, doubting and admiration. There were examples of almost all of the categories, although for some techniques the number of the examples was very small. The study concludes that punctuation techniques are not commonly used in CMC language, but when they are, they have various pragmatic functions.

This study found that punctuation techniques can be used e.g. to express emotions, attitudes and humour. The parceling technique (1) is used to express emotions and also to create emphasis to a certain part of the message, or to convey irony. The doubting technique (2) is good for creating



a dialogue between the participants of the conversation. Admiration (3) by exclamation marks expresses positive emotions and builds solidarity in a subreddit community. The synergy of punctuation marks (4) is a very productive technique and with its many variants it has a great power to add to the expressiveness of CMC language. The technique of distancing the punctuation mark from the final letter of the statement (5) was only found in a few examples, where it functioned to express mixed emotions or to soften the message. Functional and positional modification of punctuation marks (6) was almost absent in the data.

This study argued for another punctuation technique not included in the subsystem of Tarasova called *creating a functional pause* by using ellipsis dots. Ellipsis dots as a punctuation technique has various functions: hinting disagreement, conveying confusion, delaying responding, representing pauses and silences, trailing away in the end of the sentence, and creating emphasis. Ellipsis dots are arguably a very expressive punctuation mark even without combining them with another punctuation mark, and the technique was used more often in the data than the other punctuation techniques.

The results of the study could be further researched and they could contribute to the need of analyzing the changes taking place in CMC language now and in the future concerning the use of punctuation marks. The study could be developed by using a larger corpus of CMC language and more efficient methods of analysis. The results of the study are reproducible using the language of Reddit, which is pseudonymous and publicly accessible. The results are arguably similar also in other languages than English CMC language, although there can be some cultural variants, such as the changing function of the parentheses in Russian into an emoticon-like mark. Further studies should also take into account the possible role of programming languages in this development. Finally, the results of the study could also help finding solutions to make online discourse more

tolerable and free of hate speech, if the punctuation marks' potential for expressing empathy and solidarity is acknowledged and put to use.

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## Appendix: Examples of punctuation techniques in the data

### Punctuation techniques in Reddit conversations

Collected in April, June and September 2017

The number of examples in total: 2,049

Examples with punctuation techniques: 226

#### 1. Parceling (66 examples)

- (1) I disagree, but I'm sure you're really pretty and intelligent in real life! You'll accomplish literally everything!
- (2) But... But... Generic white baby with flowery headband! Save the children!
- (3) You are technically correct. Which is the best kind of correct. :-)
- (4) yeah but it's not a done heart. it's a crappy little start of a heart
- (5) Don't do that. It hurts.
- (6) President Bush the second said that on air, go watch it on youtube. Very worth.
- (7) This makes so much sense! That was actually quite wise of him!
- (8) Second time he learned though, he didn't bash his nose. Cuz hes a good boy!
- (9) First time to check hypothesises, second time to confirm results. Scientist doggo.
- (10) That movie took me sideways so unexpectedly. I had no idea what it was about when I started watching, I just saw Jake Gyllenhaal was in it and decided to watch it. It'll gnaw off a piece of your soul.
- (11) Nightcrawler. Hence relevance.
- (12) One of my absolute favorites in a long time. I'd even say Lou Bloom out-creeps Travis Bickle.
- (13) I watched it when I wanted something dark yet whimsical to take my mind of problems with my SO. It worked, but not the way I expected.
- (14) It's one of my favorite movies - it'll take you to some dark, ugly places both in the movie and within yourself. But it's so, so good.
- (15) Not if you factor in the rehab. That shit is expensive.
- (16) Yeah, I misread it. My fuckup.
- (17) Art is art, and gameplay mechanics are just that. That is all there is to that game.
- (18) Yeah but 4\$ for shipping! It's a steal bro

