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Ephemera and Tradition-Founding Grammatical Constructions
Staging and Acceptance

1.   Introduction

New grammatical constructions are developed in various domains of cultural space (e.g., in sciences, in administrations, in new media) and established with specific meanings. Some of them are carried over with altered meanings into different cultural domains, while others disappear as ephemeral trends. Examples of patterns in communication studies and political science established in the last few years include: *kommunizieren* as a transitive and passive verb, as in *etwas wird gut/missverständlich kommuniziert*; *abheben* with the preposition *auf*; in the field of administration, the preposition *in* followed by a year; in comics and cartoons, verbs without endings such as *flatter, seufz*; in the sciences – in scientific and scholarly texts – the formation *nichtsdestotrotz,* originally a facetious form[1], which has appeared in the meantime in my colleagues' publications and in students' papers as a hallmark of weighty scientific argumentation[2]. In the following study, the scope of quantitative and qualitative methods of describing new linguistic conventions will be exemplified. On a systemic level, the innovations can be related to existing standardized patterns and explained. On the basis of larger corpora, temporal developments such as establishments and trends can be ascertained quantitatively and represented by growth-curves (gradients). These developments can be qualitatively analyzed through interpretative methods. It will be shown that new grammatical patterns become linguistic currency for the sake of specific meanings, and that these meanings change with their dissemination into new domains. On the level of personal action, conjectures can be used as motives for the implementation or the abandonment of syntactic patterns. This will be typified both in theory and methodologically using the example of a new media-specific syntagm: in chat rooms between 2000 and 2009, a specific type of verb phrase was staged, disseminated and generally accepted before partially being abandoned again.

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[1]   From *nichtsdestoweniger* and *trotzdem*, cf. Gauger 2004.
[2]   According to surveys from seminars, in which students are no longer familiar with *nichtsdestoweniger.*

2.   A history of dissemination: the spread of new verb phrases in different domains

In the first half of the twentieth century, verb forms without endings were already in sporadic use,[3] and with the Mickey Mouse translations of Erika Fuchs starting in 1951, they became popular, productive word formation patterns:

> (1)   *grübel, flatter, seufz, ächz*
> (2)   iterative: *grübel, grübel; flatter, flatter*

These are usually interpreted as calques.[4] Diffused through comics, they belong to the significant characteristics of this type of literature. These formations appeared at the very latest in the 1970s in the oral utterances of young comic fans in Zurich as well as Berlin.[5] Meanwhile, verb phrases without an inflected verb are used in diverse forms in the written texts of online chat rooms.[6] The documents in question derive from corpora collected from 2002, 2004 and 2007 with regionally differentiated names: Berlin-Brandenburg (hereafter *BB*), Hessennetz (*H*), Pälzer unner sich (*P*), Bayern (*B*).[7]

> (3)   **grins*, *freu*, *sing*, *anstups*, *knuddel*, *snief*, *anschiel*, *wink*, *wunda** [from *sich wundern*],[8] **schäm** (B, 11.01.07, 13:24:57)[9]
> (4)   with graphemic iterations: **knudddddddddddlllllllllllll** (B, 11.01.07, 14:11:17), with lexeme iteration: **freufreu** (H, 14.04.02, 20:33:49)
> (5)   in acronymic variations: **g** (abbreviates *grins*)[10]
> (6)   with syntactic extensions: **freudig-kuck** (BB, 09.05.04, 12:37:48), **liebguck** (B-B, 14.04.02, 15:25:52), **frechgrins** (B, 14.04.02, 16:54:20), acronymic: **fg** (B, 14.04.04, 15:44:20), **nichtfreu** (H, 22.09.02, 00:58:11), **ganzdollfreu** (B, 14.04.02, 18:26:13), **handstandmach** (BB, 14.04.02, 15:49:21), **kopfschüttel** (H, 22.09.02, 1:15:40), **andreas hand geb** (B, 14.04.02, 21:03:11), **Coolfun auch ma vom eis leckenlass** (BB, 14.04.02, 19:58:21), **sich ganz nah an nervi setz und ihn*

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3   Götz 2006.
4   Cf. Schlobinski (2001: 3/4, note 3), where verbs without endings are regarded, and justifiably so, as a new phenomenon, in spite of *knall!*, cited in Adelung 1782, which will not be interpreted analogously to the constructions thematized here.
5   Private communication: Daniel Süss, Barbara Schmugge, Institut für Angewandte Psychologie der Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften Zürich.
6   Cf. Schlobinski 2001, Henn-Memmesheimer 2004.
7   See the Spin-Chat-Korpus described in Henn-Memmesheimer 2004, supplemented with material from 2004, 2007 and 2009. See below for more specific characteristics.
8   Documents from Spin-Chat, cited in Henn-Memmesheimer 2004, Zetzsche 2008.
9   Linguistic units that are objects of this study are in italics, with the exception of those cited from chat and only documented in writing; these units are bolded.
10   Documents from Spin-Chat, cited in Henn-Memmesheimer 2004, Zetzsche 2008.

*ganz ganz süß anguck** (BB, 14.04.02, 00:41:37), ***heulend chanel verlass** (BB, 14.04.02, 02:53:16)[11]

Formal changes with the transition to the new medium consist of inserting a structure sign: «*», development of the construction through expansion via verb supplements and information, as well as coalescence and reduction to the point of univerbation and acronym. Around 2004, one finds complex phrases in oral utterances with verbs in the last position:

(7)   *Was macht ihr mit der Weihnachtsfeier? Nur mal so in die Runde frag.* (undocumented evidence, 2004).

Here a medial change and an expansion of the domain for this type of syntagms take place. At the same time, it can be shown in the chat corpus of 2004 that they begin to disappear from usage.

The adoption of these syntagms in literary texts constitutes the next medial change. Being a symptom of his entanglement in internet communication, they are used to cite reflexively and also to symptomize the addiction and confusion of a novel figure. For the first-person narrator, it is a way of distancing himself from the mainstream's demands, of emotional postures iconified by hasty, short statements that breach the education-oriented standard language: syntagms containing verbs without endings, *Herzklopf* and *Geldverdienmist* (Kehlmann 2009, PP. 138, 134), appear among other constructions considered to be chat- and forum-specific.

3.   Syntactic development

Chat participants indicate the special status of utterances such as those mentioned in (6) in several ways:

– through structure signs,
– through verbs without endings,
– through verbs placed in the last position.

With surprising new forms, chatters follow a "maxim of explicitness for written texts"[12] which comprises part of their standard language, as Zifonun's grammar and others have confirmed. This is necessary because "content for communicative purposes" must be "made available solely with written means".[13] The designation of certain text functions with punctuation is not easily imparted, whether it be in school or at the university. One need only think, for example, of the difficulty of implementing the designation of words used metalinguistically

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[11]   For a detailed description of the syntax of these syntagms within the framework of dependency grammar, see Henn-Memmesheimer 2004.
[12]   Zifonun et al. (1997: 253).
[13]   Ibid.

with italics, or the designation of cited statements with quotation marks. By contrast, the usage of asterisks is conventionalized in the chat texts from 2002 for the designation of a kind of stage direction. With asterisks, chatters offset actions accompanying utterances from other utterances, since, due to the medium of communication, these actions can only be presented verbally. There is no corresponding phenomenon to be found in standard texts, barring the italicization of stage directions in dramatic texts.

Syntagms with 'uninflected' verbs are indeed described as standard language; however, verbs with an infinitive ending are usually meant in this context:

(8)   Syntagms without personal, modal or temporal markers, ending with a verb: *Anfangen, jetzt aber anfangen! sofort kommen, alle mal herhören, vor Gebrauch schütteln, den Tisch abgeräumt,* etc.[14]

Also, by the same token, syntagms ending with a verb:

(9)   Syntagms ending with a verb: *wie gut er doch tanzt! mit welch einer Ausdauer sich alle amüsiert haben! was du dir jetzt schon wieder denkst!*[15]

Standard grammars confirm the specific status, as well as the modes, respectively, of such constructions. Weinreich treats examples ending with a verb, as in (9), as exclamations[16], while Zifonun attributes the same examples to the "exclamatory mode", examples with infinite verb forms as in (8) to the "demanding", "exclamatory", "interrogative" and "optative" modes. In captions, Zifonun also ascribes the latter examples to the "declarative mode".[17] The syntagms with uninflected verbs documented in chats, which lack both inflected form and infinite endings, belong exclusively to the declarative mode. They operate on utterances and thematize an action, relevant to text or to conversation, which can only be conveyed verbally under the conditions of comics or chat. In the following example, this function is especially clear:

(10)   11.01.07, 23:42:03 [BB]   ~krYa~: *wer saugtn hier *asteri anguck*,*[18]

where the interrogative mode of the statement, aside from being signaled by the interrogative pronoun, is designated by the asterisked syntagm, but not by the structural sign (question mark).

