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The Influence of Netspeak on Students' Writing

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Abstract

Kajian ini adalah mengenai pengaruh bahasa internet terhadap perkataan atau frasa yang disingkatkan dan kerap digunakan oleh pengguna Internet. Penggabungan jalinan bahasa ini memerlukan kawalan rapi semasa mengendalikan komponen di dalamnya. Pengetahuan luas mengenai pelbagai aspek bahasa akan membantu pembaca untuk dapat mengendalikan bahan bacaan tersebut. Oleh itu, penulis memerlukan kefahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang realiti linguistik tertentu. Kajian ini membantu untuk menyedarkan bahawa terdapat pelbagai jenis bahasa yang digunakan semasa menggunakan mod komunikasi yang berbeza. Di samping itu, pengetahuan ini dapat mengelakkan pertimbangan yang kurang menyenangkan mengenai penggunaan berkomunikasi melalui bahasa yang kurang formal. Kajian ini juga berharap untuk menunjukkan bahawa tiada apa-apa yang aneh mengenai penggunaan bahasa internet semasa berkomunikasi dalam rangkaian internet. Pengaruh negatif hanya timbul jika ia digunakan dalam persekitaran yang formal. Kajian ini berkaitan dengan tanggapan bahawa pengaruh bahasa internet adalah bahasa umum yang digunakan terutamanya oleh generasi muda untuk berkomunikasi antara satu sama lain menerusi internet. Walaupun, kebanyakan pendidik menganggap pengaruh bahasa internet sebagai negatif dan memudaratkan ke arah penulisan pelajar, bagaimanapun, penggunaan bahasa internet masih berleluasa. Kajian ini juga memberi pernyataan masalah, objektif, kepentingan dan batasan. Adalah diharapkan bahawa masyarakat, terutamanya para pendidik tidak akan melihat bahasa internet sebagai punca kemerosotan prestasi penulisan pelajar, tetapi penyusunan dalam bahasa, yang diakui sebagai gaya untuk peredaran masa yang singkat.

Keywords: *penulisan, internet, komunikasi*

Abstract

This study on Netspeak writes about words or phrases that are abbreviated and used frequently by Internet users. Language incorporates explosive items which need special care when handling the components in it. Wide knowledge regarding the various aspect of language will help readers to be able to handle the substance. Therefore, the author calls for a deeper comprehension of certain linguistic realities. This study helps to enlighten the various types of language used while using different mode of communication, thus avoiding harsh judgments regarding the informal use of language. The study also hopes to show that there is nothing linguistically eccentric about using Netspeak while communicating online. They are regarded a negative influence only if they are used in a formal environment. This study deals with the notion that Netspeak is a common language used especially by the younger generation to communicate with one another while online. Although, most educators have regarded the influence of Netspeak as negative and detrimental towards students' writing, however, Netspeak is still prevalent. This study also gives the statement of problem, its objectives, significance and limitations. It is hoped that the people in the society, especially educators will not view Netspeak as only a cause of the decline of students' writing standard, but a fixture in language, which is acknowledged for its passing style and momentary trend.

KEYWORDS: *writing, internet, Netspeak*

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Introduction

The function of language in the Internet and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has brought up new-fangled linguistic researches on the English Language. Crystal's first edition of the book 'Language and the Internet' in year 2001, is one of the original, comprehensive study regarding the effects of Internet towards the English Language. In addition, Crystal (2006, 275) states in the second edition of the same book that, we are on the edge of the greatest up rise of language. On the same note, Baron (2001, 23) states that Internet has drastically altered the manner of people's communication. The effect of the Internet is widespread as it covers the manner of how language is altered both locally and globally. Baron describes computer-mediated communication as 'a type of linguistic centaur', which integrates features from traditional writing and face-to-face discussion but wrapping up, to be more than an uncomplicated blend of the two after conducting a detailed investigation on the linguistic tools used online. There are also other researches which stand by the same idea that, certain modification can be observed especially in the aspects of punctuations, grammar and vocabulary when modern technology is integrated to language. (Kwak, Morrison, Peters & Zinkhan 2003; Denis & Tagliamonte 2008; Stavfeldt 2011)

