



Language of Social Media impacts the use of English?

Dr. Arun Behera

Associate Professor, Dept. of English Language & Literature

Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Bangalore

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ABSTRACT

Language keeps evolving all the time-its dynamic and it's dependent on various factors. The most important among these factors, of course, are its users and the environment they are a part of. There have been unprecedented changes especially in the past twenty years or so and much of this happened because of the manner and pace at which the internet aided the social media. Of course, this has had a great influence in the English we use in our everyday communication to such a large extent that misspellings or incorrect grammar, or flawed punctuation are no longer considered wrong. Notwithstanding the language we use in the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn etc. we should bear in mind the fact that each medium restricts the use of the number of characters. It is, therefore, incumbent on us as users to restrict ourselves to the limits to express ourselves in the best possible manner without mincing any word so that the English we use is not branded 'bad' English. In effect, as users of this international language, we must draw a line between formal and informal English!

Keywords: Social Media, Language, English, Communication, Message

Introduction

Social media, as defined by Kietzmann et al (2011), are web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modifies, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible. Simply put, it is a technology based on computer which is used to share ideas, thoughts, and information. And it does so by electronically transmitting the messages or content through virtual networks for the users and communities really fast. Social media is further defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Social media is called so because it offers its users a social environment- a space where they participate, communicate and entertain. Social media has so many functions both positive and negative but its primary role is to build a brand and increase the brand's visibility thus making it the most popular mode. Some of the negative impacts of social media are cyber bullying, sexting, cyber-crimes etc. According one of the data-driven marketing managers who is also a buff of Big Data, Digital Marketing & Social Media, there are seven main types of social media:

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- i) Social networks refer to a dedicated website or other application which enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc. (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- ii) Media sharing networks are those sites that enable users to store and share their multimedia files such as photos, videos, music etc. with others (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube)
- iii) Discussion Forums, also known as discussion boards or discussion groups or online forums refer to any online "bulletin board" where one can leave and expect to see responses to messages one has left (e.g. Reddit, Quora, Digg)
- iv) Bookmarking & Content Curation Networks are hubs of creativity and inspiration for those people who are looking for ideas and information (e.g. Pinterest, Flipboard)
- v) Consumer Review Networks are platforms for reviews of products or services made by a customer who has purchased and used the products or services (e.g. Yelp, Zomato, TripAdvisor)
- vi) Blogging & Publishing Networks are broadcast-style communications systems that enable authors to publish articles, opinions or product reviews, also known as posts, which can be delivered through stand-alone websites, email, feed syndications systems and social networks (e.g. WordPress, Tumblr, Medium)
- vii) Social Shopping Networks are collaborations of online shoppers networking together (e.g. Polyvore, Etsy, Fancy)
- viii) Interest-Based Networks are social networks built around interests, using common threads to bring members of an audience together (e.g. Goodreads, Houzz, Last.fm)

In effect the way we interact with each other, for example, the sharing of our thoughts and photos or planning a night out, or organising social events is the result of social media influence and it has a noticeable bearing in the way we speak or write English. There is no denying the fact that language is an evolving phenomenon which is why it affects our use of the language and it may involve our interaction with others in the society at any given point in time.

Increases the Rate of Communication

The language of the media, especially the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram etc., in recent times, has changed phenomenally. In fact, the use of such language has come to be accepted by a substantially large number of English users. It is, of course, true that those who propagate Standard English are of the opinion that the language is abused. However, the users of English don't quail because they know what they mean. And language succeeds in transmitting the idea between the people in the community. It is, however, significant to note the rate at which communication takes place. Since these conversations happen almost at a lightening pace, the volume of the message also increases drastically.

But then there is the space crunch because some social media platforms usually put a cap on the number of characters that one is allowed to use. As a result, people use short forms, acronyms and abbreviations in an attempt to minimize the number of characters in the conversations they carry on thereby succeeding in sending the message in the limited space provided. Thus we are able to more efficiently communicate with a large number of people in a certain community and with greater speed. Several social media, especially the more popular ones, put a ceiling on the number of characters a user is allowed to write in a post. Twitter, for example, allows upto 280 characters in the "Tweet". Similarly, Instagram Caption limits 2200 characters thus



pushing its users to become more adept at saying what they wish or need to say with as fewer words as possible yet not fail in conveying the message.

