

Effects of Internet Lingo on Students' Academic Writing

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Abstract

Internet lingo refers to the formation of and use of specialized vocabulary in the computer field. It includes jargons, slangs and clipped words. Instant messaging system, chatting, e-mail etc. have become inseparable parts in our life. Today, people want to communicate with the minimum ease, effort and time. That is why; there are some terms in the internet field which are used for daily communications. Internet lingo plays a significant role in the development of academic English writing systems of young people. Now a days, it is considered to be a distortion (by the way as btw, you as u etc.) of the English language. Apart from some controversies, which see this impact as a positive result of development and change of the language, teachers and practitioners from different genres, cannot ignore its negative result on the poor performance of students' writing. The frequent usage of internet lingo influences students to use bad grammar, poor punctuation and improper abbreviations in their academic writing. Teachers need to be careful in making students conscious regarding using correct language in their academic writing by making aware of different context and audiences; and drill them to avoid these improper terms in order to develop their writing skill.

Keywords: Internet Lingo, Academic Writing, Grammar, Performance, Technology.

Introduction

With the advent of science and technology, the world is at our hand. The greatest inventions of science and technology are computer and internet through which we can visit the world in few seconds. Internet is considered a blessing in this present era. The popularity of this blessing is growing rapidly in all over the world in all sectors of human life. This has changed the way we communicate with others in English language. Not only in education and research but also in entertainment sector people use internet every time. Especially, young people seem occupied all the time with using internet. Instant messaging and chatting have achieved a great prevalence in our society. Internet lingo exerts unarguably a great impact on the English language in the 21st century. It influences the way we write. Using internet lingo has taken a position of a “new literacy”. This new literacy does not seem to occupy only in ability to read and write but also in ability” to decode information in various orthographic formats” (Plester, Wood and Joshi, 2009). This has set a new etiquette or more specifically netiquette in the English language.

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Types of Internet lingo

Internet lingo is of various classes. One such group is “Letter Homophones” which comprises of different abbreviations and acronyms. An abbreviation is shortening of a word such as CU for “See You” whereas an acronym is formed with the initials of the words such as LOL for “Laugh Out Loud” or “Lots of Love”, OMG for “Oh My God” etc. According to Wood, Meachem, et al, “abbreviated text messages are messages that are crafted by texters who select common definitions and symbols to communicate ideas in a brief and succinct way and this form of computer-assisted communication is often used in e-mails and instant messages”. Again, there is another class of internet lingo, called Punctuation, Capitalizations and Other Symbols. In this group, periods and exclamation marks are used repeatedly for emphasis such as “.....” Or “!!!!!!!”. Grammatical punctuation rules are avoided such as e-mail as “email” and jhon’s book as “jhons book”. Lastly, there are keyboard generated emoticons and smileys such as <3 as a sideways heart.

Mark McCrindle in an excerpt from Word Up illustrates the idea of the effect of internet lingo at present like this:

“From a letter written by Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra:

I believe I drank too much wine last night at Hurstbourne; I know not how else to account for the shaking of my hand to day. You will kindly make allowance therefore for any indistinctness of writing, by attributing it to this venial error.

How would Ms. Austen convey the same sentiments today? Most likely by text, chat or email, and no doubt with less fineness:

Thnx for ur txt last night ended up getting totally maggotd n my hands r still shakin dis mornin so if any typos thats y “(McCrindle)

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, spoken form always seems a much-relaxed form than the written one. However, use of frequent internet lingo has a great effect on the way people read and write. Young students use less formal, loose structure and flexible spelling and grammar of English language in their academic writing. It has just been few years that educators have started to realize that frequent using of this new literacy (internet lingo) surely has a great impact on the performance of young students especially, in their academic wiring. The various usage of internet lingo is affecting students in the process of developing their writing skill. Correct spelling, grammar rules, proper punctuation etc. seem disguise in their writing. At present, teachers discover that formal writing of multi pages seems a monumental task for the young students who tirelessly keep their fingers on the buttons of computer in either texting or chatting. This frequent use of lingo is declining youth’s literacy, no doubt.