- (19) Spoken like someone who knows how to crochet. Typical.
- (20) Fast is a relative term. Like 2 weeks is considered fast.
- (21) You literally judged a book by its cover. You're not supposed to do that.
- (22) And a new word was born. On this day in reddit history. This was created.
- (23) Thank goodness they labeled "fern". I wouldn't have gotten that shit
- (24) You could've tripled that karma if it was on r/oddlysatisfying. Tsk tsk tsk.
- (25) Or OP spent hours reverse engineering the wrapping process to get the perfect picture for Reddit. And still failed.
- (26) Far from perfect. Close though.
- (27) There must be a real satisfying feeling when you're able to line up gift wrapping paper. Especially for people with OCD.
- (28) Damn that is OCD heaven. Or OCD orgasm
- (29) Stealing this for my phone. Gonna work great to help calm my anxiety. Bravo.
- (30) These fucking things get posted once a week. IT'S NO LONGER INTERESTING.
- (31) Not really, cats are mass murderers towards birds and other animals. They're objectively a shitty pet.
- (32) Based on what I've heard from people with cats... One head. And it would look proud as hell.
- (33) So there's no excuse for "spoilers". Your own fault.
- (34) Came here for this comment. Was not disappointed.
- (35) So serpentine is effective against ground units but not air units. Noted.
- (36) Most local fauna are massively overpopulated thanks to humans killing off their predators.  
Deer, raccoon, opossum, squirrel, rabbit, gopher - in north America all of these species are hugely overpopulated.  
Let the cat hunt.
- (37) Most mouse traps and gopher traps are essentially the same thing as a cat. It's not a quick death.
- (38) Came here for this. Well-played.
- (39) This squirrel does high rounds in Cod Zombies on his days off. He knows how to train.
- (40) I'm pretty confident that I could serpentine my way past a gunman shooting at me, and punch him right in the face. That is how effective it is.
- (41) I have actually heard that the drivers of Ford Fiesta's are very agile. It's quite a peculiar coincidence.
- (42) I see what you did there son. I like it.

(43) Can confirm. Was driving down a quiet, rural road once when I saw a bunny in the middle of the road. Went to swerve around it and it darted straight into my path. A telltale thud followed, accompanied by me screaming, ""Nooooo!!""

RIP bunny.

(44) I used to live on a unpaved mountain road with not really enough room for two way traffic. It was a long stretch, made longer when those little bastards get in front of you at night. Just go into the trees, dummies. Nope, zig zag in front of you for a mile and a half.

We called them traffic.

(45) Riiiiight.

You dump bodies. We know.

(46) I am not sure. Is a very furry cat.

(47) Too bad he was too afraid to step in and take the charge to draw an offensive could at the last minute. All that work for nothing

(48) I never forget a pussy. cat.

(49) Look at how much that cat's tail helped with balance and movement. They're both incredible.

(50) Every time the cat was closing he was changing direction and moving closer to the tree. If look closely you see he actually does a 230 degree arc around the cat's reach and then burns a beeline opposite the cats initial momentum long enough for the cat to switch and gain momentum the other direction for the close then rinse and repeats. It's amazing.

(51) DO YOU SEE RICKON. THIS IS HOW ITS DONE.

(52) I have a few cats and maybe once every six months one of them catches a bird, and usually lets it go. Or I make it let it go.

(53) Jesus Christ get that Squirrel on kickoff returns for the NFL. Hold my chestnuts Devin Hester.

(54) I can honestly say that i would have been caught. I am less smart then a squirrel

(55) It was so funny how the cat instantly gave up as soon as the squirrel reached the tree. Game over.

(56) Poor squirrel got to watch its back all the time. Can't even enjoy a walnut in peace.

(57) Not sure if I'd call this a "technique"... they do the same thing with oncoming traffic. It often doesn't work.☺

(58) This cat was bamboozled 7 times. One for each pivot.

