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E Block

“Their writing is real writing because their writing is their voice”[[1]](#footnote-0)

We live in a time where we can press one button and in a matter of minutes, we can have just about any food imaginable. We can play movies and music or have an answer to just about any question conceivable with a couple of spoken words. The ability to instantaneously connect with someone across the globe in mere seconds makes the world so much smaller. Advancements in technology have brought about the creation of a whole new virtual world, from bitcoin to the dark web. But what is the most astounding byproduct of technology is social media: an ever-present outlet in our lives that most of the population can’t live without. This includes sharing works of online writing and ideas. Take, for instance, Facebook with its 1.13 billion monthly active users. This is just one of many platforms of social media that most of the global population use to incessantly write posts and status updates. Social media has taken over our world, but is it such a bad thing? We live in a rapidly evolving society that revolves around the growth of new technology; we cater to this development by adapting our language to fit this new culture. In the sage words of Melissa Cefkin, an ethnographer at IBM, “We’ve always had the introduction of new technologies that transform and move society in new ways. It changes our interactions, our sense of the world and each other” (Pratt). Social media is changing our society but whether is has a positive or negative effect on our lives is a matter of opinion. I argue that writing online has neither a significant positive nor negative effect on our language. Social media has given way to blogs, novel lexicon, and tweeting. These linguistic changes have redefined our diction and syntax, inherently changing the rhetoric of our language.

Our society is constantly progressing and with it, so is our language. As an up-and-coming social predominance, social media has brought about a tidal wave of novel vernacular. We live in an era where phrases such as “‘googled,’ ‘friended,’ ‘liked,’ ‘tweeted,’ ‘instagrammed’, and ‘messaged’” (Tenore) have become ubiquitous among the majority of today’s population. In years preceding this one, such lexicon hadn’t even existed. The diction that has become commonplace today has changed the way we think and act, inherently changing our language. This is neither a positive nor negative effect of writing posts on social media, it simply makes evident the impact our milieu has on our brains. Our very apparent change in diction clearly shows how the rhetoric of our language has evolved. That being said, not only has online writing expanded our language, but it has also redefined it. Our culture is so extremely immersed in the internet, that it has refined our diction by giving even the most mundanewords a new meaning. For instance, “troll is no longer just a character from Norse folklore, but someone who makes offensive or provocative comments online; a sock puppet is no longer solely a puppet made from an old sock, but a self-serving fake online persona” (Reed). Through online writing, words have been used in false pretenses and the widespread usage of such language has redefined the meanings of these words. As a direct result of the interconnected cyberspace, the verbiage used on social media has indefinitely made its mark on our language. This change in diction has changed the way we speak, write, and think, thus changing the rhetoric of our language.

Similarly, the syntax of our language had also evolved to accommodate the new vernacular that has arrisin from social media. Our communication style has consequently become more informal and open, and this seeps into our language. When writing on social media, “we are also more succinct, get to the point quicker, operate within the creative constraints of 140 characters on Twitter, or aspire to [brevity](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/brevity) with blogs”(Reed). The billions of global social media users have adapted to a more efficient way of writing. As a direct result, many have become accustomed to using acronyms such as “lol,” “brb,” or “g2g”. Abbreviations “help to say more in media where there is a limit to the number of characters one may use in a single message” (Reed). Such verbiage has become a staple of our colloquial language, “an alphabet soup of acronyms, abbreviations, and neologisms have grown up around technologically mediated communication to help us be understood” (Lee). Yes, using such syntax can make for a more succinct writer, and yes, communication can be faster and easier, but a succinct writer does not make for a compendious one. There is no point in being able to write with only a few characters if the point to the writing is not lucid. That being said, using such syntax can actually cause miscommunications if the recipient is unaware of the meaning behind the shortened text. Altogether there is no significant net gain or loss to our language. There is simply a change to the rhetoric of our language as a result of our change in syntax.

With that said, social media has also affected our syntax down to the characters used in writing. An infamous element of “Twitter syntax is the hashtag – a clickable keyword used to categorize tweets….you will find hashtags all over popular culture, from greetings cards and t-shirts to the dialogue of sitcom characters” (Lee). The “hashtag” has become a global icon that is known to one and all. It has made its way into our speech and writing. The effect of this new syntax is exhibited by the [Oxford English Dictionary](http://www.oed.com/public/latest/latest-update/#new), which now includes hashtag, “♥, and [LOL](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/291168) as real words worthy of etymological recording...Other words added include the formidable OMG” (Lee). This new syntax becomes a part of our vocabulary and it only seems fit if such vernacular was made official in our dictionaries. The syntax of our language has changed; the rhetoric of our language has changed. This is neither a positive or negative effect on our language. It simply proves that our language is expanding as society progresses. The use of such syntax in no way takes away from our language. There is no scholastic deterioration to our vernacular, but at the same time, using such syntax does not add to our language. It is simply a shift in our communication and writing brought about by the ability to write online.

Technology has revolutionized online writing through the creation of spell-check. Spell check and autocorrect are ubiquitous staples of any online writing platform from word processors, to social media. With such applications, writers have become accustomed to online programs fixing their verbiage. The only setback to this is that people have become reliant on spell-check. An observational study conducted by the New Yorker states that “the use of the wrong word jumped three spots to become the most common error in students’ papers; misspelling, which didn’t even place in the top twenty in 1988, jumped to number five” (Greenfield). Many times, spell check cannot differentiate between the context of a word in writing. As a result, these programs mislead writers. The writers on the other hand rely so heavily on spell check to correct their improper diction and syntax that they do not proofread or question the changes that the application makes. That being said, “word processing has been shown in most cases to be an extremely helpful tool for writers with learning disabilities” (Ashton). In many cases, the use of spell-check and autocorrect can in fact prove beneficial to our language. Such applications make for easier and more flexible communication. Many times, word processors are able to help writers improve their diction and syntax by correcting their literary mistakes. As a whole, spell check has not shown a significant gain or loss to our language, as “our spelling has been degrading for much longer than iPhone auto-correct has been around” (Greenfield). Word processors have not been the reason why literary errors have become prominent in recent years, as our decline in spelling had been an issue even before text processors existed. Spell check and autocorrect have benefited our language while also being a source of error in online writing. That is not to say that the use of such applications proves to have more of a positive or negative effect on our language. Both have arisen as an aftermath of online writing, which has changed the rhetoric of our writing.

We write to feel empowered and to empower others. Writing is a form of self-expression, each voice individualistic and inspirational. For this purpose, then, does the matter in which one writes to make a difference if the intent for writing is clear? Is the rhetorical change in our language through diction and syntax significant? No. This rhetorical change does not prove detrimental nor is it beneficial to our language. Technological advancements have brought about a variety of new platforms for online writing along with novel lexicon, sentence structure, and grammar. We live in a time that embraces this change in language and it would be nonsensical not to do so as well. Our ever-changing language evolves with our milieu and will continue to do so for years to come. Our language expands it modifies our rhetoric, which proves neither positive nor negative towards our language. It only affirms our digression in an advancing society.

1. "How to Find Your Social Media Marketing Voice and Tone - Buffer Blog." 14 Apr. 2014, <https://blog.bufferapp.com/social-media-marketing-voice-and-tone>. Accessed 6 Mar. 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)