Social media has enabled us to communicate with a huge number of people irrespective of the location they are in. In other words people can share and receive digital information, e.g. text, images, photos, videos, audio files etc. remotely on a global scale in a way we could do on a local level. It is, of course, true that such an idea sounds great and in fact works well simply for the reason that it keeps the relationships going while also eliminating the constraints of the physical distances. Let's take Facebook which connects an individual with thousands of people across geographies and lets her or him communicate quickly, effectively and efficiently too.

You need to write the message only once and the same message can be shared between all your friends on any platform though social media platforms have limits on the number of characters one can use. Facebook Post, for example, has a limit of 63206 characters, Twitter 280 characters and Instagram Caption up to 2200 characters. Another powerful social media LinkedIn Publishing puts a restriction of about 120000 characters, while Pinterest Board Description allows its users to use up to 500 characters. And YouTube Video Description has a cap of upto 5000 characters.

Now that each social media platform has a cut-off in terms of the number of characters a user is allowed to use, the user takes the challenge head on and turns the threats in to opportunities. And the result is creativity in expressing herself or himself using as little words as possible. So we have people resorting to various ways of cutting down on the number of characters to accommodate their expressions and ideas. And what can be a better way of achieving than by employing all sorts of abbreviations and acronyms. We give here an exhaustive list of similar expressions with their meanings or connotations.

Uses Acronyms and Abbreviations

In their attempt to use fewer words yet conveying what has to be people alter the usage of the language by inventing creative means, for example, acronyms and abbreviations. True to the adage "Necessity is the mother of inventions," people replace the full verb phrases with acronyms or short forms in order to make the everyday online communication quick and succinct. Some of such common examples are: ROFL for "rolling on the floor laughing" (usually written in response to something very funny) or TTYL for "talk to you later" (usually said when one finishes the conversation) or LOL for "laugh out loud" (generally used as a response to something funny or as a follow-up to something said only as a joke). These and many such short acronyms crop up in our everyday language and prove to be a useful tool because it makes the conversation short and simple saving a lot of space in terms of characters.

List of Acronyms/Abbreviations

AFAIK=As far as I know

AMA=Ask me anything

BAE=Before anyone else

BRB=Be right back

BTAIM=Be that as it may

BTS=Behind the scenes

BTW=By the way

CMGR=Community Manager

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CMS=Content Management System

CPC=Cost per click

CR=Conversion Rate

CRO=Conversion Rate Optimization

CTA=Call to Action

CTR=Click through Rate

DAE=Does anyone else

DM=Direct Message

DYK=Did you know

ELI5=Explain like I'm 5

FB=Facebook

FBF=Flashback Friday

FBO=Facebook Official

FF=Follow Friday

FOMO=Fear of missing out

FTFY=Fixed that for you

FTW=For the win

FYI=For your information

G2G or GTG=Got to go

GG=Good game

GTR=Got to run

HBD=Happy birthday

HIFW=How I feel when...

HMB=Hit me back

HMU=Hit me up

HTH=Here to help or happy to help

ICYMI=In case you missed it

IDC=I don't care

IDK=I don't know

IG=Instagram

IKR=I know, right?

ILY=I love you

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IMHO=In my humble opinion

IMO=In my opinion

IRL=In real life

JK=Just kidding

LI=LinkedIn

LMK=Let me know

LMS=Like my status

LOL=Laughing out loud

MT=Modified Tweet

MTFBWY=May the Force be with you

NBD=No big deal

NM=Not much

NSFW=Not safe for work

NVM=Never mind

OMW=On my way

OOTD=Outfit of the day

OP=Original poster

OTP=One true pairing

PM=Private Message

PPL=People

ROFL=Rolling on the floor laughing

ROI=Return on Investment

RT=Retweet

SFW=Safe for work

SMH=Shaking my head

SMP=Social Media Platform

SoLoMo=Social Local Mobile

SRP=Social Relationship Platform

TBBH=To be brutally honest

TBH=To be honest

TGIF=Thank God it's Friday

TIL=Today I learned...



TL;DR=Too long; didn't read

TMI=Too much information

TW=Twitter

UGC=User generated content

WBU=What about you?