Based on the researches mentioned, in this modern era of education, we, as teachers should be aware that information technology has a profound influence on students' life, especially their writing skills. Digital technology has become a part and parcel of students' life as a mode of communication; however, it also may cause some detrimental effects on students' ability in the writing component. The easy access in using information technology stimulates students' to communicate with each other more frequently. However when they are communicating via this method, they tend to use the most dreaded skill out of the other four macro skills of language, the writing skills in an informal manner using various contractions, loose sentence structure, colloquial abbreviations, trendy acronyms and emoticons. This computer mediated communication's (CMC) influence on the living language has caused a major concern among linguists such as, Susan C. Herring, David Cristal and Brenda Danet. Some critics have also noticed that the increasing trend of using computer mediated communication has led to a new trend of written language, which seems to be deviant from the natural form. A report published by the American Alliance for Children confirms that, technology can cause physical, social and intellectual damage on children. The impaired language used through this method of communication can cause unfavorable effects of students' writing skills, as the influence of netspeak is rather powerful and children tend to absorb it faster than the formal language.

Most educators would agree that one of the key to successful teaching is the use of a variety of instructional methods that is able to cater to the different learning styles of heterogeneous students. Different students have different learning styles, therefore, language teachers try to vary the way they teach, introducing new materials in different ways and providing a variety of activities designed to help students practice and eventually master the skill being taught. Blogging which is based on technology would be a new learning device for the students and when they are told to write dialogue journals through blogging, they would be even happier as they are free to write based on the topic assigned. Students also like journal writing because it allows the teacher to 'monitor' students' development and by writing journals, they are able to form a correlation between the concepts in class and everyday experiences.

In our country, Malaysia, the role of the English subject is becoming prominent as it is a 'must be learnt' language for all. It is an undeniably important language as it is used internationally by all countries as a mode of communication. Therefore, it is the duty of the teacher to build a firm foundation for the students in this particular language. It is vital for them to be able to read, write and speak in the English language, thus teachers have to vary the methods of teaching this particular subject which sometimes does not interest the students. The usage of technology as mentioned above is one effective method to teach the students this language and at the same time grab their attention. Students nowadays enjoy learning through the usage of technology as it proves to be more efficient and interesting compared to the conventional teaching styles.

Aim of the Study

In order to further investigate the influence of Netspeak on students' writing and its linkage to literacy development. The study hypothesized that Netspeak is used commonly among their peers when communicating online where it indicates a closer relationship between the members. Besides that, the Netspeak is also used to bring out group identity as each group have some common Netspeak terms that can only be understood by their group members. Using the data collected from the spontaneous blogging sessions of the students, it is hoped that other findings will be brought to the limelight.

Literature Review

What is Netspeak?

Netspeak is used mostly on social media websites and online messengers and consist of a variety of features. According to Baron (2001, 20) and Mann and Stewart (2000), Netspeak comprises of emoticons, flaming, abbreviations, acronyms and new modification on words and sentences. Crystal (2006) notices more characteristics in Netspeak that are spoofing and trolling and he categorizes them as 'Netspeak maxim'. Netspeak is usually used as a system to abridge or modify spelling of words so as to limit the keystrokes while typing. The messages which are typed, more often sounds as if the person is conversing, where punctuations and grammar are not taken much into consideration. Individuals write out messages as if they were chatting and use a great sum of abbreviated terms including acronyms, (Crystal, Language and the Internet, 2001). Abbreviations and acronyms were actually created to save time and speed up the typing process, however now it has become a trend among the younger generation.

The Influence of Netspeak in Students' Writing

Netspeak has become a norm among adolescents and teens throughout the world. Due to this situation, parents, teachers and even students are expressing their worries. However, the question whether the influence is a friend or foe is a thought that runs in the minds of most teachers. There are also debates which mirror scholarly worry over the influence of Netspeak on students' literacy, (O' Connor 2005; Shaughnessy 2008). Some have the understanding that the so-called 'Internet English' is a breakdown of the English Language.

Netspeak does actually have a negative impact on students' writing. According to those articles, students who frequently use the abbreviated method of writing when online, tend to practice the same method during formal writing in the classroom as well. According to Lee (2002), it is quoted, many teachers say that homework are being written with shortened words, inappropriate capitalization and punctuation, and characters like @, \$ and &. This statement is also made concrete by Scotsman (March 4, 2003) who quoted that dismayed teachers are now presented with essays written not in standard English but in the condensed, minimalist language of messaging.

