

MAKING OR MARRING ACADEMIC ENGLISH: A STUDY OF ERRONEOUS USAGE OF ENGLISH BY THE SOCIAL MEDIA AFFLICTED INDIAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

English language has undergone a tremendous change over the decades due to the influence of technology, scientific development and the evolution of mass media or, to be more precise, the social media. In the present era, while some words appear quickly and fade away equally fast, others immediately become permanent fixtures of our vocabulary. With the social media dominating the young impressionable minds, the teaching of English as a second language in India to this social media afflicted generation of students is really an ordeal. It is observed that words are overused and misused on social sites like Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. Social media is negatively affecting language skills in the classroom. From change in lexis to change in syntax and grammar, the language of social media users has undergone a cosmetic refurbishing. Viewed from pedagogical standpoint, this misuse of language on social media is harmful as it negatively affects the learners of English language who do not speak English as their first language. New learners are exposed to errors in writing English without their awareness of the fact, leading to incorrect usage of these words in the classroom. This paper is an attempt to analyse the lexical errors which have crept in English language due to social media usage in the language of Indian students from remote backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: *Lexis, Social Media, Erroneous English*

INTRODUCTION

Media, an important social institution, is a crucial presenter of politics, culture, social life and language of society, reflecting as well as shaping all these variegated paradigms from different perspectives. Media synthesises entertainment with community building and in the process becomes a propagator of language. It is an important linguistic institution which uses major proportion of language as its output. This language is heard and read by a large multitude of people every day. The media usage of language mirrors as well as styles the language along with the attitudes of speech communities. Different forms of media utilise variant dialects and forms of language according to their convenience and purpose. The language of newspapers is different from the language presented on Television and this is entirely different from the language used by radio jockeys to construct their unseen, unknown image. Add to it the social media which utilises language with an 'apart from others' gusto. All these diverse varieties of languages volleyed on the people take them with surprise, confusing them regarding the correct form of language to be used. This confusion is more specifically in India which is a multilingual country, where every state has its own native language as the mother tongue. In such a scenario where language follows the personal perspective of the presenter on media, or the type of media one is exposed to,

teaching a particular language gets very difficult. This ordeal is more so in context with teaching and learning of English as a second language in India owing to the fractured English usage on the various forms of media.

Language learning has always been a rich experience for any country or race as it opens up new vistas of knowledge, unbundles varied hues of different cultures and brightens different perspectives of learning in different fields. “The study of second language learning is an immensely rich and varied enterprise. Most participants in this enterprise still see its ultimate justification in terms of the desire to improve learning and teaching” (Littlewood: 2006). English always stands as a second language in India. Teaching English to Indians speaking a variety of mother tongues has always been a humongous task beset with hurdles and the advent of social media has multiplied these hurdles many fold. The earlier obstacles in the teaching learning of English were mainly policy based due to the faulty policies framed by the policy makers. This included less time devoted to teaching of English, lack of infrastructure, faulty evaluation system, unqualified teachers etc. but in the modern social media coloured scenario, the teaching of academic English has become a real tough task for the academicians.

The imbroglia social media gives rise to in case of English language is difficult to handle. The propagators of CALL, MALL etc. regard e- media as a very good source of teaching language. But here the discussion is from the perspective of the type of English language circulating on social media (which refers to Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook etc.) and the faulty lexis usage prevailing on them. Social Media is different from mass media, or Electronic media. Social media refers to that media form in which you are not just a passive reader but can comment on the effectivity or ineffectivity of a statement. Here the communication is mutual and not one sided. So on social media people have an advantage over the earlier media forms or internet that they are a participant in the discourse instead of being mere readers or listeners. But this, in the absence of any correcting authority, has resulted in highly erroneous usage of English on the Whatsapp groups, Facebook, Twitter etc. This effect is clearly displayed in academic assignments and exams of students from remote areas in India where English teaching learning is not given much priority.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

A number of researches have been carried out on social media forms and various networking sites. Naomi Baron’s monograph *Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World* (2008) focuses on the sociological and historical perspective of social media. Baron writes on the development of electronic (mobile) communication and also focuses on social networking sites. However, she does not analyse the types of language used on *Facebook* and other social networking sites.

The paper “Analysing the Language of Social Networking Sites- An Analysis Model” by Michael Szurawitzki (2012) focuses on developing a model for analysing the language of social media. Language on social media, like face book is a two way traffic in which there were comments and counter comments, so the writer analyses some facebook scripts to develop a model on the basis of which language can be analysed.