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14   Examples from Zifonun et al. (1997: 141f., 613, 654).
15   Examples from Weinrich (2003: 893).
16   Weinrich (2003: 8.3.4, 892f.), see also Zifonun et al. (1997: D2, 648: "Verbletzt-Formtypen im Fragebereich" 669, 674).
17   Zifonun et al. (1997: D2, 613, 654, 669, 674).
18   In this context, *saugen* means 'to download music'.

The utterances placed within asterisks are strongly formalized to the point of abbreviation: *grins*, *g*, *frech grins*, *frechgrins* *fg*. The complex, expanded syntagms are very strictly organized in their syntactic form as well: they are marked by asterisks, and their constituent elements always have an identical sequence. Described in terms of syntactic relations from left to right, the elements are: 1. modals[19], 2. dative object, 3. accusative object, 4. prepositional object, 5. prepositional adverbial, 6. adverbial with an adverbial head, 7. adverbial with an adjectival head, 8. uninflected verb as predicate. The individual positions can be empty. Many writers apparently see the parts as being so fixed and integrated that they write them into one word. The emergence of such complexly integrated phrases can be described in terms of process as grammaticalization. We have

1. graphic reduction to the point of acronyms,
2. morphological reduction: Ø as verb morpheme,
3. coalescence: writing as one word to the point of univerbation,
4. topologization: firm position of the constituent elements of the syntagm according to syntactic relations,
5. semantic reduction and synsemantisation: reduction to the designation of an action accompanying the utterance of the particular chatter.

More or less grammaticalized forms are found side by side: *grinst frech* next to *frech grins*, *frechgrins* and *fg*.

Furthermore, the stereotypical configuration of constituent elements described in terms of syntactic relations found here corresponds to the configuration postulated in the universal grammar and appearing in a certain phase of language acquisition. It is also the 'salient arrangement' described in functional semantics or categorial grammar, for example, that of Zifonun.[20] According to optimality theories, it may also be the optimal, unmarked sequence in the verbal phrase[21] (however, these theories are only typified by partial aspects of the structures described above).

4.   Formation and breakdown tendency of a chat convention – observations

In the examples before 2000 from the literature (e.g. Beißwenger 2000), there are many deviations from verbs without endings, verbs in the last position, and utterances in asterisks. In 2002 the convention appears very stable, the afore-

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[19]   Used here to mean, on the level of lexical categories: *modal particle*, on the level of syntactic relations: *modals*.
[20]   Cf. Zifonun et al. (1997: 1300, 1324: on the realization of primary components, 102 on the relationship between sequences and salient arrangement.
[21]   E.g., Müller (2000: 242).

mentioned characteristics form a consolidated collocation: asterisks as structural signs are consistently placed in nearly all phrases that have the syntactic characteristics of verbs without an ending and verbs in the last position. The adverbial, adjectival and substantivial expansions of the verb phrase have the same configuration almost everywhere. In the corpora of 2004 and 2007, however, signs of a convention breakdown crop up that will be examined until 2009. Upon inspection of corpus excerpts, one notices that uninflected verbs are used less frequently and that verb phrases with uninflected verbs are not structured as regularly as before. A great number of variants appear side by side:

(11) 11.01.07, 22:54:59 [BB]   assos: *schulterzuck*
      11.01.07, 23:41:15 [BB]   assos: *neue geb*
      11.01.07, 23:41:44 [BB]   *~asteri~*: seh schon g*

In other cases, asterisks are not used:[22]

(12) 11.01.07, 23:37:53 [BB]   *~asteri~*: schultern zuck+
      11.01.07, 00:23:18 [B]   Mochlos: weglach
      11.01.07, 00:23:21 [B]   authateia: grinst frech

There are also usages of double asterisks in meanings conventional to chat, with infinite and finite verb phrases, as well as with substantivial phrases (in this case, an acronymic substantivial phrase):

(13) 11.01.07, 04:03:57 [BB]   Phili: *reküss*
      11.01.07, 00:44:50 [B]   zestos*agori*20*: jettchen was ist mit genau? bin nicht mitgekommen *schäm*
      11.01.07, 16:56:57 [H]   *~InDiana~*:   *UrlaubNeigtSichDemEndeZu* :(
      11.01.07, 13:24:57 [P]   !BrachoS83!: *fährt sich mit der Hand über sein Kinn*
      11.01.07, 13:59:28 [B]   nai1976: <<<<<<schweigt ...... ~XuXu~ *gfG*[23]

In the preceding examples, asterisks have the function (among others) of ornamenting proper names. This usage will be taken up again in 6.4. In the quantitative analysis in chapter 5, however, only messages will be analysed.

How can the tendencies of changes be quantitatively and qualitatively conceived?

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[22] The plus symbol, «+», could be interpreted as an intended asterisk, «*», perhaps because the writer accidentally let go of the control key too soon, but this investigation will follow the formal differentiations.

[23] XuXu is a username, gfG is an acronym for ganz freches Grinsen.

5. Quantitative analysis of the development of intra-chat conventions

5.1 Hypothesis and corpus

The expectation of convention formation and convention breakdown can be conceived in the following hypotheses:

1. Until 2002 and 2004, there is a tendency to greater distance from standard language and a tendency to consolidate intra-chat conventions.
2. From 2004 to 2007, there is a tendency to greater proximity to standard language and a tendency to dissolve intra-chat conventions.
3. This tendency continues beyond 2007.

Therefore, statements will be made on developments between 2002 and 2009. The population comprises of messages composed in chat rooms during this time in the online community of the firm SPIN-AG. The firm can be reached at the web addresses http://www.spin.de and www.spin-ag.de, respectively. Access is free, and registration must merely be verified by a valid e-mail address.[24] Spin has approximately 1.2 million members and approximately 120 million hits per month. 24-hour records were selected as a sample from the years 2002, 2004, 2007 and 2009 from the Spin rooms Berlin-Brandenburg, Hessennetz, Pälzer unner sich, and Bayern.[25] Although users still look at the chat room of Palatinate, it was discontinued after 2009 due to lack of participation. There are 103,600 lines of chat altogether. A line counts as that which is between two enter-signs (¶). A line is composed of the date, time, name of the chat room, name of the chatter, and the message. These types of lines are reproduced in shortened form in examples (10) to (12). In the Excel spreadsheets in which the corpus was transcribed and which forms the basis of the computations, there is a column for the date and time, the name of the chat room, the chatter's name, and the message. The prerequisite for the processing of such a large corpus is the isolation of elements that can be read and quantified by the computer program Excel and its operating macros.[26]

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[24] Cf.: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spin.de, as well as http://www.spin-ag.de (visited on 01.03.2008).

[25] Regional differentiation will not be pursued in the following investigation.

[26] The Excel macros were generated by Ernst Eggers of the Studienseminar Mainz. The calculations were carried out by Sarah Zetzsche (Zetzsche 2008), and reviewed and adjusted by Ernst Eggers. I thank Tilmann Deutler, Universität Mannheim, and Raoul-Martin Memmesheimer, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., for their critical review and consultation.

5.2 Quantifiable indicators for intra-chat conventions and their development

In our research, the usage of asterisks in messages allows us to use them as indicators for the stability of conventions. Indeed, they fulfill the following requirements: the asterisks are frequent; they have specific meaning in this type of text that they do not have in standard language and that cannot be fulfilled by other means; they are easily and automatically detectable, in contrast to other intra-chat characteristics including verbs in the last position and uninflected verbs. The chart in Table 1 arises from asterisk usage in messages.

