Linguistic Autobiography – Life in Technology

I, for one, stay true to myself whenever possible. There is too much going on in the world that there really is no time for me to try to conform. I’m no asshole either; I can navigate through social life decently fine. In the past, I was too used to fitting in with others. So naturally, a people pleaser. But today, it feels freeing to speak my thoughts. Why is it that when some teenagers grow up, they stop caring about every single person? There is some psychology to this, but I have interesting perspectives to share.

A friend took a Philosophy 101 course and asked me: “What’s your take on nihilism?”

Uninterested, I said: “I don’t care.”

“And what led you to that conclusion about nihilism?”

“People can do what they want with their beliefs and values, and I have my own… I’d say my friends have more meaning.”

“What does it mean to give meaning? I want to know ways we make of things, such as our life, meaningful?”

“In reality, 99% of people have no meaningful lives. A relatively small percentage of people are very passionate and fulfilled about the things they do…”

“...So, to have a meaningful life, it would be one to have the passion and goals and work on and continue those goals until they die, is what I’m thinking.”

“Yes.”

           Looking back on the 40-minute conversation, I was relatively open to what I had to say, disregarding the feelings of conformity. Compare that to a group project in my Physics 221 class, where I had honest ideas about how the group project should be done, but I confirmed to others’ ideas when majority rules, even if I slightly disagree. Still, I'm a fighter; I want to push any ideas I think are genuinely good. With close friend groups, I am happy to be heard and to present my ideas without feelings of discomfort while also being content with other people’s ideas if I think it’s better. Although, it wasn’t always like this. In fact, I think age and passion plays a significant role in presenting our different Englishes.

           During freshman year, it was a battle between conformity and individuality. The pursuit of obtaining friendships with everyone during a virtual year was difficult, but I wanted to do it. I conformed with everyone’s ideas, even those close to me. This didn’t stop until the end of the academic year, when I found a passion for coding. When people develop a passion, it feels like that passion takes up so much time that social situations matter significantly less to them. Now, this feels like a realization from a self-improvement book, but obtaining it “naturally” amplifies the effect of not caring about other people. In my junior year, I was incredibly passionate to learn new perspectives in my sociology, psychology, and history classes. Simply, I just wanted to learn about new perspectives without caring about what other people thought about mine. This realization ferments with age as I develop new habits with how I speak with other people, especially to those who feel academically challenged.

           Aside from hating on conformity, it's interesting to note how communication over email and text message are different. Text messages didn’t have punctuation or extremely formal writing. On the other hand, formality in emails is typically a greeting followed by information you wish to communicate and a closing, all with precise punctuation. My physics group communicated over email for a little while before switching over to Discord, where we used informal messages like ‘u’ and ‘tq.’ Once I see that these students talk just like me, I become more comfortable with them. It’s like when a white person speaks Chinese; suddenly, you’re best friends with them. And once we are in a different environment (in this case, email to Discord), our ways of communication are different. It’s like talking in public and at home with the same people but are more judgmental at home. And unless your name is Mr. Harp, Canvas comments are generally low stakes without the need to greet someone with 'Good morning' (I'm only joking).

           Me and my homies have a Discord server titled A2USSR, which expands to Applying to USSR. Obviously, this looks wrong to people with serious political ideologies, but it’s an inside joke in my closest friend group. Some people think that for a joke to be widely received, it should be humorous to a large group of people. But that kind of humor is not as fun as jokes only you and your close friends can understand. I’m in a friend group with quite a bit of chinks and sometimes when we make jokes about our racial identity, people will judge us and even try to lecture us about ourselves. Part of me sees why the other group might be offended, but it’s merely a mockery of chinks, by chinks. But really, making jokes about race, gender, and controversial topics that shouldn’t be controversial should be fine in certain groups of friends. But I’ll stay away from making seemingly sensitive jokes out in public. Hell, I’m no Communist, but I’m Communist at heart in my homie’s Discord server.

Now there’s one key component on why my Englishes are shaped the way it is: the internet. Our generation is high on social media, resulting in terrible attention spans and the need to fit in with others, not to mention the amplitude of news sharing and how passions are likely to stem from technology. Text messaging is so convenient and easy to set up that if file uploading was improved and mass message sending was more efficient, emailing would be rendered useless. Topics that were taboo a few decades ago such as gender and race are much more normalized, but can lead to unrealistic expectations if not educated enough or to those who conform with what people think is right (social polarization).