

Influences of Social Media on Spoken and Written English

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to present the influences of social media on spoken and written English. This article began with the definition of the key term of this article, which is 'social media'. Although social media is widely used, its definition is not clearly known to most people. Most people would only know of the applications found on social media. The definitions of social media vary; however, there are only slight differences among these definitions. In addition to the definition, this article will also bring forth the characteristics seen in the language usage of social media. This explores mainly the morphological and phonological characteristics of the use of English language on social media platforms. In terms of morphology, written forms are seen as deviating from the conventional grammatical rules. The increase in the usage of slangs and abbreviations play a huge role in this deviation. Phonologically, cases of removing a consonant or vowel are seen among social media users. On top of this, the positive and negative effects of social media on spoken and written English will be discussed together with a few other significant issues.

Keywords: Social media, Influences, Spoken and written English

Introduction

Before understanding the key term ‘social media’, it is important to first have some preliminary knowledge about Web 2.0. The name Web 2.0 would suggest that it is a second or an improved version of the Web. According to Murugesan (2007), Web 2.0 refers to the second phase of the evolution of the web. It is a phase of web development which led to a growth in the number of users. Many of the IT professionals and business professionals are attracted to this phase of web development. The term Web 2.0 had a few other names, such as ‘web of wisdom’, ‘web of participation’, ‘web of reading and writing’, and ‘people-centric web’. This second phase of the web evolution emphasizes participation, collaboration, and interaction among peers on the internet. Web 2.0 first started in 2004 and became popular in 2005. Within two to three years after that, social platforms such as YouTube, MySpace, and Flickr have gained popularity and success through Web 2.0. Since then, many new applications have been developed. These new applications were previously considered unimaginable. This brings us to the inevitably popular term, “social media”. Social media can be considered as a big umbrella with all social-related applications under it. With the current cutting edge technology, the usage of social media has been more prevalent than ever before. This brings about certain effects and influences on the users.

Accordingly, this article aims to study these influences and whether they are positive or negative. Furthermore, it will also explore the characteristics of the language that is used on social media, both the written and spoken forms.

Popularity of Social Media

According to Ferriter (2010), 61% of adults and 73% of teens use social media frequently to communicate with their peers online. Both show a relatively high amount of social media usage and even adults are drawn to it. The platform Facebook is known to most people. In recent years, the number of active users on Facebook have increased from 5.5 million in 2005 to around 500 million in 2011 (Richter, 2021). This is an exponential growth which happened across a span of less than a decade. Not only is

Facebook growing in popularity, other social media platforms are growing in the number of active users as well. Statistics show that in America, this year, 79% of Americans have a social media profile. In 2008, only 10% of Americans had a social media profile. In Turkey, a research was conducted by the Turkey Statistics Institute (Gazi et al., 2017). In a country with more than 79.14 million people, 46.3 million have connections to the internet. Among which, 42 million are active users of social media. Out of this number, 77% of social media users in Turkey visit social media platforms daily. This continually growing popularity of social media should be put into consideration, as to help better understand that the influence of social media could be very prevalent.

Definition of Social Media

Carr & Hayes (2015) mentioned that it is easy for most people to come into an agreement on what platforms are considered to be a social media platform. Such examples include Facebook and Instagram. However, when dealing with the definition of the term ‘Social Media’, it is often difficult to come into a general consensus of how to define it. This is due to the fact that some definitions could be very general, while others tend to be more specific. According to Lon Safko (The Social Media Bible: 3), “social media” could be defined as simply the media or platform that is used in order to socialize. Safko’s definition is rather straightforward and generic as it is obvious from the term itself. Thus, in this case, the term ‘Social Media’ has to have a more concise and clear definition.

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010: 61) said that social media is a platform where a wide range of applications could be found. A few examples are YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook. These applications require internet access. It allows the users to create ideas and further exchange it with others. These social media platforms can be classified into different groups, depending on the amount of the users’ presence and how much they present themselves, as shown in Table 1. Grouping the platforms this way helps to better understand the degree of interactiveness of the online environment.

Table 1 Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61)

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Table 1 shows that Kaplan & Haenlein classified social media in an interesting way. It focuses mainly on the amount of time spent on social media (social presence), and how much of one’s identity is shown on the internet (self-disclosure). Knowing this will help to better understand that social media is a platform where users would spend their time on, and also disclose themselves to others.

