The internet is changing language less than curmudgeons fear

What is technology doing to language? Many assume the answer is simple: ruining it.

Fortunately, the story of language and the internet has attracted serious *analysts*. For example, why do languages change? A computer *simulation* proved that a mix of strong and weak ties — *close-knit* groups existing in a larger sea — allowed language-change "leaders" to *disseminate* updates to the wider population. Twitter combines strong and weak ties — and sure enough, drives more language change than Facebook, which is more dominated by strong ties.

analyst　分析者	simulation　模拟；仿真
close-knit　紧密的	disseminate　传播；散布

Emoji, odd as they may look, also reflect something universal. They are the digital equivalent of gestures. Those come in two types. "Emblems", like a thumbs-up or a *wink*, have a fixed meaning and form. But "co-speech" gestures — wincing, gesticulating, pointing — are *spontaneous* and more variable. And emoji come in these same flavours. People randomly combine many co-speech-style emoji, but are more restrained in mixing emblems.

wink　眨眼	spontaneous　自发的；无意识的

For *millennia*, speech was all there was. For most of "recorded" history, nearly everyone was *illiterate*. Then, in the age of the *printing press* and mass literacy, writing acquired a kind of *primacy*, seen as prestigious, a standard to be learned and imitated.

millennia　千年期	illiterate　文盲
printing press　印刷机	mass literacy　大众识字
primacy　首位；卓越	

Future historians may regard that epoch of *reverence* as unusual. Mass reading has now been joined by mass writing: frequent, error-filled and *evanescent*—like speech. Little surprise that internet users have created tools to give their writing the gesture, playfulness and even

meaninglessness of *chitchat*. Mistaking it for the downfall of "real" writing is a category error. Anything that helps people enjoy each other's company can only be a good thing.

reverence　尊敬；敬畏　　　　　　　　　evanescent　容易消散的

chitchat　闲聊