The paper “The Impact of Social Media on Vocabulary Learning Case Study - Facebook” by Sim Monica - Ariana and Pop Anamaria - Mirabela investigates the impact of computer and social media in improving students’ knowledge of English language in ELT students in Economics at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea.

This study was intended to assess the role and effectiveness of Facebook use in vocabulary learning in a group of students. No doubt there was an improvement in the groups using face book from pre-test to post-test but it was not very significant.

Social media, no doubt, enhances vocabulary and English skills in people but it is also responsible for the introduction of errors in the usage of English of the social media users. Social media is a two way process where comments are followed by comments. But these comments, written in English by Indian students, for whom English is a second language, are not corrected by any one. As such these errors in spellings and lexis creep into the vocabulary of students and affect the academic language of these students consequently leading to lower scores in English assignments and exams.

Research Question

Various other scholars have dealt with different aspects of social media in their own effective manner, but the fractured usage of English language resulting in erroneous academic English has not been the concern of these scholars so far. This paper attempts to study the faulty English spellings and lexis used on social media and the havoc that these faulty spellings wreak on academic English.

This research paper analyses Whatsapp chat of about 20 groups of Indian students from remote areas of Punjab to spot the lexical/spelling errors committed on Whatsapp group chats. The prime idea of this analysis is to frame the spelling errors made in Whatsapp chats done in English by students for whom English is a second language, resulting in marring the standard of academic English in Indian classrooms of remote areas.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

A number of random Whatsapp chats were done with students of undergraduate classes and on the basis of those chats a number of lexical, semiotic, punctuational and grammatical errors were spotted. Since this paper deals with only lexical errors, the chats were analysed only for erroneous spellings. It is detected that for the sake of ease and comfort, the students discard the rules of English language and manhandle spellings in the chats. The words are shortened, abbreviated, blended or clipped as per choice on the social media. This continued usage of faulty spellings becomes a habit for students who carry these spelling errors to English language classrooms. These faulty spellings of social media afflicted students, have become a great hurdle in their learning correct academic English. A thorough analysis of the Whatsapp chat has lead to the emergence of following lexical errors in the usage of English by the Indian students belonging to remote areas:

Missing the Last Letters

It is observed that the social media users generally miss out the last letter used in words as they are deemed unessential on the Whatsapp chat. The words become clear even without the obsolete ending letter. So why waste precious time in using the last letter. Skipping the 'g' or the ending 'e' in words is a common practice on Whatsapp chat and this new type of spellings very easily creep in the English language classrooms.

Table 1

Love	Luv
Give	Giv
Calling	Callin
Mailing	Mailin
Writing	Writin
Dancing	Dancing
Commenting	Commentin
Willing	Willin
Working	Workin
Gave	Gav
Role	Rol
Brave	Brav
Save	Sav
Crave	Crav
Going	Goin
Doing	Doin

These spellings, though faulty, are comprehensible and find easy acceptance on Whatsapp platform. But academic English does not accept this kind of spellings and errors like these make the students score less in term papers and assignments.

Spelling the Words According to the Sound

The data also reveals that majority of the spellings are written on the chats according to their sound without realizing that some languages are phonetic while others are not and English is a non- phonetic language. With phonetic languages, there is a direct relationship between the spelling and the sound whereas in non-phonetic languages, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the letters and the related sounds (Khalilzadeh). In other words, spellings and pronunciations are in most cases different. In such languages the number of letters and sounds is unequal, e.g. there are 26 letters in English (which is a non-phonetic language) while the number of the sounds is 36 (leaving apart the diphthongs). So in case of non-phonetic languages, like English the learners have to focus on spellings and pronunciation in addition to grammar and vocabulary. But contrary to this, the whatsapp users are throwing the rules in the air and transforming English to a phonetic language with words like:

Table 2

Guys	guyz,
Exams	Xamz
Schools	Schoolz
Colleges	Collegz
Phone	Fone
Extraordinary	Xtraordinary
Pneumonia	Numonia
Phobia	Fobia
Photo	Foto
Fridge	Frij
Psychology	Sycology

Missing the Already Silent Letters

Another favourite spelling disaster on the social media is missing out the silent letters from the words. This kind of spellings may be acceptable on the social media but are not acceptable in the classroom of English. There are many spellings used in the chats where the silent letters are left out for the sake of ease in typing, leading to legible but faulty spellings as depicted below:

Table 3

Night	Nite
Could	Cud
Should	Shud
Text	Txt
Thank you	Thnku
Anniversary	Anversry
Happy	Hppy
Nice	Nyc
Station	Statn
Year	Yr
For	Fr
Awesome	Awsm
Please	Plz
Dinner	Dnr
Done	Dn
Your	Ur
Might	Mite