Table 1: Decrease in asterisk expressions

	2002	*2004*	*2007*	*2009*
Corpus size: Total lines Lines with self-written messages	32885 22928	32232 23084	28262 20065	16118 10208

Self-written messages with asterisks
    Absolute frequency
    Relative frequency
	2578
	11,24 %
		2544
		11,02 %
			1862
			9,28 %
				726
				7,11 %

Relative change of the percentage of asterisk-expressions compared to the prior value (rate of change)		–2 %	–15,8 %	–23,4 %

Over the years in question, a decrease in messages marked with asterisks can be observed. The points in the figure below indicate the percentage of lines with asterisks found in the sample, and the confidence intervals show the probability with which lines containing asterisks appear during the years from which the samples were taken. The confidence intervals (based on 2σ) are calculated at the confidence level $1-\alpha = 95{,}5\,\%$. For 2002, the confidence interval is then [10,8 %; 11,7 %], for 2004, it is [10,6 %; 11,4 %], for 2007, it is [8,9 %; 9,7 %]. Between 2002 and 2004, the decrease is not significant, because it still falls inside the confidence interval. However, the decrease between 2004 and 2007, and between 2007 and 2009 is significant (see Figure 1). The displayed confidence intervals in Figure 1 (0,45 % for 2002; 0,4 % for 2004; 0,4 % for 2007; 5% for 2009) are for the confidence level $1-\alpha = 95{,}5\,\%$. For the rate of change ↓(-15,8 %), cf. commentary in the text.
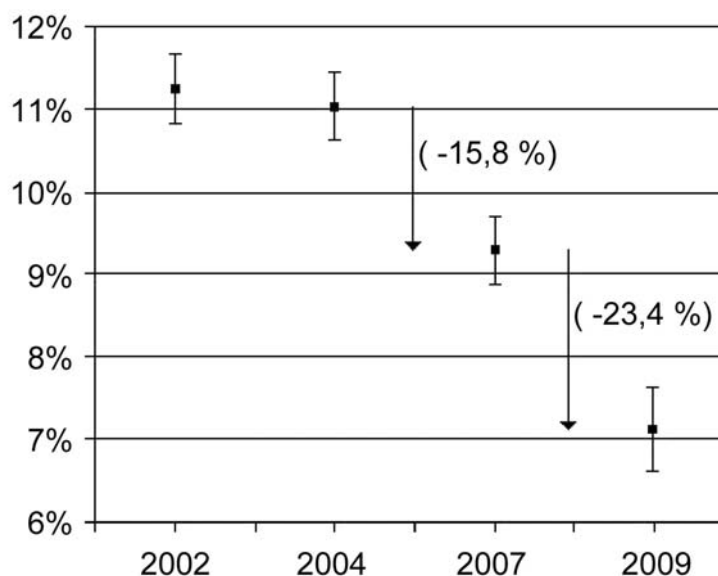
Figure 1: Decrease in the percentage of messages with asterisks (cf. Table 1)[27]

This development can be clarified through an illustration of the rate of change (also called 'gradient analysis'), which takes the percentage of the year 2004 as base value and sets it to 100 %: the percentage of messages with asterisks decreases by 15,8 % from 2004 to 2007 and even more by 23,4% from 2007 to 2009 (see also Table 1).

The indicator *asterisk placement* can be further differentiated, since chatters use the structural sign of double asterisks (*…*) very consistently in 2002 to designate actions accompanying utterances. The occurance of simple asterisks in a message is an indicator that these signs' usage is only perfunctory, i.e., only at the beginning or at the end of a syntagm, as in the example (10).We have no quantifiable data from the time before 2002 in the following image results (cf. Figure 2). From 2004 to 2009, the percentage of messages with asterisks generally declines. The percentage of messages with only one asterisk increases from 2002 to 2007 then decreases slightly from 2007 to 2009 but still remains above the level of 2004. The percentage of messages with two asterisks decreases. The use of three, four, or more than four asterisks in a message plays practically no role in our statistics.

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[27]   The displayed confidence intervals (0,45 % for 2002; 0,4 % for 2004; 0,4 % for 2007) are for the confidence level 1-α = 95,5 %. For the rate of change ↓(−15,8 %), cf. commentary in the text.
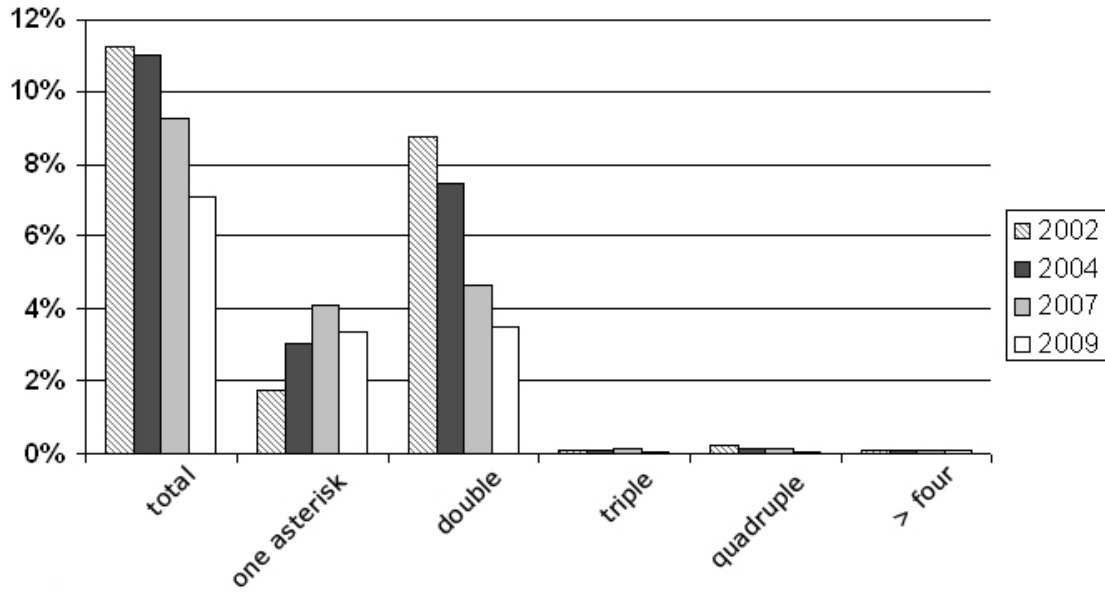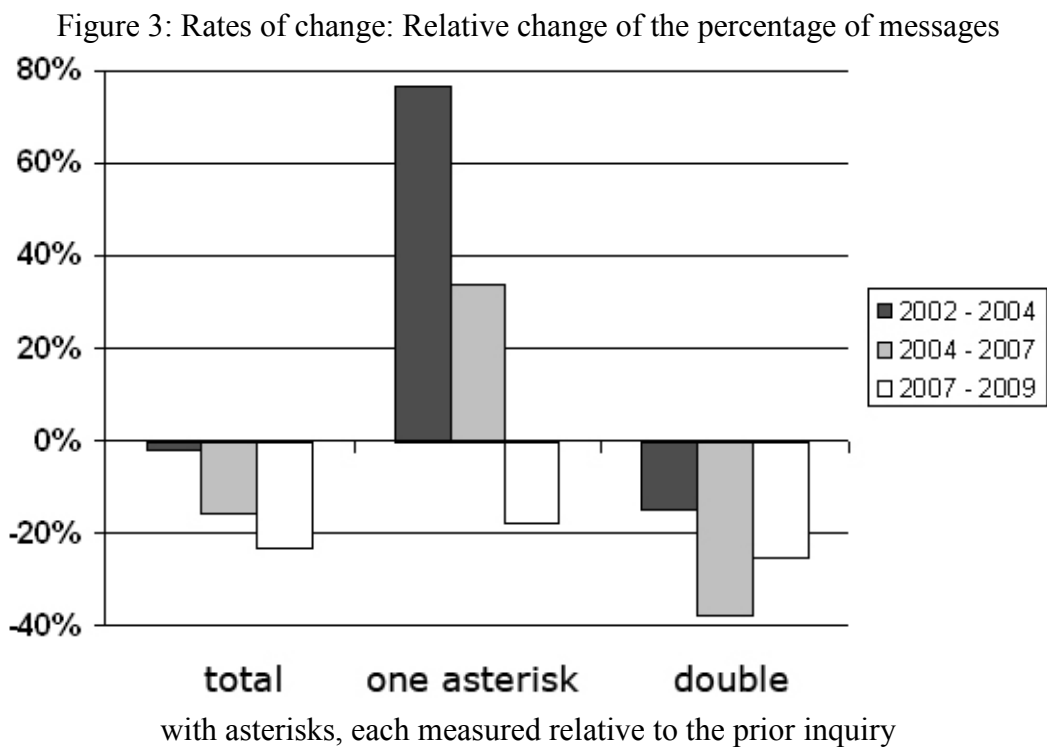
Figure 2: Percentage of self-written messages with asterisks

The development can also be clarified here based on rates of change (cf. Figure 3).

