Orality and Scripturality of Telephony and SMS

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0. Introduction

The boom of telephone-mediated communication (TMC) marked decisively the 20th century. Interpersonal communication has experienced an unprecedented evolution, if not a mutation, through telephony. The notion of computer-mediated communication emerged at the beginning of the 1980s in the academic world to qualify the new forms of communication, a part of which is TMC. This environment viewed the computer as a simple vehicle or “medium” and did not distinguish the different types of CMC. Since then, it has become rather absurd to omit the singularity of each of these types and to ignore the influence of the medium on the nature of communication itself (Ko 1996; Panckhurst 1999). The studies tend to converge in one conclusion: the continuous evolution of information processing entails changes in the genres of speech and writing.

By providing a communication tool in every household, TMC enabled long distance communication between individuals. It subsequently evolved into a mobile tool: while the pre-existing mediated distant exchange typical of telephony was kept intact, the reachability of individuals increased. TMC was restricted to oral communication until it offered a new written service in the form of text messaging. From that moment on, the mediated distant exchange became asynchronous.

This chapter exposes the features of two main telephone functions: (mobile) calls and texting. We will first highlight the properties of phone conversations from a linguistic point of view, taking into account the evolution of the object “telephone”. This article also considers the main questions of research and studies carried out on phone conversations. We will then present the short message service (SMS) as one form of CMC, detailing its special characteristics. We will then look into the question of orality and scripturality which remains a highly controversial issue, mainly regarding CMC. We will propose to overcome the traditional dichotomy by applying the models of Koch and Oesterreicher (2001) and Herring (2001). Finally, we will present the results of our own research and the perspectives in this field.

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³ Computer-mediated communication.
1. Defining Telephone Communication

1.1. Language and Telephony

The telephone is an object of everyday life which served for a long time exclusively aural communication. Progressively, textual functions have been added: first came SMS, then with the arrival of smartphones, the Voice Over IP systems and the text message services via Internet (such as Whatsapp, Viber, etc.). In this first part, we will elaborate on the oral communication via telephone, transmitted traditionally through cables and waves. We will then focus on communication via SMS.

To raise the issue of the traits of oral telephonic communication, it is necessary to recapitulate some basic aspects of so-called spontaneous oral communication, which we take from Bouraoui (2008). The concept of spontaneous orality is used in linguistics for every oral production that has not been prepared extensively (like, for instance, a talk learned by heart, or a text read from a teleprompter), as opposed to what is traditionally thought of scripturality. The specific features usually attributed to orality have been described abundantly. The following, non-exhaustive list is based on the works of Blanche-Benveniste (1997) and Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1990).

a) The linearity of the sentence: once a word has been pronounced, it is no longer possible to go backwards to correct it, to add or to remove elements in its context, in contrast to what is possible in written discourse. This particularity of orality entails consequences on the speaker’s production strategies. For example, every attempt to correct an element ex post provokes an unexpected structure of the utterance. Likewise, the speaker may need to pause in order to plan the progression of their utterance.

b) The flexibility of syntax: many constructions considered as defective in written discourse are accepted in oral discourse. Among the most frequent examples, we can cite the omission of the negation particle “ne” (95% of omission according to Blanche-Benveniste 1997: 39), indirect interrogation, use of “est-ce que” questions, etc.

c) Cleft sentences: “On appelle clivages, depuis les années 1980, les divers dispositifs par lesquels un élément est séparé et distingué du reste de sa construction” (Blanche-Benveniste 1997: 96). Cleft sentences are mostly found in the structure “it/this is X who/that/whom/which, where/when Y.” Par exemple “It was Peter who lent us the money (not Paul).” (Thomson and Martinet, 1986:78, quoted in Nowakowska, 2002:4).

d) Use of prosody: Prosody is a generic term to designate the variation of acoustic parameters of the voice. It has multiple uses, some of which can influence on the structure of the utterance. For instance, there is the possibility to mark the interrogation solely by rising intonation. In this way, the speaker can avoid the use of means belonging to the written register, like in French interrogatives using est-ce que (Est-ce que tu viens pour les vacances?) which is substituted by a rising intonation (Tu viens pour les vacances?).

e) Use of interjections: Interjections are words used to express the speaker’s emotions (e.g., “super!”) or to reproduce sounds (then called onomatopoeia). For a long time, it was thought that interjections could be used in written discourse as well, but mostly to
render orally produced utterances or to simulate them (like in comics). As we will see in the second part dedicated to the new means of written communication, interjections occupy a special place in written discourse that goes far beyond imitation of orality (e.g., excessive vowel lengthening).

