

Running head: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE

1

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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE

2

Abstract

This paper is aimed at exploring the impact of social networks on English language proficiency, whether it affects the language knowledge and usage negatively or positively. The paper is focused on investigating various key components like grammar, vocabulary, and 4 crucial language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, keeping in mind the effects of numerous elements of Social Media on each of them. Based on the results of the present study, it can confidently be stated that social networks impact our writing more than any other skill. Constant software enhancements have made constructing a message or statement, of any length, a child's play. Ironically, our smartphones have become smarter than us, even when it comes to our natural communication skills. The basic building blocks of any Language lies in its roots and sentence construction. In this generation, those building blocks are replaced or modified by the inclusion of several elements like abbreviations, emoticons and autofill. This paper explores both positive and negative aspects of the effects of social media on Language and presents a critical evaluation.

Keywords: impact on language, social networks, language skills, vocabulary, cognitive skills.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE

Introduction

"We are what we share." - Charles W. Leadbeater

The emergence of the internet and the consequential array of social media networks have, without doubt, resulted in an exponential increase in new types of written language: blogs, tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram status etc. There's no doubt that social media has had a severe impact on the massive volume of people we are now able to communicate with along with the frequency with which we are able to communicate with them. This has to a worldwide exposure to a myriad of dissimilar personalities and perspectives. Except social media professionals and academic journalists, the majority of what is written by the general public on social media is unedited, unsupervised and unchecked. With the freedom to use the English language in whatever way we choose to on social media, trends are bound to appear... Trends having massive implications on people's ideologies and perception of an incident, personality or the Truth. The general grammar undoubtedly worsens due to social network usage.

The prominent linguist of the Modern Period, David Crystal (2001)

showing his attitude towards this issue, quoted:

"When telephones arrived in the 19th century, people panicked because they thought it was going to destroy language. Then broadcasting came along in the 1920s and people panicked because they thought everybody's going to be brainwashed. Same with the Internet. People panicked because they thought

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE

4

the Internet was going to do devastating things to language."

The prominent linguist of the Modern Period, David Crystal (2001), on the people's perception of this matter, quoted:

"When telephones arrived in the 19th century, people panicked because they thought it was going to destroy language. Then broadcasting came along in the 1920s and people panicked because they thought everybody's going to be brainwashed. Same with the Internet. People panicked because they thought the Internet was going to do devastating things to language."

Effects on Key Language Components:

Vocabulary and Grammar

Many words have now been given completely new meanings in an online context, which thereby spills over during verbal communication. A few words which have been remodelled for social media use include:

1. Wall, which refers to the homepage of an individual's social media profile
2. Tag, means to link to someone else's profile in a social media post, commonly a photo or status update.
3. Troll, which is a term used to describe an internet user who seeks attention by making outrageous or unreasonable comments about something or someone.
4. Ping, which means to make contact with someone by sending a brief electronic message, as a text message.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE

5

5. Profile, now refers to the personal details, images, user statistics, social-media timeline, etc., that an individual creates and associates with a username or online account.
6. Viral, means to become very popular by circulating quickly from person to person, especially through the internet.

Many words have created within the huge confines of the World Wide Web, having enough impact and reputation for themselves to officially be included in the Oxford Dictionary. A few of these words are – selfie, twerk, phablet, derp, photobomb, woot, inbox, sext, noob, etc. Abbreviations like lol, af and omg have become so common in day-to-day communication that along with the previously mentioned new words, they too are slipping into our verbal conversations.

Research suggests that although people prefer using minimal apt messages, almost one thirds of the modern generation are prone to using rich vocabulary, both in social media and formal mails, thus expanding their field of technical knowledge.

Reading and Writing Skill

"Youngsters are reading more than ever because they're glued to screens" says David Crystal. [13]. With the help of social networks texting, almost half of the people, while typing any text message, try to avoid long sentences replacing them with shorter ones. But the prominent linguist David Crystal (2008) in his book " Txtng: The Gr8 Db8" mentions that the more students write, the more

they develop their writing skills. Therefore, its increased use rather intensifies the literacy of users, especially the youth instead of harming it [14]. Speedy writing skill ends with making frequent spelling errors. Craig (2003) found that while using social networks students create undesirable reading and writing habits due to common use of abbreviations and unusual jargon, and this situation brings to the damage of the students' formal literacy skills [15].