(59) Someone has to Put Text on this. I swear it will be funnier

(60) Now think about the fact that that's a FAT cat. Cats are truly, truly amazing

(61) Fuck cat owners who let their pets do this to native wildlife. I'd have shot it.



(62) I used to have a cat that caught squirrels like this all the time. He wasn't quite as big and he was FAST! He'd eat the entire damn thing. I found nothing but the lower jaw bone and the tail once. He'd bring them onto the front porch after the kill for his meal. Hell of a mess.

(63) The definition of "vermin" is a squirrel. It's literally vermin.

(64) Look, we get it. You h8t cats.

(65) I had a cat that had new kills lined up for me to clean most mornings before school. Mice, sparrows, moles, various sizes of rabbits, a seagull, and even a falcon once. But he never, ever caught a squirrel. Maybe this is why.

(66) Washingtonia robusta\* aka the Mexican Fan Palm. Beautiful specimen.

## 2. Doubting (52 examples)

(67) How does someone get their heart broken in 15 seconds? Sounds like they can't handle rejection.

(68) Yeah but how long were they together before he asked that question? longer than 15 seconds i hope.

(69) That's one explanation, but then why start the old saying at all? The other possibility is that he shares some traits with golden retrievers. See below.

(70) There's a dog in this gif?

Nah, I'm not even gonna play like that. This dog is cute as hell.

(71) In a way, though, isn't it like buying a big toy and only having the kid play with the box? Using an Apple Pencil as a shadow puppet?

(72) Related to Mr. Peanutbutter? He's pretty smart by Labrador island standards.

(73) What's night crawlers? Because it sounds like a game where you dress up as worms.

(74) You want campaign game play and ETA on game? FUCK U HERE 2 BATTLE VIDEO!

(75) I know right? It could be like a roaming base

(76) So...did all his daughters and sons hookup with each other and have babies? I didn't see anyone else at the hospital or funeral.

(77) Nice use of the roaming base. No force field though?

(78) And I'm actually curious, how much money does it cost to start playing realistically? I'm going to guess and say maybe 1-2k?

(79) Are there places that sell big googly eyes? Like softball sized?

Edit: Silly me of course there are.

(80) \$760 for some googly eyes? I don't think so.

(81) You mean purple and black? That was the mermaid one.

- (82) Jesus \$81? I've never touched yarn before but i thought it was astronomically cheaper than that
- (83) so I'm guessing you used a random username generator then yeah? good person?
- (84) User recently created? With only this comment? I don't know about you but r/hailcorporate
- (85) why r/mildlyinteresting to begin with? it's not "interesting".
- (86) Why am I not seeing what you are seeing? lol
- (87) The rest what? They're talking about perfectly aligning the wrapping - that's it, there's nothing else.
- (88) PERFECTLY? I would not choose the words "lined up perfectly".
- (89) A bit of paper wrapped around styrofoam? Odd indeed.
- (90) What is it?
- It's a bike, isn't it?
- (91) What I want to know is who has an outside cat and bird feeders and then sits down to tape the carnage?
- Pick a side, geez.
- (92) Is this supposed to be funny? Good luck with dying alone.
- (93) One try, and then it just gives up because it failed? It seems to have bare minimum ambition.
- (94) Do you watch your dog maul other life forms? My cat knows not to do it in front of me anymore because I've made it very clear to the cat I don't wanna watch a rodent or bird twist and turn in disembowelled agony, but that's just me
- (95) How about birds? Many species have declined a lot.
- (96) Little dumb fucks think they are so important don't they? As if anything bigger than them is aiming to get them. Pfft
- (97) And have any autonomous vehicles killed any squirrels or rabbits? I doubt any company would release that information.
- (98) This is what you're meant to do if you're chased by a rhino, right? Or is it an elephant? Crocodile?
- (99) Is she really energetic? That can cause any animal to be skinny and still eat a lot.
- (100) More amazed by the swiftness of the fat-ass cat. But cats can climb trees, so? Did he just get tired? Did the squirrel really trick the cat into not seeing him?
- (101) Could they have just been playing around? I mean maybe the cat was, but he squirrel was almost definitely HOLY SHITting all the way to the tree
- (102) Why do people let their cats outside? Outdoor cats are basically an ecological disaster. It's estimated that outdoor cats have caused the extinction of 33 bird and mammal species.

