

Emerging connection between languages and internet

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Abstract

The spread of English as an international language and the emergence of the Internet as a fast communication channel that has no boundaries, are mutually enforcing trends in an age of globalization. Since its conception, the Internet has, so it seems, revolutionize the ways of human communication as well as English language learning in a global context. Learners of English language today need a new set of critical and interpretive skills. Teachers of ESOL therefore, need to understand how the Internet is revolutionizing English language learning. This paper attempts to discuss the impact of the Internet on English language learning as well as the need for new frameworks for teaching English language in computer mediated contexts.

Keywords: Globalization; the Internet; English language learning and teaching.

Introduction

For hundreds of years, technology has been driving the evolution of the English language. In the fifteenth century, the invention of the printing press established standard methods of spelling English words. New forms of punctuation were invented to make printed texts easier to read, and for the first time people from different regions began to agree about English grammar. The invention of the telegraph and later of the radio and the television, had an term paper writing effect on the English language. New words were invented to describe these new technologies, and new styles of speech were invented by broadcasters. However, it is the Internet that has had the largest effect on the English language, changing it completely in less than two decades.

The Internet has also an ever growing impact on the lexical, phonetic, syntactic standards of language, and the great importance that most teachers place, or should put, on the use of 'correct' language. For example, this global technology has led to the evolution of an abbreviated English language that emerged in chat groups and in what is referred to as the virtual world. Examples for this feature include, 2day (today), cu (see you), b4 (before), R U OK? (Are you OK?), c%l (cool), to mention but a few. Capital letters are also given syllabic values, as in thN (then), nEd (need) in Internet communications. In one creation such as ru2cnme18r? (Are you two seeing me later?), less than half the characters used in the traditional sentence formation are used. It seems that sentence length will tend to be short and that certain types of complex structures (relative clauses, for instance) will be avoided in Internet communication. In every day conversation, terms from the computer technology are given a new application among people who want their talk to have a "cool" tone (In slang - great, terrific). Such examples include: It's my turn to download now (I've heard all your gossip, now hear mine) She's multitasking (She is doing two things at once) E you later (farewell—see you later) The Internet seems to have important implications for linguistics or language learning. In this context, this paper explores the impact of the Internet on today's teaching and learning of the English language.

The hallmark of Internet communication is efficiency. People who began using e-mail, and later instant messaging, found it efficient to invent a whole new world of acronyms, and these spread like wildfire across the Internet. Acronyms such as 'brb' and 'lol' have made their way into the ordinary speech of young people, and even into the pages of some respectable dictionaries. Meanwhile, it became so easy to communicate over the Internet that people stopped writing things out with a pen and paper. Letters have become obsolete, and everything from school projects to professional reports are created on computers, with the aid of online dictionaries and spellcheckers. Some studies have suggested that young people no longer know how to spell, because they use programmes that auto-correct their work. In this way, the Internet has had as large an effect on spelling conventions as the printing press did, almost six hundred years ago.



The printing press affected the English language in some of the same ways the Internet does today

More than any other technology, the Internet has encouraged the invention of new words. Sometimes these words are created by expanding the definition of existing words. 'Traffic' used to refer to foot traffic, and then to horse and

carriages, and then to automobiles. Now it refers to people visiting a website. Words like 'cyberspace' and 'virtual' were originally invented by science fiction authors, but they were adopted by early Internet users, and entered the wider vocabulary of the public. A 'virus' used to be something that made you sick, but today it's a destructive programme that spreads itself across the Internet. The word 'wireless' was originally used for radio communication, but today it refers to wireless Internet. If you use a social networking site such as Facebook, you will be familiar with 'tagging' people, or 'posting' something to your 'wall.' These words all had similar definitions in the past, but they have been given a new twist and are used to refer to virtual activities.

Sometimes words are given entirely new definitions. A 'troll' used to be a malicious creature from Norse legend, but now it refers to someone who enjoys harassing other people over the Internet. 'Spam' used to be a kind of canned meat, but now it refers to a self-replicating message, often containing advertising, or promoting a scam. A 'stream' used to refer to running water, but now it's a constantly updating stream of information. Sometimes the Internet creates new verbs out of nouns. 'Troll' and 'stream' can both be used as verbs, and 'google' is an entirely new verb that has even been included in some dictionaries.



A conceptual image of a 'stream' of information

Words that were adopted and modified by Internet users come full circle when they make their way back into everyday speech. The word 'troll' is a perfect example. It used to refer to a strange, inhuman creature living in the woods of Northern Europe, and then it came to refer to someone behaving badly on the Internet. Now someone can be called a troll when they behave obnoxiously in real life. The word 'lurking' is another example. It was adopted by Internet users to refer to someone who views an online conversation without contributing. Now people use it in real life to refer to someone who is part of a group but doesn't join in the conversation.