Listening Skill

Listening, defined as the “process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages, requires significant attention to the other”. While we can listen to others via the social media, in most cases much of the nonverbal part of communication is missing. Moreover, digitized friendships are established on rapid response rather than reflection on the soul. Listening requires one to slow down, something that is quite hard on social media. Listening in a face-to-face interaction requires way more work and compassion than it does in an online “conversation”. Listening interpersonally allows us to peel away the masks we can so easily hide behind online. [16] Warrell notes the craving for intimacy: “Genuine intimacy demands vulnerability and vulnerability requires courage.”³⁵ She says that the human factor within any relationship can never be replaced by technology, especially empathy.

Components of Social Media:

Textese

Textese is a form of abbreviated written (typed) language, that is characterized by the omission of words and the use of *textisms*, such as abbreviations, letter/number homophones, emoticons, etc. [3] Overuse of textese by children and teens has been clearly linked to poor reading and writing skills and even significant language deterioration. [4] However, in the majority of studies, one's use of textese and their spelling and literacy abilities were found to be positively related: accuracy of reading textese and speed of reading and writing textese were positively associated with one's spelling, reading and non-word reading scores [5]; and number of (certain types of) textisms and textism density—the ratio of textisms used per word—were positively associated with spelling skills [6,7,8-11]; orthographic processing ability; phonological and phoneme processing, awareness and retrieval abilities [6,8-11]; verbal reasoning scores [7] reading skills [6,8-11]; and writing skills [10]. Recurrent use of textese may lead to better metalinguistic knowledge and a heightened sensitivity to language in general, affecting one's grammar performance, among other aspects of language. By using textese—and as a consequence omitting words in their messages—one applies rules of grammar and does so in a context-sensitive manner. In order to decide which words to drop in which context, one analyses their sentences and in doing so, are constantly training their grammatical knowledge, and strengthening their grammar system, especially those of children and teens. “Chat conversations exhibit features of both written and spoken language” [17] Hence, it is so easier to use and thus, preferred over conventional forms of communication.

Emoticons/Emojis

Emoticons are graphic representations of facial expressions that many internet users

embed in their messages. Similar to emoticons, emojis are actual pictures instead of only typo-graphics. Emoji are ideograms and smileys used in messages and web pages. Emoji exist in various genres, including facial expressions, common objects, places and types of weather, and animals. Facial expressions have greater effects than vocal and spatial non-verbal cues. “Visual cue primacy is also stronger when decoding emotions related to positivity...especially when visual cues involve the face,” according to Burgoon [12], who continue that “the face is particularly important in judging positivity because receivers associate the smile with positivity, a link that has no analogue in the body and the voice”. Thus, emojis and emoticons have become replacements for sensitive messages, especially those conveying feelings. Although it directly does not affect the grammar and vocabulary but it greatly reduces their need by acting as viable replacements, in specific cases.

Conclusion

Technology is evolving at such an unprecedented scale that we need to adjust and adapt to the changing digital ecosystem. Analysing carefully, we find that the positive effects of the social networking exceed the negative effects. Positive effects are mainly demonstrated in the one’s vocabulary enlargement, pronunciation improvement, scanning ability development while reading the text on the net, etc. Writing skill is most negatively affected. To minimize the negative effect of Social Network on English language proficiency, it is extremely imperative to educate our future generations on the healthy use of information and communication technology, and decrease the usage of abbreviations in their academic writings. Hand written text is undoubtedly tougher than typed text, given the added

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE

9

advantages like autocorrect, instant thesaurus, auto indentation and font choices, to name a few. In spite of all that, we can still minimize the adulteration of language by filtering out the junk habits. Using the features provided to us, we can have a better understanding of our language mechanics and vocabulary. Apart from that, we need to unplug our minds from social media, preventing a potential addiction. There is nothing better than interacting with real people of flesh and blood. The one-to-one human factor can never be nullified by social media.



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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE

12

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