In contrary, there are several articles as well as quotes from experts saying that the usage of Netspeak does not inflict any threat to the writing skills of students. According to David Crystal (2008), it is said that the more students write, the more they progress in their writing. Therefore, its augmented use rather improves the literacy of users, especially the youth instead of harming it. It helps to enhance the command of language due to the higher frequency of usage although abbreviated forms are being used. This would increase their language skills as they are actually thinking in that particular language when they are typing. There are some who regard 'Internet English' as a form of stable, positive development and a structure of literacy on its own

Current Studies Regarding the Influence of Netspeak in Writing

Abundant of researches have been done covering various areas of Netspeak. The function of language in the world of Internet has raised many new linguistic researches on the aspect of its influence in the English language and its progress in the twenty-first century. There are many current researches which had been done by researchers in this field as well, since this topic is an on-going issue which seems to progress in many aspects day by day. A research done by Danica Jovanovix, 'A Qualitative Study of the Use of Netspeak in English Language Classroom', in year 2013 investigates the linguistic changes and its primary motive in its implementation in the language classrooms. Based on the findings of this study, it has been found that many teachers are aware of the existence of Netspeak in language classrooms, and it also has changed students writing skills as many tend to accidentally use them in their academic writing. However, many teachers have not approved the function of Netspeak as a pedagogical tool due to its interference in the proper language rules. They still have the impression that Netspeak will distract the students from writing according to the language rules.

Apart from Danica Jovanovix's research, Einar Stavfeldt's also did a study titled 'Friend or Foe: Netspeak in English Language Teaching,' in year 2011 which investigates the variety of language gained from texting, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and the Internet (Netspeak), in the current teaching materials. She believes that Internet is a topical pedagogical issue that should be taken into consideration when lessons are being conducted. This is because, Internet opens the doorway to learn and gain many new words and modern ways to use language. The language used in Internet, which was considered informal once, is now achieving popularity in the formal context as well. Netspeak is somehow considered as a resource that should be integrated while teaching as it deals with the daily usage of students' language.

Helen J. Watt in her research 'How does the use of Modern Communication Technology Influence Language and Literacy Development? A Review' in year 2010 mentioned that, the usage of technology by children has shown a striking increase over the past decade as it has become a popular mode of communication. Thus, this research was done to identify the positive and negative consequences of technology in students' language and literacy skills especially during communication. Since communicating via technology has many different forms, the most prominent form is through the usage of computers. This type of communication is set in the mid of written and spoken type of interaction among its users. According to Crystal (2006), there are several researchers who have given the term 'written speech' or 'spoken writing' for this type of mode of communication. However, the research done by Helen J. Watt actually found that the usage of technology in communicating has many outstanding effects on language and literacy skills. It can be used as a stepping stone in the development of new media literacy skills.

The Study

Participants

The sample of this study consists of 5 matriculation students from the science stream. The participants are all females and 18 years old. They are proficient in the English language and are equivalent by standard. All 5 participants have scored A1 for their English subject in SPM and also A1 for GCE. The participants are also well-versed in using computers and considered as IT literates. All of them are used to blogging as they have their own blogs and are also active in social networks, especially Facebook. They spent nearly 5 hours per week to socialize online.

Design and Procedure

The design of an investigation covers approximately all areas of the research, from the little details of the data collection to the choice of the data analysis techniques, (Ragin, 1994:191). The outline of this research project involves three phases that are:

- 1) Collecting dialogue journal blog responds from the participants
- 2) Analyzing the blog responds
- 3) Reporting the findings of the research

The dialogue blogging session analyzed here were natural interactions between the students. The data collected was analyzed in four categories that were contractions, shortenings, initialisms and acronyms. Besides that, to assist in increasing the reliability of this research, the researcher also conducted interview sessions with the participants.

Results and Findings

Research Question 1

What is the frequency of these four types of Netspeak abbreviations in students' writing (shortening, contraction, initialism and acronym)?