Haenlein (2010: 60) shares a similar idea as he mentioned that social media is an internet-based service which enables users to participate in exchanging of ideas, contribute their contents, and be a part of the online community. On the other hand, Carr & Hayes (2015: 49–50) went on to further explain that besides the presence of the user, and the internet-based interactions, social media is a platform which could help generate income. This is done by having sponsors and viewers who are interested in buying or selling ideas on the internet. Moreover, it provides opportunities for users to interact both in real-time and at any time they want. Table 2 shows Carr & Hayes classification of social media according to what they have defined.

Table 2 Classification of Social Media (Derived from Carr & Hayes: 2015)

<i>Social Medium</i>	<i>Not a Social Medium</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social network sites (e.g., Facebook, QQ, Google+, YouTube, Yelp, Pheed)• Professional network sites (e.g., LinkedIn, IBM’s Beehive)• Chatboards & discussion fora• Social/Casual games (e.g., Farmville)• Wiki “Talk” pages• Tinder• Instagram• Wanlo• Yik Yak	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online news services (e.g., NYT online, PerezHilton.com)• Wikipedia• Skype• Netflix• E-mail• Online news• SMS/Texts• Oovoo• Tumblr• Whisper

From the classifications of Table 1 and Table 2, there is a difference between social platforms such as Wikipedia and Tumblr. Carr & Hayes' definition includes the generation of revenue. This would mean that platforms which are solely for the sharing of ideas and information are not considered a social medium.

Aside from these characteristics of social media, Leonardi et al. (2013) deemed that social media has to have these following characteristics:

1. It should allow users across different areas to communicate with each other.
2. Users should know whom they are interacting with, whether explicitly or implicitly.
3. Users should be able to post ideas, edit, sort out their files, and share it with others.
4. Users should be allowed to view messages, files, posts, edits at any time they want.

This means that if any of these criterias are not met, the platform will not be considered a social media. These criterias are suitable as they are depicting the actual usage of social media. Moreover, these criteria are mainly the purposes and functions of social media. In the case of Leonardi et al. (2013), generating revenue from contents is not included in the lists of criteria; thus, showing that it differs from Carr & Hayes' definition. It is agreeable that social media is a platform for exchanging ideas, while doing so, there could be income generated. However, that is not necessarily the case for all users. Some users are using it to merely interact with others without the purpose of generating any income from it. Carr & Hayes' definition is in direct opposition to that of Safko's in the sense that it is too specific that it narrows the possibility of other purposes for using social media. However, both are agreeable in terms of it being a web-based interaction and that users could access it any time they want.

Characteristics of English Language found on Social Media

According to Johnson (2021), in January 2020, the most used language on the internet is English. This is representative of 25.9% of internet users around the world. With English being the most widely used language, it is important to study the characteristics of the English language in social media. This will help to better understand the influence it can have on the English usage of its users. The usage of the English language that is found on social media can be characterized into two main categories. Firstly, its morphological characteristics which refers to the formation of words – how words are constructed from smaller units (Oiry 2009: 1). Second is the phonological characteristics. This particular characteristic focuses on speech sounds, speech production, and speech patterns.

Morphological Characteristics

The usage of morphology is necessary for our day to day lives. In speaking, writing, and communicating with others, words have to be used. Social media is not an exception. The usage of words in social media is essential. Jahromi (2020) mentioned that social media exchanges are mostly written and not spoken. She made a reference to a word known as ‘text-speak’ which refers to how a text could ‘speak’ to its audience. According to Attila (2017), social media users are trying to make writing on social media quicker and easier. This has made users more liberated from the restraint of what is called the traditional form of writing. Furthermore, this has brought about an increase in the use of logograms, abbreviations, acronyms, and paralinguistic features.

