

The Language of Netspeak

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Abstract

The present study is a descriptive linguistic study of netspeak. It focuses on three linguistic features which are (abbreviations, acronyms, and punctuation marks). Abbreviations and acronyms are dealt morphologically as word-formation processes and semantically as vocabularies by giving their meanings, whereas punctuation marks are dealt syntactically as appropriate to sentence order.

The main conclusions are summarized in the following points.

- 1- The developments of technology affect the language use in netspeak and many linguistic properties such as abbreviations, acronyms, and punctuation marks have emerged.
- 2- Participants in netspeak "chatgroups" have tendency and creativity to use standard and non-standard abbreviations and acronyms in their exchange to hurry their messages typing, save time, energy and effort, and as economy expressions to flow the exchange of conversations.
- 3- Non-standard abbreviations and acronyms are considered as new conventions because they are unfamiliar outside netspeak. They are considered as unique to netspeak only and are not used in offline writing or other formal situations.
- 4- Punctuation marks tend to be minimalist and sometimes absent in most 'synchronous' conversations because participants try to write what they speak.

Introduction

The present paper is a quantitative descriptive linguistic study of an informal online English in netspeak. This study concentrates on some situation of netspeak in their both synchronous and asynchronous situations. It focuses on three linguistic features which are (abbreviations, acronyms and punctuation marks). Abbreviations and acronyms are dealt with morphologically as word-formation processes and semantically as vocabularies by giving their meanings, whereas punctuation marks are dealt with syntactically as appropriate to sentence order.

The models which are adopted in the analyses of the data of this study are eclectic. First, Crystal (2001: 81-93) highlights the linguistic features of Netspeak which are: (lexicon,

neologisms, blending, abbreviations, acronyms and punctuation marks). He gives a description of seven situations of Netspeak which are: (e-mails, chatgroups, virtual worlds (MUD and MOO), the web, blogging and instant messaging). He (2001:239) mentions that the studies of Netspeak are still in the earliest stages and it is difficult to find samples of data which relate to various situations on the net in which people communicate. Second, Werry (1996) sheds light on the features of one situation of Netspeak which is Internet Relay Chat in terms of addressitivity, abbreviation, prosody and gesture. Third, Baron (2008) mentions in her experimental study on her students many features of one situation of Netspeak which is instant messaging in terms of: "emoticons, lexical shortening like abbreviations, acronyms, contractions and punctuation". Fourth, Quirk et. al. (1985:1580- 84) classify abbreviations into clippings, acronyms and bends, and describe punctuation marks.

Crystal (2001: 93) argues that Netspeak "is a complex and mixed message that can only be understood" in details of the individual internet situation (ibid). Moreover, he tells that the phenomenon of netspeak will change the way people think about language in a fundamental way because it is a linguistic singularity, a genuine new medium". Linguists, editors, stylists and other observers have grouped to express what they find in the internet language, but they fail because the language of the internet in its various situations is fundamentally different, though it displays some similarities with other forms of communication (ibid:238).

Crystal also mentions that "studies of netspeak are still in their earliest stages" and there is a difficulty in finding samples of usable data that relate to every internet situation. Every situation often has problems "arise out of the transitional nature of the medium. Thus, netspeak is still in the early stages of its evolution and generalizations are difficult to make" (ibid:239).

Most of the general features of Netspeak are distinctive in graphology and lexicon, so that the levels of language may be easy to introduce innovation and deviation from the norms of standard English because Netspeak is everyday language or written speech that shares features of both spoken and written language. Internet is one of many factors influencing the way language is changing and the linguistic forms of the internet language are also influenced a lot by the constraints of technology itself. This means that language bases on creative typology and many of the norms of the standard language are sometimes broken. The main research questions that this study will answer are:

1. What are Netspeak's abbreviations and the most frequent ones?
2. What are Netspeak's acronyms and the most frequent ones?
3. What are the punctuation marks used in Netspeak and the most frequent ones?
4. What are the reasons beyond the popular use of these three linguistic features ' abbreviations, acronyms and punctuation marks' in Netspeak?

5. Are these three linguistic features deviated from the norms of standard language in the internet language or not?
6. Do abbreviations, acronyms have lexical meanings?

Language of the Internet

Language of the internet is also called computer-mediated communication (CMC) which includes: emails, chats and instant messaging. This language is used when people talk to each other using electronic devices (Crystal, 2008b: 178). In addition, Crystal (2001: 6-7) mentions that the language of the internet is also called "language variety" which is a system of linguistic expression whose use is governed by situational factors and this language includes speech and writing.

Danet and Herring (2007:12) mention that the internet language tends to display both spoken and written language features as well as distinctively digital ones. These features and their use vary according to CMC mode. Synchronous modes tend to be more speechlike than asynchronous ones. However, many features are shared across mode such as the emoticon (smiley face), abbreviations such as

- LOL (laughing out loud),
- CU ("see you")
- LOLZ (more than one laugh)
- ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing)
- LQTM (laughing quietly to myself)
- LSMH (laughing & shaking my head)
- LMHO (laughing my head off)
- HAHA (this one goes without saying)

This is a tendency toward speech informality.

