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INTERACTION OF SOCIETY AND SCIENCE: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Abstracts of III International Scientific and Practical Conference

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EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE

Kolisnyk Maryna

Assistant

Bila Tserkva National Agrarian University

The overall digital transformation has not only made the world more accessible, but it has also changed the way we communicate.

According to statista.com, [7] there are roughly 4.66 billion active internet users worldwide (which is 59,5 percent of the total global population). And, if we consider social media users, there are approximately 4,2 billion of them today (which is about 52% of the Earth's population). Such a statistics of the Global digital population are the proof of growing dominance of digital media in our daily lives.

The emergence of the internet and the widespread use of social media for communicating ideas, personal and professional stories and experiences have had a profound effect on the way people communicate today. It resulted in the emergence of the new types of written language (blogs, tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts, etc.).

Social media can be described as the collection of online platforms that involve sharing and collaborating with an online community by posting, commenting, and interacting with one another. The most commonly used social media platforms today are Facebook, Youtube, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook Messenger, [8].

One of the positive effects of social media is the ability to get an intimate view of other cultures and places. With social media, especially on Instagram, users are able to see what others are doing around the world. People are exposed to travel ideas, new cultures, and ways of life unlike before.

At the same time, there is a significant social media "side-effect": people are becoming bored having real, face-to-face conversations. They feel a constant need for social media consumption and that instant, colorful feedback only social media can give, that people often become bored during real conversations, resorting to their phones. This can lead to a decrease in the quality and number of meaningful conversations.

A lot of individual reactions to various non-verbal, emotional, as well as social features are also changing. The reason is that there is no need to respond to these types of communication while being online. As a result, the experience and awareness of others' needs based on these types of features that can only be received from face-to-face communication are almost lost.

English has been dominating the internet languages for many years. And, according to statista.com, in 2021 English was recognized as the most represented online language (25.3% of internet users worldwide).

In this article, I examined how social media has changed the Standard English language and tried to figure out the main peculiarities of online English.

It is evident that social media has had a colossal effect on the way we communicate with other people (both in writing and by parol). Nowadays we are free to use the English language depending on personalities, perspectives, and approaches we use social media to communicate. With the exception of social media professionals and academic journalists, which tend to use proper English language, the majority of what is written by the general public on social media is not restricted to almost any is rules, either to spelling, grammar or vocabulary.

Even the most reputable dictionaries (such as Oxford English Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary Online and Merriam Webster Online Dictionary), now acknowledge the influence of social media on the English language and add new ‘media’ words every year.

Here I am going to analyze the main changes that social media communication brought to the English language.

1. Appropriating existing vocabulary

One of the most notable ways that social media has influenced the English language, is through the appropriation of existing vocabulary. Words that had existing meanings, have now been given other meanings in an online context, which then overflow into verbal communication. Years ago, if somebody said the word “*wall*” to you, you might think of the ones in your house, or the ones outside in the street; however, in a social media context the word “*wall*” refers to the homepage of your social media profile, where you can share aspects of your life/work in a public forum. A few other words which have been re-purposed for social media and can be found in Cambridge Dictionary Online include:

- *Post*, which is something such as a message or picture that you publish on a website or using social media, [9];
- *Follow*. If you follow a particular person on a social media website (= a website where people can publish their thoughts, photographs, information about themselves etc.), you choose to see everything that person posts (= publishes) on the website, [9];
- *Share*, i.e, to put something on a social media website so that other people can see it, or to let other people see something that someone else has put on a website, [9];
- *vitamin S*, i.e. social contact with other people, considered to be as good for your health as the vitamins in food, [9];
- *social hangover* - a feeling of tiredness and slight illness after meeting and spending time with friends and family, especially after lockdown, [9].

2. Introducing new vocabulary

The internet has become one of the influences of the English language in recent times, and along with appropriating existing vocabulary, it has given life to a lot of new words and phrases. A few years ago, nobody had heard of the terms “*unfriend*”, “*selfie*” or “*emoji*”, however these words have trickled down from social media, and into our ever day conversations. Some of these terms are now the part of the Oxford Dictionary. Here are some new words from Oxford English Dictionary (added in June 2021):

- 1) *staycationer*, n.: “A person who holidays at home or in his or her country of residence, [10];

2) *virtual assistant*, n.: “A program (or device running a program) that can respond to commands or questions and perform tasks electronically; = digital assistant, [10].

3) *webcam*, v.: “transitive. To record (someone or something) using a webcam and broadcast the recording (usually live) over the internet, [10].

4) *webcamming*, n.: “The action of recording or broadcasting something using a webcam, or communicating online via webcam. Cf. *camming* n., [10].

Almost universally known are specific social media acronyms, such as “*LOL*” (and its variants “*lolwat*” and “*lulz*”), “*DM*” (Direct Message), “*FOMO*” (Fear of Missing Out) and “*TBT*” (Throwback Thursday). Here are some examples of the newly added abbreviations from Merriam Webster Online Dictionary:

1) *WFH* - work (or working) from home. This is an important word to know if you become part of an English-speaking workplace this year, [11];

2) *NFT* - non-fungible token: a unique digital identifier that cannot be copied, substituted, or subdivided, that is recorded in a blockchain, and that is used to certify authenticity and ownership (as of a specific digital asset and specific rights relating to it), [11];

It should be mentioned that the speed at which new vocabulary is introduced online, used, quickly over-used and then discarded is phenomenal and has never been so rapid. For example, the following terms would now be considered ‘antique’ on social media: *OMG*, *TXT*, *GR8*, *M8* and *L8R*.

Moreover, acronyms can be found in traditionally non-abbreviated forms of communication such as spoken language, email communication, and even academic forms of writing. This has caused concern among some academics, citing studies that show a connection between social media communication and negative effects on literacy skills (such as writing skills and reading accuracy) [3; 4] and the development of linguistic skills [2; 4; 6]. Other studies [1; 5] show that social media communication has no effect on spelling ability, or correct grammar use.

3. The use GIFs and Emoticons

It may seem fun and innocent to use emoticons (or emojis) to show our feelings or to replace some words, as well as to use a small picture or a funny moving photo (GIF) to express a reaction or attitude to something. Although it is interfering with our ability to properly create a written response to a message (comment) with our own words. It may be a real problem as far as our further offline communication is concerned.

4. Summarized Writing

Since the beginning of its use, social media messages have been getting shorter and more concise. Other areas of communication have adapted for summarized writing as well, such as in shortened work memos, shortened academic communication between students and professors, and shortened messages in advertising.

It is needless to say that social media is a rich playground for experimenting, creating new words and repurposing old ones. It also provides a platform for people who aren’t consumed by grammatical rules and syntax, giving the freedom to change the usual English language and be innovative, creative and forward thinking.

Although the developments and trends we witness in a language over time are significant, the basics of the English language remains as strong and authoritative as it always has been.

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