

Deviation of English in Modern Usage

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Abstract

Language change is a natural phenomenon which is the characteristic of every language. “When a language ceases to change, it is no longer considered to be a living language.” (Baugh & Cable, 1993, pp. 2) But still, language keeps its identity and is recognized as the same language that was born many centuries ago. Many changes took place in the evolution of language due to social, linguistic and cultural factors. After the advent of internet, language mutation took place both in written and spoken form. To cope up with the societal changes, a deviation is seen in the usage, which is observed at all levels of a language both morphologically and syntactically. According to Oxford English Dictionary (OED), deviation is an action of departing from the norm. There is a need to study these deviations and the factors that contribute to their formation because they are regularly causing slight tremors, which in turn are causing a major quake in their usage. Apart from factors like utility and acceptability, other factors such as cult shift, youth quake and role of technology are discussed. These factors gave rise to modern usages like acronymic expressions, superfluous expressions, truncations, e-words and words that are formed by productive analogy which are explained here.

Keywords: English Modern Usage, mutation, deviation, truncation, youth quake, nonce words

Introduction

It is very interesting to observe the transformation undergone by English language over a period of time. English has become Englishes. Changes like I to i (capital to small), /t/ silent to /t/ pronounced as in the word ‘often’ are often seen in present usage. Nearly hundreds of words are added to OED every year. To perform its primary function, that is communication, language is undergoing mutation. During this process, some words die out, others change their form or meaning, sometimes insignificantly, but at other times, they transform beyond recognition. Due to development of technology, a drastic change in the society led to a vast drift in directing English to become a global language. So, no demarcation is seen between purpose of learning language (for communication) and language learning for its own sake. And this became the first sight of deviation.

Deviation is defined as ‘The action of departing from an established course or accepted standard.’(OED). To perform fast, short, trendy and effective communication, a deviation is seen in distinctive structural properties of English. Pinker (1994) called them ‘discrete combinational system’ which is unique for every natural language. English, being one such language that is used all over the world, is undergoing deviation in its discrete combinational system for effective communication. There are many reasons that triggered deviation in English usage.

Reasons for Deviation

Utility

According to Bickerton, ‘...language began as a free for all catch-as-catch-can mode that utilized sounds, signs, pantomime and any other available mechanism that would carry intention and meaning.’ Due to greater utility of meaning, language is gradually getting focused on vocal mode. Users are creating signs and sounds for words which would deliver the deepest intention. Ex: woah, hmm, grrl, achcha, emoticons etc.

Cult Shift

‘There has never been a time when so many people wished to travel to so many places.’ (Leshem & Markoviz,2013) So, there is an urgent need for a global language that would flow through the global village. Fast travel induced cultural intermixing. This shift of culture urged intermixing of languages. English has become the largest solvent capable of dissolving languages of almost all the countries of the world that it has been to. Words of Latin, French and Spanish are already in the vocabulary. Due to intercontinental migration, words from almost all countries found a place in the English vocabulary. For example, many Hindi words like bazaar, naatak, dadagiri, jugaad and words of Indian cuisine like idli,sambar, gulab jamun,vada and words from Arabic like alcohol, coffee, lemon etc. are added into the vocabulary.

Acceptability

Many users today prefer to talk about acceptability, that is, the degree to which users of a language will judge an expression as ok. According to John Algeo, “an acceptable expression is one that people do not object to, indeed don’t even notice unless it is called to their attention.” In modern times, the degree of acceptability is directly proportional to the degree of utility. With the introduction of technology in communication, shortened and contracted vocabulary is accepted. Ex: obvi,vom,popo, mini-me, defo, bro, sis.

Youth Quake

As Salman Rushdie said, ‘What seems to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it – assisted by the English language’s enormous flexibility and size, they

are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.’ His words clearly explain how young people identify the flexibility of English and are exploiting it for their convenience to communicate.

In his book *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell writes ‘the paradox of the epidemic: that, in order to create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first.’ In the free development of global English, the language has had many small movements. Today’s youth are creating small movements in large quantities. To make easier, faster and quicker communication, youth are preferring to use acronyms, initialisms, emoticons, among other strategies of communication. They prefer this lingo because it is ‘cool’ and it distinguishes them from others. Ex: YOLO,☺,ttyl , bfn, asap, etc.

Role of Technology

Technology made its way into the lives of people. Throughout the years, technology became faster, smaller, affordable and accessible. Internet changed the way people communicate, study, work, entertain and socialize. This technological blow up resulted in linguistic mutation which is an unstoppable reality. The launching of SMS (Short Message Service) became a global phenomenon that lead to synchronous and asynchronous shortening of words, phrases and even sentences like, wn for when, gdnyt, hwru. The text speak consists of abbrvs, typos, emojis, deletion of subject pronouns in order to reduce typing time. To express an intense emotion in the shortest possible way, the user invented word blends like fantabulous, gigonormous, hangry and absobloodylutely. Acquaintance with computers brought the users of all age groups to understand and coin words connected with the computer. Words like click bait, window blogging, tweet (message posted to Twitter), info mania (one who has a desire to check information from his mobile), and noob are a part of regular conversation.

