

Linguistic Dimensions of Initialisms used in Electronic Communication

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Abstract

The language of electronic communication is a new variety of language. Electronic communication leads to remarkable variations in written form of English language because it has its own lexicons, grammar, graphology, and usage conditions. Hence, the Internet users use acronyms, abbreviations and Emoticons, which express and convey their thoughts and ideas. The use of the Internet and computer technology have led to the development of an English language Acronyms that emerged in instant messages, emails, social networks, chat groups. The present study aims to explore and investigate the language of electronic communication (e-mail, chats, and web-based discussions and SMS messages). It also aims to identify the linguistic features (Initialisms) that used in written English in the communication done via the electronic devices. Hence, Initialisms considered part of online discourse. This study also focuses on how the language of the Internet has unique linguistic dimension and its implication on the learning of English.

Key words: Electronic communication; Initialisms

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INTRODUCTION

Computer technology has become an important tool in the teaching & learning process and in students learning and

their achievement in schools today. The Internet seems to have very important implications on English Language Learning. The rapid development of computer technology together with the use of computers by linguists and literary researchers have paved the way for introducing computer in language teaching and learning. With the advent of Internet and multimedia, studies in recent years (Ali, & Yacob, 2010; Ercetin, 2010; Kilickaya, 2010, AbuSeileek, 2011, AbuSeileek, 2012) have shown an explosion of interest in using computers for foreign language teaching and learning.

Recently the significance of Information Technology (IT) for teaching and learning of English is widely acknowledged. According to Warschauer (1995) when the Internet first emerged, the early tendency among the educators of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was to see how it could be employed as a tool in teaching English. The Internet considered as the most important linguistic medium. It includes every aspect of human life, including the learning of English language. English language is considered as the most widely-spoken language in the world because of its usage in new globalized media and commerce, hence there has been a major growth in the number of English speakers all over the world.

According to Crystal (2007) the important of incorporating or using acronym or abbreviations in CMC chat or CMC Messages is socially-based motivation to show one's membership along with the network users. Crystal (1997:53) described the purpose of in-group language, "*The chief use of slang is to show that you're part of the gang!*" The use of acronyms and abbreviations in the electronic media are considered as the technique of indicating membership in group.

Graddol (1997), points out that the *new electronic communications increase the language change*. The innovations in the electronic communication may give rise to new modes of communication. The characteristics

of spoken language are shared in the style of written text, which used in electronic mail. New patterns of communication might be created by electronic communications, by generating and creating the needed new words to describe the situations that arise around their use.

1. THE LANGUAGE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

It is essential to know how the language is used via the electronic communication in order to understand how the Internet affects and shapes English language. According to Biesenbach-Lucas & Wiesenforth, (2001), the language of electronic communication (or e-communication) leads to interesting variations in the use of written language. The language of electronic communication (e-mail, chats, Web-based discussions and SMS messages) is marked by formal writing and informal speech features. It contains acronyms, abbreviations, and changes in spelling norms for managing social interaction, and changes in spelling norms (Abdullah, 1998). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has impact on the teaching and learning of English language. McQueen (2005) defines Computer-mediated communication (CMC) as any communicative transaction that occurs with two or more electronic devices. According to Abrams (2006), CMC is widely discussed in language learning because CMC provides opportunities for language learners to practice their language. Herring (1996), states that CMC refers to the communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers.

The used of the Internet and computer technology have led to the development of an English language Acronyms that emerged in instant messages, emails, social networks, chat groups.

Warschauer and Healey (1998: 63) state that:

'It is the rise of computer-mediated communication and the Internet, more than anything else, which has reshaped the uses of computers for language learning at the end of the 20th century. With the advent of the Internet, the computer—both in society and in the classroom—has been transformed from a tool for information processing and display to a tool for information processing and communication. For the first time, learners of a language can now communicate inexpensively and quickly with other learners of speakers of the target language all over the world'.

Since the 1990, the advent of the Internet and the increasing availability of the computer have created a new shape of communication that helps to overcome the limits of time and space, namely that which researchers and scholars refer to as Computer-Mediated-Communication (Guarda, 2012). Thorne, (2007) focused that CMC has brought about a '*shift in L2 education, one that moves learners away from simulated classroom-based contexts and toward actual interaction with expert speakers of the*

language they are studying (p. 424).

