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<div align="center">Millennial Sociolinguistics: My Observations</div>

Communication through CMC (computer-mediated conversation) is hazardous. It only takes a single misconstrued text for one to realize the importance of extreme care with typed words; just about everybody who engages with texts and social media can conjure an example where their intentions were taken badly, to disastrous ends. In the absence of body language, tone, and facial expressions, misinterpretations occur with irritating frequency. The commonality of CMC misunderstandings suggests this conclusion: proper grammar is not always adequate for expressing meaning. Many attempts have been made to bridge this gap between CMC and speech; in the last few years alone, punctuation marks such as the love mark ♡?, the doubt point ⸮, and the authority point ꙮ have been proposed[1]. But while academics were inventing fanciful additions to the keyboard, millennials were developing their own tactics for inserting nuance into CMC, no typographical squiggles required. Nevertheless, a negative perception of millennials' command of grammar seems to persist; a Google search for "millennials grammar" produces some positive articles, but more so offers an influx of titles such as "Millennials: are they losing the art of communication?", "Why Do People Insist On Using Horrible Grammar On Social Media?", and "Does grammar matter anymore? (LOL)". Although some observers are quick to accuse millennials of illiteracy or laziness, dissection of these trends reveals that, since

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[1] Everson, Michael; Baker, Peter; Dohnicht, Marcus; Emiliano, António; Haugen, Odd Einar; Pedro, Susana; Perry, David J.; Pournader, Roozbeh, "Proposal to add Medievalist and Iranianist punctuation characters to the UCS" (2016).

millennials engage in CMC at far higher rates than older generations, they have subsequently

developed a number of grammatical quirks intended to mimic the nuances of face-to-face

conversation in CMC. Through examining millennials' treatments of sarcasm and emphasis as

examples, the purposes behind these linguistic trends will be revealed, hopefully explaining if

not outright justifying the phenomena.

It is important beforehand to note what this essay does *not* pertain to. First, "chat-speak"

abbreviations such as BRB, L8ER, G2G, and so on, which were especially popular in the early

2000s, are not included, partially because the trends this essay shall evaluate are relatively

recent, but primarily because chat-speak evolved from a need to circumvent the character

limitation in flip-phones, not the need to mimic face-to-face conversation in CMC. Second, this

essay does not pertain to emojis. Although emoji usage has its own fascinating etiquette, emojis

are by definition not words and are thus difficult to evaluate through a sociolinguistic lens.

Historically, there have been several proposals for "sarcasm punctuation." The

percontation point, or "irony mark" (⸮), was proposed in the 1500s and 1800s[2]; Hervé Bazin

offered up the Greek ψ in 1966[3], and those examples just scratch the surface. Yet millennials

have impacted culture and contemporary life by developing several sarcasm indicators. Two

such developments are the mOcKIng vOIce and intentional misspelligns. In the mOcKIng vOIce,

scattered capital letters visually imitate a sing-song voice, signifying ridicule. In the Twitter

screenshot in **Figure 1**, the student innocently asks

their professor for extra credit; the professor finds this

so laughable that they repeat the student's words in a

failing classes
Me: "Can I get some extra credit?"
Professor: "cAn i GEt SomE eXtRa creDiT?"

Figure 1

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Hervé, Bazin, "Plumons l'oiseau" (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1966) 142.

Today 8:32 AM

UGH mom is driving me crazy

"are you going to get dressed before work?"

nooOOOOoooOOOo I'm just going to go in my boxers

Figure 2

scornful tone. This nuance would have been entirely lost if the author had simply written, *"Me: 'Can I get some extra credit?' Professor: 'Can I get some extra credit?'"* Likewise, the conversation in **Figure 2** between the author and her brother is a textbook example. His subversion of grammar conventions conveys nuances more concisely and more similarly to face-to-face communication than proper grammar would be able to. Gretchen McCulloch, linguist from McGill University, aptly notes that, "Minimalist capitalization, often combined with minimal punctuation, is also a tremendously productive source of sarcasm. If standardly-capitalized and punctuated text is a regular newsreader voice and all-caps and/or repeated punctuation is SHOUTING!!!! or ENTHUSIASM???, then no-caps with no or little punctuation invokes a flat, laconic tone of voice that fits naturally with sarcasm.[4]." These decisions are completely intentional; in fact, millennials crack jokes about their craft (see **Figure 3**). Intentional misspelligns, on the other hand, are usually used to demean the intelligence of a strawman opponent whose character the author assumes. These tongue-in-cheek personas can vary from anti-feminists to literally just birds as a species. The Twitter account WomenAgainstFeminism

Patrick W Charlton
@PatrickCharlto5

when you accidentally type a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence

oh no my aloof and uninterested yet woke and humorous aesthetic

Figure 3

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[4] McCulloch, Gretchen. "A Linguist Explains How We Write Sarcasm on the Internet." The Toast, A Linguist Explains, 25 Oct. 2015, the-toast.net/2015/06/22/a-linguist-explains-how-we-write-sarcasm-on-the-internet/.