The Internet has only existed for a short time, but it's already had a huge effect on the way people communicate. It's too soon to judge how permanent the effect of the Internet will be on society and the English assignment help language, but it's likely that the changes people have made to the way they speak will last for hundreds of years. It's also possible that a new technology will come along and replace the Internet, and acronyms such as 'lol' will seem like archaisms to our grandchildren.

There are more than 7,100 languages in use around the world, with Chinese, Spanish and English being the most widely spoken. Despite the high placing of English, around 75% of the world's population doesn't speak a word of the language, so it might seem surprising that, as illustrated in this infographic (and based on this data), more than half of all content on the internet is in English.

A universal language

One reason for English being so dominant online is that it is considered a 'universal language', often chosen by people of different nationalities as a common way to communicate. Unlike Chinese, which until relatively recently was little spoken outside its homeland, English has long been a common international language in areas such as business and scientific research. This gives it a natural advantage online and helps account for its widespread use.

A head start

Another reason for English being so common is that it had a head start when the internet was created. Developed in the UK and the US, it was only natural that much of the original content for the internet was written in English.

It also helped that both of these countries were quick to get large numbers of people online, ensuring that English would continue to be the favoured language as the internet grew in size.

Access all areas

As more countries have come online, the amount of content in other languages has also increased. In the 1990s, very few Russians were online but today more than 61% of the 143.5 million population has internet access.

Countries like Germany and Japan also have high levels of internet access – more than 85% – which account for the large amount of content they both produce. The number of Spanish speakers online is also growing rapidly and, with 50% still to go, there will be plenty more Spanish content in the future.

Speaking your language

English accounts for 55% of all online content today yet less than 20 years ago it was more than 80%. During that time, we've gone from being passive consumers of content to active creators of it, while online retailers have increasingly offered personalised content to attract customers.

People are more likely to favour their native language online when discussing local issues or sharing with friends and they prefer to shop in their own language. As we continue to create our own content and look for even more tailored content from others, the amount of non-English pages online will only keep growing.

Share a thought

Despite this increase in other languages, when someone wants to share something with as large an audience as possible, English is still the most likely language to choose.

From citizen journalism in war-torn countries to food blogs featuring traditional recipes, people opt for English when they want to increase the chances of their content being shared around the world. Learning English can therefore help you communicate more effectively online while also giving you access to a much wider choice of content.

And with an estimated 1.5 billion English language learners across the globe, English looks likely to remain the 'universal language' of the internet for quite some time. Make sure you're one of them.

Final remarks

Machine translation and constructed international languages are alternative but not mutually exclusive solutions to the problem of communication between people with different native languages. They can be combined in several ways.

A constructed language might form the basis of a semantics-oriented machine translation system. It could be used as an intermediate language, thus reducing the problem of making $m \times n$ translators from m languages to n languages into the problem of making $m + n$ translators.

A constructed language, specifically designed to allow exact and unambiguous expression, might also be more suitable than English to the role of the language of "authorized" translations.

The design of a constructed language which might achieve general use is, of course, a very difficult and controversial issue. A few years ago I wrote an (unpublished) article *The Effect of Computer Technology on the Design of Artificial Languages* which emphasizes computer tractability as an essential point in constructed language design.

Conclusions

With the rapid changes brought about by globalization and technological development, teachers of ESOL need to understand that they are entering, or have already entered the biggest language/linguistic revolution ever. Many people have learned to meet the demands of the new Internet conditions, such as e-mails, chat groups, Web pages, etc.

The e-prefix must have been used in hundreds of expressions of people on a daily basis.

The Oxford Dictionary of New Words (Knowles, 1997) had already noted e-text, e-cash, e-books, e-conferences, e-voting, e-loan, e-newsletters, e-cards, e-shop, etc. However, it is impossible to know how many of these e-expressions which originated with the Internet will remain in long-term use in the English language. We can only recognize and describe language change once it has occurred. Linguists have begun to investigate the linguistic properties of the so-called 'electronic revolution'. Whether the way in which the English language is being used on the Internet is so different from previous linguistic behavior, and should it be described as revolutionary.

The continuing changes in the spread, reception, interaction, sharing, and understanding of global information have altered the process of human and technological communication. It has created a necessity for linguists, especially language teachers, to fully understand the factors and their Internet influence on the way the English language should now be taught.

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