

EXTENDED ESSAY

English B

To what extent does the ever spreading usage of internet slang have on the degradation of the English Language and the human mind?

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Abstract

The goal I had in my mind throughout the creation of this writing was to rationalise and demonstrate my argument that the ever increasing practice of integrating slang words into the English language would cause significant corruption in the language and lead to the irreversible degradation of it and make others care about this transmutation of their main tool of communication. To accomplish this monumental task, I first identified the most important aspect of English that was degrading in quality due to this new, unexpected change in the language, namely grammar, and then explained, in stark detail, how important a role said aspect plays as the very structure of the English language, backing up my reasoning with specific examples. Secondly, I showed the impact of the oversimplified language that came to be through the unrelenting use of slang words on the human mind and its way of thinking. And thirdly, I showed the future consequences of the integration of slang words into the language as something to watch out for.

There was understandably a very small amount of written sources to that discuss this subject which simply goes on to show that the amount of people who are aware of how their language is irreversibly changing is far smaller than it should be. In fact, I could not find a hand written source to back up my arguments. As such, all of my sources come from various corners of the internet where this subject is discussed at great length. My sources included both real life examples and rationalised arguments showing the degradation of the language and impact of this degradation on communication in English speaking countries.

Now, that I am finished with my extended essay I am satisfied by the results and believe that I have managed to illustrate my argument to its fullest extent, sufficient to make others care about its significance.

Word Count : 313

Introduction

As humanity evolves so does their way of living. This is best exemplified in the ever advancing concept of technology. With this evolution also comes the concept of change. The conception of new tools and devices gives life to the need to express oneself more efficiently which coupled with the inherent laziness of the people results in fundamental changes in one of the cornerstones of human communication : language. In the twenty first century, the widespread use of various electronic tools and devices such as computers and cell phones resulted in the occurrence of this exact same phenomenon. Nonsensical combinations of letters that are simply easier and much less time consuming to write or type have come to fruition by the hands of those, who find their legitimate synonyms in the English language lacking in comparison, out of a need for convenience. The most common occurrences of this phenomenon can be observed in the internet, indeed the vast network of communication found through the use of cell phones and computers are the place where this process of using abbreviations and acronyms began. These new creations are merely shorter versions of popular phrases on the net such as “laughing out loud” and “be right back”. Because of the inconvenience one would have to suffer to actually type these phrases by hand and thus expand physical effort in order to convey their thoughts, the residents of the many forums of the internet have found it easier to substitute them for the aforementioned nonsensical combinations of letters such as “LOL” and “brb” respectively for the phrases given above. The practice then spread like wildfire to many other sites such as the ever popular Facebook or Twitter which are built with the intent of helping establish communication between others through the internet in the first place so it is unsurprising that the people who frequent such sites would adopt the usage of new “words” if they can be called over their legitimate alternatives in the English language because of the convenience they provide. Because of the ease with which concepts are spread through the internet and text messaging, these “words” if they could be called have come to possess the exact same meanings as those of the ones in the real language by most if not all of the Internet communities, rendering the old words more or less obsolete in the face of their more convenient counterparts. The most accepted ones of these new words have found their way into the English language thanks to the sheer numbers of individuals who have come to integrate the words into the vocabulary of their daily

lives. As words are much easier to speak than to write, this merger has the inevitable result of degrading the English language because the convenience gained from the short expressions are rendered unimportant outside of internet usage and text massaging with the end result being the discarding of words and phrases of sound structure such as the simple act of laughing in favor of an abomination such as “LOL” which is supposed to represent “laughing out loud”. Thus, the ever present need for convenience born from the advancement of technology in the twenty first century has resulted in the degradation of the English language and continues on to this day.

The Destruction Of Grammar and It's Importance In Communication

To start with, perhaps the greatest major consequence of this degradation is the destruction of the rules governing the language that comes with the oversimplification of words and phrases. With these new words the concept of grammar and all that it brings is non-existent. For example, using variations of the aforementioned "lol" such as "LOLing" to complete sentences is common practice in many corners of the internet which usually utterly destroys any semblance of grammar that the complete sentence might have had. However, it should be noted that this is in fact an intended attribute of the new words because, as stated above, their purpose is to provide convenience by trimming what is perceived to be unnecessary in a word or phrase and many see having to conform to the rigid rules of language that is grammar to be unnecessary. Unfortunately, the significance of grammar for the stability of a language, regardless of which language it is, is not as negligible as many people on this world seem to believe. To understand the significance of this loss of grammar, one must first understand why grammar is important in the first place. The concept of grammar is the manner in which the sentences formed in the language it governs are formatted and structured. Simply put, it is the law that binds the world that is language and it is important because it is this law that holds the English language together in a coherent, easily understandable form. Without the use of grammar, most sentences barring very simple ones become an incoherent, jumbled mess and whatever message the sentence might have had simply cannot be communicated properly without losing something that the person attempting to communicate placed within the sentence, be it a thought or an emotion. Here is an example : *"the statement "I filled the bottle with water" sounds correct, but "I filled water into the bottle" does not"*¹. As a matter of fact, it can safely be said that the lack of grammar makes one unable to convey more complex messages which unsurprisingly places significant restrictions on communication between parties. This excerpt is from a position statement on the teaching of grammar in American schools :