(103) Dang type of dude you'd want in your special team squad. Down 3 in the 4th with 9s left? This dude will run the 103 for the 6

(104) Would this kind of running help you evade an active shooter's aim? Of course you'd be wanting to move as far away from them as possible while you zigzag, not toward them.

(105) Ever seen a slow moving squirrel? I haven't. It's like they live in fast forward.

(106) Anyone remember the slingshot the guy set up outside his door that a Squirrel climbed into and then got fired off into the distance? Even writing that made me laugh remembering it.

(107) Is this sped up? What in the fuck

(108) This speed up? Why?

(109) What escape technique? It just runs around

(110) Or just coincidence? I didn't come across any fountains of Wayne in the past two days until now. I promise I didn't just not notice them

(111) Was her name Stacy? You know what to do.

(112) Where is this? St. Cloud?

(113) St. Cloud, where? FL? CA? AZ? I'm just guessing here.

(114) How many years ago? It wasn't there in January, 2017....

(115) So I can assume r/trees came first? I was confused about the title for a second.

(116) Yeah, but where is the fun in that? And /r/actualtrees exists and might not agree with them on the same guidelines.

(117) How messy could it be? And what would it look like if you did nothing?

(118) I wonder what its roots look like underground. Are they proportionally deeper due to its height? Come to think of it, I've never seen palm roots in general before

### **3. Admiration (41 examples)**

(119) No, you don't understand, Pigeotto is so good!

(120) No, no, it's not fake. You matter to everyone, and everyone loves you! 😊 ❤️

(121) He really stuck the landing!

(122) That smoosh face!

(123) That booped snoot!

(124) OMG awwww!

(125) This is definitely my dog!

- (126) Brilliant!
- (127) So cute!
- (128) Awwwwwww!!!
- (129) When it's face hits the wall...D'AAWWWWWW!
- (130) Great idea Schmitty!
- (131) They're really cool 😊 Well done !!
- (132) Ohhh I'm totally gonna try the shark. Stoked!
- (133) Nicely done!
- (134) I'm actually more impressed by your fingernails! Very nice
- (135) Totally satisfying!
- (136) Nice. That's pretty hard to do!
- (137) Wow amazing. Such accuracy. No more work for the rest of the year. You've earned it!
- (138) Such cute paper!
- (139) That makes my day!
- (140) I just love it!!!
- (141) The gift wrap is adorable!
- (142) Ugh I LOVE when that happens!
- (143) I hope one day I get a gift wrapped in that paper! So cute <3
- (144) Omg so satisfying!
- (145) This is so visually pleasing! Great wrap job!
- (146) Lmao!! I am OCD about wrapping presents. Great job!!
- (147) Ross Geller loves this too!
- (148) That was an insane jump!!
- (149) Dat camera work!
- (150) Ah, what a profound thought!
- (151) Damn...Fat cat has some awesome footwork, though!
- (152) that cats reflexes are on point though! and then when the chase is over he just strolls away lol
- (153) thats fucking incredible!!
- (154) Terrific camera work!!

(155) Wow!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(156) Wow. He cuts better than Steph Curry on the court!

(157) Wow!

(158) Way to go, Kyle!

(159) dayumn that shit tall!

#### **4. Synergy of punctuation marks**

##### **question marks (4 examples):**

(160) Where did you get this wrap???

(161) Can he play WR at seattle??

(162) Southern New York?? Uh Staten Island?

(163) How??

##### **exclamation marks (36 examples):**

(164) Awwwwwww!!!