f) **Noise**: The reception of oral production may suffer various perturbations according to the quality of the channel and the context: noisy environment, “parasites” on a telephone line…

g) Finally, **disfluencies**: as indicated by their etymology, disfluencies correspond to any interruption or perturbation of fluency, i.e. of the “normal” progress of spontaneous oral production. In contrast to other phenomena specific of spontaneous spoken language (such as clitics, for instance), their occurrences are not produced voluntarily by the speaker. The generic term disfluency covers a disparate amount of phenomena and presents multiple modes of manifestation which we are to present further down. As opposed to mistakes, they mainly occur in spontaneous orality, but not in written discourse. This latter point is contradicted by some precise usages; for instance, the author of a message in an instant messenger (unlike in chat systems) cannot correct themselves since the text appears in real time, character by character, the interlocutor having access to the writing in progress. Note, for instance, the following types of disfluency: hesitation (the classic “euh” or more generally any sound not corresponding to a word and marking a hesitation), silent pauses (a subjective notion of an abnormal long time of silence between two words), repetitions (any repetition of one or more words), and autocorrection (any correction made by the speaker themselves, consisting in an interruption of the ongoing oral production, excluding discursive correction such as “This is Malika no sorry Marika”).

These peculiarities of oral communication must be precised by those defined by the medium telephone. Actually, the face-to-face situation traditionally associated with oral communication is henceforth replaced by a **voice-to-voice** which allows generally to disinhibit the speaker and to release an intimidating discourse usually associated with face-to-face. We will note this as well on the levels of syntax and lexis as on the level of raised issues (Cougnon 2008). As Caron and Caronia explain, “‘Être présent’ ou ‘absent’, ‘être ici’ ou ‘là-bas’ […] ne sont que des étiquettes lexicales qui nécessitent une renégociation” of communicative properties. “Les droits, les obligations, les attentes et même les bonnes manières des participants en vis-à-vis doivent maintenant être négociés en fonction des droits, des obligations et des attentes des ‘participants fantômes’” (2005: 6-7). This phenomenon culminates on the one hand with the answering machine which “offers the vocal cues of speech without the opportunity for feedback from the interlocutor, thus truncating the expected parameters of spoken language” (Baron

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4 Note that the inverse effect is also observable: a **voice-to-voice** inhibiting the speaker due to the lack of paralinguistic (gestural and facial) information. This discomfort is solved in the case of CMWC where gestural and facial information are reintroduced through smileys and images. Thus, paradoxically, the double privation of face and voice of the interlocutor disinhibits even more the speaker than the simple privation of face in oral telephone communication does.
on the other hand with the necessity for the phone owners to manage their not answering a phone call immediately, in particular the obligation to justify it (Licoppe and Heurtin: 2001, Salovaara et al.: 2011).

Finally, oral telephone communication has experienced an important metamorphosis in the passage to mobile phones which transformed deeply the relationship of humans to communication and the relationships between humans. As Ling et al. (2005: 96) explain, “the transition from exclusively land-line based telephony to mobile telephony has made interpersonal communication more commonplace”. This common character of communication born from mobile phone communication modifies even language in its private nature: we have moved “from one mobile per household, to one per person, to even, in some cases, multiple mobiles per person” (Haddon 2001: 9). The frequency of telephone conversations rises and the accessibility of people is total. These two features engender a pressure on the speaker who is forced to higher and faster output. These phenomena impact the interpersonal relationships, personalities and even language itself, which is directly affected by daily stress. There has already been conducted a lot of research on adolescents’ use of telephony who are particularly concerned (Ling 2005; Ling and Yttri 2002; Rautiainen and Kasesniemi 2000; Ling et al 1999).

The accessibility of the other to entail communication also engenders a completely new phenomenon: the death of silence. Caron and Caronia (2005: 38) precise: “Les gens semblent pris par une certaine incapacité de supporter un moment de répit, un moment de réflexion, un moment porteur, un moment pour soi…un silence”. In this way, messages and calls are decreasingly less carriers of semantic content (dating, planning, daily organization, declarations, etc.), but rather of simple maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

The fact that telephone communication does not take course face-to-face entails consequences from a cognitive point of view. Several studies show indeed that the use of the telephone complicates the interaction, making it more difficult to access for children younger than 5 years and for the elderly (Ballaga et al.: 2009, Hashizume and Kaneko: 2008): besides the sole action of oral communication, there are also tasks like the manipulation of the telephone to join the interlocutor, handle the reference to objects in the immediate context, open and close the dialogue channel beyond any contextual evidence. On the other hand, the telephone user unconsciously creates a mental representation of their physically absent interlocutor, which supposes an additional cognitive load. This phenomenon is particularly important in the case of phone use when driving a car, a context which has attracted the attention of several studies (namely Trbovich and Harbluk 2003). Yet it is known (Sherer 1986) that the cognitive load has a direct impact on the quality of spontaneous oral production: when it is too high, it provokes difficulties in oral production, observable especially in disfluencies.