¹ "The Nature of Language." Mc Graw Hill Higher Education. 2010. Mc Graw Hill. 12. December 2011 <<http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/0073385115/872472/SampleChapter04.pdf>>

“Grammar is important because it is the language that makes it possible for us to talk about language. Grammar names the types of words and word groups that make up sentences not only in English but in any language. As human beings, we can put sentences together even as children--we can all do grammar. But to be able to talk about how sentences are built, about the types of words and word groups that make up sentences--that is knowing about grammar. And knowing about grammar offers a window into the human mind and into our amazingly complex mental capacity.

People associate grammar with errors and correctness. But knowing about grammar also helps us understand what makes sentences and paragraphs clear and interesting and precise. Grammar can be part of literature discussions, when we and our students closely read the sentences in poetry and stories. And knowing about grammar means finding out that all languages and all dialects follow grammatical patterns”. (Richard Nordquist, lines 5-23)²

The poor communication that would result should grammar be stripped from the language is especially harmful not only to the individual but also to the community as a whole because communication is, in fact, one of the turning points in human development. Without it, it would be impossible to efficiently convey thoughts and feelings in order to create new or improve upon existing solutions to the many problems faced throughout the course of one’s life. In addition, it would take herculean effort to dissolve any conflict, no matter how simple, without resorting to violence and brute force, after all it is all that is left unsaid upon which tragedies are built. As such, for the reasons established above, mankind needs to be able to communicate with one another in order to keep on living comfortable, peaceful lives and in order to communicate with one another they need a tool that is simple enough to use but also complex enough to relay a colossal range of thoughts and emotions with which to express itself. This tool is language, and the layer of complexity covering it that allows us to put our more complicated thoughts and emotions into words is grammar. Unfortunately, in English speaking countries more and more people pick up internet slang and integrate it into their speech everyday. As shown

² Nordquist, Richard. “Why Does Grammar Matter ?”. About.com Grammar & Composition. 2007. 31 October 2011. <<http://grammar.about.com/od/grammarfaq/f/grammarvalue.htm>>.

by this report on the success rates of Canadian college students after long term exposure to internet slang:

“LOL-speak, fractured grammar, and emoticons are all finding their way into the college essays of Canadian students with increasing and disturbing frequencies, if a report in that nation's popular press is to be believed. Entitled "Students failing because of Twitter, texting," the report is based in part on the failure rate of an English language exam administered by the prestigious University of Waterloo in Ontario. The failure rate has now approached one third, up from 25 percent a few years ago, and a University administrator blames failure of basic grammar”. (John Timmer, lines 1-6)³

Consequently, the disruption of grammar continues at an even faster pace. One might even go as far as to say that the English language is degrading, slowly but surely it is losing its quality and with it its value. The truth of the matter is, while people believe that they are improving the English language by making it easier to use in certain situations, they are in fact corrupting it by discarding words and phrases that conform to the rules of the language and replacing them with low quality words that lack such an attribute which only serves to decrease the value of the language. As the rate of this corruption increases, the degradation of the English language also continues to increase and will most likely continue to do so until it has completely lost its value as an efficient way of speaking. To sum up, keeping the importance of grammar in language as detailed above in mind, it should be readily apparent just how large of a negative impact that the integration of internet slang has on the English language. The merging of internet slang into the English language in order to make it easier to express in written form as done by many people worldwide today, has the debilitating side effect of robbing the English language of the precious structure that it is built upon : grammar. With this loss, the English language also ends up suffering significant losses in its coherency, fluidity and its ability to relay complicated thoughts and the emotions associated with them.

³ Timmer, John. “Student grammar failure: capability or context ?.” [ars technica](http://arstechnica.com/science/news/2010/02/student-grammar-failure-capability-or-context.ars). 2010. 13 December 2011. <<http://arstechnica.com/science/news/2010/02/student-grammar-failure-capability-or-context.ars>>

The Impact Of Oversimplified Language On The Human Mind

Another drastic consequence of this simplification of the English language is its negative impact on the way we, humans think. As more and more new combinations such as the ever popular “LOL” are created, more and more of the old words are being discarded by various people in the favor of their younger counterparts. Because the vast majority of these new creations are a means to convey whole phrases, not individual words, the users of these words will eventually end up adapting a way of thinking that encompasses a much more narrow range of thought than their original one.