In line with Attila, Chua et al. (2014) also mentioned the increase of new jargons, or in other words ‘Internet Slangs’. Internet slang refers to the words that are being used by users of the internet in order to facilitate their form of communication and other purposes for example, blogging and product review. These words are usually shortened. Chua et al. (2014) cited from Merriam-Webster dictionary about the definition of the word ‘slang’ which refers to words that are commonly used in an informal manner by a particular group of people. These words are usually not considered part of

the standard vocabulary of the language. Chua et al. (2014) classified internet slang into various categories as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Categories of Internet slang (Chua et al., 2014)

Types of internet slang	Description	Example
Letter homophones (Abbreviation and Acronym)	Shortening of words or set of alphabets formed by the initial component of several words.	cya (see you) LOL (laugh out loud), BTW (by the way)
Punctuation and capitalizations	Punctuation and capitalizations are normally used to express emotions or emphasize on something.	“.....”, “!!!!!!”
Onomatopoeic and stylized spellings	Onomatopoeic is a type of extra-ordinary spelling and had been widely used recently on the internet. Onomatopoeic spellings are very language dependent.	Hahaha in English but in Spanish they use jajaja which is looks like typing error but it is not.
Keyboard-generated emoticons and smileys	Emoticons are usually used to express emotion through symbols and can be found throughout the internet.	^.^ (smiling face) , T.T (crying face)
Leet	The replacement of some symbol to represent certain alphabet that looks similarly	10V3 (love) , 2EZ4JK (too easy for Jing Kai)

The types of internet slang are related to its morphological characteristics. As seen in Table 3, these internet slangs cause a change in the formation of a word. It could be seen that words are either shortened, or replaced with symbols and alphabets. For example, “*by the way*” is shortened to “*BTW*”, and “*love*” is replaced with numerals which becomes “*/OV3*”.

Abbass (2019) mentioned another distinct feature of the language used in social media which is spelling. Users on social media have been incorporating new conventional English spelling into how words are spelled. For example, the alphabet ‘z’ is often added to the end of a word, such as ‘ballz’ and ‘goodz’. This usage expresses informality which is often used on social media rather than formality.

Therefore, it can be observed that the use of English language on social media mostly consists of changing, shortening, and replacing the spelling of a certain word, hence, changing the way of how the words are formed.

Phonological Characteristics

According to Eisenstein et al. (2013), the origination of words on social media is associated with specific geographical areas and demographic regions. Eisenstein (2013) studied the variation of phonological systems within differing dialects. Eisenstein gave an example of consonant cluster reduction. This refers to the deletion of the final consonants such as ‘-t’ and ‘-d’. With these deletions, a phonological variable is introduced. These variables are common amongst African American English (Green: 2002), Tejano and Chicano English (Bayley: 1994), British English (Tagliamonte & Temple: 2005), and Quebecois French (Cote, 2004).

Eisenstein (2013) raised an example about deletion in word pairs by giving these examples:

American and British English		African American English, Tejano and Chicano English, Quebecois French English
1.	left (lɛft)	lef (lɛf)
2.	just (dʒʌst)	jus (dʒʌs)
3.	with (wɪð)	wit (wɪt)
4.	doing (duɪŋ)	doin (duɪn)

As seen from the examples, there is a reduction in the consonant cluster, more specifically the deletion of ‘-t’. The deletion of consonant clusters is commonly used in African American English (AAE) and other English dialects. Another variation is the stopping of the interdental fricative ‘th’, which is commonly used in New York English (Gordon: 2004), rural Southern English (Thomas: 2004), as also AAE (Green, 2002). For example in the word ‘thanks’ (θæŋks), it is pronounced as ‘tanks’ (tæŋks). As seen from the examples, ‘th’ is replaced with just a ‘t’. These words are often shortened when used in social media and on other internet-based communication platforms (Gouws et al., 2011). In order words, certain consonants tend to be left out when the word is being pronounced.

Eisenstein (2013) stated that different geographical regions use different dialects. When these dialects are incorporated into the spoken language in social media, it can change the way a certain word is pronounced by speakers of another country. In addition, Eisenstein (2013) did a study of the relationship between phonological variables and social variations. In the study, word pairs which are related to ethnic and regional dialects are being tested.

It was found that not everyone is influenced by the phonological factor. Some groups of people, for example, the Non-African American, mostly pronounce words without reducing any consonant clusters such as “left” and “just”. On the other hand, the African Americans tend to pronounce words without the ending consonants as in “doin” and “goin”. It can be concluded there is a phonological variation amongst different groups

of people. These phonological variations can be found anywhere on social media. This is because social media allows people to be connected from anywhere in the world. This can also mean that a user from a certain country can be exposed and influenced by the dialects and pronunciation of people from across the globe. Hence, when communicating through the social media platform, different phonological factors, especially in terms of pronunciation, will be observable depending on the region that the users are living in.