1.1 Acronyms and Abbreviations in Electronic Communication

Acronymy is a term that refers to initialisms, which are produced as single words (Crystal, 2003:124). Acronyms are most of English language terms used in the internet language. The user of the Internet should know the different acronyms used in the electronic communication, it may become easier for users to understand and employ the acronyms on frequent basis when using the electronic communication such as chat rooms, emails, social networks etc. Hence, the types of electronic communication in which one chooses to chat play a role in using the internet language. Table1 shows some of the Acronyms used in the electronic communication.

Table1

Abbreviated Form	Full Form
GL	Good Luck
IDN	I don't know
CM	Call Me
SU	Shut Up
CMB	Call Me Back
CU	See you
GTH	Go to hell
WerRU?	Where are you?
ATM	At the moment
LOL	Laugh out loud, lots of luck
ILU	I love you
JIC	Just in case
brb	be right back
btw	by the way
Imho	in my humble opinion
cul8r	see you later
Irl	in real life

There are many examples of words or phrases that share the same abbreviations (e.g., *lol* could mean *laugh out loud*, *lots of love*, or *little old lady*). Therefore, the users of the electronic communication should know the meaning of different acronyms and abbreviations.

For example, if we check how many meanings the abbreviation *lol* has on the following useful website <http://www.acronymfinder.com/>.

We will find that *LOL* has 95 meanings based on six categories as follow: Information Technology (5), Military Government (2), Science & Medicine (4), Organization, Schools, etc (15), Business & Finance (10) and Slang, chat & Pop Culture (65) meaning. See figure 1 below for more details.

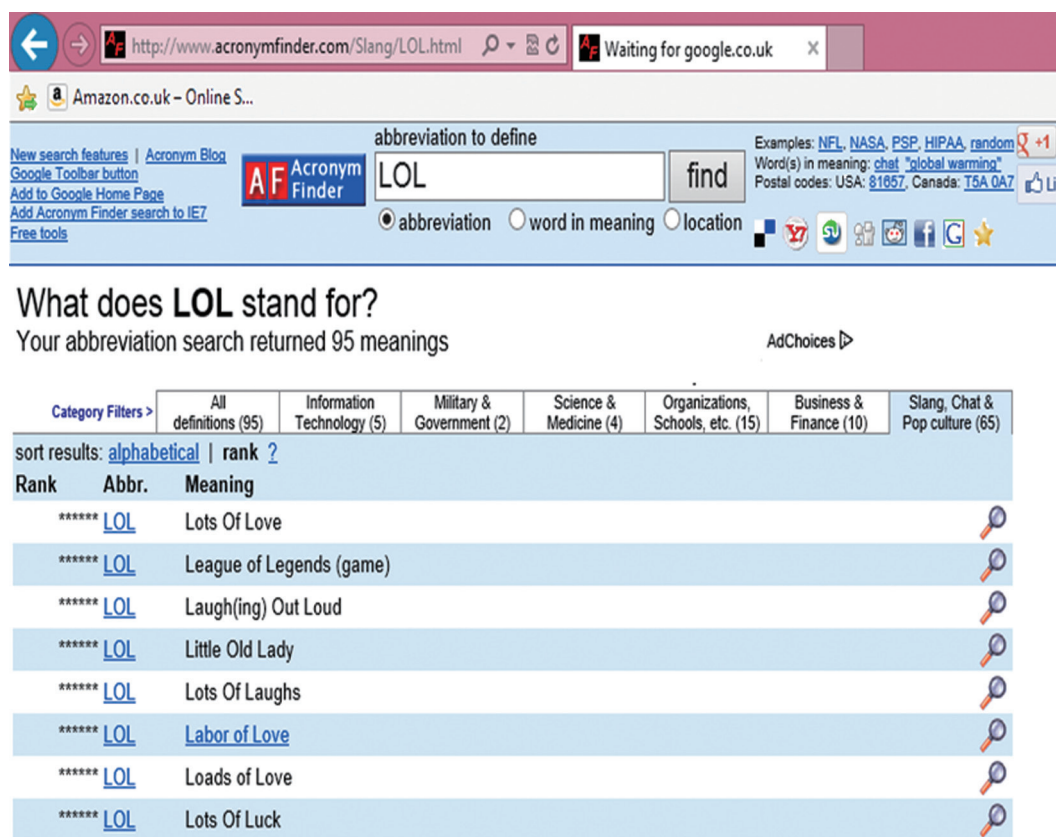


Figure 1
McArthur (2000: 40) states that

‘Electronic revolution’ and globalisation are buzzwords of the last ten to fifteen years, and these phenomena have contributed to a new creative energy in word-formation. We are witnessing the creation of new types of acronyms, including numerous mixed forms like “netcronyms” or “e-abbrevs” some of which have even found their way into everyday usage.