Crystal argues that the internet language is a 'fourth medium' after writing, speaking and signing and how the rate of change has been tremendous. Experts of CMC are always interested in the difference of language in cyberspace because it deserves to be seen as a new variety of language (Thurlow et al., 2004:123-124). Moreover, internet language is a written speech that involves writing and talking, it also comprises listening and reading (Para, 2016: 193).

Speech vs Writing

Crystal (2001: 48) points, on the one hand that Netspeak is something genuinely different in kind of speech, writing and electronically mediated properties. It is more than just a

hybrid of speech and writing. On the other hand, he mentions (2011: 21) that internet language is better seen as writing that has been pulled some way in the direction of speech rather than as speech that has been written down. He also argues that internet language is identical to neither speech nor writing but it displays properties of both. It is more than an aggregate of spoken and written features but it does things that neither of other mediums does.

One of the characteristics of netspeak is it can be viewed as a written speech and Crystal describes which characteristics it shares with speech and which with writing (Hewings & Hewings, 2005: 139). So, Crystal (2001:26-28) mentions some characteristics of speech and writing, in that speech is time bound, transient and dynamic. It is a part of interaction in which participants are present and the speaker has a specific addressee in mind. With speech, there is no time shift between production and reception unless one is intentionally introduced by recipient. Speech participants can rely on extralinguistic features such as gestures and facial expressions to aid meaning because they are face to face. Speech has common features such as contracted form, lengthy coordinate sentences, nonsense vocabulary, obscenities and slang. The unique features of speech are pitch, intonation, tone, loudness, tempo and rhythm.

Besides, writing is space bound, static and permanent. The writer is far off from the reader and the reader is often unknown. There is always time shift between production that permits for repeated reading and analysis and promotes the development of careful organization and compact expression. In writing, lack of visual contact means that participants cannot depend on context to make their meaning clear. The common features of writing are multiple instances of subordination in the same sentence, balanced syntactic patterns and long sentences (ibid).

Netspeak

Crystal (2001:18) uses the term netspeak to refer to a type of language which displays features that are unique to the internet arising out of its character as a medium which is global, electronic, worldwide and interactive. He also adds that Netspeak can be viewed as a novel medium combining written, spoken and electronic properties (ibid: 48). Netspeak is "a term used by some commentators, devised on analogy with such words as doublespeak and airspeak, to describe the kind of distinctive language found on the Internet". (Crystal, 2004a: 78). Netspeak refers "to speaking in ways used to converse text on the internet, it is the special language, abbreviations and expressions used by users when communicating using the internet (Para, 2016: 193).

According to Crystal (2001: 17) and Para (2016: 189) the term netspeak serves as an alternative to ' Weblish, Netlish, Cyperspace, Internet language, Electronic language, Electronic discourse, Interactive written discourse, CMC, etc.'. These idioms are used before Netspeak existed. Each idiom has a different collaboration for example, Netlish and Weblish are derived from English to make the internet more multilingual.

Crystal cited in Baron (2008: 48) uses the term Netspeak to refer to the language that is used in CMC as a whole and he also mentions that Netspeak has more features link it to

writing than to speech. So, Crystal (2001:17-18) and Baron (2008:11) argue that Netspeak is an alternative to interactive written discourse and it is functional and succinct as long as it is borne in mind that speak involves speaking and writing as well as the receptive skills listening and reading.

Crystal (2001:238-9) says that Netspeak is a development of millennial importance. It's a modern medium of linguistic communication which does not arrive regularly in the history of the race. The interest of Netspeak comes from its salient features which are taken from one of its situational manifestations. These manifestations are begun to use outside of the situation of CMC even though the medium has become available to most people. He comments that the influence of Netspeak has mainly affected on vocabulary with graphology in some written varieties and in everyday conversation, forms from the underlying computer technology are given a new application between people who want their talk to have a cool cutting-edge (ibid: 19). Crystal (ibid: 28) adds that Netspeak is so interesting form of communication because it depends on characteristics belonging to both sides of the speech and writing, it displays the properties of both.

Netspeak Abbreviations

Crystal (2001: 85-86) and (2011: 5) refers to some types of abbreviations that are used in netspeak interactions especially in "chatgroups". One of these types is the reduced words to two or three letters by omitting some letters usually vowels such as 'pls' for 'please'.

The other type is called "rebuses" "in that the sound value of the letter or numeral acts as a syllable of a word" such as 'b4' for 'before' or combinations of rebus and initial letter such as 'L8R' for 'later'. These rebuses or colloquial elisions of abbreviations can give sentences unfamiliar look such as 'r u' for 'are you' (ibid, 2001: 164). Another way of creating abbreviations in netspeak is by using "contractions" or contracted forms such as 'gonna' for 'going to' (Crystal, 2001: 185). Arabi (2008: xiv) defines contractions as words that are formed from the first and last letter of a word such as 'dr.' for 'doctor'.

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