Finally, from a more technical point of view, the sound transmission by telephone reduces in a largely its quality by reduction of the frequency range and their compression: the consequence is a degradation of information such as intonation, of which we know the importance in communication.

Taking these parameters into account is thus important for studies on the specific features of oral interactions via telephone. Furthermore, mobile phones have also introduced another
revolution, this time in the written communication, the particularities of which we will present in the following sections.

1.2 Text messaging, a Computer-Mediated Communication Type

1.2.1 Some important terminology

Over the last few years, CMWC or Computer-Mediated Written Communication has become a subject of intensive discussion, as well with regard to its practice as to the controversies it triggers in the media, the population and the academic world, to a point that makes it henceforth impossible for linguists to ignore. Despite the exaltation that often presents CMWC as a homogeneous entity, there are very distinct types of new written productions.

CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) is defined in different ways that sometimes seem incomplete or imprecise. Herring (2007) suggests the following succinct definition: “Text-based human-human interaction mediated by networked computers or mobile telephony.” This might be suitable for our study subject, but it is still inadaptable since it includes the written (“text-based”) in an acronym that does not allude to this but refers to any other type of computer-mediated communication, among which teleconferences, voice chats in multiplayer games, etc. We observe the same problem with Anis (2002), who describes CMC as being “échanges dont les messages, affranchis des supports matériels habituels de l’écriture grâce à des codages numériques, sont véhiculés par des réseaux télématiques”. On their part, Véronis and Guimier De Neef (2006) refuse the designation CMC in favor of NWCF (“New Written Communication Forms”, in French NFCE or “nouvelles forms de communication écrite”), covering the totality of written communication spread via digital means (websites, e-mails, message boards, instant messengers, SMS, blogs, etc.) – firstly because the designation CMC does not offer direct reference to the written code and thus encompasses all oral communication. Secondly, it does not include the domain of telephony (which they do not consider as a computer) and therefore excludes SMS. Finally, the designation referring originally to CMC, “mediated” meaning “serve as intermediate”, is in fact a rare use of the participle which competes too often with the meaning “popularized through the media”.

We find their reasoning interesting with regard to written communication. Concerning the exclusion of SMS from the domain of information technology, the mobile phone comprising its use for SMS is a technology that presents electronic components and offers similar functions as a computer. It is in some way a mini-computer allowing to write and to send SMS, offering orthographic autocorrection, punctuation signs and even emoticons. We thus believe, following Bieswanger (2007), that the medium is indeed a computer. Yet we refuse the adoption of the acronym NWCF for several reasons: firstly, the adjective new is only appropriate for a limited time; we think it does not fit for a type such as e-mail which was introduced about 40 years ago and popularized 20 years ago. Then, NWCF does not refer to information technology or to electronic means; it does not make any allusion to the medium of communication. Yet, as explain Höflich and Gebhardt (2005: 14f.), the vehicle always influences in one way or another on the language: it “n’est pas un simple véhicule (neutre) pour la transmission de messages. [II] montre toujours un sens méta-communicatif qui a un effet sur le contenu de la communication.”
The notion of language vehicle is essential in that it can refer as well to a machine (the medium or channel of communication) as to a human; all types of CMWC are mediated by a machine (a computer or mini-computer). In some cases, such as e-mail and SMS, it is merely the actual mediation; in others (chat, message boards, network sites, etc.), there are two consecutive mediations operating: the one by computer and the human one (we think of moderators who modify by selection or censorship the content of messages).

We wanted to solve this terminological problem proposing CMWC, which not only adequates the acronym and its definition, but also conserves the relevant elements found in literature: it is indeed a form of communication whose realization is written and whose influencing vehicle is the computer, in its broadest sense.

1.2.2 A little history

Research on CMC begins in the 1970s with the seminal work of Turoff and Hiltz (1977). CMWC starts to be a prolific research area in the 1980s, when e-mail and chat massively enters the workspace (Goodman and Sproull 1990; Rice et al. 1989). The approach is mainly sociologic, focusing on the working environment and often concluding negative influence of CMC on human relationships.

From the 1990s on, research – still mainly in sociology – becomes more objective and oriented toward the impact of CMWC on social relationships (familial, intergenerational, loving, etc.) and the construction of identities (children and adolescents) (Rheingold 1993; Devisme and Dussarps 2010; Paragas 2003; Rivière 2002). Some researches such as Wei et al. (2010), Moynihan et al. (2010) and Bamba and Barnes (2007) analyze human behavior in CMWC situations, e.g. the use of commercial messages via SMS.