Figure 3: Rates of change: Relative change of the percentage of messages

with asterisks, each measured relative to the prior inquiry

To this end, first the percentages from 2002 are set to 100 %. From 2002 to 2004, the percentage of double asterisks decreases by 14,8 %.[28] Setting the percentages from 2004 to 100 % reveals a decrease in percentage of double asterisks of 37,4 %. Setting the percentages from 2007 to 100% reveals a decrease in percentage of double asterisks of 25,3% from 2007 to 2009. Taken together, we see a 'negative growth' of the intra-chat convention of double asterisk usage and of asterisk usage altogether. A positive growth in the usage of simple asterisks, which does not correspond to intra-chat conventions, is seen from 2002 to 2004 with +90 %, from 2004 to 2007 with a lesser growth of 33,7 %, and from 2007 to 2009 a negative growth applies, i.e. the usage of asterisks decreases in general (Figure 3 and Table 2).

Table 2: Rates of change

Percentages	Percent of lines with asterisks, of lines with messages	Percent of lines with simple asterisks, of lines with messages	Percent of lines with double asterisks, of lines with messages
2002	11,24%	1,74%	8,77%
2004	11,02%	3,08%	7,46%
2007	9,28%	4,12%	4,67%
2009	7,11 %	3,38 %	3,49 %

Development of percentages	Of lines with asterisks	Of lines with simple asterisks	Of lines with double asterisks
2002-2004	-2,00%	76,50%	-14,90%
2004-2007	-15,60%	33,80%	-37,40%
2007-2009	- 23,4 %	- 18,0 %	- 25,3 %

The following significance can be read out from Figure 4, which summarizes the information in Figures 2 and 3 and shows confidence intervals and rates of change.

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[28]   Values that Excel outputs, rounded to a decimal place after the fact.
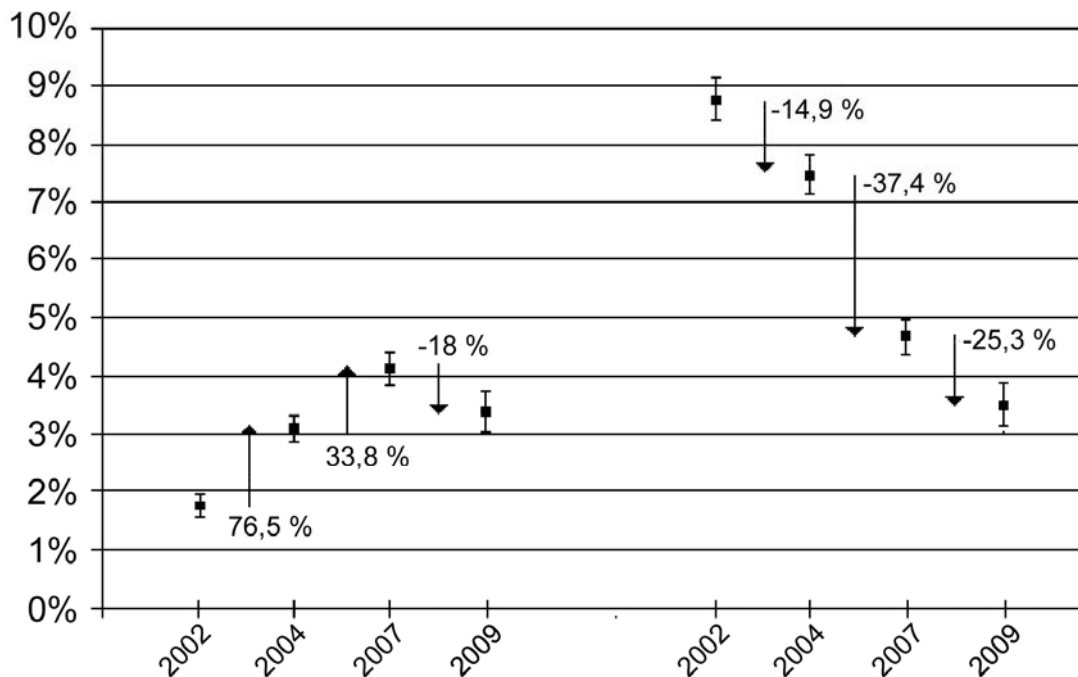
Figure 4: Development of the usage of one and two asterisks with entry of rates of change ↑(X%)

Taking the confidence interval into consideration yields the following results: based on 2002, the percentage of lines with an asterisk increases to 76,5 % (arrow) on average, the gain accounts for at least 53 % and 100 % at most. Based on 2004, the percentage of lines with an asterisk increases to 33,8 % (arrow) on average, the gain accounts for at least 17,2 % and 50,3 % at most. Based on 2007, the percentage of lines with an asterisk decreases to 18% (arrow) on average, the loss accounts for at least 46,9% and 69,5% at most. Based on 2002, the percentage of lines with two asterisks decreases to 14,9 % (arrow) on average, the loss accounts for at least 6,6 % and 23 % at most. Based on 2004, the percentage of lines with two asterisks decreases to 37,4 % (arrow) on average, the loss accounts for at least 28,8 % and 46,1 % at most. Based on 2007, the percentage of lines with two asterisks decreases to 25,3% (arrow) on average, the loss accounts for at least 51,5% and 72% at most.

   For one as well as for two asterisks, the values differ significantly. We note the following as a final result and as a correction and specification of the statement formulated in the hypothesis (in 5.1): the increase of messages with one asterisk decelerates and reaches its peak in 2007, while the breakdown of the double-asterisk convention accelerates until 2007, and continues slightly slower until 2009.

5.3 Quantitative analysis of *grins* and its variations in 2002: The development of a convention through quantitative analysis

The aforementioned examples (1) to (13) are relevant for a structural description, but on the majority are not possible for quantitative analysis. *Grins* and its variations are adequately frequent and, therefore, promising for a qualitative analysis. In 2002, *grins,* or a variation thereof, appears in 1371 lines with messages (6 %); in 2004, they appear in 1697 lines (7,35 %); in 2007, in 1280 lines (6,4 %) and in 2009 in 258 lines (2,5%). The following variations are documented (see Table 3):

Table 3: *grins*-variations

grins	*heftig grins*	**sfg…*
grins intelligently	*saufrechgrins*	
grins silently		**grins**
grins*	*grins**	**grinst frech**
grinsel	*angrins**	**grinst**
grinselt	*g**	**dich angrins**
grinst	*gg**	**dichangrins**
grinst diabolisch	*ggg**	**fiesgrins**
grinst dreggisch	*ggg…**	**frechgrins**
grinst einzigartig frech	*sfg…**	**frechzuniederbayerrübergrins**
grinst extrem frech	*… ggg*[29]*	**ma fies grins**
grinst frech	*fg…**	**schadenfroh grins**
grinst frecher		**fg* / *FG**
grinst ganz frech	**grins*	**fg… *, *FG… **
grinst hessisch frech	**grinsel*	**g**
grinst ma	**fiesgrins*	**gg**
grinst mal	**fg*	**ggg**
grinst mal eben mit	**fg…*	**gggg…**
grinst mal frech	**g / *G*	**grinsäää**
grinst noch frecher	**gg*	**gb* / *bg**
grinst rotzfrech	**ggg*	**gfg**
grinst sich eins	**ggg…*	**sfg*, *s..sfg**
fgrins		
fresch grins		*"grins"*

For the following analysis, only the variations that appeared in more than 1 % of the messages containing *grins* (in at least one of the four years) are drawn upon.