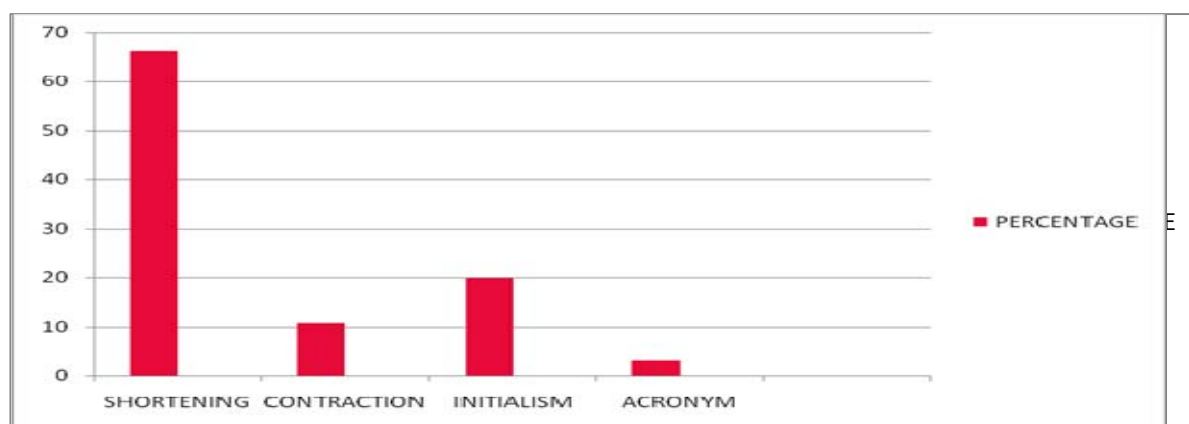


Figure 4.1. Frequency of Netspeak (Abbreviation) Based on Four Categories

Based on the observation above, all the participants of this study have used at least one or two categories of the abbreviations. Some of them have used all four categories of the abbreviations. This clearly shows that the usage of Netspeak abbreviations is common among the users of computer. However the ratio of usage differs among the participants in the sense that, four of the participants have used many Netspeak in their posts, while one participant used very limited Netspeak while posting in the blog. The participants of this research are active users of Netspeak while online. Although most of them did use Netspeak, but there are students who are comfortable writing without using Netspeak. As for them, writing the complete word is not a problem and does not cause any difficulty. In fact, it actually teaches them to write sentences which are grammatically correct with the accurate spelling. This is in accordance with what O' Connor (2005) had mentioned, that, Netspeak violates the rules of proper English in the aspects of capitalization, punctuation and sentence structure. The levels of written work produced in the classroom are at times not up to the formal standard of English due to the usage of improper abbreviations.

However, most of the participants in this study have used quite a number of Netspeak (abbreviations) in their posts which comprises all the four categories (shortening, initialism, contraction and acronym). They do not perceive the usage of Netspeak while participating in activities online as a threat although, they have made the mistake of using Netspeak terms in their essays while writing in the classroom.

The amount of Netspeak used by the participants varies according to their knowledge regarding the types of Netspeak and the frequency of using it while online. The more types of abbreviations they know, the more they tend to use them while they are writing online or even when they send text messages using their hand phones. As for the frequency, the more they use it when they are online, the more proficient they become in using Netspeak as the abbreviated forms will just flow as they are typing. However, the participants do not take Netspeak as an element that needs much attention as it is used mostly during leisure and its influence is not immense.

Research Question 2

What are the words which have a variety of Netspeak?

There are many types of abbreviations that were used by the participants while writing their comments in the blog. Based on the analysis done, the researcher found that there are several categories of words which have been abbreviated in more than one manner. Analysis of data will be made based on three categories in the grammar component that are, 'WH' questions, contractions and demonstratives.

Table 4.1. Number of Netspeak users (%), Frequency of Netspeak usage (%) and Mean for the 'WH' Questions

No	Word	Types of Netspeak	Number of Netspeak Users (%)	Netspeak Frequency (%)	Mean (SD)
1.	What	wat	2 (50.00)	3 (60.00)	1.0 (1.0)
		wt	2 (50.00)	2 (40.00)	
2.	When	wn	2 (40.00)	2 (33.33)	1.2 (1.3)
		wen	3 (60.00)	4 (66.67)	
3.	Where	whr	3 (75.00)	4 (66.67)	5.0 (1.2)
		wr	1 (25.00)	2 (33.33)	

Table 4.2. Number of Netspeak users (%), Frequency of Netspeak usage (%) and Mean for the Contractions

No	Word	Types of Netspeak	Number of Netspeak Users (%)	Netspeak Frequency (%)	Mean (SD)
1.	Is not	isn't	1 (20.00)	7 (58.33)	2.4 (2.38)
		Izn't	4 (80.00)	5 (41.67)	
2.	Do not	dnt	4 (80.00)	5 (50.00)	2.0 (1.90)
		don't	1 (20.00)	5 (50.00)	
3.	Cannot	cnt	3 (60.00)	4 (40.00)	1.0 (1.0)
		can't	2 (40.00)	6 (60.00)	
4.	We are	v r	3 (60.00)	4 (57.14)	1.4 (3.24)
		we're	2 (40.00)	3 (42.86)	