Review of Literature

There are a group of people who see 'Internet English as an example of how language is constantly developing and changing, but also as a type of literacy in and of itself, which can be capitalized on to engage students in more traditional writing" (O'Connor). Some educators see the pervasiveness of the internet lingo as an opportunity to teach students about language evolution. Erin Jansen, founder of net lingo, supports this new technology as the view of addition to the vocabularies in a language. Also, Erika Karres, a teacher educator," shows how English has evolved since Shakespeare's time." (Lee, 2002)

On the other hand, "It is an unstructured language that violates the standard rules of the English language" (Ochonogor, Alakpodia and Achugbue, 2012) Frequent use of different internet terms affects students to perform poor in the formal English writing. According to Lee (2002), "Teachers say that papers are being written in shortened words, improper capitalization and punctuation, and characters like &, \$ and@". To connect to the friends and share every action of everyday life, young generation constantly use internet and various sorts of internet terms, such as, "I wud love 2 met u @ 1 n wrk wit u." These young people have now reached at a saturation point where they no longer notice this sort of distortion of the English language, spelling, pronunciation, writing, etc. and very unintentionally they use these in their formal academic writing. Along with grammatical rules, students even use different types of symbols as the replacement of words. Now-a-days, English teachers see the words like r (are), b4 (before) oic (oh I see) , brb (be right back) etc. in their academic writings. It is indeed a sign of language destruction as it collapses its standard. "The claim that abbreviations and acronyms used in communication technology like text messaging are spilling over to damage formal communication (such as essays) is one that requires attention" (McCrindle). Frequent use of Internet lingo sacrifices uniformity such as grammar, punctuation, syntax in a formal language. Now a days, the young generation is always on internet using abbreviations, smiley symbols etc. that hinder their capacity to use uniform language in their academic writing. Friess and English instructor Cindy Glover, who- while teaching undergraduate freshman composition in 2002, "spent a lot of time unteaching internet -speak." "My students were trying to communicate fairly academic, scholarly thoughts, but some of them didn't seem to know it's "y-u-o", not "u"" (Freiss, 2003). Heavy IM and chat use have a great impact on the way students read and write on the pages. Students cannot distinguish between formal and informal writings and use different types of internet lingo in their formal writing. Moreover, it is affecting in developing students' typographic skill. In a survey in 2012 Ochonogor, Alakpodia and Achugbue showed that even though students are aware of the negative impact of using SMS slangs in their academic writing, they still cannot stop it since they do it incautiously. There is a strong relationship between widespread mistakes in students' academic writing and the over use of internet lingo.

Need for the Study

Thinking about this alarming situation, teachers need to be careful in teaching students to understand what actually constitute correct language and when different styles of language are

appropriate to use. People can say that this misuse of English language is the fault of students where others can go against it. However, Leila Christenberry, former President of the national council of teachers of English and a university professor said, “it’s not that there’s never a place for this sort of thing, but it’s the difference between how you would dress to go out on Saturday night versus how you dress when you do yard work” (Friess, 2003.) It can be debatable that frequent use of internet and internet lingo are negatively affecting youth’s literacy standard. Number of empirical researches has been done to examine the level of impacts of internet lingo on students’ writings. Some argues with the development of communication among the students while others see a major decline in the quality of academic writings because of lingo. Eleanor Johnson is a professor in the department of English and comparative literature at Columbia university who notices a significance misuse of language because of the electronic communication. ” I think that instant messaging has made students believe that it’s far more acceptable than it actually is to just make screamingly atrocious spelling and grammatical errors” (Johnson). According to Johnson, over the past several years, her students have increasingly used a more informal English vocabulary in formal assignments. Furthermore, White, Beckerman, Pritchard and Schanbaum, the famous educators and linguists, state that internet lingo surely creates problem when they appear in the offline prose because these terms do not possess any formal styles and they are very much free in terms of their nature.

Regardless of different controversies, this situation needs to be checked properly. If not, proper use of English language will completely be eroded at one point of time. Teachers should take the responsibility to make students aware about the concept of audience for whom they are writing. The acceptance of various styles of language in formal writing depends on the various types of audiences/readers. Again, they need to be taught about the importance of using correct form of language in the correct settings. After all language is context specific. One writing style does not fit for all situations. Styles of writing vary on different purposes. Using informal internet lingo can be appropriate while one chats in a chatting room or texts while in case of writing an academic paper needs use of formal form of the language. The students need to be trained to use a proper constructed form of the English language.

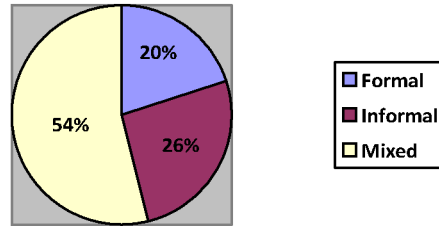
Methodology

This paper has adopted a descriptive survey method (both qualitative and quantitative) in this research. A Questionnaire has been used as an instrument for this research to find out the effects of computer lingo in the students’ academic writing. A total of 60 people (50 students and 10 teachers) were sampled to obtain information for this paper. All the students and the teachers belonged to Southeast University. I gave a brief idea of internet lingo and the purpose of my survey before distributing the questionnaires so that the respondents can participate properly in this survey.