The spellings like those depicted above may not be wrong as per Whatsapp norms, but they definitely break the spelling rules of English. Another kind of spelling disaster on Whatsapp groups is the substitution of one letter for a word according to sound:

Table 4

Are	R
You	U
And	N
Eye	I
Why	Y
Be	B

Using just one letter as ‘u’ for you, ‘n’ for and ‘r’ for are, ‘y’ for why is so addictive that students don’t even realise that they are going wrong by using these single letters in the exams. These spellings are so convenient and so repeatedly used that they become a part of memory. So whenever the students write, if they are not conscious enough, they use these spellings in the exams and assignments, fracturing the structure of academic English.

Mixing of Letters and Numerals

Another favourite spelling error for the whatsapp users is the ‘letter- number- combos.’ Here, there is a blending of numerals and alphabets leading to apparently different words which are easy to type and spell. These words, easy as they are to type, become so much a part of students’ subconscious vocabulary that they are inevitably used in the academic assignments. The students from remote backgrounds don’t even realise that they are making error by using these spellings in their exams.

Table 5

M2	Me too
Gr8	Great
2day	Today
2n8	Tonight
M8	Mate
B4	Before
L8r	Later
U2	You too
F2F	Face to face
F9	Fine
2	To
4	Four/ for
2morro	Tomorrow
W8	Wait
L8	Late

This unique list of combo words invented by Whatsapp users is endless. These spellings, though difficult to understand by beginners, are very convenient and addicting. This technique may sound correct on social media, where time is to be saved on typing, but technically speaking these spellings pronounce the real end of Queen's English. These type of spellings, on one hand, lead students towards securing fewer marks in their academic writings and exams and on the other hand, spoil the basic fabric of English language.

Usage of Acronyms

Acronyms have existed for several centuries in English language, so their migrating in media does not appear to be a serious issue. While chatting online on social media, people want to save time. So instead of wasting time by using long words, they use acronyms because what can be shortened must be shortened. There are, no doubt, standard abbreviations which are comprehensible to all groups of people, but apart from these abbreviations, we have a whole bunch of Whatsapp words which have been abbreviated for the purpose of saving typing time. Some of these words have become so popular that they have even made it into the Oxford Dictionary. There is a vast array of social media acronyms like "LOL" (Laughing Out Loud which is celebrating its 28th birthday this year), which have gained popularity with media users. But there are other acronyms which are incomprehensible to non social media users:

Table 6

Abbreviations	Meanings
CU	See you
OMG	O my God
BTW	By the way
DM	Direct Message
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out
IDK	I don't care, or I don't know
AEAP	As early as possible
ASAP	As soon as possible
CWOT	Complete waste of time
CYT	See you tomorrow
FYI	For your information
EM	Excuse me?
TBH	To be honest
GM	Good morning
GE	Good evening

CUS	See you soon
YOLO	You Only Live Once
CTN	Cannot talk now
TC	Take care
NP	No problem
RIP	Rest in peace
HRU	How are you
GTG	Got to go
BRB	Be right back
BRT	Be right there
ATM	At the moment
GBU	God bless you
HBD	Happy Birthday
DIY	Do it yourself
US	See you soon
CUL	Catch you later

These acronyms are not established as the standard forms of English language. They are user created forms which are gaining popularity on the social media. But this usage is and has become really serious when it comes to the classrooms where the academic writings do not give recognition to these abbreviations. These over used Whatsapp acronyms, when used in academic writings, spell a disaster of language.

Clipping of Words

Clipping, in linguistics, is the process of word formation which leads to cutting or reduction of a word to one of its parts. Clipping is also known as “truncation” or “shortening” (Merriam Webster dictionary) where words are clipped to form new words. According to Marchand (1969), “Clippings are not coined as words belonging to the standard vocabulary of a language. They originate as terms of a special group like schools, army, police, the medical profession, etc., in the intimacy of a milieu where a hint is sufficient to indicate the whole. For example, exam(ination), math(ematics), and lab(oratory) originated in school slang; spec(ulation) and tick(et=credit) in stock-exchange slang; and vet(eran) and cap(tain) in army slang.” When used widely by a large group of people, these clipped forms can pass into common language usage becoming a part of Standard English. This has transpired with words like maths, lab, exam, phone, fridge etc. But when their usefulness is limited to narrower contexts, they remain outside the standard register. This clipping of words is another favourite go to for social media users where words are clipped to make sensible short forms which are fancy, attractive and of course time saving for the busy social media users. This non standard clipping, though goes well with social media users, is not acceptable in language learning classes where they are the major cause of lower scores.