Toward the end of the 1990s, linguists become interested in CMWC. Mondada (1999), Gains (1999) and Herring (1998) engage in defining the linguistic features associated with these new practices; their studies focus mainly on stylistic and interactional questions. With the rise of the Internet, interpersonal communication intermingles with group or even mass communication: more heterogeneous forms of CMWC appear, such as message boards and social network sites where the bounds between private and public life (messages addressed to a limited number of persons vs. messages addressed to a community) become blurred. This diversification of CMWC features leads researchers to reevaluate their vision of a totality of common features and to consider them rather a quantity of new communicative forms showing each one its own features. These can be found also in SMS, whose particularities – mainly the simplifications in the graphic code – have been studied by Fairon et al. (2006b), Frehner (2008) and Panckhurst (2009). Logically, this simplification process tends to alarm media, parents and educators who worry about the impact of new the written practices on the mastery of orthography.

The wave of anxiety entails a new drive and new directions for research which finally overcomes the simple answers to mediatic or pedagogic requirements affecting simply linguistics (David and Goncalves 2007; Volckaert-Legrier et al. 2006; Thurlow 2003). From now on, research is about finding out whether daily practice of CMWC modifies profoundly orthography or even language. Bouillaud et al. (2007), for instance, studied the impact of
CMWC on orthography in general and on children’s orthography in school compositions in particular. Their research, based on the results of dictations in 3 classes of different levels, suggests that there is indeed a correlation between mastering CMWC and mastering orthography, but this correlation being positive, as opposed to what is commonly believed. It would be an additional competence, a digraphie (Jaffré 2010). Panchhurst (1998) studies orthography in e-mails and proves that users can easily happen to mix intentional variation and spelling errors, allowing themselves so-called controlled deviations from the norm that could actually hide important knowledge gaps. Fairon et al. (2006c), on their part, are more cautious and conclude from their analysis of an SMS corpus (from Fairon et al. 2006c: 41): “presque tout semble permis dans les limites imposées par l’intelligibilité, par le destinataire, des formes employées. Seules certaines tendances qualifiées de ‘confusions’ (volontaires ou non) ont pu être dégagées. Si l’on veut se garder de toute extrapolation hâtive, il faut donc éviter, de façon générale, de parler d’erreurs.” Cougnon (2010, 2012) equally concludes that in the majority of cases, it is impossible to decide whether it is an actual error or a particular strategy of CMWC, especially when the strategy abridges forms, which is simply a way to deal with the requirements of the medium.

More recently, linguistic studies have diversified and raised heterogeneous subjects such as aspects of dialogue (Rivens Mompean, 2007), minority languages (Vold Lexander 2007, 2009; Berruto 2005), code switching (Cougnon 2011; Atifi, 2007), diacritics (Van Compernolle, 2011), adverbs (Guimier 2009), etc.

Compared to other types of CMWC, SMS was late to arouse interest in the academic world (mostly in the 2000s). The pioneering works in this area mainly originate from the Scandinavian countries where the new mobile technologies have been divulged, notably among the younger age groups. These studies, as we have seen for CMWC in general, concerned primarily sociology and focused on SMS as a device in the relationships between young people or on its importance for identity construction. Initially, the studies focused on examples of messages without relying on a corpus (Anis 2001; Cortelazzo 2000, 2001; Davis 1991). Since then, research on SMS has attracted the interest of corpus linguistics which converted it into an independent research object (Fairon et al. 2006a; Guimier de Neef and Fessard 2007; Tagg 2009).

1.2.3 SMS and CMC

Concretely, we categorize under the name CMWC communication via SMS, e-mail, instant messaging, chat, message board, Social Network Sites, and other types such as MUD (Multi-User Dungeons) which we will not elaborate upon. These different communicative modes have features in common with SMS.

- **E-mail**: E-mail is the oldest type of CMWC and still one of the most used. It is a system of message exchange between users who have an electronic mailbox. E-mail was initially very close to the style and format of a “traditional” letter and does not present a style similar to that of SMS, which is shorter and refined. Yet SMS shares with e-mail its formulae of
politeness, opening and closure of the message, which are (as opposed to what is commonly believed) particularly present in SMS (Cougnon 2015).

- **Instant messaging and chat:** Chat is a service of live, collective textual communication via Internet invented in 1998 (###????###) and based on a common subject or interest. Instant messaging is an interpersonal textual communication service created in 1996 allowing each user to entail a dialogue with the persons of choice by request. Most instant messaging and chat messages are limited in characters (normally between 2000 and 5000): this particularity is similar to SMS which is limited to 160 characters. As opposed to e-mail, these forms work mainly on the conversational mode of short questions and answers, which is also the case for SMS.