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[29]   …: Iteration of the last graphem.

Table 4: Table for the statistically relevant / applicable *grins*-variations[30]

Year:	2002		2004		2007		2009	
Lines with *grins*-variations:	1371		1697		1280		258	
	Z	h	Z	h	Z	h	Z	h
fg / *FG*	166	12,1 %	263	15,2 %	72	5,8 %	10	3,9 %
*fg...	35	2,6 %	75	4,3 %	43	3,4 %	16	11,2 %
*g / *g / *G	73	5,3 %	266	15,4 %	253	20,3 %	87	33,4 %
g	345	25,2 %	352	20,4 %	206	16,5 %	55	21,3 %
*gg	22	1,6 %	69	4,0 %	18	1,4 %	11	4,3 %
gg	131	9,6 %	126	7,3 %	63	5,1 %	4	1,6 %
ggg	60	4,4 %	18	1,0 %	10	0,8 %	1	0,4 %
gggg...	55	4,0 %	3	0,2 %	7	0,6 %	2	0,8 %
grins	14	1,0 %	18	1,0 %	26	2,1 %	0	0 %
sfg, *s..sfg*	37	2,7 %	44	2,6 %	31	2,5 %	1	0,4 %
g*	4	0,3 %	3	0,2 %	39	3,1 %	1	0,4 %
Grins	63	4,6 %	14	0,8 %	30	2,4 %	20	7,8 %
grins silently	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	24	1,9 %	0	0 %
grinst frech	317	23,1 %	353	20,5 %	351	28,1 %	0	0 %
grinst rotzfrech	0	0,0 %	61	3,5 %	0	0,0 %	0	0 %
Σ	1371	100 %	1657	100 %	1280	100 %	258	100 %

Table 4 shows that in 2002, the variations *g*, *gg*, *ggg*, *gggg...*, *fg*/*FG*, *sfg*/*s..sfg* account for 58 % of all incidences of *grins*-variations. Acronyms without asterisks do not appear, *grins* without asterisks accounts for 4,6 % of the total incidences of *grins*-variations, the inflected form *grinst* appears exactly five times (0,4 %), the simply inflected form *grinst frech* without asterisks accounted for 23 % of the total incidences of *grins*-variations. The last part, "Breaks with convention", shows that acronyms beginning with one asterisk account for 9,5 %, do not appear or remain at 0,3 % of all *grins*-variations (see Table 3). For this reason, the usage of acronyms with double asterisks can be identified as an intra-chat convention in 2002.

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[30]   The absolute frequencies are listed in the Z columns, and the relative frequencies are listed in the h columns.

5.4 Quantitative development of the usage of *grins* and its variants until 2009: Liberalization of a convention

In Table 3, the values from 2004 to 2009 are already entered. The following image emerges for *g*, the most often employed variation (Figure 5).
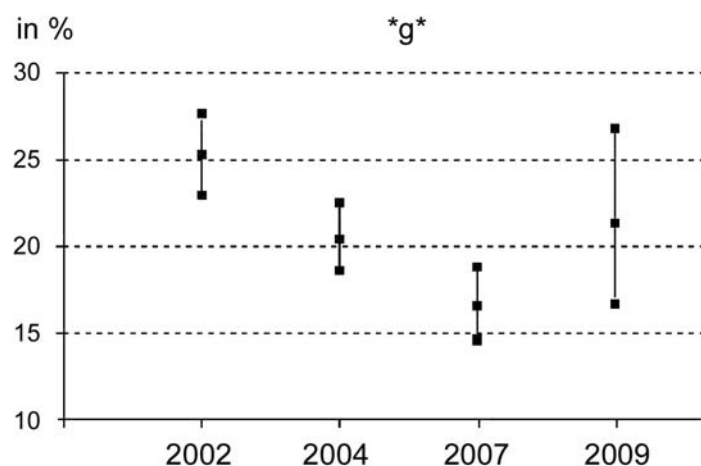

Figure 5: Development of the usage of *g*

In 2002 *g* appears 345 times in our corpus, it makes up 25,2 % of all 1371 *grins*-variations. The confidence interval entered in the figure amounts to 22,9-27,6 %. In 2004 *g* appears 352 times and only makes up 20,4 % of all 1697 incidences of *grins*-variations, and the confidence interval amounts to 18,5-22,4 %. With a total of 1280 incidences of *grins*-variations, the 206 incidences of *g* in 2007 correspond to 16,5 % and a confidence interval of 14,5-18,5 %. With a total of 1280 incidences of *grins*-variations, the 55 incidences of *g* in 2009 correspond to 21,3 % and a confidence interval of 16,6-26,8 %. The apparent increase in 2009 is, when compared to 2007, not significant. We conclude that with its confidence interval entries, the figure clearly illustrates that the decrease until 2007 is significant; as the values of the following or prior year, respectively, lie outside the confidence interval. The decrease of a central element of intra-chat conventions of 2002 is therefore quantitatively documented.

In terms of the other acronymic syntagms that had turned out to be conventionalized elements in chat for 2002, Figure 6 appears for *fg*/*FG* (in the order of their frequency in 2002).
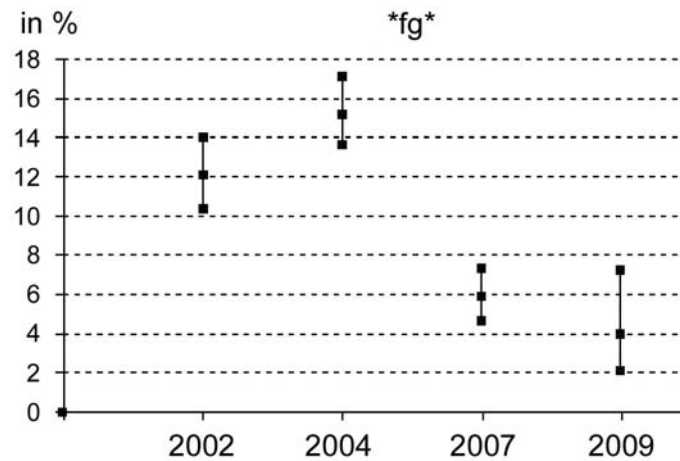
Figure 6: Development of the usage of *fg*/*FG*

The data (cf. commentary on Figure 5): Absolute incidences in 2002: 166, relative 12,1 %, confidence interval: 10,4-14 %; absolute incidences in 2004: 263, relative 15,2 %, confidence interval: 13,6-17,1 %; Absolute incidences in 2007: 72, relative 5,8 %, confidence intervals: 4,6-7,3 %,; Absolute incidences in 2009: 10, relative 3,9%, confidence intervals: 2,1-7,1%. The data are significant here, as well: an increase until 2004, a decrease until 2007 and 2009. – For the development of *gg* see Figure 7.
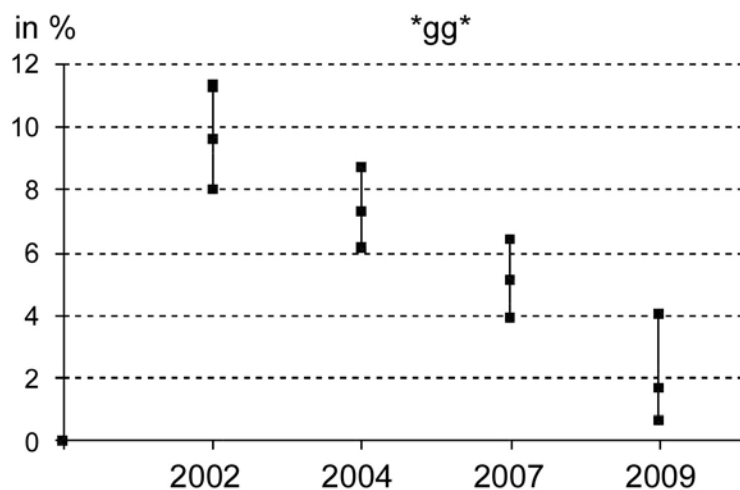