(@NoToFeminism), with nearly 180,000 followers, has nearly turned intentional misspelligns into an art. Each of the account's Tweets intentionally misspells the word "feminism" in different ways—implying that anti-feminist women are ignorant enough that they can't spell the name of the movement they decry. Not only are these misspellings humorous, but they also indicate the thought that the author has put into crafting their satire (contrary to the carelessness one might attribute to an author who allows misspellings to slip by.)

WomanAgainstFeminism @NoToFeminism · 9 Feb 2015
I don't need femims women can't be leaders what if they get periods?? They might start a war over a bad reason! a thing men have never done

249　　25K　　34K

WomanAgainstFeminism @NoToFeminism · 21 Sep 2016
I don't need fiemesm it is RUINING ROMANCE!! How are men meant to flirt if they now have to 'care' if the woman is 'interested' or not??

7　　1.5K　　3.3K

As a far less polarizing example, BirdsRightsActivist (@ProBirdRights) utilizes intentional misspelligns to imply that birds are probably not very intelligent:

birdsrightsactivist @ProBirdRights · May 28
im wrap myself into tortilla. i the Danielday Lewis of burtitos.

15　　1.0K　　4.3K

birdsrightsactivist @ProBirdRights · Apr 11
i hate airplane befor it is cool

20　　2.8K　　9.1K

The origin of the author's grudge against birds is, as of today, shrouded in mystery, but through intentional misspelligns, one must admit that their stance is crystal clear.

In the same way that sarcasm is difficult to express through proper grammar, the options for expressing emphases in CMC are few. In face-to-face conversation, emphasis is generally

expressed through tone or a punctuating gesture; in formal writing, italics are preferred. However, texting and social media messaging do not provide tools for typographical emphases, so the only technique remaining is capitalizing full words, a tactic which is generally frowned upon, as it gives the impression that the author is shouting at their reader. However, millennials, who engage in CMC frequently, have developed a way around this, although it again trades grammatical accuracy for function. Two specific methods observed are s t r e t c h i n g and Random capitalization.

Figure 4 is a Facebook message the author received in August, showcasing s t r e t c h i n g. In this case, the act of physically elongating the word "forever" (representing the seemingly-eternal lecture the student is experiencing) functions as a psychomime—that is, a form of onomatopoeia for emotions, thought processes, and states of mind[5]. This is assumed to make up for the lack of prosody, or the tune and rhythm of speech and how these features contribute to meaning, in writing[6]. Similarly, in **Figure 5**, the author's righteous exasperation is conveyed through the elongation of "d u d e."
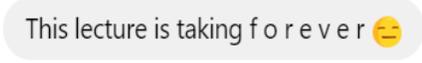
This lecture is taking f o r e v e r 😑

Figure 4
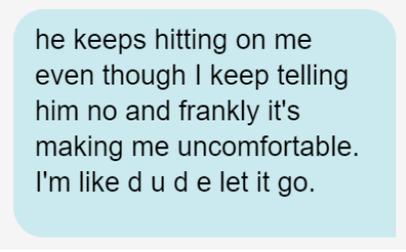
he keeps hitting on me even though I keep telling him no and frankly it's making me uncomfortable. I'm like d u d e let it go.

Figure 5

The next common technique for CMC emphasis is Random capitalization, made all the more dramatic by the fact that millennials generally avoid capitalization in personal correspondences, reserving it instead for what are viewed as overly-formal communications,

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[5] "pyschomime." Glosbe - the multilingual online dictionary. Web. 19 September 2017. https://glosbe.com/en/en/psychomime.

[6] Werry, Christopher C. 1996. "Linguistic and Interactional Features of Internet Relay Chat". In Susan C. Herring, ed., *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives:* 47-64.

such as emailing professors. In **Figure 6**, one reddit.com writer indicates the importance of the "look" with a capital "L." Capitalizing the whole word ("he just gave me this LOOK") would
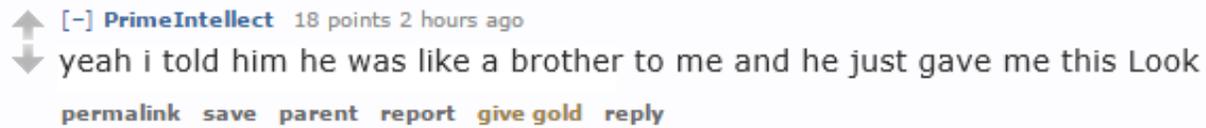