- **Message board:** Online discussion forums or message boards appeared in the late 1990s. They are public sites similar to interactive platforms on which the visitors can contribute to discussion subjects linked to fields of interest (ecology, video games, etc.) or to specific target groups (young parents, “emo” adolescents, etc.). The spontaneity of conversation brings message board communication close to SMS.

- **Social Network Sites:** Social Network(ing) Sites (SNSs) are online services allowing individuals to create a (semi-)public profile and to establish relationships with other individuals signed up in the same system. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+ are representative examples of SNSs. The reason why we are particularly interested in the phenomenon of SNSs, which have not initially been created as a means of communication, but as a platform for social relationships, is that the services have since evolved: most of them do indeed encourage conversational exchanges similar to chat and SMS.

The use of SMS started to spread significantly only at the end of the 1990s. This communication system linked almost exclusively to the mobile phone allows sending messages in packages of 160 characters (this limit can be exceeded, the provider charging then a 2nd SMS). This type of communication, even though asynchronous, is also defined by the immediacy of exchange, which entails a promptness of reaction and thus a coarse style (i.e. without rereading) and a virtual absence of formal requirements (conventions) which leads to a more familiar register. Its organizational norm is specific in comparison to other CMWC types: it is the only service that requires no previous inscription and that does not filter the messages. It allows for mobility, being the only CMWC type that can be practiced whatever the place and the situation, given that the only requirement is a mobile phone.\(^5\) SMS is also to be distinguished by its encoding system which does not pass via a computer keyboard. Character encoding in SMS can be done in two ways: either by the multi-tap technique or by a system of autocompletion (predictive text entry)\(^6\).

### 1.2.4 SMS Properties

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\(^5\) This specificity tends to disappear with the massive use of smartphones allowing for mobile consultation of e-mails, social networks etc.

\(^6\) See above: the other CMWC types are in the meantime contaminated by the properties of smartphones.
In the following, we will specify the features of the written code of SMS.\footnote{Note that these features may in part be attached to other CMWC types.}

a) **Abbreviations**: The phenomenon of abbreviation can be explained by the necessity for rapidity imposed by the context of SMS (because of its use amidst daily practices), next to the difficulty of encoding via a keyboard, the constraints of space and costs encouraging a brief style, at least in time, if not also in the number of characters. To categorize these phenomena related to abbreviation, we will base ourselves on the typology developed by Tatossian (2008) and Berruto (2005), which we will complete and adapt to the specific context of SMS:

- Graphic abbreviations without phonic incidence: apocope (dim for sp. dime), aphaeresis (lut for fr. salut), syncope (aple for fr. appelle)
- Graphic abbreviations with phonic incidence: phonetization, i.e. graphic representation of phonetic values by a character (kb for cat. que bé), by number (6 for it. dove sei), by sign (pl@ for fr. plate) and by a spelling nearest to the actual pronunciation, to a regional accent or to a special style (fr. representation of /ca/, /co/, /cu/, /qu/, /k/ by /k/)
- Specialization of characters: creation of acronyms (tvtb for it. ti voglio tanto bene, bal for fr. boîte aux lettres)
- Management of white space: tendency to delete white spaces (jemarche for je marche) and to bring back punctuation signs such as the apostrophe and the hyphen (j arrive for j’arrive)

b) **Emoticons**: an emoticon or smiley consists in a combination of characters, mostly punctuation signs that represent (head inclined 90° clockwise) facial expressions and emotions like bursts of laughter, winks, pouts etc. The concept of the little smiling face, initially yellow, originates in the Hippie era in San Francisco where it was used as a mascot; it was reused lately as a badge representing the music style house. Consequently, when computer scientists wanted to disambiguate the tone of their first messages exchanged on private servers, aiming to “matérialiser les ressentis” (Dejond 2006: 28), they immediately thought of the little face and the most simple way to schematize it by means of a keyboard.

c) **Punctuation, uppercase writing, echo characters**: The context of SMS, as well as in other CMWC types, shows particular uses of punctuation signs. We already mentioned the possibility of facial expressions by emoticons. They can also hold a more intense expressive function than in traditional written contexts, adding some paralinguistic information like in the case of multiplication of one sole character. Punctuation in its rhythmic function is observed to be underused. The writers focus exclusively on the expressive and prosodic functions (exclamation and question marks, ellipsis, etc.) The extension does not only concern punctuation, but also the Latin characters: following Tatossian (2008), we will name this phenomenon caractères echo (echo characters). It often occurs with interjections (like sp. noooooooo). This multiplication concerns vowels as well as consonants, which leads
us to conclude that this phenomenon does not only represent an imitation of orality but also an intensification of transmitted emotion. The use of uppercase characters can represent either alphabetical pronunciation (in the logic of phonetization of each character) or contribute to expressivity; there is actually a certain implicit convention common of all different CMWC types suggesting that uppercase text parts should be understood as being shouted. This convention offers thus a paralinguistic information of size. As Marcoccia (2004: 2f.) explains: “On retrouve dans ce procédé la fonction d’amplification du verbal par l’accentuation paralinguistique.” Tatossian (2008) precises that the uppercase characters reflect “l’exacerbation d’une émotion – négative comme un sentiment de colère, ou positive comme la joie.”