Figure 7: Development of the usage of *gg*

The data (cf. commentary on Figure 5): Absolute incidences in 2002: 131, relative 9,6 %, confidence interval: 8,0-11,3 %; Absolute incidences in 2004: 126, relative 7,3 %, confidence interval: 6,1-8,7 %; Absolute incidences in 2007: 63, relative 5,1 %, confidence interval: 3,9-6,4 %; Absolute incidences in 2009: 4, re-

lative 1,6%, confidence interval: 0,6-4%. The development is significant: compared to 2002 a decrease until 2004 that continues until 2009. – For *ggg...*, i.e. for 3 or more *g* in double asterisks see Figure 8.
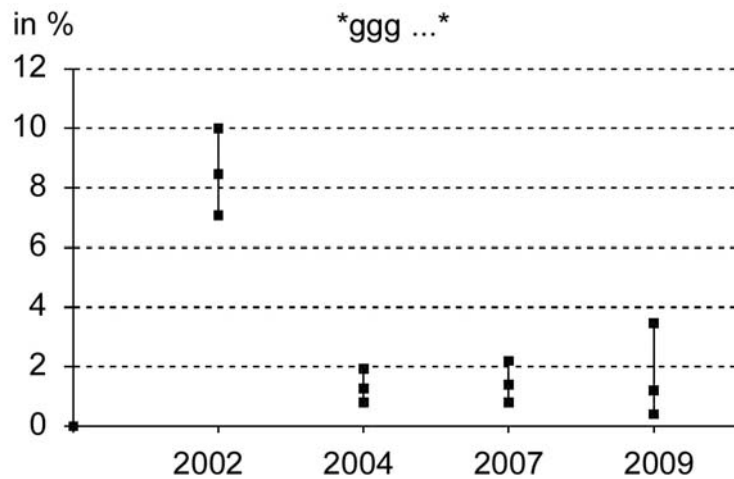

Figure 8: Development of the usage of *ggg...*

The data (cf. commentary on Figure 5): Absolute incidences in 2002: 115, relative 8,4 %, confidence interval: 7,0-10 %; Absolute incidences in 2004: 21, relative 1,2 %, confidence interval: 0,8-1,9 %; Absolute incidences in 2007: 17, relative 1,36 %, confidence interval: 0,8-2,2 %; Absolute incidences in 2009: 3, relative 1,2%, confidence interval: 0,4-3,4%. The decrease from 2002 to 2004 is significant, and from 2004 to 2009 there are no further changes. – For *sfg*/*s...fg*, i.e. with an *s* or iterated *s*, acronymic for *sehr frech grins*, see Figure 9.
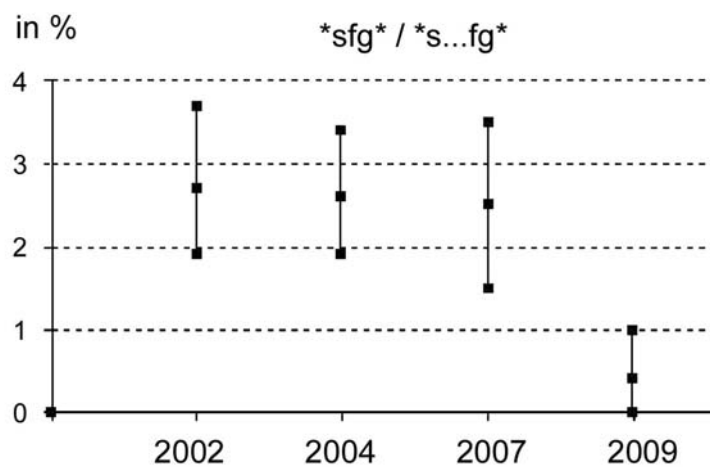

Figure 9: Development of the usage of *sfg* / *s...sfg*

The data (cf. commentary on Figure 5): Absolute incidences in 2002: 37, relative 2,4 %, confidence interval: 1,9-3,7 %; Absolute incidences in 2004: 44, relative 2,6 %, confidence interval: 1,9-3,4 %; Absolute incidences in 2007: 31, relative 2,5 %, confidence interval: 1,7-3,5 %; Absolute incidences in 2009: 1, relative 0,4%, confidence interval: 0-1%. From 2002 to 2007, there is no significant development to be accounted for here; the decrease in 2009 is significant, however cannot be interpreted at the moment due to a lack of data from following years.

A development in the opposite direction can be observed with *g/*G (see Figure 10).

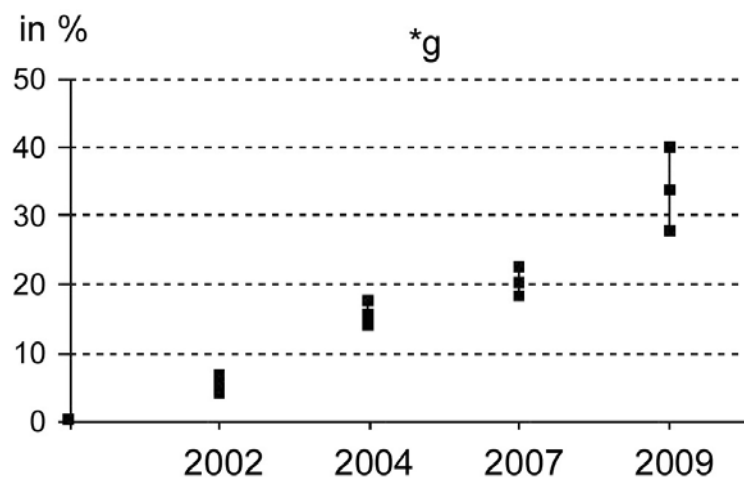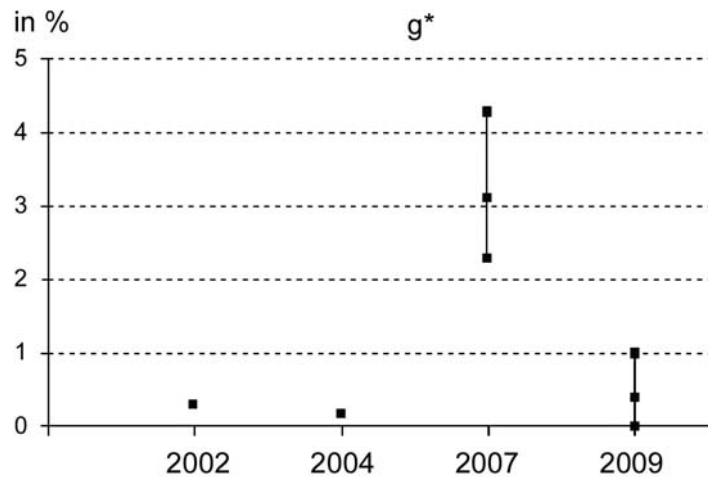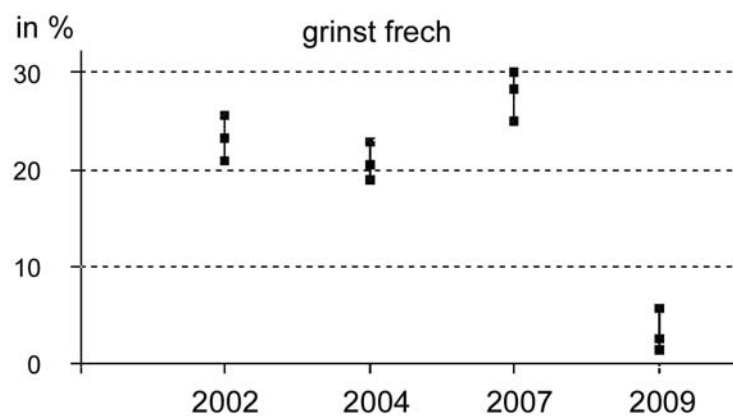Figure 10: Development of the usage of *g / *G

The data (cf. commentary on Figure 5): Absolute incidences in 2002: 73, relative 5,3 %, confidence interval: 4,2-6,7 %; Absolute incidences in 2004: 266, relative 15,4 %, confidence interval: 13,7-17,3 %; Absolute incidences in 2007: 253, relative 20,3 %, confidence interval: 18,1-22,7 %; Absolute incidences in 2009: 87, relative 33,7%, confidence interval: 28-40%.

