warpz0r has 2,840 hits. This seems rather a small number in any event. Perhaps we should not expect to find many hits for these words since, as McKean suggests, the function of l33t-sp34k is to be exclusive, accessible to only a small number of enthusiastic followers.

6.4 Digitisation and ebooks

Crystal argues that ‘[a]ll areas of English language study have been profoundly affected by technological developments’ (Crystal, 2003, p. 446). First, the speed with which operations can be carried out is unprecedented. Second, the ways in which information can be processed and analysed has changed. Third, digital artefacts are open to a wider community. For example, at the touch of a button, digital copies of historical manuscripts stored in the geographically distinct museums can be brought together on demand, and the reader, while perusing these documents can have an email exchange with the curator; references can be made to other documents which, again, can be immediately brought to the virtual desktop. Aspects of this way of working have much in common with traditional scholarly practice but, according to some commentators, immediacy introduces new perspectives on interrelationships between hitherto disparate fields of enquiry. In this section, I will therefore focus on new practices involving the use of technology applied to the production, mediation and provision of English language texts. I will begin by looking at digitisation.

Digitisation

Digitisation is a term applied to the transfer of physical artefacts, either by scanning, camera, or any other digital recording device, into a form that can be processed by a computer. The process can be lengthy: it took a team of fourteen staff from Keio University, Tokyo, ten days to photograph the British Library’s two editions of the Canterbury Tales (British Library, 2006a). These documents may be stored optically on CD-ROM, DVD, etc., or may be stored magnetically on a hard disk drive and made available online through digital repositories – projects or organisations dedicated to the storage and distribution of digitised texts. Through the website of The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and using the projects link, you would find listed the many digitised texts of projects in the UK related to further and higher education. Such documents exist in what is said to be a ‘virtual space’, the point being that they can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection. Although access to such connections are not equally available around the world as indicated by population usage figures (see Table 6.4, the third and fifth columns from the left), the storage of documents in a virtual space means that documents in English are potentially more easily available to those in less prosperous regions. Digital Imaging South Africa (2006), for example, makes available a fully searchable database of a rare and otherwise inaccessible body of South African journal literature.