Text speak has made its way into the online culture. Instead of diminishing, it continues to expand and presents new and creative ways to facilitate communication, tailoring language to meet society’s needs. Through texting, it is evident that language will undergo a makeover due to dramatic changes because of technology and the obsession of some people to be trendy. Young people have been labeled as the ones responsible for making changes in written language in their text speaking. But they are not the only ones. The influence has spread to older age groups as well. It is inevitable that text speak has weaved into culture and language nest. Ex: V shl dscs abt it b4 8.

Types of Deviation in Modern English

Nonce Formations and Neologisms

Nonce word is the one coined ‘for the nonce’- made up for one occasion and is not likely to be encountered again. According to Leech (1969 pp.42), ‘the newly created words are called nonce formations since they are created solely for the purpose of enlarging vocabulary.’ For example, Lewis Carroll coined frabjous (delightful) and fluddle by David Crystal(‘Nonce Word’). Neologisms are brand-new words or brand-new meanings for existing words, coined for a specific purpose. Examples

are spam, BFF, ego surfer, etc. Their meaning can be deduced by previously known familiar words and occasionally these words will enter the standard vocabulary. Kastovsky assumed that the words that are listed now might be new at some point of time. He said, "...we do not have sufficient record of all the words that never made it to the lexicon." To test Kastovsky's assumption, we have to keep track of new words. Kjellmer (2000) summarizes the outcome of such studies as follows "...it appears that neologisms due to semantic change have in general, a much better chance of survival than other neologisms, but in other cases only half or less than half of them stay on in the language."

Words coined by Shakespeare like cold blooded, blushing, gnarling were once termed neologisms. Due to their extensive use in everyday situations they are no longer called so. In modern English usage, neologisms are born for the sake of social networking sites. For example, tweet cred (social standing on twitter), 404(someone who is clueless. This is taken from the www error message not found), app (a software application). These words represent the evolving nature of English in terms of technology.

However, poets and reporters also use nonce formations and neologisms for eye catchy effects. Contrary to the intention of the writers, nonce formations by poets are more colloquial rather than flaring because their writings are judged, read, memorized and put to use orally and in written texts. For example, Sir Walter Scott, in his novel Ivanhoe, devised the term "Free Lancers" for people hired as militants. This word is no longer a nonce because it is extensively in print media.

Truncations

Shortened word formation as a part of active discourse, is another deviation. It is obvi that such formations are in active vocabulary because they express the meaning of a word in the briefest possible way. Ex: mini-me, po-po, defo, totes, pro, demo, bro, sis, etc.

Superfluous Expressions

They are words which express a mixture of feelings the user wants to put in a single word. As Allen and Greenough's New Latin Grammar says, "in current discourse the word most prominent in the speaker's mind comes first, and so on in the order of prominence." Examples are fantabulous, chillax, bromance, showmance.

Acronyms and Initialisms

To keep up with the fastness of time and work users like to express their thoughts in a couple of seconds. Words like YOLO, YODO, YOMO, LOL, BFN, NBD, OMG, ASAP are no longer used as esoteric codes but used extensively.

Productive Analogy

Instant words are created by users to fit their context. Words like yoga moon, child moon are analogies of honeymoon. Oxy junkie, adrenaline junkie, techno junkie, tinder junkie, media junkie are other similar analogous productions. Words like manikini, burkhini, blue whale, pink whale, green whale, vacation followed by funacation, runacation, staycation, kingdom followed by fandom, youthdom, teenagerdom are some of such instantaneous formations.

Conclusion

Deviation is observed not only in the syntax of the language (for example, my bad for sorry), but also seen in the morphological, phonological, phonetical, grammatical, idiomatic, contextual and through lexical or vocabulary and spelling. This might be due to need, acute requirement of time and sometimes, intentionally for specific reasons. As the existence of an individual depend on the society he lives in, any change in the society reflects the language one is using. The coining of words from already existing ones, adding or deleting some part of it is easier because the user already knows the meaning of existing ones and can easily guess the meaning of the newly formed word by intuition. So, the user tries to express his intention in the strongest possible way with the known words. The more the word equates with the situation the user is in, the faster and permanent it enters the lexicon. Therefore, the coinage of words like buzz kill, screenager, twittarati, clicktivist are used that reflects the role of technological society in which he lives. The invention of emoticons, abbrvs, sounds states that the user wants to express in the briefest way.

But language is not just for communication. It is for effective communication. It is not a crowd of words that convey the meaning, but it is a group of words that can express an intention. So, education in language ought to show the major and minor patterns of our language, the way in which they interlock in function so that they can be used for effective communication.

Though to love a good book for its own sake is important and joyous, to analyze it is less joyous, but still it is important to analyze the deviation that is taking place in the language. As William J. Long points out,

“Behind every book is a man. Behind the man is the race
Behind the race are the natural, social environments.”

This compels us to analyze the influence of social, natural, historical and cultural environments on deviation.

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