(165) someone tell plato to tell that dog the truth!!!

(166) Darkness falls!!!! And majik begins..

(167) Imagining there's new and uniq content in each world you visit! In a Quadrillion Ways! Like Planet A, B and C!!!

(168) Tell them we pushed you!!!

(169) "Darkness falls...and magic stirs! As we become...creatures of the night!!!"

(170) they actually come alive !! :p

(171) I want to be shark!!! I want one! I want one!

(172) Someone make me this!!!

(173) Dammit!! This is what I was afraid of! Hey bro!

(174) They're really cool 😊 Well done !!

(175) I can't believe there was a time where you could not share this with the entire world and had to just keep all satisfaction to yourself!!!

(176) I've always dreamed of this happening to me!!!

(177) I just love it!!!

(178) Witchcraft!! lol seriously tho, that's pretty damn impressive. I've never been able to do that and I've actually tried a few times

(179) OCD win!!!

(180) excited!!

(181) Lmao!! I am OCD about wrapping presents. Great job!!

(182) Emperor Meltingdiamond will must have gladiators, no matter the species!!!

(183) That was an insane jump!!

(184) Serpentine Babou!!!

(185) ""V-formation! V-formation!""

""I'M BY MYSELF!""

(186) Can confirm. Was driving down a quiet, rural road once when I saw a bunny in the middle of the road. Went to swerve around it and it darted straight into my path. A telltale thud followed, accompanied by me screaming, ""Nooooo!!""

RIP bunny.

(187) Squirrel: Holy shit, holy shit! What the fuck is going on!! Ahhhhhhhhhh!

(188) Cat: I've gotta move like zagger, I've gotta move like zagger!!

(189) "He jukes left! Right! Left! Right! Le... oh no!! He's dropped the ball and stopped to dig a tiny hole just a yard from the endzone!"

(190) SERPENTINE!!!!

(191) SERPENTINE SERPENTINE SERPENTINE!!

(192) SERPENTINE!!!

(193) Wave...wave...wave...wave...wave...wave...wavvee...WAVVVEEEE!!!

(194) thats fucking incredible!!

(195) Zigzag zigzag zigzagggg!!!! Done

(196) Terrific camera work!!

(197) That squirrel is me playing Metal Gear Solid.

Guards: ""holy shit!!! I am gonna kill you!!! I am gonna fuck you... Huh... Must be my imagination.""

(198) Wow!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(199) Nuh-uh!!! It's a tree Dad! Duh! :D

**question marks + exclamation marks (16 examples):**

- (200) Who's the one who will pick up his big poop on the floor later. Only to then hours later feed him again and give him a rub!?
- (201) ""Wha-What's that?!"" boop
- (202) Where's our God damn bible!??!
- (203) He's 7?! Why wait 7 years to reveal the shark then?!
- (204) So you're saying it will also keep my dick warm!?!? Keeps getting better and better.
- (205) Why is no one talking about the bee pattern!?
- (206) Is that what kids are calling it these days?!
- (207) Where did you get this wrapping paper!?
- (208) Odd....this is front page worthy?!?!? 🐾
- (209) PERFECT?!?!?!?!?
- (210) Why you have to be mad?!
- (211) RUN FROM AN ARROW ZIG ZAG!?!? On AN OPPEN FIELD NED?!??????
- (212) Who else learned today that's it's unlikely this squirrel has rabies?!
- (213) ! ???
- (214) Wait the lower head has puckered lips?!
- (215) Coco?!

**dots + question marks (1 example):**

- (216) I love how he leaves his snout smooshed against the wall for a few seconds like. "Hm. This didn't work. Why didn't this work?..."

**dots + exclamation marks (0 examples):**

-

**5. Distancing punctuation mark from the final letter (7 examples):**

- (217) The best kind of games .
- (218) they actually come alive !! :p
- (219) They're really cool 😊 Well done !!
- (220) Aww thank you !