Table 4.3. Number of Netspeak users (%), Frequency of Netspeak usage (%) and Mean for the Demonstratives

No	Word	Types of Netspeak	Number of Netspeak Users (%)	Netspeak Frequency (%)	Mean (SD)
1.	That	dat	3 (60.00)	15 (75.00)	4 (4.94)
		tat	2 (40.00)	5 (25.00)	
2.	This	dis	2 (50.00)	5 (55.56)	1.8 (1.74)
		tz	2 (50.00)	4 (44.44)	

Although the words listed in Table 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 have more than one abbreviation, but the participants who took part in this research could comprehend each others' posts. This is because, they are friends who are familiar with the variety of abbreviations used by one another. They are able to understand the abbreviations used although there are more than one short form for the same word. There are also certain abbreviations which are being used by the same age group or one generation and are not understood by the other generation. For example, the initialism for 'I Love You' used by the older generation is '143', but nowadays it is written as 'ILY' by the younger generation. Thus, although certain words have different abbreviated manner, that does not mean that everybody despite of whatever age, will be able to understand the abbreviations used.

A researcher from the Victoria University, Dr Roberto Bergami, mentioned in his research that, Netspeak existed through the online communication of students and has caused the English Language to evolve. Thus, the teachers of the second language have to come in terms with Netspeak so that the students will not be left out while communicating online and a two way interaction can be carried out without any confusion or misunderstanding. Therefore, in Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 it can be seen that there are a variety of Netspeak that can be used for the same word, especially in the grammar component, thus the older generation has to be aware of this in order to stay in touch with the younger generation.

Research Question 3

How does Netspeak (abbreviations) influence the students' writing?

Sakowicz (2007) mentioned that students do not realize that they are using Netspeak when they are writing on social media as they are only concerned about getting the message to the recipient and not getting the spelling right, so basically it is going to be applied in the classroom as well. Consistent with Sakowicz's findings, all the five participants interviewed mentioned that Netspeak certainly has influenced their writing. There were several categories mentioned by the participants of the study when interviewed regarding the influence of Netspeak in the writing that are spelling, and grammar.

All five participants mentioned that their spelling is most affected by the frequent use of Netspeak. This is because, there are many ways words which are being spelt online using Netspeak, and therefore students are influenced to use the similar spelling when they are in the classroom as well. David Crystal mentions that Netspeak exist due to the sound value of the letter such as b4n (bye for now) and l8r (later). Spelling is altered using the sound of the letters and also the combination of letters that exist within the words. Netspeak is accepted as long as the sender and recipient are able to understand the terms and communicate with each other.

Besides influencing the spelling while writing in the classroom, Netspeak also influences the grammar where the punctuation marks in certain words tend to be missing and this makes the particular word grammatically incorrect. There are some words which are contracted without the apostrophe or the apostrophe is wrongly placed and this is not considered wrong when used online. However, there is possibility for this mistake to be carried out in the classroom as students are unaware of the proper apostrophe placing in the contracted words.

Netspeak does influence students writing especially in the aspect of spelling and grammar. The more frequent the students' use Netspeak during online activities, the more they tend to use it when they are offline as well. This is because, they are so used to the abbreviated terms that, they with or without realizing tend to use it in the classroom as well. However, the participants do not view this as a threat as they are aware of the difference between Netspeak and formal English.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is obvious that Netspeak has significant influence on the students' writing. Their level of Netspeak usage is highly influenced by context and also the purpose. When they are interacting among their friends, the tendency to use Netspeak is high. However, when they are required to write in a formal situation, Netspeak is barely used or only used minimally. The minimal usage of Netspeak is also unintentional where they use it without realizing. Netspeak is also rarely used when they are communicating with adults as they have this conception that the older generation might not be able to comprehend the message that they intend to convey. Netspeak is used spontaneously when they are communicating with one another via computer. The effect of freedom and without any rules set for the blogging sessions, a high percentage of Netspeak is being captured in this study. Therefore, the role of Netspeak in writing cannot be brushed aside as the large variety of Netspeak definitely has influenced students' writing. It takes time and vast energy to follow the development of the style of Netspeak as it varies from century to century, generation to generation, one social setting to another. Thus, teachers need to explore Netspeak and incorporate it while teaching in order to motivate the students to learn the language in-depth as it is a fresh and inexhaustible teaching source.

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