

Language Evolution: How The Internet Changes English In The Digital World

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Abstract: The article investigates changes in the English language connected with a large-scale Internet usage throughout the world. Some aspects of this appearance are examined by dint of concrete illustrations. Global communications, mass media, social networks proceed altering the English language promptly. Changes and additions occur at semantic, grammatical, morphological and lexical levels. The term “netspeak” has appeared relatively recently. It depicts the phenomena of transformation of language in modern digital space. The aim of the research is to define general tendencies of the English language development in Internet space and identify the reasons of its rapid transformation.

Key words: Internet, netspeak, online communication, language development, English transformation, influence, social networking, cyberspace, user’s slang.

In the era of high technologies, the Internet and instruments of online communication have become a daily part of our life. People are more addicted to global network. There are reasons for that: the World Wide Web (WWW) has changed our lives beyond all recognition, it is practical, operational and easy-to-use. The Net provides access to a large database on any subject you need. Furthermore, the Internet not only allows people to find necessary information, but to considerably simplify their communication anywhere in the world. The number of users of social networks, messengers, online forums and Internet communities is inexorably increasing. There are more and more people getting involved in online society. According to statistics, in January 2018 the amount of Internet users surpassed 4 billion people.

Undoubtedly, the fact of the impact of online communication cannot be ignored. In particular, the English language as lingua franca influences the World Wide Web in the global scale.

The language of international interaction underwent some changes over the last 20 years. New words, expressions, abbreviations have appeared. ‘Text speaking’ and some other features of the ‘netspeak’ will be considered through examples.

The facts of Internet slang (“netspeak”) is sorely diversified. It differs according to the user and type of Internet situation. In this article I would like to draw attention to several aspects of the “netspeak”: abbreviations and acronyms, Web neologisms, changes in punctuation and grammar.

Abbreviations and acronyms are widespread in online communication. Acronym is an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word. One of the most popular acronyms in the Web is “LOL” – laughing out loud (also written occasionally as “lots of laughs”). The similar acronym is “ROFL”/“ROFTL”– rolling on the floor laughing, used to convey great amusement. “IMHO” (in my honest opinion) and “OMG” (oh, my God!) have become a part of everyday interaction, especially in the Internet space.

Texting language (“textese”) as a distinctive type of abbreviated language has peculiar properties:

- Frequent word shortening (e.g. “tnx” – thanks, “srsly” – seriously, “lil” – little);
- The substitution of letters with numbers (“2morow” – tomorrow, “L8R” – later, “B4N” – bye for now)
- Common symbols replacement instead of words (“?” – what do you mean? I do not understand you, “=” – that is, “<3” – love).

Nevertheless, in one American study, researchers found that less than 20 % used texting language.

Speaking about neologisms, it is necessary to note that the number of new words originated from cyberspace (including “Twitterverse”) attained about 5000 in 2015. The vocabulary of Internet neologisms replenishes every year. So, the word “selfie” (a photograph that one has taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media) named as the word of the year in 2013. The verb “to google” (searching information about someone or something) gained popularity by virtue of mass use search engine Google. Here a few more examples of new words with their definitions:

“Facepalm” – used in social networking sites to show that you are embarrassed annoyed or disappointed.

“Meme” – an idea, image, video etc. that is spread very quickly on the Internet.

“Spam” – unwanted or intrusive advertising on the Internet.

“Clapback” – a quick reply to a critical or unfair treatment.

Changes in punctuation and grammar are also should be paid attention to. In on-line communication users often ignore punctuation rules. Comma is used very rarely, practically only for recitation or emphasis. Point at the end of the statement is replaced by an exclamation point or a smiley (“emoji”).

Grammar punctuation is overlooked too. For example, the word “email” is written instead of “e-mail”. The verb “to be” in different tenses, apostrophes, articles are often omitted. In the majority of statements passive voice and complex tenses are rare enough.

In this way, on the basis of the facts previously cited above some principal tendencies about the English language development in the Web could be identified:

1. Simplification of the English language in general connected with the reduction or substitution of words, omitting articles, verbs etc.;
2. The language becomes “free” from rules;
3. The creation of new Internet terminology that describes rapidly changing virtual environment and trends;
4. The adaptation of classical English words – old words acquire new meanings;
5. The development of specific Internet language area.

There are three main reasons why the English language is developing in a such way. First of them is modernization – new technologies, industrialization, urbanization, the genesis of new branches of science.

The second reason is mass media spreading, standardization and simplification in many spheres of society including the English language. The third reason is globalization related with an accelerated rate of life and unification of culture and language environment. Is it good or bad for the further development of the English language? The question remains open.

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