Data Analysis of Students as Respondents:

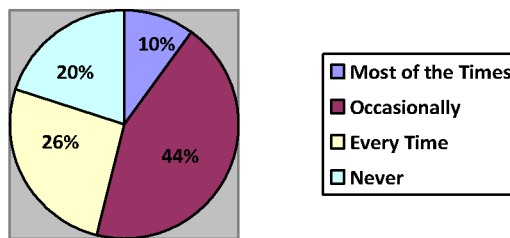
1. 20% of the students say that they use the formal form of English when they text or chat with others. 26% use informal while remaining 54% use mixed forms of language.

Fig: 1 The style of English language students use in case of text message and chat



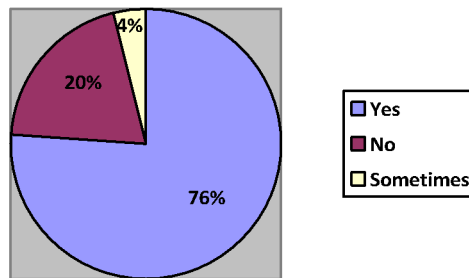
- 10% of students say that most of the times they use correct English in either texting or chatting. Again, 44% say occasionally they use correct form while 26% agree to use this at every time. However, 20% say they never use correct form when they text and chat with others.

Fig: 2 Frequency of using correct form of English in either texting or chatting

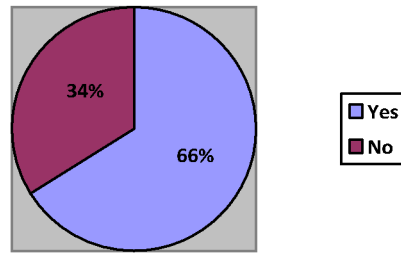


- In case of distinguishing between formal and informal form of English in academic writing, 76% say yes that they can while 20% and 4% say no and sometimes in recognizing two forms.

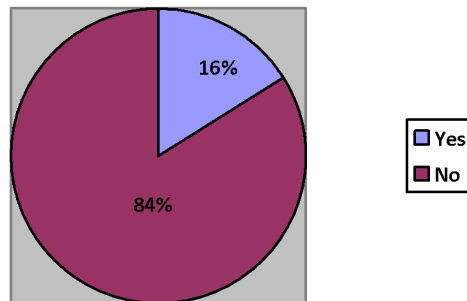
Fig: 3 Students distinguish between formal and informal form of English in academic writing



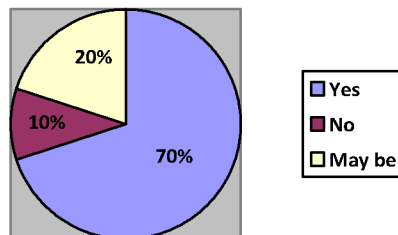
- 66% of students actually bother the effects of using informal form of English in their academic writing while 34% do not really bother.

Fig: 4- Students bother the effects of using informal forms of English in their academic writing

5. 84% of the students say that they will never stop texting and chatting only because they hamper their writing skill. However, 16% say that they can indeed stop it.

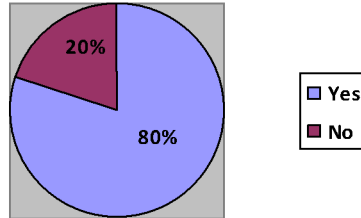
Fig: 5- Students stop texting and chatting only because they hamper writing style**Data analysis of teachers as respondents:**

1. 70% of the teachers say that frequent use of text message and chatting hamper students' writing skills. Again 20% say "may be" and rest of the 10 % teachers responded by saying "no" to that particular question.

Fig: 1- Frequent use of text message and chatting harm students' writing skills

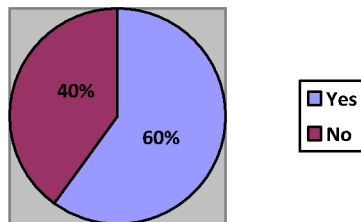
- 80% of the teachers say that today’s digital technologies are creating distracted generation with short attention span while 20% deny it.

Fig: 2- Today’s digital technologies are creating “distracted” generation with short attention span



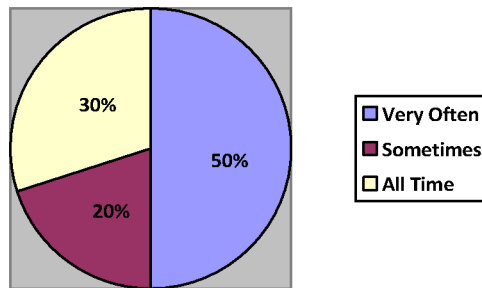
- 60% teachers believe that young generation need more time away from social networking sites but 40% teachers responded negatively.