According to Svennevig (2005) that when Internet chat groups and emails came into being, users started communicating with each other without having any conventions that were established for this particular genre of communication. This resulted in new genres being developed. In addition, the Internet chat has developed new conventions that are particular for this means of communication, such as a system of using acronyms, abbreviations and icons; hence, the Internet chat builds on the conventions of speech.

Electronic communication has become very popular during the last decade, they contains numerous acronyms and abbreviations. Crystal (2008: 7-8) supports the above ideas;

‘texting has evolved as a twenty-first-century phenomenon – as a highly distinctive graphic style, full of abbreviations and deviant uses of language, used by a young generation that doesn’t care about standards. There is a widely voiced concern that the practice is fostering a decline in literacy. And some even think it is harming language as a whole ‘Text messages destroying our language’

Crystal (2001) points out that we are on the brink of the biggest revolution in language ever, that Netspeak, this is how he calls online language, is not a monolithic creation, but rather a disparate set of communication methods and types such as e-mail, chat rooms, Internet Relay Chat, World Wide Web pages, Websites etc. He suggests that online language is best viewed as a new species of interaction, a genuine «third medium» (besides the written and oral forms of English), which is evolving its own systematic rules to suit new circumstances.

Crystal (2001:17) defines the term ‘Netspeak’

“is an alternative to ‘Netlish’, ‘Weblish’, ‘Internet language’, ‘cyberspeak’, ‘electronic discourse’, ‘electronic language’, ‘interactive written discourse’, ‘computer-mediated communication’ (CMC),”

Crystal (2001: 67) pointed out the innovation of Netspeak “one of the most creative lexical domains in contemporary English, involving all major lexical processes”

1.2 A linguistic Dimension of Electronic Language

The Internet is widely used in learning of second language all over the world. According to Crystal (2001), technology bears gifts also for linguistic investigation: Netspeak is a new opportunity for academic study. He outlines the “once in a lifetime” opportunity offered by the emerging communication media. A new academic

study of “*Internet Linguistics*” includes, at the very least, a comparative study of the style of different formats and the development of language change within these new media.

According to Baron (2003), CMC considers as concrete form of written communication, in which the receivers of such text can only rely upon the text itself to interpret the sender’s intent. Hence, CMC is actually a written medium; some of the common linguistic conventions in (particularly synchronous CMC), informal types of CMC are finding their way into traditional off-line writing. Acronyms and abbreviations, spellings mistakes, and random grammar are commonly accepted in CMC world. They can be noticed all the time in learners’ written composition.

The main prominent written feature in CMC is use of acronyms or abbreviations. Acronyms and abbreviations are part of the written language, which appear in both printed and handwritten manuscripts. Their most general purpose in both CMC and off-line writing is to save space and/or energy. In CMC case, saving energy and time is often an inspiration when chatting, or writing IM, or SMS messages. The consideration of space becomes very important when the users use portable devices, which limit the number of characters that can be transmitted in a single message (Baron, 2003).

According to Graddol (1997), social networks spread the innovation in language. The changes in the patterns of

communication or in the structure of social relationships in the social networks lead to a change in language use. The creation of new forms of social network or new patterns of social networks can also be expected to alter the way that speech communities are created and maintained. The Internet encourages the formation of ‘discourse communities’ in the social networks.

David Crystal (2001) points out that the language of electronic communication that found in email and chat actually has more in common with writing than with speech, and he points out a challenging notion when he calls the language of Netspeak as a new variety of language, because it has its own lexicons, grammar, graphology, and usage conditions. However, it can be labelled as a distinct variety of language if there is adequate cohesion in Netspeak. Appendix (1) contains list of basic anonyms and abbreviations used in electronic communication from (Crystal 2001:85-86).

David Crystal (2001:84) states that:

“The various types of abbreviation found in Netspeak have been one of its most remarked features. Acronyms are so common that they regularly receive critical comment....The chat groups and virtual worlds also have their abbreviations, some of which turn up on e-mail and in personal Web pages”.

