

The Social Media Effect on the Evolution/ Involution of Language and the New Pidgin Phenomena

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Abstract: Unable to deny the fact that social media influences the way we interact nowadays across different languages, people have to face and accept that it also changed language itself by inventing new words and combining the existing new ones. The present article explores the linguistic changes and the adverse effects social media has on grammar and spelling, making difficult the understanding of a written message which does not use capitalization, apostrophes, commas etc. Taking into account the fact that half of the online content is in English, which makes it the most common language of the Internet flowing into daily usage, this paper focuses on the creation of new Pidgin phenomena which bear different names across cultures, such as Franglais, Spanglish, Denglish or Romglisch.

Key words: language, Pidgin, communication, evolution, non-native speakers.

The rapid wide spreading of the new technologies has altered the way people access information, commerce, education or the way they make friends and communicate. The world has changed in the last two decades as a result of the social media's presence into people's lives. The rise of these computer-mediated technologies has come together with an increase of the amount of

time spent online. The use of digital apps and social platforms is now a daily routine and people pick up new skills at a stunning pace. These fast changes spark fears about possible negative aspects and effects.

The growing impact of social media is undeniably influencing the worldwide communication, yet this may be concerning when facing the language changes it may induce. Undoubtedly, indirect speaking blocks plain communication, making difficult the understanding of a written message which does not use capitalization, apostrophes and commas, but that is not all we are concerned about; it also has an adverse effect on grammar and spelling.

Linguists and researchers all over the world seem to be more and more preoccupied by the effect the Internet community has on language, especially on English because of its presence in half of the online content which makes it the supreme language of the Internet. Hermione Foster notes in one of her articles that: social media is a rich playground for experimenting, creating new words and repurposing old ones; it also provides a platform for people who aren't consumed by grammatical rules and syntax, giving the freedom to flout the usual maxims of conventional English Language and be innovative, creative and forward thinking. Language is, and always has been ever-evolving (Foster, 2015: np).

In 2015, the U.K.'s leading English expert, Professor John Sutherland from London's University College, has conducted a survey about the use of terms regarding familiar interactive multimedia and texting language. He discovered that more than 80% of the parents participating at his study had the feeling that their children spoke a totally unfamiliar language online, which led to a generation gap between youngsters and adults regarding the use of the modern non-standard language. John Sutherland

concluded that in the years to come, people will use less and less words and even letters while sending messages, due to the fact that they would consider it effortless to send a picture or an icon instead.

In 2018, Lino Cabrera, from the Department of Education of the Philippines, concluded in his SWOT analysis regarding the impact the online platforms have on learning English that:

with the widespread abbreviated writings, memes¹ and internet slangs that cause depletion to the language novices' writing skills, it is suggested to the educators or adults to educate their students about the dangers of these trends that these youngsters should be guided to text-rich sources of sound English language (Cabrera, 2018: 23).

In 2019, two professors from the Tabuk University, mention in their study about the impact social media has on language learning that:

the possibilities offered by social media nowadays could also be linguistically rewarding for users, be they students or educators, as these media interactions are bound to take place either within the same linguistic communities or across different ones (Slim & Hafedh, 2019: 57).

In April 2020, J. Clement came to the conclusion that, according to the number of Internet consumers, platforms as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, along with Instagram and Tik Tok were the most fashionable applications globally used. The continuous expanding of all these social platforms skyrocket the change of language. On one side there have been invented new words and expressions and on the other side the language has

¹ A joke, a funny image or video which is spread among Internet users.

been shrinking due to fewer used words or shorter ones and to an abundance of abbreviations and acronyms.

The rapid vocabulary changes and the ongoing alterations in the meaning of the words are owed to social evolution. Alongside the vocabulary changes, sounds and syntax also suffer continuous metamorphosis. The linguistic researchers have no choice but admitting that the role of the Internet community is dominant regarding the expansion of the English vocabulary.

One of the most notable ways that social media has influenced the English language is through the appropriation of existing vocabulary. Words that had existing meanings, have now been given other meanings in an online context, which then spills over into verbal communication (Foster, 2015: np).

Some examples of appropriated words or expressions are: *salty*, which is used when feeling petty, bitter, angry or annoyed towards something or someone; *woke*, which is used as a term for the people who are socially aware and fight for social justice and for the right causes; *goat*, stands for Greatest Of All Time, used for iconic people.

The worldwide use of English through social media channels is flowing into daily usage, starting to create new Pidgin phenomenon which bear different names across cultures, such as Franglais, Spanglish, Denglish or Romglish. According to the New Oxford Dictionary of English, a *pidgin* is:

a grammatically simplified form of language, typically English, Dutch, or Portuguese, with a limited vocabulary, some elements of which are taken from local languages, used for communication between people not sharing a common language. Pidgins are not normally found as native languages, but arise out of language contact between speakers of other languages (“Pidgin”, The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1999, Oxford University Press).