Similarly, we have a clear increase with g* in 2007, which apparently did not correspond to the conventions in 2002, 2004 and 2009 (see Figure 11). When searching for reasons, it becomes clear that the increase stems from two particular chatters in Berlin-Brandenburg, who chat with each other and used g* 32 and 5 times, respectively. Compared to a total of only 39 incidences in 2007, the use of g* can still be considered scarce.

Figure 11: Development of the usage of *g**

The data (cf. commentary on Figure 5): Absolute incidences in 2002: 4, relative 0,3 %, confidence interval: 0-0,6 %; Absolute incidences in 2004: 3, relative 0,2 %, 0-0,4 %; Absolute incidences in 2007: 39, relative 3,1 %, confidence interval: 2,2-4,3 %; Absolute incidences in 2009: 1, relative 0,4%, confidence interval: 0-1%. – For the development of the formally standard-oriented phrasing *grinst frech* see Figure 12.

Figure 12: Development of the usage of *grinst frech*

With 317 incidences in 2002, *grinst frech* makes up 23,1 % of all *grins*-variations; with 353 incidences in 2004, 20,5 % of all *grins*-variations; with 351 incidences in 2007, 28,1 % of all *grins*-variations, with 7 incidences in 2009, 2,7% of all *grins*-variations.[31] In all three years, *grinst frech* takes the leading

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[31] Confidence intervals: 2002 [20,9 %; 25,5 %], 2004 [18,9 %; 22,8 %], 2007 [25 %; 30 %], 2009 [1,3%; 5,6%].

position. That the percentage of a phrasing close to standard language is the highest in 2007 confirms the general tendency to greater proximity to standard language since 2004. The decrease in 2009 cannot be explained on a grammatical basis.

The syntagm *grins* (no Figure) is uninflected and formally noticeable without asterisks. With the following statistics it can be counted as a convention (owing to its frequency) in 2002, but not in 2004. Absolute incidences in 2002: 63, relative 4,6 %, absolute incidences in 2004: 14, relative 0,8 %, absolute incidences in 2007: 30, relative 2,4 %, absolute incidences in 2009: 20, relative 7,8%[32]. The increase in 2009 can be seen as an example for the general abandonment of the asterisk's usage.

Taken together, we note the following as a final result and as a correction and specification of the statement formulated in the hypothesis (in 5.1): most of the examples mentioned already document the tendency in 2004 to liberalization of intra-chat conventions and a tendency to greater proximity to standard language.

5.5 Another parameter: length of statements

Another parameter that can be measured well is the length of statements. Their development is drawn upon here in order to support the overall tendency.[33] Calculated in terms of all self-written messages in 2002, we have: 13,7 symbols per statement; in 2004 and 2007: 18,2 and 18,5 symbols per statement, respectively. The result speaks for the change of a characteristic determined to be typical for chat between 2002 and 2004 in the literature.

5.6 An ephemerally appearing occurence in quantification

grinst rotzfrech, a standard language-oriented phrasing, appears 61 times in 2004 and makes up 3,5 % of all *grins*-variations. In 2002, 2007 and 2009 this phrasing does not appear at all. A single chatter on 09.05.2004 in Hessennetz entered it 24 times between 11:59:08 and 12:46:03, then another 33 times between 17:32:09 and 19:40:42. At 22:08:30 and 22:49:34, two other chatters use it again. Since we are only investigating one day from each year, this clearly indicates a limit for statements about ephemeral patterns and short-term (daily) modes.

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[32] Confidence intervals: 2002 [3,6 %; 5,9 %], 2004 [0,5 %; 1,4 %], 2007 [1,6 %; 3,4 %], 2009 [5%; 11,8%].

[33] The calculations of statement length were carried out by cand. phil. Marlen Jens in 2009 in the context of a research term paper.

6. Qualitative analysis of the development of chat-specific verb phrases

6.1 System and system development: syntax and semantics

The quantitative analysis was explicated based on minimal chat-specific syntagms. The smallest syntagm was *g*, the most frequent was **g** after *grinst frech*. For 2002, the quantitative analysis reveals a very consequent usage of chat-specific syntagms (as described in chapter 3) that are marked by a specific usage of structural signs and specific grammaticalizations including: graphic, morphologic and semantic reductions as well as coalescence and topologization. Due to their consequent and narrow usage in form and function in (almost exclusively) chat-rooms, these syntagms can be understood as chat-specific conventions. Hence, a decrease in usage indicates an easing of conventional use.

For a formal, well-distinguishable Excel-based analysis, high-frequent syntagms were selected. A qualitative analysis that follows up on the present quantitative analysis can incorporate further syntagms that, for different reasons, are not quantifiable: e.g., because they are too seldom, like those in (6) and (15) to (20),[34] or because they cannot be found automatically, rather only upon complex processing of the text, which could not be made consistenly.

(15) **<-** *schnitzel ess* (P, 09.05.04, 19:54:44)
(16) *assos*[35] *egal an Kopp knall* **^^** (BB, 11.01.07, 11-23:30:10)
(17) <<<<<<<<<nickt zustimmend Xetsipotos[36] (B, 11.01.07, 19:34:30)
(18) *hmmm ich liebe diese freundlichkeit under den chattern. *tränenweg wichvorbegeisterung** (H, 09.05.04, 14:17:30)
(19) <-- *sich auf ihre tortellini freut* (B, 09.05.04, 17:19:10)
(20) <-- *sich grad Wasser für tortelline hingestellt hat* (B, 09.05.04, 17:10:51)

These syntagms can be read as further proof for the tendency to dissolve intra-chat conventions insofar as they maintain certain features without consistently using all of them. We are dealing with the following: non-chat-specific word order conventions that retain asterisks (18), chat-specific word order (non-inflected verbs in the last position) without asterisks (15, 16), chat-specific word order (verbs in the last position) without asterisks but with standard inflected endings (19, 20) and various usages of symbols (15-17, 19-20). The verb phrase

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[34] Zetsche (2008) compiles all variants of verb phrases containing *feix, freu, gähn, grins, grummel, guck, handgeb/-reich, knubu, knuddel, kopfschüttel, lach, lol, muah, re-, rofl, schau, schrei, sing, wein/heul/schnief*. The documented evidence is too scarce for confident calculations.
[35] Username made anonymous.
[36] Username made anonymous.

patterns described in detail in part 3 can be assumed to follow intra-chat convention prototypically, despite an increase in variations.[37]

The semantics of these chat-specific verb phrases likewise demonstrate a prototypical core area and a more complex image than the quantitatively investigated patterns above provide. In the core area, the described syntagms are used in order to described actions or moods, which are to be staged alongside statements, but can only be represented verbally and in writing due to the medium of communication. They are adequately demarcated, clearly and formally, from other statements (see above, parts 2 and 3). The verb phrases marked with asterisks are largely semantically unambiguous, even if only one asterisk is employed. In the examples (15), (16), (17), (19) and (20), however, other symbols are used instead of asterisks. Apparently, what matters is only the differential aspect: the situation's staging is defined by the usage of any symbol in order to introduce the staging graphically and semantically highlighted into the text, as the following examples illustrate (21-24):

(21)   <-------*fand alba besser als F1* (BB, 14.04.02, 18:04:20)
(22)   <<<<<<<<< *nimmer weiter weiss* (B, 11.01.07, 14:01:08)
(23)   <<< *wach is, nur gerad am futtern is "g"* (B, 11.01.07, 13:49:20)
(24)   *ganz traurig um sich her schaut* (BB, 11.01.07, 11-12:06:18)

When analyzing the semantics of chat symbols, the notion of unambiguous codifications and stable conventions must be abandoned and replaced by a differentiated analysis of fluctuating symbols.