The acronyms are not restricted to short phrases or words, however Acronyms can be sentence-length: *AYSOS* [‘Are you stupid or something?’], *CID* [‘Consider it done’], *CIO* [‘Check it out’], *wdys*[What did you say?]

Table 2

Single letter replaces words		A single letter or digit replaces a syllable or phoneme		shorten a single or multiple words	
Words	Abbreviated Form	Words	Abbreviated Form	Words	Abbreviated Form
<i>be</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>today</i>	<i>2day</i>	<i>see you</i>	<i>cu</i>
<i>see or sea</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>tomorrow</i>	<i>2moro</i>	<i>Wonderful</i>	<i>1drfl</i>
<i>okay</i>	<i>k or kk</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>b4</i>	<i>for you</i>	<i>4u</i>
<i>are</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>forget</i>	<i>4get</i>	<i>Someone</i>	<i>sum1</i>
<i>you</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>great</i>	<i>gr8</i>	<i>your and you’re</i>	<i>ur</i>
<i>why</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>band</i>	<i>b&</i>	<i>no one</i>	<i>no1</i>

Note:Table 2 shows process of creating abbreviations used in electronic communication.

According to the Economist (2006), electronic communications have affected, and will continue to affect, language in three distinct ways. First, electronic communications change the way language is used. Secondly, electronic communications have created a need for a global language and English language will fill that gap. Finally, electronic communications will influence the future of other languages, which people will (perhaps perversely) continue to speak. The simplest sort of change start with the way English is used in electronic chat.

The language of electronic chat is full with abbreviations that make it not just faster to type but also impenetrable to the novice. Many activities have their own vocabularies, badges of identity for the cognoscenti. According to Baron (2003), CMC considered as a kind

of linguistic variety, incorporating face-to-face and traditional writing discourse features but end with a simple mixture of the two. Linguists pay attention in characterizing the language of CMC and what sort of linguistic modality it has, as well as in studying the influence of CMC on written and spoken language.

2. THE IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

The emergence of the Internet as a prominent technology has influence all aspects of the English language learning and teaching. The impact of electronic communication

on English language learning & teaching has been acknowledged globally such that the integration of CMC in language learning has become essential in today's learning and teaching setting.

Crystal dismisses the common view that online communication is illiterate and dumbed-down language. He agrees that most of the language used in online communication is non-standard, full of new words and spelling errors, playful, highly deviant in bending the usual rules of language, tolerant of typographic. However, in the same time he is fascinated by its innovation and variety and takes a very positive view, suggesting, «The phenomenon of Netspeak is going to change the way we think about language in a fundamental way, because it is a linguistic singularity - a genuine new medium». (Crystal, 2001)

The Internet considered as an important linguistic medium. It is an important tool in the teaching & learning process. The Internet has been added to every aspect of human life, including the learning and teaching of English languages. Warschauer and Healey (1998:63) state that:

‘It is the rise of computer-mediated communication and the Internet, more than anything else, which has reshaped the uses of computers for language learning at the end of the 20th century. With the advent of the Internet, the computer both in society and in the classroom has been transformed from a tool for information processing and display to a tool for information processing and communication. For the first time, learners of a language can now communicate inexpensively and quickly with other learners of speakers of the target language all over the world.

According to Crystal (1997), 85% of the world's international organizations use English as their official language in transnational communication. About 85% of the world's important film productions and markets use English as well, and 90% of the published academic articles in several academic fields, such as linguistics, are written in English. In many cases, the increased growth in the use of the English language can be attributed to educational, economic, or cultural globalization.

Eastment (1999) points out that that there were 1,000 ELT (English Language Teaching) sites devoted to language learning activities, resources, and materials (on the Internet). According to Eastment (1999:1) in his survey on the Internet and English-language teaching (ELT) notes that ‘*no doubt that the Internet...will eventually transform the way that the teaching and learning of English, and the business of ELT is conducted*’.

The electronic means are going to provide the learning environment in the future due to the growing use of the Internet around the world. The electronic communications via Internet include Instant messages, discussion boards, interactive blogs, and online forums. Learners of English language are taking help of English movies, songs, and TV shows to get exposure to different English accents and increase their mental lexicons. In addition, social

networks can be used to develop language skills and have the potential to involve the students in learning English language (Islam, 2011).