Fig: 3- Young generation need more time away from social networking sites



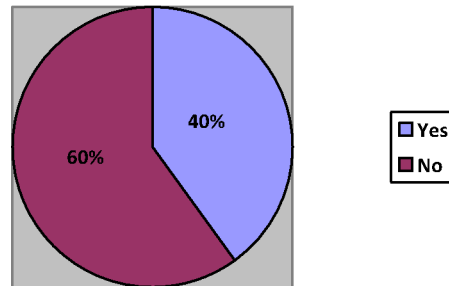
- 50% of teachers very often see informal form of language in their students’ academic writing. 20% teachers say sometimes and 30 % say all the time they see this problem.

Fig: 4- Frequency of seeing informal form in students’ academic writing



5. 40% of teachers say that students use the unstructured form of English in their academic writing intentionally while 60% deny this.

Fig: 5- Students use the unstructured form of English in their academic writing intentionally



6. In response to question No. 6 which was, “Write your thoughtful comments regarding the steps that can be taken to make the students aware to avoid improper English in their academic writing,” the teachers responded differently. Among the various comments most commons are:
- Teachers should teach students the difference between formal and informal form of language.
 - Before giving any writing tasks teachers should make them write draft and check them.
 - Teachers should make students aware of the negative impact of using unstructured English in their academic writing.

Findings from the Survey

The frequent use of text message, chat, e-mail etc. is affecting both teachers and students. The students are aware of internet informal terms and its effects but cannot avoid making use of these terms when they are asked to write formal writings. Again, teachers know that students are making these mistakes very unintentionally but nevertheless often find this informal writings in the name of academic one. Students cannot keep themselves away using social sites whereas teachers believe that they should work more on it to keep themselves away from using these sites. Teachers also believe that it is very obvious that young generation will use technology and teachers should take some responsibilities in order to make their students aware using formal terms and avoiding informal terms in their academic writing.

Recommendations

Technology has a great prevalence and influence in our society, especially on our young minds. As a result, it has become a pertinent issue for the teachers engaged in the academic development of their students due to its effects. At present, due to the widespread use of different social sites there is the frequent presence of “internet terms” in students’ academic writing that makes teachers annoyed. However, teachers need to take some initiatives to improve students’ academic writing by keeping the negative effects of internet lingo aside. Some such suggestions are given

below in order to minimize the use of informal structure of English in the academic writing and thus develop students' writing skill.

1. Teachers need to be more concerned and careful in teaching basic writing skills to their students. This involves using correct syntactic structure with correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. For this, they can implement some activities in the classroom where students can learn more about grammar, spellings and punctuations in a more structured way. Activities can be given as pair-work where each group will be given different sheets containing incorrect sentences (improper grammar, spellings and punctuations). Students will be asked to rewrite them. In this way students will be able to know the importance of correct English in formal writings.
2. Peer editing is one of the effective processes through which students can judge their own writings, find their mistakes and make corrections. The task performed by students in a group can be exchanged with other groups where peer will make necessary corrections. Teachers should not absolutely depend on peer editing feedback rather they should implement it as a supplementary technique in the classroom. This is because sometimes students may not feel comfortable to get correction from their peers.
3. In the classroom the teacher will make the students know and aware about the actual style of formal writing. Teachers can again take some important initiatives to encourage students to practice formal writings with formal vocabularies. Before composing the main writing, teachers can ask students to do some drafts to revise their own writings.

A teacher cannot expect the best writing output from students at the first attempt of their formal writings, rather it comes from repeated practice of writing, mastering the rules and implementing them. Students should be given sufficient time to develop their academic writings. Lastly, teachers should not discourage students to use technology to avoid using informal and incorrect terms (internet lingo), rather they should encourage and motivate them to be more conscious and aware while doing academic writing.

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Questionnaire for students:

1. What style of English language you use in case of text message and chat?
 - a. Formal
 - b. Informal
 - c. Mixed
2. How often do you use correct form of English in either texting or chatting?
 - a. Most of the times
 - b. Occasionally
 - c. Every time
 - d. Never
3. Can you distinguish between formal and informal form of English in academic writing?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. No
4. Do you bother the effects of using informal forms of English in your academic writing?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Would you stop texting and chatting only because they hamper your writing style?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Questionnaire for teachers:

1. Do frequent use of text message and chatting harm students' writing skills?
 - a. Yes
 - b. May be
 - c. No
2. Do you believe today's digital technologies are creating "distracted" generation with short attention span?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Do you believe young generation need more time away from social networking sites?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. How often do you see informal form in your students' academic writing?
 - a. Very often
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. All the time
5. Do you think students use the unstructured form of English in their academic writing intentionally?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Write your thoughtful comments regarding the steps that can be taken to make the students aware to avoid improper English in their academic writing.