L. Todd and I. Hancock (1986) define it as “a simplified, spoken language which evolves to permit communication between people who do not share a mother tongue” (Todd & Hancock, 1986: 351). “Pidgin languages have no native speakers; they are used only as contact languages” (Albu, 2003: 164). What linguists did not know two or more decades ago is that the exposure of the Internet and the rise of the Internet community would bring a great deal of changes regarding communication and the evolution or involution of languages across the world.

English pidgin appeared in the early 18th century, when England imposed itself as a global maritime superpower, controlling the trade arriving in China via India. The Cantonese officials banned foreigners from studying Chinese, which eventually resulted in a dominance of English as exchange language. Since Chinese man did not master English, yet merchants needed a way to communicate, a class of pidgin speakers has emerged. They were formally known as linguists and were employed to negotiate both for the Chinese Customs officers and for the foreign merchants. ‘Chinese businessman also used pidgin to facilitate their professional relationship with English merchants’ (Fitzgerald, np).

R. Albu refers to pidgin languages as being “hybrid rudimentary languages” and sees them as being characterized by monostylism; reduced grammar and lexicon; total or near total lack of subordination, synthetic constructions, inflectional morphology and word-formation rules; use of reduplication for emphasis; reinforcement by sign or body language (Albu, 2003: 164).

Nobody speaks pidgin as their first language, one cannot be a pidgin native speaker. These mixed languages are characterized by interference phenomena, a “negative transfer of features of the mother tongue or of another dominant language on pronunciation,

grammar, vocabulary, and discourse features.” In some cases, “it is difficult to say when English has ceased to be English and has become a different language” (Albu, 2003: 57).

The most interesting global trade deal, linguistically speaking, is the language blend. Some would consider it a delight while others will see it as a nightmare. Here are some of these new types of pidgin:

FRANGLAIS

Français is French that uses excessive English words and expressions. Some people would define it as being the Anglicisation of French by English. This mixture of languages leads to some amusing, yet confusing, vocabulary. Jessica Phelan suggests a beginner’s guide to this new language:

Un after-work (n) = an event that takes place after work.

Le baby-foot (n) = table football.

Le brushing (n) = a professional blow dry in a hair salon.

Le cocooning (n) = term invented by marketers with the aim of selling women casual clothes they don’t really need. It means, roughly, staying in and being cozy.

Le fooding (n) = made of ‘food’ and ‘feeling’, meaning eating well.

Le footing (n) = jogging (from using one’s feet)

Le forcing (n) = sustained attack on your opponent, for example in sports or business.

Un hard-discounter (n) = a discount store

Hype (adj) = trendy

Le jogging (n) = a tracksuit

Un lifting (n) = a face-lift

Le looping (n) = to go loop-the-loop on a roller coaster.

Le mailing (n) = junk mail

Un/une people (n) = a celebrity

People (adj) = showbiz; ‘*une soirée très people*’ = an event packed out with celebrities; ‘*la presse people*’ = gossip magazines

Un pin’s (n) = a pin or a badge

Le planning (n) = schedule

Une pompom girl (n) = cheerleader

Un recordman (n) = an athlete who holds the record in his event

Relooker (v) = to give a makeover

Un talkie-walkie (n) = a walkie-talkie

Un shake-hand (n) = a handshake

Un shooting (n) = a film shoot

Speed (adj) = busy; ‘*je suis speed*’ means to be in a rush.

Zapper (v) = to channel surf (Phelan, 2014: np)

The researchers from the French Academy are deeply concerned about the state of the French language and about how it would be preserved. They worry that proper French will cease to exist if *Franglais* continues to develop and be spoken.

SPANGHLISH

Spanglish, as I. Stavans² defines it during an interview for PBS³, is “the encounter, perhaps the word is marriage or divorce of English and Spanish, but also of Anglo and Hispanic civilizations”, he further explains that:

it is the way of communication where one starts in one language, switches to the other back and forth or perhaps coins a few new words or thinks in one language and reacts in another one (Stavans 2003: np).

Here is a sample of the most used Spanglish words:

² Professor at the Amherst College, Massachusetts.

³ Public Broadcasting Service.

Machar/ machear (v) = to match
Janguear (v) = to hang out
El parking (n) = the parking lot
Parquear (v) = to park
¿Estás ready? = Are you ready?
Chequear (v) = to check
Creeppear/cripi (v) = creeping on somebody (such as stalking somebody's Facebook profile)
Googlear = to search something on Google
A full (adj) = completely; forcefully
El top (adj) = the best of something
Heavi (adj) = heavy, as in food or a situation.
El shopping (n) = the mall or a shopping center
El locker (n) = locker
Ver un show (v + n) = to see a show/ a play/ a concert
El ticket (n) = a ticket

Spanglish is on the rise; it is diverse and has a great communication influence. We can hear it on the radio⁴ and on television and we can even read it in novels⁵. There are linguists considering that Spanglish will be treated soon as an official language.

