Guest Editorial

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It is difficult to say when exactly the Internet began.[1] Was it August 6 1991, the date when the world wide web was officially launched? Was it October 29 1969 when the Advanced Research Projects Agency NETwork (ARPANET) first became operational? Was it a few years later in 1971 when Ray Tomlinson sent the first electronic mail between two adjacently seated computers?[2] Or would it even be fair to say that the real revolution actually began far earlier, in 1822, when the English mathematician and engineer Charles Babbage designed the first mechanical computer? In many ways, the history of the *Internetwork*, *Internet*, or *Net* is as wondrously convoluted as the web which forms its base. Although the exact moment of its birth may remain a matter of scholarly dispute, there are two points which everyone can agree on. One: as hard as it may be for my students to believe, there *was* a world before the Internet. And two, since the advent of the Internet, the world has never been the same.

According to statistics compiled by Netcraft,[3] an international survey research firm specializing in the Internet, the Internet now supports more than 227 million websites with more than 65 billion webpages. In addition, Netcraft further estimates that the Internet is now regularly used by no less than two billion people around the globe. This amounts to approximately one-third of the world's population. However, according to internetworldstats.com, a leading international survey research firm devoted to collecting population statistics on Internet usage, there are many stark geopolitical differences in the degree to which the Internet has been able to enter or "penetrate" the world's societies. For example, in some European countries like Sweden, Luxembourg, Denmark, and the Netherlands, the percentage of people who use the Internet (i.e. the degree of Internet penetration) has reached nearly 90%. By comparison, in other nations of the world such as Myanmar, Timor-Leste, Ethiopia, and Liberia, the Internet penetration is still less than 1%.

Table 1 below provides the differential regional rates of Internet penetration and the relative percentage of users which each geographical region supports. In addition, the rate of growth in Internet use from the year 2000 to 2011 is also provided. For example, in December of 2011, it was found that 13.5% of the total African population used the Internet. This number represents almost a 3000% increase over the regional penetration for the year 2000. Still, seen from a global perspective, African Internet users make up only 6.2% of the total number of users online today.

As can be seen in Table 1, although not everyone on the planet is linked in, the overall trend is clear: for an increasing number of *netizens*, the Internet has become an indispensable part of the way we work, love, and play.

TABLE 1

THE DIFFERENTIAL DISTRIBUTION OF INTERNET USERS BY REGION, NUMBER, PENETRATION, GROWTH, AND SHARE OF GLOBAL USE

	Geographical region	Number of Internet users	Percentages		
			Penetration	growth	Regional share of global use
1.	Africa	139,875,242	13.5	2,988.4	6.2
2.	Asia	1,016,799,076	26.2	789.6	44.8
3.	Europe	500,723,686	61.3	376.4	22.1
4.	Middle East	77,020,995	35.6	2,244.8	3.4
5.	North America	273,067,546	78.6	152.6	12.0
6.	Latin America	235,819,740	39.5	1,205.1	10.4
7.	Oceania/Australia	23,927,457	67.5	214.0	1.1
8.	TOTAL	2,267,233,742	32.7	528.1	100

In an effort to measure the specific impact this new medium has had on the daily lives of US Americans, in the winter of 2000, the Pew Research Center launched an ambitious longitudinal study: "The Pew Internet and American Life Project Tracking Survey." Table 2 presents some of the survey findings. In particular, a listing of some of the most common activities which US Americans regularly pursue online is given. Also presented are the frequency rankings and percentages of users who reported each of these selected activities.

As shown above, the Internet is not only a means of exchanging information. For many US users, it has become an integral part of their social life. In this respect, the United States is by no means an exception. From Austria to Zambia, Venezuela to Armenia, the Internet is, well ... where it's @. It is this enormous social potential which prompted the NYU professor and world blogger Clay Shirkey to quip: "prior to the internet, the last technology that had any real effect on the way people sat down and talked together was the table" (Oldfield and Mitchinson, 2011).