(221) How did you not realize that taking the picture ?

(222) Man, I wish I was the one taking this video !

(223) Juking at maximum .

### 6. Functional and positional modification of punctuation marks (3 examples):

(224) !redditsilver

(225) ! m😊😊😊😊

(226) ? Maybe yours don't. Most wild things will eat most processed human food. I've definitely seen a bunch of squirrels consume a bologna sandwich. Pigs are the worst though, they'll eat a pen-mate they watched killed and cooked in front of them.

### Ellipsis dots (130 examples):

1. It's also a good place for people like me, who can become sad suddenly and without warning or any good reason! And I think that "faking" being nice usually just means being nice when you don't really feel like it, which is... nice. (61)
2. Yeah, I think I meant to put that instead, but I've had quite a lot of cider this afternoon... (62)
3. But... But... Generic white baby with flowery headband! Save the children! (102)
4. Captain, perhaps it would be best... (163)
5. You lost me...uh oh (166)
6. Believe it or not, most babies have even worse grammar than that. They are like... *so* dumb. (175)
7. "There's an old saying in Tennessee. I know it's in Texas, probably in Tennessee that says, 'Fool me once, shame on ... shame on you. Fool me... You can't get fooled again!'" (190)
8. You know what they say: fool me once, strike one. Fool me twice... strike three (193)
9. Read that as fetuses... (221)
10. So...he's a little special. I'm not one to judge (222)
11. While "Boop snoot" is pretty much guaranteed gold... (234)
12. Apparently I'm [/r/OutOfTheLoop](#)... What's with all the emoji hate? (238)
13. I love how he leaves his snout smooshed against the wall for a few seconds like. "Hm. This didn't work. Why didn't this work?..." (252)
14. At first I thought this was about using an Apple Pencil with no cap on the lightning connector... (259)
15. One of ours does this with bugs.....that are on the other side of the glass. It's very entertaining. (267)
16. something something.. united airlines sucks... (298)
17. 1.Hes a good boy 2.He noticed A not extremely defined Shadow.. 3.Hes got good sight for a dog (300)



18. Aw I thought my dog was the only one to try to eat a shadow before! Granted, it was her own..... (317)
19. Object Permanence is hard... :( (328)
20. When it's face hits the wall...D'AAWWWWWW! (336)
21. I really love it when someone says something, and then someone else copy and pastes said comment and gets upvotes..  
No /s, that shit is funny lol (353)
22. Darkness falls!!!! And majik begins.. (366)
23. I remember those... (371)
24. ... then I got a PC. (372)
25. ... like NetHack. (387)
26. I'm sorry, charming...taint-man? (409)
27. Oh hellooooo... (420)
28. You had no idea about plot, you knew it's a good one and that's the best way to watch a movie. I just stopped watching trailers, teasers, looking photos about movies/shows a while ago. Because I read it somewhere on reddit and also realized myself that they totally ruins the fun of it. Just a very short description about what is movie about and its score on IMDb and Rottentomatoes... (441)
29. Darkness falls!  
And magic stirs  
As we become ...  
THE CREATURES OF THE NIGHT (447)
30. "Darkness falls...and magic stirs! As we become...creatures of the night!!!" (450)
31. I don't think Etsy has Jake Gyllenhaal masks.....yet. (465)
32. I feel bad for the left-over yarn kid that has to pretend they're not jealous of that dolphin/seal and the.. lobster outfit? Don't trust crocheters at all! Quality yarning here! (466)
33. Depends really... 1k-2k will probably get you an army in a good spot. But you will eventually want more armies or make your first on bigger. So it keeps going up. I have last time I put time into counting how much retail it would be I am sitting at \$5k probs more now. Not including the paints and carrying cases and shelves to put said armies on. (488)
34. Boyfriend got me addicted to WOW... (498)
35. What is that supposed to mean?  
Art is art, and gameplay mechanics are just that. That is all there is to that game.  
As a matter of fact when I was young the christian baptist school I was going to said we weren't allowed to have Pokemon cards because the "names were satanic" (I'm talking first series and fossil era).  
...So I really can't see where you are drawing the line is all I'm saying. (528)
36. I think it's more that magic can be a slightly more complicated game. While some seven year olds could learn mtg...the other fact is that magic tends to have a lot more valuable cards involved, and more costs in general. (531)
37. or... hear me out... pokemon is a simpler game. (536)
38. There's always someone looking to waste some money on frivolous things... (556)
39. No black...it's shades of green, blue, and yellow. (637)
40. Here we go again... (638)
41. To put your mind at ease...the yarn I used. (639)
42. The darker lines... are those purple? (645)
43. Can you make me one... This looks so fun. (660)