Influences of Social Media on English Language

Since the usage of social media is increasing in our society today, it is inevitable that social media has an influence on its users. According to Baldwin (2012), social media can be considered as a friend and a foe at the same time. Thus, these influences can be positive or negative or even both.

The positive influences of Social Media written and spoken English

Firstly, social media can enhance one's lexical retrieval skills. In a study conducted by Wood et al., (2011), social media users exhibit a relatively high lexical retrieval skill. In simpler terms, they were able to recognize, remember, and recall words more easily. Due to the amount of new words that are constantly being created on the internet, users have to be able to remember those new words and know how to use them. For example in words such as '*spam*', '*selfie*', and '*hashtag*'. To further elaborate, the word '*spam*' was first used by Gary Thuerk who was employed as a marketing manager in a digital media company (Ryssdal, 2013). The word then gained its popularity in 1998. It has been used frequently since then. For certain internet users, the word '*spam*' might be foreign to them. However, when they are more exposed to the internet, they will realize that the '*spam*' word is used whenever there is unnecessary information being sent to us. Thus, when they come across new words on the internet, they are more likely to be able to recognize them. This can in turn help them to better retrieve words and could further expand their vocabulary.

Secondly, social media can also help improve their vocabulary acquisition (Al Jahrami, 2019). Mason and Rennie (2008) did a study in which they found that the ability to acquire new vocabulary words is found in that of social media users. This could be due to word formation processes such as coining and compounding. Examples of words are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Examples of words formed by compounding

<i>Face + book</i>	Facebook
Snap + chat	Snapchat
Mouse + pad	Mousepad
Home + page	Homepage

This way of word formation makes it easy for non-native learners to understand the meaning of a certain word. Take for example the word ‘homepage’ in Table 5, this word would allow the user to guess that it has something to do with ‘home’, referring to the main page of the website. It could be argued that this way of guessing the definition of words can vary among all users. Certain people who are relatively new to it might not have a clue what it is referring to. Thus, it is rather subjective.

Another word formation technique which has helped to enhance vocabulary acquisition is sound imitation. One of the examples is in the word “*Twitter*”, which comes from the word “*tweet*”. This is an imitation of the sound that a bird makes. In other words, ‘tweet’ is considered an onomatopoeic word. Moreover, online sites and names have been used as verbs and adjectives. For example the platform “*Google*”, can also be used as a verb, “*I’ll Google this for you.*” Due to the way in which words are being formed, users are allowed to acquire them more easily, adding to their inventory of vocabulary.

Thirdly, social media can help improve grammar and spelling skills. Thurairaj et al. (2015) conducted a study to find out whether users correct their grammar and spelling mistakes before uploading them onto the internet. The result of the study is shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Correction of grammar and spelling mistakes (Thurairaj et al., 2015)

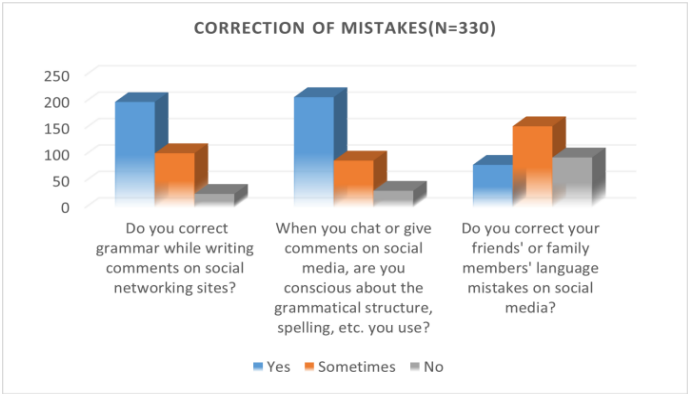


Table 6 signifies that most users tend to correct their writing, specifically in terms of grammar and spelling before posting them on the internet. In fact, this could be further guided with the help of the auto-correction tools available on electronic devices. However, it could be argued as ineffective in helping to enhance one’s grammar and spelling. It is simply due to the fact that users can become too dependent on it that they do not learn how to spell the words correctly. Auto-correct often helps to complete words that have been typed partially or correct words that are incorrectly spelt. This feature enables users to be quick with their texting and typing. As a result, users do not have a need to correct their mistakes by themselves as the auto-correct is already doing the job for them.