WFH=Work from home

YOLO=You only live once)

YT=YouTube

Alters or Reappropriates the Existing Meaning

"One of the most significant effects of social media on verbal and written English is the appropriation of vocabulary." (Dalzell & Victor 2017) The social media impacts the English we use in everyday life by altering the meaning of some of the vocabularies. For example, Pinterest, the image sharing social media, which is built to allow its users to mark and sort interesting, new ideas has its subscribers use words such as 'pin', 'pinned', or 'pinning' which has nothing to do with the regular meaning of 'pin'. Instead, in the online world, 'pinning' is descriptive of a similar concept, just to a board that only exists digitally. We also hear our social media cohorts say, 'Check out my pin', or 'I was pinning this morning while I had my coffee.'

Similarly, 'friended' and 'unfriended' have been given an entirely new meaning due to their usage online thanks to Facebook. 'Friended' is the process of adding and 'befriended' is the process of removing someone from one's circle of friends. Additionally, words such as 'like' and 'viral' are some of the more popular examples of words the meanings of which have been reappropriated by social media. 'Google' and 'twitter' are being used as verbs. Thus, for example, we ask somebody to 'google it' or 'tweet it'. One more interesting point: some new terms such as 'selfie', 'memes', and 'unfriend' have now become a part of the daily conversations whether it is verbal or written. Horobin (2018) writes, "...Similarly, acronyms such as OMG, TBT, DM, and LOL have trickled from social media platforms to ordinary verbal and written English. These words were unheard of before in English language usage, and their popularity has been made possible by social networking sites. Some of these words have even been incorporated in English dictionaries."

Invents new Vocabularies

Social media also leads to coinage of new vocabularies. Dalzell & Victor (2017) argue, "The English language has become more volatile with synonyms growing every day. In our attempt to be creative and smart users of the tool, we invent new words. Troll, blogosphere, buzzword, Vlogger (Video Blogger), Tweople (Twitter People), Clickbait (the practice of using a provocative title with the sole purpose of driving clicks), Cray (crazy), Fam (family) are some of the more common vocabularies." The word 'troll', for example, as defined by the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary refers to a message to a discussion group on the internet that somebody deliberately sends to make other people angry; a person who sends a message like this. Similarly, another word 'Blogosphere' refers to all the personal websites that exist on the internet, viewed as a network of people communicating with each other (the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary). And the 'buzzword' is defined by Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary as a word or phrase, especially one connected with a particular subject, that has become fashionable and popular and is used a lot in newspapers, etc.

Affects the Grammar

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One of the serious charges against the social media is that it makes the younger generation develop bad grammar. In the attempt to cut down on the number of characters to fit in the available space, we end up compromising on grammar and its rules. We, as social media users, believe that as long as we succeed in conveying the message even at the cost of semantics or grammar, it is fine. But in reality 'bad' grammar has become a part of our life in such measures that people have made several appearances on news channels about social media and bad grammar. Hoffmann and Bublitz (2017) explain this scenario by pointing out, "most social media communication is concerned with being pragmatic and that the highest priorities are accessibility and mutual comprehensibility. In effect, social media has expanded so much that people have become dependent on the Internet and create their own language devoid of grammatical rules and sentence structures."

Social media as a tool, as some argue, may be helping people to communicate better and faster in their day-to-day life. But it is, in reality, placing a burden on the learners. They are so accustomed to using wrong grammar, incorrect punctuation, unacceptable structures, shocking spellings English that all the wrong learning gets transferred to English. According to the Information Resources Management Association (2016), there is the likelihood of a general weakening in proper language skills because most conversations on social media are full of abbreviations, misspelled words, and abbreviations. Some of the examples below will suffice the argument: 'Sup, cant make 2 wrk L8ts', 'C U 2morrow', BTW (by the way), B4 (before), OMG (oh my god), y (why) etc.

Conclusion

Social Media impacts all spheres of the English we use- vocabularies which includes inventing new words; reappropriating the existing words; using acronyms, abbreviations and short forms of words; using ungrammatical grammar etc.-in an attempt to cut down on the number of characters each of the social media has a put cap on. And the result is that our English gets awfully bad. In effect, switching from academic to colloquial English leads to declining grammar skill besides speaking skill, wrong spelling, punctuation and vocabularies. We need to learn to communicate in English correctly so that the next gen does not learn bad English. We need to fix this problem fast and save our younger generation from learning or using bad English.

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