44. Thanks! I have no experience at all... think I'll definitely take longer to finish them. Well, I'm gonna start practicing and learn asap! (663)
45. Yes ... I agree with fhis
46. Are you... purposely trying to get on r/iamverysmart? (740)
47. Joke guys relax damn....typo.
48. Best part about reddit....NO ONE ACTUALLY LINKED A SOURCE. (743)
49. Redditor for 1 year... You should expect this by now. (750)
50. I open the comments fhis.... (759)
51. Seriously though... I want this )
52. Hi yeup, Paperchase it is. I got it at their Vancouver store maybe a month ago for \$2... there may be one or two left in stores? )
53. There is no more, OP uses it all to get it to line up perfectly..
54. Like
55. (•\_•)  
 (•\_•)>┌─■-■  
 (┌─■\_■)  
 ... This
56. I think whether or not the pattern lines up depends on the dimensions of the actual gift you are wrapping?  
 a\_stitch\_in\_lime:  
 Dimensions of the gift and the length of the pattern repeat on the paper  
 And I am the one talking about aligning the gift at the correct angle within the wrapping paper..... )
57. That's how I was taught to wrap by my dad when I was a kid. So I find it strange that so many people don't line up their wrapping paper.. enough to up vote this thread..  
 Sometimes when there isn't enough wrapping paper to fold over I just turn it around till it matches up. Which is more difficult than folding it though. )
58. Nice..... )
59. Yeah, really... show us the OTHER side. )
60. wait a minute... )
61. The cactus and tree at the right aren't perfectly lined up... )
62. Iuno, just thought it was cute... guess it doesn't make sense but cactus and dinos are like super in right now, they are the new owls and wishbones )
63. My life's goal... )
64. Seal the entire line with tape.... Mmmm, that would look nice. )
65. Well.. that is mild. )
66. Your definition of perfect is different than mine... )
67. Huh... I didn't realize that was mildly interesting... I guess I should be posting pictures of the wrapping my wife does as she's always making sure this happens... )
68. Almost lined up perfectly... )
69. wait a minute... how do we know it's not cut on both sides so you could trick us! release your long-form wrapping paper certificate! )