“Whether it's due to sloth or inability, the reality is that the generations that are using the internet most heavily for communication are seeing their grammatical and linguistic levels flounder”. (Thananachai Wudhapitak, lines 8-10)⁴

The reasoning for this is simple, they will no longer have as many words with which to express themselves with and instead they will attempt to use shortened phrases, the new words, with a similar meaning but which could potentially mean something fundamentally different than what they were trying to convey due to small differences that seem unnecessary at first glance but in truth play a vital role in granting the English language its ability to express the emotions of the speaker without them having to state said emotions out loud. For example, take the words “thin”, “skinny” and “slim” all of which seem to have the same meaning at first glance. These words all have the same meaning of being slender. However, the emotion they convey is quite different; skinny implies that this particular quality of the person in question is not a positive one which in turn has the subtle implication that the speaker is concerned about the subject that the word is being directed to. In stark contrast, the word slim implies that this particular trait of the subject is a positive attribute. It expresses the speaker’s belief that being as slender as the subject in question is something to be envied and desired even. It can even implicate the presence of a subtle resentment or envy on the speaker’s part. On the other hand, the word thin is

⁴ Wudhapitak, Thanachai. “Is Twitter Destroying the English Language ?.” Toolbox.com. 2010. 13 December 2011. <<http://it.toolbox.com/blogs/future-guide/is-twitter-destroying-the-english-language-36704>>

neutral with no emotion attached, indicating that the speaker has no particular opinion on whether the subject being slender is beneficial or not. Its use can also indicate that the speaker just plain doesn't care about it. As one can see, all three of these words differ from each other in a small yet vital manner, in fact it is this difference that allows us to subtly express our emotions and opinions on many subjects ranging from insignificant ones to ones that are of vital importance and reduce the risk of misunderstandings to a minimum when communicating with others. Because most of the new words are intended to be used to describe a large variety of situations by themselves alone, they tend to be vague and merely relay a general outline of whatever it is that they are describing to their audience without placing much emphasis on detail or elaboration. In addition, the new words also lack the diversity of the English language as shown above, having little more than a single word to express an action or thought. As a result, the integration of the new words into the English language has the effect of encouraging people to have a much more narrow frame of mind when it comes to speaking with others because the words they use lack the ability to express potentially important details whereas the original English language already fulfilled this purpose for them automatically, consciously or otherwise on the speaker's part. Having lost the ability to express themselves in full detail, people will eventually begin to consider details to be unimportant and not worthy of mention, as a result of this the efficiency of communication will suffer. For example, the new word "brb" means, "be right back" which when translated into proper English means that the speaker will be back soon, it is used virtually everywhere on the internet and in a few parts of the real world when the speaker has to leave his companion for a time. However, the word does not specify what exactly "soon" is. Depending on the speaker's perception of time, "soon" could refer to anything between the range of a minute to an hour or so. As a result not only does the speaker risk instigating a misunderstanding on their intended audience's part, they also begin to associate being gone for between a minute and an hour with a single nonspecific word thus narrowing their range of thought. There is also the problem of the intended audience of the speaker not understanding that brb indeed means be right back. A glorious example of this can be seen in this excerpt from a BBC news article:

But many mistake "LOL" for "lots of love", leading to some unintended "LOLs", such as the infamous tale of the mother who wrote: "Your grandmother has just passed away. LOL" (James Morgan).⁵

After all why would anybody bother using different words for different situations when a single word is enough to cover all of said situations at the cost of being much more vague? To sum up, the senseless combinations of letters that have been integrated into the everyday language of many people not only damage the grammatical structure of the English language but also simplify the manner in which these people think, with the expected result being a much more narrow way of thinking on the speaker's part and a high risk of misunderstanding on their audience's part.

⁵ Morgan, James. "Why did LOL infiltrate the language?". BBC Mobile News Magazine. 2011. BBC. 31 October 2011. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12893416>>

The Current and Future Segregation Of Old Speakers and New Speakers

Yet another major consequence of the corruption of the English language by the blight that is internet slang and final point I intend to make about the major negative consequences of forging new, *inferior* words to replace the present ones in this writing, is the inevitable isolation of these “new speakers” from the people who use the English language in its proper form as it was meant to be. After all, considering the wide variety of people who speak English and the fact that the addition of these new words was not originally instigated by the respective governments of any English speaking country but rather done because of how widespread the practice was among a large amount of people for the sake of convenience along with the many of the glaring faults that using these words have, there will always be traditionalists who refuse to use the new words integrated into the language and make use the old ones instead. As more and more new words are invented the greater the difference between the vocabularies of those who use them and those who do not becomes and as this difference increases so does the lack of understanding between the two communities. Here is an excerpt from a BBC news article that details an encounter between members of the two communities:

When a 13-year-old Scottish girl handed in an essay written in text message shorthand, she explained to her flabbergasted teacher that it was easier than standard English.