6.2   Symbol, function, and loss of salience

When linguistic studies negotiate verbs without endings, acronyms, and special symbols on the level of symbol selection that chatters agree upon, one explanation often comes to the fore: the speed and brevity that the medium supposedly compels. Here, we allow the argument for the fast sequence of contributions. The practical-functional explanation may explain part of the history: acronyms are de facto shorter than the written-out variants. The placing of asterisks, however, may offer the reader the advantage of quick ascertainability of the structure of the message. But for the writer, owing to the complex string of keystrokes (shift key – asterisk – acronym – shift key – asterisk), the time saved compared to typing a short string of letters is almost completely cancelled out. The practical functional explanation has to be replaced, or at least complemented, by a communicative explanation. The usage of asterisks or other symbols offers the recipient the advantage of a faster comprehension of the messages' structure.

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[37]   Approaches to a quantification can be found in Zetsche 2008, who compiled lists of verb phrases formally marked with asterisks or other graphic symbols.

Throughout all kinds of text, the asterisk is a marginal symbol. By contrast, the asterisk is so popular in chats that in 2007 it still appeared, simply, doubled or multiple times, in 9 % of all messages (5.2). The accumulation of this formal element alone is particularly noticeable for that reason. It was able to become salient[38] and characteristic for chat in the perception of users. As a result, its sheer frequency, as well as the specific rules of its usage, became salient. Double asterisks were thus used with great consistency and uniformity. The correct handling of double asterisks identified the text as appropriate and the chatter as a member of the chat community. In 2002, the asterisk is a part of verb phrases with uninflected verbs, i.e. of a syntagm that is likewise marginal throughout all types of German texts, and for that reason its appearance is striking. The verb phrase is not only salient, but also has a special meaning developed from a tradition that reaches back to the 1920s. In its cultural meaning, it is linked to the literary genre of comics, to an attitude that is anti-traditional and critical of school-learning.

The asterisked syntagm with an uninflected verb in chats becomes syntactically expandable and associated with the properties of chat texts, which distinguish these syntagms from the norms of standard language stipulated by schools. Symbols that are used and iterated in such a specific way become stylistic features. Chat was considered a medium of youth culture in 2002, and the phrasings employed there were a symbol of quick, unconventional, spontaneous writing. Because of their specific syntax, syntagms with asterisks had become an especially salient, stylistic feature that established the user as a competent chatter with regard to group distinction.

In the data from 2004, however, a tendency to dissolve asterisk usage already emerges. This can be explained by a loss of salience within chats, which results from the broad usage of these syntagms. The construction in the form conventional for chat has lost its conspicuousness and distinctiveness; it is no longer understood to be funny, spontaneous, or eccentric. It no longer lends itself (to the extent that it previously did) to staging interesting actions of a person, to being an indicator of style. Fittingly, a diffusion of longer syntagms without verb inflection is taking place in spoken language concurrently with the

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[38] On the term *salience*: salience is described substantially in Gestalt psychology. There is a tradition reaching back to the first decades of the twentieth century of investigating pre-rational 'impulse factors' that make objects noticeable. It is shown that social norms also influence what may draw attention and what must be overlooked. Cf. Hofstätter 1972, s.v. *Aufmerksamkeit*. In biopsychology, salience is explained in terms of incentive salience, cf. Birbaumer/Schmidt (1996: 640). In pragmatic theories that thematize language as an institution and language usages as a coordinational problem, salience is the prerequisite for coordination (cf. Schelling 1960, Lewis (1969: 13-14, 35-36), Clark (1985: 179-231), Clark 1996). In semantics, v. Heusinger 1997 uses the term *salience* in conjunction with the definition of that which is meant by noun phrases, which is elaborated there. On salience and group perception, cf. Blanz 1998.

verifiable liberalization of intra-chat convention we have discussed: *Was macht ihr denn mit der Weihnachtsfeier? Nur mal so in die Runde frag* (undocumented evidence, 2004). Dissemination is necessarily accompanied by loss of salience and distinctiveness.

6.3 Tendency to standard forms

A loss of salience in non-standard forms need not result in a turn toward standard language. One can also imagine rapidly changing modes of non-standard forms. In the quantitative analysis, the trend toward the standard clearly begins to show. This trend exists generally in online communities: Facebook as well as StudiVZ presents people with their profiles, out of which stable social contacts, professional and private, may develop. The presented characteristics are attributed to the users over the long-term. Owing to its codification and enforcement by schools, the standard language of German is recognized by all users even if they are not adequately familiar with it and provides for orientation.[39] The situational, lackadaisical play with language is being pursued less demonstratively and less intensively within these online communities. This tendency towards standard language is also noticeable in chat rooms since many of the writers use the aforementioned communities in addition to chat (informal survey among students).[40]

6.4 The asterisk

There is indeed a liberalization of the convention of double asterisks. In messages, the formal element «*…*» is no longer employed with the consistency and unified function typical for 2002. What clearly remains constant is the general popularity of asterisks and their playful usage in one other syntagm. Asterisks as part of personal designations do not experience a change in usage: The percentage of nicknames with asterisks relative to the total amount of names neither decreases from 2002 to 2004, nor decreases significantly from 2004 to 2007. Furthermore, the pattern of asterisk usage in names remains stable: in 50 % of the names, two asterisks are used, while merely one asterisk is used in slightly more than 20 % of the names. In the examples (made anonymous) numbered (10) to (12), one finds the following ornamentations of self-designations:

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[39]   On the orientational function of school-enforced language standards, cf. Bourdieu 1984.
[40]   Another explanation for the approximation to standard language could be the age of the chatters: some users have aged five years while using chat. That chatrooms are also used by thirty-year-olds can be read in the usernames with numbers. The analysis of the 30-40-50 CHAT-SET chat room, however, shows a decrease of conventions since 2002, as well.

(25) zestos*agori*20*
(26) *@*|Aristos|*@*
(27) *~asteri~*

With these ornaments, the asterisk attains a meaning that will stay in the game as long as it makes proper names more noticeable and as long as participants are interested in this particular functional differentiation. This applies for every linguistic form.

7. Ephemera and 'exapted' syntagms

The thematic concept *ephemer* was taken literally because of the corpus structure: 'for the day', one documented day from 2002, 2004, 2007, 2009, respectively. Normally the term is interpreted metonymically to mean, 'for a short time'. Other corpora that could show this quality might be packs of data collected in short time intervals, e.g., press releases from databases, which one can analyze with other means, with trend curves, etc. For that reason, we only pointed out one syntagm (*grinst rotzfrech*), which, although part of standard language, could be shown in our corpus as an example of an ephemeral incidence, an event only taken up in the short-term by others (5.8).

The focal points of our analysis of tradition-founding grammatical constructions were a type of syntagm developed about 90 years ago in a literary genre and its differentiation in several media. The syntagm's development was described in part 3 as grammaticalization. In part 2, absorption into various discursive traditions and the functional shift attending them were shown. With a gesture to evolutionary theory, the adoption of linguistic forms and their transferral to new contexts and media can be referred to as 'exaptation'.[41] Adoption with a functional shift is the essential characteristic of developmental processes that can be documented with the term 'exaptation'.

For syntax theory, this means the following: there are 1) standard syntagms, 2) syntagms in comics, 3) chat-specific syntagms (that can be explained as both extensions of comic-specific syntagms and as grammaticalizations of standard forms at the same time) and 4) syntagms, which lack certain features of chat-specific grammaticalization and which are also closer to standard syntagms.[42] Newer and older syntagms are used side by side and employed with different meanings. Structurally speaking, this is a matter of functional differentiation. At the beginning of the last decade comic-specific syntagms were used and extended specifically in chat rooms. During the decade, these chat-specific syn-

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[41] Cf. Traugott 2004, where the usage of this term is not only understood as a gesture or a metaphor.

[42] There is no need to interpret the syntagms categorized under 4) as degrammaticalizations of the syntagms under 3), but rather as renewal of characteristics of standard syntagms.

tagms were modified so that the current usage of syntagms (which were originally used in chat rooms at the beginning of the last decade) indicate a selection from a new repertoire (in a structural, paradigmatic sense – the competition between older and newer symbols), that has to be approached and interpreted from a new perspective.

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