Figure 6

seem overly aggressive, but leaving it entirely lower-case would lose the intent. **Figure 7** is another example of imparting severity/gravitas on a phrase via Random capitalization. Fascinatingly, such grammatically incorrect emphases do not appear in emails or letters, merely because there is no need for them there. It stands to reason that if Facebook or Android
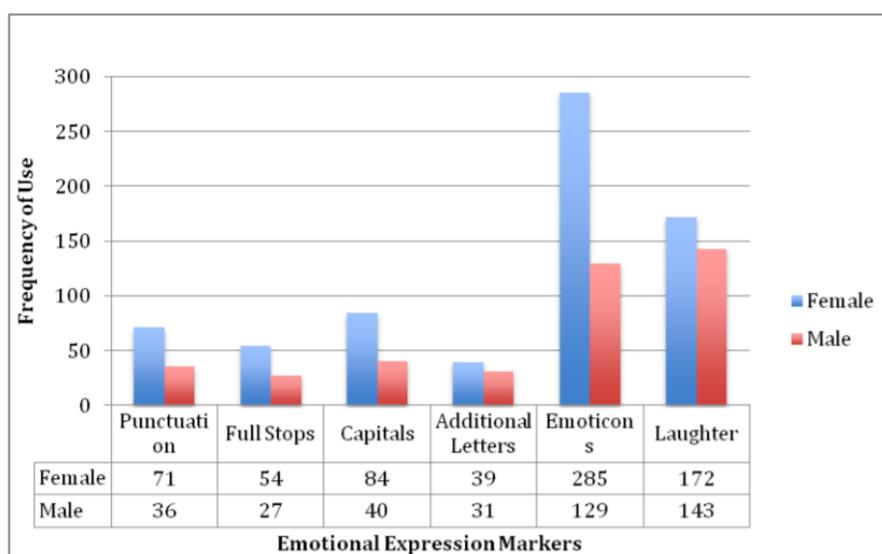

Figure 7

were to provide users with italics, bold, and underline, these techniques might disappear.

At this point, there are likely to be two types of readers of this essay: the ones thinking, "Yes! This is exactly how my friends and I talk!" and the ones wondering, "Why don't I see this around?" For the latter, there are three explanations: code-switching, generic formality, and gender disparities. "Code-switching" is defined as the phenomenon of "shifting the languages you use or the way you express yourself in your conversations" on the basis of environment[7]. This can be as simple as changing languages when encountering a language barrier, or it can be more intricate, such as making an effort not to swear around children. People of all races, classes, ethnicities, ages, and cultural backgrounds naturally engage in code-switching, and millennials are no exception. In general, millennials do not expect individuals outside of their demographic to understand the way that they type, most likely because there is the perception among

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[7] Thompson, Matt. "Five Reasons Why People Code-Switch." NPR, National Public Radio: Code Switch, 13 Apr. 2013, www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/04/13/177126294/five-reasons-why-people-code-switch.

millennials that older generations are helpless with CMC in the first place; complicating matters with in-references and generational trends would only serve to muddy things further. So, millennials often intentionally censor themselves in CMC with non-millennials. They code-switch. Second, a principle that this essay will term "generic formality" is in play. Goddard and Geesin of York St John University write in regards to CMC, "In general, the wider the audience for communication, the more formal and careful the style is likely to be[8]." Facebook, for an example, provides a far larger audience than Tumblr, Reddit, Twitter, etc.; comments and posts made on Facebook will be visible to the author's colleagues, friends, and family, whereas posts on other social media sites will be visible only to the author's peer group, not their entire extended social network. Therefore, non-standard forms of grammar are more likely to be seen only by peers, rather than widespread audiences, due to the principle of generic formality. Last, just as many studies have identified the gap in emotional expressiveness between various genders, there is a similar gender division in emotionally expressive typing. A study entitled "Gender and Emotional Expressiveness: An Analysis of Prosodic Features in Emotional Expression" collected data regarding the differences in the way men and women type:

	Punctuation	Full Stops	Capitals	Additional Letters	Emoticons	Laughter
Female	71	54	84	39	285	172
Male	36	27	40	31	129	143

Emotional Expression Markers

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[8] Goddard, A. & Geesin, B. *Language and Technology.* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

As the study explains, women are much more likely to use multiple exclamation points (wow!!!), repeated capital letters (WOW), extra letters to lengthen words (woooow), etc.[9]. It is not difficult to apply this study's findings to the emotional expressiveness of millennial grammar as well; it would be logical to assume that, men, sometimes even millennial men, will therefore be less likely to use this type of grammatical expressiveness themselves, and, if they mostly communicate with only other men, they will also be less likely to see it. Together, code-switching, generic formality, and gender disparities should soothe the doubts of a reader who does not usually encounter the phenomena discussed.

To conclude, adherence to perfect grammar and spelling has long been considered a sign that a person possesses higher intellect or better communication skills, but this status symbol may come at the cost of functionality. Despite the common misconception that younger generations are careless, uneducated, or lazy due to their typing mannerisms, trends like the mOcKIng vOIce, intentional misspelligns, s t r e t c h i n g, and Random capitalization have in fact developed, sometimes organically and sometimes as a calculated effort, to minimize the hazards of computer-mediated conversation through mimicking the nuances of face-to-face conversation. Millennials often make efforts not to use these grammatical quirks in CMC with older generations, thereby engaging in code-switching; general formality and gender disparities also affect who is privy. Dozens more examples exist, from ~*~sarcasm sparkles~*~ to Ironic Trademarks™ to disemvowelment (such as "srs bsns" instead of "serious business"), and new quirks are sure to develop as old ones wane. In the meantime, do not judge millennials too harshly—unless you are confident in your ability to decipher their messages when they Tweet about you to their friends.

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[9] Parkins, R. (2012). Gender and emotional expressiveness: An analysis of prosodic features in emotional expression. Griffith Work. Papers Pragmat. Intercult. Commun.. 5. 46-54.