2. About Orality and Scripturality

2.1 A Historical Distinction between Orality and Scripturality

Following the major theories in the field, researchers working on the new communication media (Collot and Belmore 1996; Yates 1996) have soon tried to situate the new written practices in an intermediate space between orality and scripturality, considering a continuum whose extremities would be written discourse (and asynchronous types of CMWC) on the one hand and spoken discourse (and synchronous types of CMWC) on the other. Anis (1998) suggests considering electronic communication as a “hybrid” between written and spoken. These conceptions follow the traditional dichotomous model presenting written and spoken as two opposed manifestations of a sole phenomenon: language. In the traditional conception, CMWC is typically a written manifestation of language. Fig. 1, taken from Baron (1998: 137), illustrates some fundamental points of the dichotomous model spoken/written.
As a reaction to this dichotomous model, another movement tried to reverse radically this tendency, exposing the similarities between CMWC and orality. For the case of French, we mention e.g. Anis (1998), Luzzati (1991), Marcoccia (2004) and Panckhurst (1998, 2007). Some linguists, among them Ko (1996), stated a clearer convergence of CMWC and spoken discourse, based on the fact that both forms of communication take place in real time, as opposed to older written communication forms like letters and postcards.

Likewise, other authors sought to approach the new communication media to what we call “langage ordinaire” (colloquial language), a solution often used to elude the spoken/written dichotomy. Gadet (1989: 3) defines the “français ordinaire” as follows: “Ce n’est bien sûr pas le français soutenu, ni recherché, ni littéraire, ni puriste. Mais ce n’est pas non plus (pas seulement) le français oral ou parlé, puisqu’il peut s’écrire. Pas davantage le français populaire, ramené à un ensemble social. C’est davantage le français familier, celui dont chacun est porteur dans son fonctionnement quotidien, dans le minimum de surveillance sociale : la langue de tous les jours.”

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<tr>
<th>Writing (Endophoric)</th>
<th>Speech (Exophoric)</th>
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<td><strong>SOCIAL DYNAMICS:</strong></td>
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<td>separated in time and space</td>
<td>face-to-face</td>
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<td>objective</td>
<td>interpersonal</td>
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<td>monologue</td>
<td>dialogue</td>
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<td><strong>FORMAT:</strong></td>
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<td>durable</td>
<td>ephemeral</td>
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<td>scannable</td>
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<td>planned</td>
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<td>highly structured</td>
<td>loosely structured, including repetitive</td>
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<td><strong>GRAMMAR:</strong></td>
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<td>complex syntax</td>
<td>simpler syntax</td>
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<tr>
<td>deals with past and future</td>
<td>deals with present</td>
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<td><strong>STYLE:</strong></td>
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<td>formal</td>
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<td>argument-oriented</td>
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<td>abstract</td>
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Finally, CMWC has also been characterized as being “produced spontaneously” (Cougnon and Fairon, 2010). The occasionally high frequency of less formal traits in such writings, associated with other tendencies (the desire to transmit a certain form of expressivity, the dialogic context, the absence of normative authority, the desire to belong to a sociocultural group, etc.) has indeed made emerge this notion.

All these tendencies show a traditional and dichotomous conception of communicative modes. The modern perspective which we prefer and which we will present in the following considers these modes on a continuum according to the communicative situation.

### 2.2 A Modern Perspective

As Höflich and Gebhardt (2005: 23) put it: “un e-mail ou un SMS peut ressembler quelquefois plus à une lettre et d’autres fois plus à un appel téléphonique.” Indeed, some characteristics of SMS production seem to stem from orality, showing features of spontaneous or even colloquial communication. It is therefore difficult to define SMS in terms of genre. Following Charaudeau and Mainengueneau (2002: 280), we believe that to describe SMS, and CMWC in general, we must take into account “l’ancrage social du discours, [...] sa nature communicationnelle, [...] les régularités compositionnelles des textes [et] les caractéristiques formelles des textes produits.” From a discursive perspective, the functionality of CMWC “à l’implicite, sur présupposés partagés, sous-entendus et inférences conversationnelles” (Gadet 2004: 36), comparable to the functionality of spoken discourse (as opposed to written discourse which tends to decontextualize, imposing explicitness), is manifest and recurrent, but these features are neither regular nor omnipresent; they do not represent a constitutive trait.