Hamzah, Ghorbanil& Abdullah (2009), conducted a study entitled the impact of electronic communication technology on written language. The findings indicate that the language used in students' e-mails and SMS was full of unconventional use of punctuation and abbreviations, spoken-like spelling and ungrammatical sentences.

CONCLUSION

The advents of Internet and electronic communication have changed the way we speak and write English drastically. The electronic devices and the Internet have allowed the users to conduct electronic communication in different styles that is formal and informal and use many types electronic communication such as e-mail, chats, Web-based discussions, facebook, SMS messages, blogging and online games. In the electronic communication, Initialisms are one of the most remarkable features, which save time, space and energy. Initialisms can be word or short phrases or sentence long. The numerous numbers of Initialisms used in the electronic communication shows that the creation and formation of acronyms follows a principle of economy. The various types of acronyms found in the electronic communication considered as linguistic remarkable features. The kind of written English used in the electronic communications differs from conventional written English. From linguistic point of view, Net Lingua is much like slang: one must know when and where to use it. From psychological point of view, it should be borne in mind: the subject we are in contact with is not a living creature but computer and technologies do influence human behaviour in their direction. The English vocabulary has changed due to the influence of acronyms in electronic communication, and due to the increase of many new expressions in the varieties of language, that is standard and nonstandard. The emergence of numerous initialisms acronyms shows the creativity and insight of electronic communication's participants.

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APPENDIX

Some Abbreviations Used in Netspeak Conversations (Both Upper- and Lower-Case Forms Are Used)

Abbreviation	Full Form	Abbreviation	Full Form
Afaik	as far as I know	hhok ha ha	only kidding
Afk	away from keyboard	hth	hope this help
asap	as soon as possible	ianal	I'm not a lawyer, but
a/s/l	age/sex/location	ic	I see;
atw	at the weekend character	4yeo	for your eyes only
awhfy	are we having fun yet?	icwum	I see what you mean
bbfn	bye bye for now	idk	I don't know
bbf	be back later	iirc	if I remember correctly
bcnu	be seeing you	Imho	in my humble opinion
b4	Before	Imi	I mean it
bfd	big fucking deal	imnsho	in my not so humble
bg	big grin opinion	Brb	be right back

To be continued

Continued

Abbreviation	Full Form	Abbreviation	Full Form
imo	in my opinion	Btw	by the way
iou	I owe you	Cfc	call for comments
iow	in other words	Cfv	call for votes
irl	in real life	Cm	call me jam just a minute
cu	see you	j4f	just for fun
cul	see you later	Jk	just kidding
cul8r	see you later	kc	keep cool
cya	see you	khuf	know how you feel
dk	don't know	l8r	Later
dur?	do you remember?	Lol	laughing out loud
eod	end of discussion	m8	Mate
f?	Friends	mtfbwu	may the force be with you
fotel	falling off the chair	na	no access
laughing nc	no comment	f2f	face-to-face
np	no problem	fwiw	for what it's worth
nwo	no way out	fya	for your amusement
obtw	oh by the way	fyi	for your information
o4u	only for you	oic	oh I see
gal	get a life	otoh	on the other hand
gd&r	grinning ducking & running	pmji	pardon my jumping in
ptmm	please tell me more	gmta	great minds think alike
rip	rest in peace	gr8	Great
rotf	rolling on the floor	gsoh	good sense of humour
Rotfl	rolling on the floor laughing	rtfm	read the fucking
Tuvm	thank you very much	txt	Thanks
Rtm	read the manual	tyvm	thank you very much
Ruok	are you OK?	sc	stay cool
wadr	with all due respect	smtoe	sets my teeth on edge
Wb	welcome back	so	significant other
w4u	waiting for you	sohf	sense of humour failure
Wrt	with respect to	wtfgo	what the fuck is going on?
Sol	sooner or later	t+	think positive
Wtg	way to go	ta4n	that's all for now
Wu	what's up?	Tafn	that's all for now
wuwh	wish you were here	thx	Thanks
Tia	thanks in advance	X!	typical woman
Y!	typical man	tmot	trust me on this
yiou	yes I understand	tnx	Thanks
2bctnd	to be continued	ttfn	ta-ta for now
2d4	to die for	tttt	to tell the truth
2g4u	too good for you	t2ul	talk to you later
2l8	too late	ttyl	talk to you later
4e	forever	ttytt	to tell you the truth