She wrote: "My smmr hols wr CWOT. B4, we used 2go2 NY 2C my bro, his GF & thr 3 :- kids FTF. ILNY, it's a gr8 plc." (In translation: "My summer holidays were a complete waste of time. Before, we used to go to New York to see my brother, his girlfriend and their three screaming kids face to face. I love New York. It's a great place.")

The girl's teacher - who asked not to be named - was not impressed, saying: "I could not believe what I was seeing. The page was riddled with hieroglyphics, many of which I simply could not translate".⁶

⁶ "Is txt mightier than the word?". BBC News. 2003. United Kingdom. 31 October 2011. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2814235.stm>

To elaborate more on this point, let me reiterate a statement I made at the very first paragraph of this essay, language is the cornerstone of human communication, it is after all the fastest and most effective therefore most efficient tool we humans have in order to express our thoughts and emotions. So then how can a normal English speaker hope to communicate with a new speaker with the same ease that they do with another normal English speaker or if indeed they can communicate through language at all? As of today the answer is that yes, they can communicate with each other, with difficulty at times perhaps, since they are at it's core speaking the very same language. However, as the number of new words introduced to the English language increases so does the difficulty of establishing communication between the new speakers and the old speakers. For example, as should be clear to anyone who has attempted to join many an internet forum without any insight as to how it functions; the vocabulary used is almost incomprehensible to normal English speakers. I myself have personally dwelled in numerous places around the vast network of communication that is the internet and observed how the English language was being used there and it is quite a drastic change from the everyday English employed by people in real life in various countries. In the vast majority of the writings on the internet, the concept of grammar is virtually nonexistent, most words are replaced by the new words and whatever remains of the old words are spelled incorrectly unless they are simple words such as "run" or "read". This lack of comprehension on the old speaker's part is not much of a problem today because the amount of new words that were added to the English language lack the numbers necessary to disrupt the communication between the parties and also because the number of people who adopted the new words into their daily lives outside of the internet remain relatively minuscule compared to the people who speak English in its intended form. However the amount of new words created and the amount of people who start carrying them out of the internet continue to increase day by day. As such it is easy to see how this could cause problems of isolation among the two groups in the future as the eventual difference between the vocabularies of the two sides will have the effect of creating a rather large gap in communication for both sides, which will then inevitably alienate them from one another. Essentially building up a wall that first has to be vaulted over with effort if a person from one group wishes to establish communication with a person or group from the other one because they would have to learn what has become a whole new language to them, the wall acting not unlike a

language barrier, similar to the ones seen between countries that speak different languages, that separates the old speakers from the new ones. To sum up, should the liberal use of internet slang in real life continue to spread among the people who speak the English language, this problem of failure to establish communication will escalate as well, further segregating the two communities from each other up until the point they are completely and utterly isolated from one another.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the invention of new words in order to replace old words and phrases already present in the English language due to a need of convenience when using the language in its written form has the effect of utterly destroying the grammar that is present in the language. Sentences made afterwards without the use of grammar are lacking both in coherency and fluidity, resulting in a strange manner of speaking that is not only awkward to emulate but also difficult to understand. Moreover, the new words integrated in to the language are poor in quality. As stated above, they lack the necessary capacity to relay the entirety of the speaker's thoughts and emotions to their audience. Making way for drastic misunderstandings, that may prove to be extremely harmful. In addition to all of this the merger of the new words with the English language has the unintended yet dangerous effect of degrading the quality of communication not only among those who adopt these new words but also between these new speakers and the traditional speakers, a problem that will only keep escalating as more more people start integrating these new words into their vocabularies. As has been repeated countless times within this writing, communication is important. It is after all, what we use to express thought and emotions. One could even say that it rather than money makes the world go around. Because communication holds such weight, it is important if not essential to ensure that it is established with as much clarity as possible in order to prevent or at least minimize misunderstandings regardless of whether it is sizeable or minor. As such, the creation of these new words is in fact a step backwards not only in the ever continuing development of the english language but also in the advancement of humanity as a whole, simply because of the dominance of the english language over every other language in widespread usage. To elaborate, English, often called the universal language by many, is the most widely used language in the entire world. As such, as the quality of English decreases so does the quality of communication around a colossal part of the entire world. Because communication and human thought are so closely linked, this phenomenon has the ultimate result of degrading the power of our thoughts by forcing us to express them through a much less flexible tool. In the end, for all of the reasons detailed above, the new words that have come to infect the English language like a disease must either be abolished completely or contained where they belong, in the vast web of networks that is the internet.

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