It is too dichotomous to split communication into “oral” and “written” (Cougnon and Ledegen 2008) since it risks to confound medium of communication and properties of language. We follow here Gadet (2004: 33) stating that: “Il faut avant tout opposer le médium [...] et la conception [...]. Le médium relève de la dichotomie, la conception du continuum. Aussi un énoncé d’oral médial peut-il avoir des caractéristiques discursives d’écrit, ou l’inverse.” We situate ourselves therefore in continuation of Véronis and Guimier De Neef (2006), who base their conclusions on the works of Blanche-Benveniste and refute the argument that these new forms of communication stem from an “oralized written” or from a “written orality”. For them, the question is all about registers and frequencies; they explain: “lorsque l’oral devient formel, on y retrouve les tournures caractéristiques de l’écrit [...], et à l’inverse l’écrit informel utilise les tournures fréquentes à l’oral (double marquage, clivées, etc.).” As the studies on e-mails conducted by Panckhurst (1998, 1999) show, we find in these writings informal traits alternating with formal traits, like the negation particle “ne” which can be omitted or maintained. Furthermore, certain specific traits of written discourse are all the way present; this is the case, for instance, for interruptions of communication, an option that does not require agreement of the interlocutor or previous notification. Moreover, some fundamental traits of orality are absent, for instance hesitations and (non-functional) repetitions; in sum, everything that can be erased in writing.
We will not speak either of informal, colloquial or spontaneous communication. The designation as spontaneous would imply that there is no linguistic or extralinguistic constraint influencing the language and that the SMS user would express themselves completely freely. Yet there are at least the constraints of adaption to the interlocutor: in this sense, there is a clear difference between formal messages addressed to elderly persons or with a different status, and the messages addressed to classmates and other individuals of the same status. Likewise, the informal or colloquial character of this communication type depends largely of the communicative situation in which the speaker is engaged.

To conclude, we propose to adopt, as explicated previously, the terminology CMWC.

In terms of communicative parameters, these writings are situated mainly toward the pole of linguistic immediacy (Koch and Oesterreicher 2001), as opposed to linguistic distance. This hypothesis is equally corroborated by Weininger and Shield (2004) in their analyses of simultaneous electronic exchanges. We maintain therefore fully the theory of a conceptional continuum between “communicative distance” and “communicative immediacy”. Nevertheless, we bear in mind that even though some phenomena of CMWC are clearly situated toward the pole of immediacy, a large number of other phenomena are positioned rather toward the pole of distance. Hence, our hypothesis is the following: a certain number of linguistic phenomena are assimilable to distance, others to immediacy, which entails the importance of a continuum to situate intermediate phenomena without splitting. This conclusion is also valid for the characterization of telephonic communication. Our hypothesis states the impossibility to categorize CMC and phone conversations as all unified, labeled “spontaneous language”, “oral language” or “colloquial”, “immediate” or “distant”, given the amount of existing variations among CMWC that we want to highlight. In the table of parameters characterizing the communicative behavior of interlocutors, elaborated by Koch and Oesterreicher (2001), we note for instance that even if SMS is clearly a private form of communication (1), the interlocutor (2) is not necessarily an intimate and emotionality (3) is not constantly high (informative SMS of the type j’arrive au train de 15h50).

![Table](image.png)

**Figure 2 – Parameters characterizing the communicative behavior of interlocutors related to the situational and contextual determinants (Koch and Oesterreicher 2001: 586)**
Likewise, the communication via telephone is situated mainly toward the pole of immediacy because it is a rather private and dialogic form of communication and the interlocutors are usually familiar with each other; yet on the other hand, this is not always the case and the communication may be prepared and thematically fixed, which would situate it toward the pole of distance.

2.3 About Features of Orality and Scripturality: a Faceted-Communication Scheme

Instead of forcing the resemblance of CMWC with written or spoken discourse, we prefer to name its concrete features. As we have done above with Koch and Oesterreicher's (2001) model, we propose to detail these specificities by means of the faceted classification scheme by Herring (2001), which is specifically adapted to CMC. Herring believes that language is necessarily affected by technological variables such as synchrony, granularity (the possible length of a text), etc. This is why the author proposes a faceted classification scheme (Herring 2007) of different CMC types corresponding to the medium and the communicative situation. We will complete this classification system.