70. Aaaaaaauuuuuuuuuuggghhhh.. lucky! )
71. That looks great, to bad nobody else is going to notice... )
72. All hail /u/hipporox, All hail /u/hipporox... )
73. Odd....this is front page worthy?!?!? 🐾 )
74. It lined up well but not perfectly... I can still see the seam.
75. This isn't that far fetched... I've wrapped things where it lined up. I think if it was conspiracy they would have made it line up more perfectly
76. Based on what I've heard from people with cats... One head. And it would look proud as hell.
77. They did the math.....wrong
78. "...B-Baka!"
79. Hey, I understood that reference...now I'm annoyed.
80. I like it...
81. I got fucking roasted this time... usually i see it coming
82. You.. you are a duck
83. I watched the episode yesterday...
84. Spoiler: Rickon survives.... but becomes a wight walker. He gets married to a female wight walker, they have a lil wight crawler, & adopt a wight dire wolf. They live happily ever after beyond the wall.
85. That's some hawk sour grapes!  
"Meh, it was probably too gamey anyway..." )
86. Nah it's Arjen Robben. You know he's gonna do that turn, and you know he's gonna curve it in with his left foot, you just never know when...
87. Squirrels and rabbits try this with my shepherd/heeler mix .. it doesn't work all the time.
88. Yeah, if you're bugged by those... do something yourself instead of letting a cat torture them to death slowly.
89. Dodge... dart? Dodge... or dart?
90. Oh give me a home where the Bugatti roam  
Where the Dodge and the Aston Martin play... )
91. Oh shit!  
Grandpa narrowly avoided crushing a squirrel yesterday in his golf cart because of it dashing back and forth in front of it... explains everything! )
92. Same thing they try to do when I smash them with my car, right? Run back and forth so they get hit no matter what.. if only they knew I wasn't actually chasing them.
93. Damn...Fat cat has some awesome footwork, though!
94. Cat: He zigged when I thought he was going to zag....clever bastard...  
Squirrel: Holy shit, holy shit! What the fuck is going on!! Ahhhhhhhhhh! )
95. The cat on the other hand...
96. But cats can climb trees, so  
he just got his ass handed to him on the ground...  
...now you want that cat to chase down a squirrel on its home territory? ))
97. If only this squirrel could have taught Rickon Stark how to zigzag...
98. They're also criminals... but I assume some of them are good people.

99. Psssh... you can't deny Donalds pussy passes; they'll just grab em up anyways.
100. "He jukes left! Right! Left! Right! Le... oh no!! He's dropped the ball and stopped to dig a tiny hole just a yard from the endzone!"
101. this has to be sped up...right?
102. Not even a little...fitter cats can be way faster than that. Evolutionary selection for being faster than the little critter you're chasing was literally the difference between life and death.
103. Cat's like "dammit...he did it again"
104. Not in my house, ah ah ah..
105. It's like hearing about Star Wars and not seeing it, and watching the first movie, then someone casually brings up Darth Vader being Dad.  
unless youre dutch... vader means father )
106. That's what Rickon should have done...
107. Had one actually run under my dog awhile back. It got away. But he also caught one not too long ago.....
108. Wave...wave...wave...wave...wave...wave...wavvee...WAVVVEEE!!!
109. finally..speed own....
110. And....the Cat's like "Fuck it,I did my job"
111. Not sure if I'd call this a "technique"... they do the same thing with oncoming traffic. It often doesn't work.☺
112. My cat caught a squirrel once... it bit him back and he was terrified and ran away.
113. That squirrel is me playing Metal Gear Solid.  
Guards: "holy shit!!! I am gonna kill you!!! I am gonna fuck you... Huh... Must be my imagination." )
114. .... And escaped. It didn't run in a straight line. Out maneuvered the cat. That's an escape technique.
115. Close...Westchester County.
116. Dude what the hell? I met this girl last night and she was singing stacys mom, it later came on her pandora. Now you mention it he next day and I haven't thought of that song in over a decade... fucking weird
117. Chad already has her... sad reeee
118. No, That's an Alolan Exeggutor...
119. Err... umm... just a vinyl disc... in my own personal experience...
120. A synthetic plastic, more brittle than silicone which is used for other ten inch pieces of plastic...
121. Record of a band that plays the blues...
122. I got you, fam ...
123. Uhh we can forget ours...
124. How many years ago? It wasn't there in January, 2017....
125. here you go ... <http://i.imgur.com/VU97y2D.jpg>
126. Please don't say Fresno. The air quality is so bad that you probably caught some respiratory diseases going up that high...
127. Highest\* palm tree.. Shame

128. As someone who had two of these in our side yard that were only about 20' high when we moved in, and in 12 years later became at least 40' high...
129. Oh... that's uh.... well... huh
130. Well.. it's definitely not in Florida.