Lastly, social media can help to reduce communication anxiety. As previously mentioned, social media is a platform where information can be shared. According to Blattner and Fiori (2011), internet users showcase a different identity on the internet. Simply speaking, they are not who they truly are in real person. One of these new identities is the linguistics identity. This refers to the way they use the English language. How they use it in real life is different from how they use it on social media. Most of the time, users are behind a screen while using social media. This creates anonymity, which then allows users to communicate with others more comfortably since their identities could be unknown. Thus, users are braver to use the English language to communicate; hence, reducing their communication anxiety.

The negative influences of Social Media written and spoken English

Although there are several positive influences of social media on the English language, at the same time, there are also negative effects. The first and most common is the incorrect usage of grammar and improper spelling of words (Baldwin, 2012). Lin et al. (2016), claimed that the language that is being used online is often criticized as being used incorrectly as compared to language that is used offline. For a comparison, language used on the internet is mainly written rather than spoken. In order to make writing faster and easier, logograms, abbreviations, acronyms, shortenings, initialisms, homophones, non-conventional spellings, and chippings are being used. For example, words such as “*great*” can be written as “*Gr8*”, and “*today*” can be replaced with “*2day*”. Moreover, there is also usage of acronyms in words like “*LOL*” (laugh out loud), “*BRB*” (be right back), “*TTYL*” (talk to you later).

When these word forms are frequently used, it can lead to the second negative effect which is incorrect use of English in formal situations. According to Jahromi (2020), the use of language on the internet has a negative impact on a student's academic performance. This is because students might have used incorrect grammar and spelling in their academic writing. Moreover, it has led to students failing their L2 examinations. A similar finding was given by Tariq et al. (2012) that social media has negative effects on the L2 learning process of Pakistani students.

Language Change/Development

The language used on social media is considered to be constantly changing, according to the trend on the internet. This means that new words could be created and older words have the possibility to be forgotten and not used any more. The constant changing of words on the internet can be deemed as negative as it deviates from the conventional English rules. However, scholars such as Crystal (2011) believe that the language used on the internet has created a new form of linguistics, which is called “Internet Linguistics”. He also believes that language is always changing but it is only a matter of time before we know it. Thus, the constant addition and removal of words

on the internet is not necessarily a negative effect. Some researchers such as Considine (2014), Goring (2005) and Jackson (2013) are not looking for any change of words in the English language. Instead, they are seeking to unify words and grammatical terms. For example, the words “*forever*” could be also written as “*4ever*”. Since they both share a similar meaning, they can be ‘unified’ into the same word which is ‘forever’. There is no need to separate between correct or wrong form since they both mean the same thing. In addition, Crystal (2011) believes that the change is not considered as negative. In fact, change is normal and because of change, new linguistic features are added. Thus, he finds that the use of new terms on the internet is considered good after all. He thinks that the introduction of new terms means that the English language is constantly developing, which is positive.

Conclusion

Ever since Web 2.0 was introduced, the online platform has been constantly gaining popularity. More and more users are using social media, and the number of users is growing every single day. It is inevitable that users are influenced by social media in one way or another. In this case, the focus is on the influence of social media on the English language. More often than not, users are unknowingly influenced. This could be due to the fact that they are on it so much that the change in how they use language seems unapparent. This then leads to users using the English language in real life in the same way they would use it online. For students who are non-natives, they might have a tendency to use it in their formal and academic writing. The use of internet slangs is unconsciously embedded in its users.

However, not all of these influences are negative. There are also many positive influences. Social media could be a medium which enables non-native learners to learn English. In the same way as how negative influences could be unconsciously embedded in its users, the positive influences could also be the same. For example, social media users might be constantly learning new English words through their usage on social media without even realizing it.

Although there are both positive and negative influences of social media on written and spoken English, it is important that users are aware of these influences. Users should try to be more conscious of their language usage, considering the huge amount of time they spend on social media. With more awareness, these influences would be able to help users acquire more knowledge about the English language.

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