

How has technology affected the relation between speech and writing?

Technology has developed extraordinarily over time and will continue to do so as time moves on.

Developments nowadays occur regularly, but this wasn't always the case. Technological developments, say thirty years ago, were much slower; especially when you compare them to the quantity of technical improvements made nowadays. In this day and age, it seems that there are technological developments on a monthly basis, rather than yearly breakthroughs.

But why is this, is it because of increased intellectual capabilities of people in this modern era? Or do our scientists need to recognise that previous breakthroughs are the foundation of our developments and affirming further progression of technology?

Technology's impact on our communication

The way in which we communicate has changed drastically. In earlier periods before mobile phones and computers, there were only two concrete ways of communicating; these were face-to-face conversations or in writing – the writer would have most likely handwritten or used a typewriter; depending on the period of time you look back to.

Back in the 1800s, there were major technological and communicative developments, impacting the way in which people were able to communicate in the written form. People were soon given the opportunity to telegraph a message to someone. This would allow the recipient to read the message in almost real time after it being sent. It was an option open to people for a faster transmission during the 1860's-1880's.

Another development was the telephone, which was introduced during the 1870's. The telephone invention later developed into a mobile phone during the 1980's, which allowed users to command more activity; not only communication through their voice but text – similar to fax or telegraph. No one could have predicted how big of an invention the mobile phone would become.

The internet's impact

There has been a huge influx in how we communicate through technology, with the assistance of the internet. The internet began its journey during the early 1990's, and has continued to grow ever since. The internet began with the introduction of E-mail, which allowed people to digitally write a message, then send it to another email user to recite instantly. This then developed into instant messaging, which was less like email and more like texting over the internet. Instant messaging was then introduced on social networking sites, to increase usability and allow people to communicate even easier.

Instant messaging service MSN has now been shut down after running for thirteen years. This was ultimately because of the increase in popularity of social networking sites like Facebook; who introduced instant messaging.

New devices; smartphones and computers

Computers, mobile phones and tablets are important in a lot of people's lives and used in everyday life. From the year 2001, mobile phone and text usage has excelled with all age ranges. Between the years 2000 and 2001, worldwide texting figures went from 17bn in 2000 to 250bn in 2001 (Crystal, D, 2008). Text usages have continued to rise also.

As well as texting being a huge force within our communicative ways, internet usage has become very popular. Statistics from the Internet World Stats (2010) shows that at the year 2000 there were 360 million people online, in 2010 there was a huge rise in the amount of people on the internet; with a staggering 2 billion people online. With the continuous rise of people on the internet, it has lead to innovative ways to communicate with not only words on a message, or your voice on a phone, but also pictures and vlogging across social networking sites and blogs.

Is technology destroying the English Language?

Although technology has changed the way we live on a daily basis, many people believe that its impact is for the better. But for others, technology is ruining the language. There have been many new words created from smartphones, instant messaging and the internet. These newly formed words are ultimately non-standard and jargon to prescriptivists within the English Language, but there are still millions of people having fun with these words and using them in everyday conversation.

Prescriptivist John Humphreys is renowned for his views on language. Over the years, he has spoken about language to the Daily Mail – in his discussion on the topic of texting, he argued, “They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped.” (Humphrey, 2007).

The evolution of internet and texting *has* introduced many new words into our language, and the introduction of these new words do not look like declining. The first two obvious words created were ‘internet’ and ‘texting’; although these two words did not exist before their creation, they’re now possibly the two most recognised words across the globe, and second nature to us and the may new generations.

Internet, texting and instant messaging

The internet, texting and instant messaging (another word they’ve introduced) have also created other words and communicative habits with emoticons, as well as a number of slang words. These slang words or phrases have been created by omitting letters from certain words, such words include ‘cya’ (meaning ‘see you’ when saying goodbye) and ‘bck’ (meaning ‘I’m back.’).

Text and instant messaging

Concentrating on text and instant messaging, they both go hand in hand together. Something that can be noted about instant messaging is that they are usually quick messages, written with rare punctuation and are usually seen as non-standard. The average length of an instant message is 5.4 words, comparing that to an informal everyday conversation which has an average of 6.2 words, or a traditional written letter that has 8.4 words. It also took an average of 7 messages (in 40 seconds) to sign off a conversation. These statistics were suggested by Naomi S. Baron.

Their language use

Texting and instant messaging both have a very similar language usage – they are both filled with new abbreviations, which are solely used when messaging. Examples of these are ‘bc’ which stands for ‘because’ and ‘k’ or ‘kk’ meaning ‘OK’.

There are many more examples of abbreviations that have been created, which have been taken away from the screen and applied to hand writing, and even speech. People tend to write notes in this abbreviated form.

Another edition of instant messaging and texting is the creation of acronyms. 'brb' meaning 'be right back', 'btw' meaning 'by the way', 'lol/LOL' meaning 'laugh out loud' and 'OMG' meaning 'oh my god'. These frequently used acronyms are now even said in everyday conversation. Face-to-face conversations can include these acronyms with the speaker uttering the acronym by spelling out the acronym, letter by letter. For example, they may say O-M-G instead of saying oh my god. O-M-G and L-O-L have become new words; they are an example of neologisms, which have impacted people's speech. More examples of such neologisms include 'brb', 'rotfl' and 'pos'. The younger generation would most likely be able to understand what was meant by these neologisms, but if they were to use it with a member of the older generation, then they would most likely be left puzzled; even though they may use it themselves when texting (if they text).

Emoticons

Another feature that is commonly used with instant messaging and texting is the use of emoticons. Many messengers like to use emoticons whilst messaging. The most frequent ones are the smiley face ':)' or ':-)', winking face ';)' and sad face ':(' - the list of emoticons used (as with language) are expanding rapidly. These faces within a conversation can even answer a question or tell you something. If someone asks a question, a reply of just an emoticon can answer that question. An example could be a typical conversation:

'Hi, how are you today?'

:('

'Oh no, what's up?'

Written and verbal like communication

Although instant messaging could be seen as 'written' communication, it does have spoken like features. These features of face-to-face conversations is the informal style of a face-to-face conversation – with the use of a direct question, personal pronouns and contractions; such as I'm, I've, He's etc. There are also rapid changes of subjects and turn-taking.

My conclusion

Just because you sit down at a computer or begin to type a message on your phone, it does not mean you are going to conduct something which is 'non-standard' and full of 'lols', 'brbs' and emoticons. People can accommodate to the situation of certain occasions and change the way in which they write – just as we do in social context with our speech. Many people can switch from an informal tone to a formal approach within a second, if they want to.

Computers and emails are used within many professional circumstances and environments; including educational faculties and company operations. People know that when in need of a formal approach, they can adapt to change their digital style of language to a more formal and accepted type of writing approach.

Technology may have encouraged people to write in a less standard way, but it has evidently affected the way in which people speak too; it seems acceptable for people to use 'LOL' instead of laughing in a social context. The acceptance of such speech is evident – you can now buy t-shirts with 'OMG' or 'LMAO' written across the front of it. Many television shows and films rely on technological language to entertain and humour audiences also, and they will even use a character to speak using the informal, technological language.

There will always be disagreements about the English language – whether it's John Humphreys, or a typical grammar and spelling prescriptivists on social networking sites; correcting statuses and tweets. But with new discoveries and technological developments, new words will be created, new meanings will be formed and the way people live their lives will always be adapting.

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