How is social media changing the English language?

By Hermione Foster

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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 and LinkedIn profiles to mention just a few. But with English being the most dominant language on the internet, how has social media changed the English language? There's no denying that social media has had a drastic impact on the sheer volume of people we are now able to communicate with, it's also had an impact on the frequency with which we are able to communicate with them. This has led to us being exposed to a myriad of different personalities, perspectives, and approaches when we use social media to communicate. With the exception of social media professionals and academic journalists, the majority of what is written by the general public on social media is not edited, supervised or checked to ensure that **proper use of the English language** is taken into consideration. With the freedom to use the English language however we choose to on social media, trends are bound to appear. Let's take a look at a few of these trends below.

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 spills over 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 include:

1. Tablet, which is used to refer to portable screens.
2. Troll, which is a term used to describe an internet user who seeks attention by making outrageous or unreasonable comments about something or someone.
3. Stream(ing), which is the transmission of data as a steady continuous flow.

4. Catfish, which is a term used to refer to an internet user who poses as someone other than themselves online.

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 plethora of new words and phrases. A few years ago, nobody had heard of the terms "unfriend", "selfie" "fleek" or "emoji" however these words have trickled down from social media, and into our day to day conversations. Some of these terms have even made it into the Oxford Dictionary; ones that have, include: YOLO (You Only Live Once) along with compound words such as "Craptacular" and "Amazeballs", not to mention the recent social media trend of identifying high-profile couples by combining their first names to form a blend word e.g. Brangelina. Alongside these words are a vast array of social media specific acronyms, ranging from the almost universally known "LOL" celebrating its 28th birthday this year (Laughing Out Loud), "DM", (Direct Message) and "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out) and "TBT" (Throwback Thursday). The speed at which new vocabulary is introduced online, used, quickly over-used and then discarded is phenomenal and has never been so rapid. An example of terms that would now be considered 'antique' text speak on social media are: OMG, TXT, GR8, M8 and L8R.

Generational language gap?

In a recent study of 2,000 parents, conducted by Samsung, 86% of participants said that they felt teens and young people spoke an entirely different language on social media. According to the study there is now a 'seismic generational gap' regarding how modern informal language is being used. The study was carried out by Professor John Sutherland at University College London, who is the UK's leading English expert. He claims that the rise of the emoji, could be the next phase in language and communications.

'Real time practice'

Here at **Language Services Direct,** we believe that incorporating modern forms of communication into lessons is crucial to providing students with a well-rounded language learning experience. Our 'Real Time Practice' course allows learners to practise communication skills live with a trainer, simulating real-live business situations. Role play scenarios such as these can be conducted by phone, email and even web chat, allowing students the opportunity to practise media language with the support of an expert

the opportunity to practise media language with the support of an expert trainer. We also direct learners to the best social media sites to follow and interact with in their target language. In addition to this we are also equipped to set specific homework assignments on social media, for example asking a student to write a response to a relevant post online. We can also make constructive use of messaging apps such as WhatsApp and set up social media forums on platforms such as Facebook for students to practise their language skills online.

Evidently, 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 flout the usual maxims of conventional English Language and be innovative, creative and forward thinking. Language is, and always has been ever-evolving. Although the developments and trends we witness in language over time are significant, the foundation of the English language remains as strong and infallible as it always has been.

References

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-3063505/Generational-language-gap-seismic.html