A first set of parameters comprises technological characteristics, such as the protocols, the servers and the clients of a CMWC service, the material, the software and the interfaces presented to the users. This does not mean that the author admits a strong influence of the medium on the actual communication, quite the contrary, but she insists on the importance to include all the characteristics that may allow defining at the best the specific circumstances entailing a specific communication type. The second set of facets comprises social features such as information about the participants, their relation among each other, the objective and the subject of the communication and the language used.

The following table uses Herring’s facets in order to compare (oral) telephony and (written) SMS. The bold lines mark the differences between the two types, showing that they are indeed rather close to each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facet</th>
<th>SMS</th>
<th>Telephony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymacy</td>
<td>Identity revealed</td>
<td>Identity revealed*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication channels</td>
<td>Text, image</td>
<td>Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoting</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay of response</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Immediacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filters</td>
<td>Yes: number blocking</td>
<td>Yes: number blocking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Linear order of messages</td>
<td>Linear order of messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms</td>
<td>No group moderation, no charter, but implicit politeness conventions</td>
<td>No group moderation, no charter, but implicit politeness conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private/public</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational structure</td>
<td>2 or more**</td>
<td>2 or more**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject/theme</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanency of transcription</td>
<td><strong>Persistent by default</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non persistent by default</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchrony</td>
<td>Asynchronous</td>
<td>Synchronous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximal size</td>
<td>160 characters (additional costs in case of exceedance)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message transmission</td>
<td>Message by message</td>
<td>Message by message</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Exceptions are possible.

** Recent systems allow for grouped sending of SMS and for conference calls.

Note the 4 “variable” lines highlighting the flexibility of the features of these two communication types corresponding to the communicative situation, the addressee, etc.

3. Perspectives

The field of CMC is in full effervescence in the academic world. Worldwide, a growing number of research groups are collecting data originating mainly from their environment and their students. Corpora of considerable size and collected in an objective way are by now rare, especially for the case of SMS, a particularly private material. The international project sms4science\(^8\) coordinated by the UCL (Belgium) offers large SMS corpora (counting, for instance, more than 1 million messages only in the Francophone corpus) in French, Italian, English and German; these corpora are perpetually extended. The corpora can be consulted as a whole or split by country: Belgium, France, Canada, Switzerland, etc. There is also the corpus of National University of Singapore comprising 45.000 messages in English and 31.000 in Chinese. Caroline Tagg (2009) from University of Birmingham elaborated an important SMS corpus in English.

The studies we conducted personally led to two major conclusions with respect to this chapter: the convergence of the digital and the mediatic, and the development of a pluricompetence.

\(^8\) For more information: www.sms4science.org
Firstly, we have to state since the beginning of the 2000s that humans have tended to fuse their media of communication: first including the possibility to send SMS from the computer (via special web services) or to make phone calls (via applications such as Skype). Next, the arrival of smartphones allowed for the use of instant messaging, e-mail and social network sites on the small screen. The mix has been effectuated up to the applications, which, as we can see in the case of Facebook, have fused chat messages and mails. As a consequence, it has become difficult to attribute specific features to a particular type of CMC: the constraints of the restrained keyboard are now also found in all smartphone applications, phone conversations can have the quality offered by the mobile WiFi or also be adorned with a high definition video from a mobile cable computer. Thus, we pose ourselves the question whether a classification of different CMC types can in the future still be pertinent.

Secondly, we have worked a lot on the potential “bad influence” of new communication media on the orthographic competences of young generations, and on the general decline of linguistic competences. To do so, we analyzed corpora of SMS (Cougnon 2015) and Facebook messages (Maskens et al. 2015). We compared the speakers’ productions in different communicative situations. The results obtained by now show that there is a large graphic variation in the speakers’ productions, especially among younger people, but there is no actual incompetence: in the majority of cases, we observe that the speakers do master orthography and that they play with language with the goal to shorten or to transmit expressivity.

Research perspectives in this field are still numerous with regard to the quality and quantity of data collected in the corpora mentioned before. At present, we believe that a totally original research perspective would be to concentrate on diachronic aspects of CMC: How did this communication evolve through time, even in few years? It would imply to elaborate a new corpus of data from a previously studies region in order to apply scrupulously a similar methodology to an identical population. The question is to find out whether such a study is methodologically possible.

Another perspective concerns the possible convergence between new means of communication (like WhatsApp and Viber) with the already more traditional ones: Is Twitter a mode whose linguistic practices have evolved on the basis of SMS or Facebook? In which way do Whatsapp messages and Facebook instant messaging resemble each other, and are they both to bee seen in the tradition of telephony or of written letters? The project What’s up, Switzerland⁹ tries to answer these questions (among others) concerning discursive traditions.

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Research literature


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