TABLE 2

INTERNET ACTIVITIES PURSUED BY US AMERICANS BY PERCENTAGE AND OVERALL RANKING

	Activity	Percentage	Ranking
1.	Use search engine to find information	92	1
2.	Send or read an email	91	2
3.	Check the weather	81	4
4.	Seek medical advice	80	5
5.	Get the latest news	76	7
6.	Have fun, relax	74	8
7.	Purchase a product	71	9
8.	Search for someone special	69	10
9.	Get information from a government agency	67	12
10.	Make a telephone call	25	31

Of course, as UK criminologist and Internet security specialist, David S. Wall (2001) is quick to remind, this virtual social revolution has also come with many very real dangers. "As we have come to terms with the Internet, it is now quite clear that it is revolutionizing many aspects of our 'social l' life. Unfortunately, this includes criminal activity" (167). In a joint annual report released by the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the National White Collar Crime Center, and the US Department of Justice, it was estimated that Internet crime resulted in a staggering loss of $485,253,871 for the year 2011 alone.[4] And this sum says nothing of the losses in public trust and safety. From *bullying*, *phishing*, *smishing*, and *spoofing*, to *sextorting*, *carding*, and general *pocket sniffing*, *cyber criminality* has sadly also become a part of our everyday life. In fact, during the preparation of this very piece, I myself became an unwitting victim of *malware* developed by a wannabe *carder blackhat* who turned out to be little more than a minor league *script kiddie*. Luckily for me and my *lappy*, a family *whitehat* was able to 404 the nasty *drive-by-download* by *file 13ing* the stampede of *trojans* hidden on my *MOBO* before there was a major *cash-out*.[5]

As this short description demonstrates, the Internet is not only a conduit of global communication. In the opinion of many prominent linguists today, it may also very well be the birthplace of one of the world's fastest growing language varieties — *cyberspeak*, *e-speak*, *e-lingo*, *e-slang*, *internet slang*, *internetspeak*, *netlingo*, *net lingua*, *netspeak*, or quite simply *Internet language*.[6] As David Crystal recently explained in a BBC interview: "The internet is an amazing medium for languages [. . .] Language itself changes slowly but the internet has speeded up the process of those changes so you notice them more quickly" (Kleinman, 2010). Although it still remains open to debate whether and/or to what degree these changes will ultimately affect the development of offline language varieties, linguists do seem to agree that Internet language users have demonstrated remarkable creativity in the vocabulary they have devised to name their individual and collective *netscape*.

In honor of this onomastic creativity, in the Fall of 2011, the *American Name Society* issued an official call for scholarly papers which systematically addressed the synchronic and/or diachronic relationship between names, naming, and the Internet. In response to that call, the ANS received many outstanding submissions from around the world. Of those submissions the following five were selected for this special publication. From Mississippi University-Meridian, JAMES KELLEY examines the onomastic patterns in and sociopolitical importance of guild names used by gay members of the online gaming community. SAMIRA HASSA, from Manhattan College, investigates the creative screen names Moroccan chatroom users devise to simultaneously mark their membership in traditional local communities and the global village at large. From the University of York (UK), KIM WITTEN uncovers the sociolinguistic correlates of phonetic variations among users in a text-based Internet community. XUEHUA XIANG from the University of Illinois at Chicago explores how the domain names of Chinese and US American websites differentially encode cultural identity. And, from Cornell University, CARA DIGIROLAMO reveals the morpho-phonological, semantic, and orthographic principles which underlie the Internet naming of famous pairs (e.g. *Tom Cruise + Katie Holmes > TomKat*). Congratulations go out once again to each one of these authors for their excellent contributions to this special issue. Many thanks also go to the blind reviewers and *NAMES* Editor-in-Chief, Frank Nuessel, for their combined assistance in bringing this issue together.[7]

Notes

[1] In 1999, the US Computer History Museum (CHM) was founded in Mountain View, California. The CHM currently holds one of the world's largest collections of computing artifacts. Readers interested in learning more about the historical development of the Internet are invited to consult the CHM online exhibit. The following web address also offers a wonderfully detailed timeline of the Internet: <http://www.computerhistory.org/internet_history/>.

[2] An engaging account of this first electronic mail is provided in a feature story of the UK *Daily Mail* (2009). Here, Tomlinson not only describes the circumstances surrounding that legendary transmission, but also provides an answer to the frequently asked question: What was in that first email?

[3] For more on Netcraft, see <http://news.netcraft.com/about-netcraft/>

[4] For more on US cyber crime and the latest national statistics, see the 2011 Internet Crime Complaint Center publication, *The Internet Crime Report*.

[5] For more on the language of cyber crime, see Ward, 2006.

[6] For a general discussion of Internet language, see Crystal, 2006.

[7] LBNL THX2 my guru sneaker GN: UATLOML.

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