Table 7

Little	Lil
Probably	Probs
Because	Coz
Brother	Bro
Definitely	Defo
Don't know	Dunno
Sister	Sis
Picture	Pic
Problem	Prob
Doctor	Doc

Faulty Usage of Homophones

Homophones are the words or group of words which are pronounced the same as other but differ in spellings, origins and meanings (Merriam Webster dictionary). These homophones, as they have very little difference in spellings, need to be mastered by students with consistent effort. But in Whatsapp chat where there is no checking and correcting authority, these homophones have become another source of confusion and erroneous spellings in English language. The homophonal pairs given below, when unmastered, lead to erroneous syntax on Whatsapp chats and subsequently in academic English:

Table 8

Their and there
Hair and here
Know and no
Read and red
Tail and tale
Weak and week
Cell and sell
Rome and roam
Weather and whether
Soul and sole
Wait and weight

The students are unable to distinguish between their and there, tail and tale, weak and week and unconsciously use them wrongly without realising the mistake. The worst error spotted in the data is when they want to write “may his/ her soul rest in peace” and the word used is ‘sole’ for soul or “I no u” for “I know u”. These lexical blunders might go unchecked on Whatsapp chats but in academic texts these errors can’t be left unmonitored.

Blending

Blending is another way of forming new words in English which means to combine or associate so that the separate constituents or the line of demarcation cannot be distinguished or to combine into an integrated whole (Merriam Webster dictionary). It refers to joining the beginning of one word and the end of another to make a new word with a new meaning. This blending of two words to form one word on the social media is gaining popularity. Though blended words like using e-mail for electronic mail, netizen for network citizen, smog for smoke and fog, brunch for breakfast and lunch etc. is a common practice which has crept into the world of academics, but there are blended words which are giving headaches to English teaching in the classrooms. These refer to the blends made by Whatsapp chatters. Since they belong to a specific register and are not a part of academic vocabulary, these blends create a problem for academicians. The recent social media trend of identifying high-profile couples by combining their first names to form a blend word e.g. Brangelina, Virushikha, Priyanik, Deepveer, Shamira etc. has lead to a practice of forming blends of every word possible. The words like ‘frenemy’(for friends and enemies) and ‘dinnack’ (for dinner and snack), foodgasm (food and orgasm), berrilicious for berry and delicious etc. are difficult to understand for a normal reader as they are not a part of the Standard English vocabulary and have not, as of now, found place in the accepted vocabulary in the dictionary of language. These new, unaccepted blends, when enter academic language, play havoc with the Standard English.

CONCLUSIONS

Language is always in the process of evolution and social media is a rich playground for experimenting with morphemes, creating new morphemes and repurposing old ones. No doubt, Social media offers a vibrant group of English language users, but these users, leaving aside professional writers and bloggers, are not concerned with the correctness of English. A person would want to be grammatically correct only if it has got something to do with his or her profession. Others would just present a whole new world of misspelled words, faulty syntax and missed or overused punctuation marks. Social media provides a platform for people who aren't bitten by the bug of grammatical correctness and its rules and syntax, giving them freedom to flout the rules of traditional English Language in the name of innovativeness and creativity. The greatest disadvantage of social media is the inculcation of erroneous spellings in the students. These E-spellings are something just right for the Whatsapp chat, but wrong when adjudged from the examination point of view. Language novices pick up ungrammatical texts and faulty language which is not exposed to correction by any authority and carry them to the classroom playing havoc with the Queen's English taught in our schools and colleges.

The vast array of social media networks have, undoubtedly, resulted in an exponential increase in new type of written language. With English being the most dominant language on the internet, social media has caused a drastic change in the English language. No doubt, social media has increased the number of people who are now able to communicate in English, apart from increasing the frequency with which people are able to communicate in English. Although the social media professionals and journalists etc. do write on social media but the majority of English is written by the general public which is not checked, supervised or edited by anyone to ensure the appropriate usage of English language. The developments and trends in language witnessed on the social media over time are significant, but the foundation of English as a second language in Indian classrooms is in a state of uncertainty. The students spending most of the time on social media learn erroneous spellings from the media which proves to be the biggest hurdle in learning English as a second language. The need of the hour is to urgently check the social media linguistic disorder creeping in English language and crippling the Queen's English. Strong steps need to be taken to separate social media English and pedagogic English before this novel and fashionable language shatters the academic language.

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