DENGLISH

Denglish is mashing German and British words in order to create new hybrid terms. English has become the dominant world language for business, science and technology which led to the adoption of more English vocabulary into German, probably even

⁴ There are songs that incorporate Spanglish.

⁵ Mexican American scholar Ilan Stavans translated the first chapter of Cervante's 'Don Quijote' into Spanglish.

more than any other European language. English terms are perceived as being 'cool' and trendy:

Ein meeting (n) = a meeting

Das Public Viewing (n) = a sportive or musical event shown on a big screen in the main square of the town/city

Einen Workshop (n) = a workshop

Das Handy = a mobile phone

Checken (v) = to understand

Ein Beamer (n) = a projector

Die City (n) = the central district of a city

Der Smoking (n) = a tuxedo

Der Showmaster (n) = the host/ the presenter

Ein Sprayer (n) = a person that carries a paint spray with the purpose of realizing graffiti drawings

Einen Bodybag (n) = a messenger bag

Trampen (v) = trying to get a ride by standing on the roadside and rising one's thumb

Der Oldtimer (n) = a vintage car

Das Peeling (n) = facial or body scrub

Der Dressman (n) = a male clothes model

Ein Fotoshooting (n) = a photoshoot

Probably the most entertaining aspect of this phenomenon is the fact that English native speakers will not get easily to the true meaning of these Denglish words.

ROMGLISH

Romglish represents the process of combining English with Romanian in normal conversations, without having a direct purpose. The phenomenon revolves mainly among the younger population who has the tendency of replacing Romanian vocabulary with English words or expressions. These alterations arise all the time because translating an English term into

Romanian can, sometimes, take time and effort and it is easier to ‘English’ the word, rather than find a suitable translation. The meaning of the English words is not lost. Here are some examples:

Senvici/ senviş = sandwich

Biţi (n) = the plural form of *bit*, a unit of capacity of a computer

Share-ui (v) = to share

Like-uri (n) = plural form of *like* (usually referring to the ‘Like button’ on Facebook)

Snacks-uri (n) = plural form of *snack*

Party-uri (n) = plural form of *party*

Hobby-uri (n) = plural form of *hobby*

Cow-boy-ii (n) = the cow-boys (articulated form)

Link-uri (n) = plural form of *link*

Hard-disc-uri (n) = the plural of *hard-disc*

Mouse-ul (n) = *the mouse*

Living-ul (n) = the living-room

Gameri (n) = plural form of *gamer*

Staff-ul (n) = the staff

Manageri (n) = plural form of *manager*

A manageria (v) = to manager

A bipui (v) = to beep

Show-uri (n) = plural form of *show*

Branduri (n) = plural form of *brand*

A brandui (v) = to brand

Jeepuri (n) = plural form of *jeep*, a sturdy vehicle with four-wheel drive

Cenţi (n) = plural form of *cent*

Jeanşi (n) = jeans

Blugi (n) = jeans (from *blue jeans*)

Pampersi (n) = baby diapers (from the name of the firm producing them)

Tenismenă (n) = a tennis woman

The Romanian Academy is not fond of Romglish although it is used in everyday talk by a great number of Romanians. Linguists see it as a danger menacing standard Romanian, fearing that its wide spread could lead to the death of the correctly spoken and written Romanian in the future.

Globalization and the rise of the Internet, which is the current main globalization infrastructure, are the primary factors that have made worldwide Englishization possible. It does not mean that Englishization is here to stay, it might just disappear as quickly as it emerged (Lupu, 2019: np).

As Jean Aitchison⁶ has said, “language, like everything else, gradually transforms itself over the centuries” and, in a world which finds itself in a continuous change, it would be quite unusual if “language alone would remain unaltered” (Aitchison, 2001: 6). There are people who actually condemn this alteration, considering it to be rather an involution of the language than an evolution of it, disapproving the laziness, ignorance and negligence of those who do not take the trouble of speaking or writing using the standard form of the language. There are more and more sloppy cases of people, both children and adults, who do not make the effort of correcting their own texts or speech errors. The language alteration is owed to insufficient awareness and conservation and to the absence of responsibility from people’s part.

Some of the modifications which arise in language have their starting point in youngsters, their interconnection with other people leads to a language growth in terms of vocabulary, syntax and semantics. Some of these adjustments do not live long, while

⁶ Professor at Language and Communication, University of Oxford.

others stay forever, affecting the language evolution. People borrow new terms and expressions from many situations: from other languages (*yin and yang*, *moped*⁷, *origami*, *ninja*⁸, *croissant*, *macho*⁹, *piñata*¹⁰), created by the shortening of longer words (*lab* for *laboratory*, *hankie* for *handkerchief*, *pram* for *perambulator* or *Insta* for *Instagram*, *App* for *application*) or by combining words (*webinar* from *web* and *seminar*, *vlog* from *video* and *blog*¹¹, *smog* from *smoke* and *fog*, *Brexit* from *Britain* and *exit*, *emoticon* from *emotion* and *icon*, *workaholic* from *work* and *alcoholic*, *Spanglish* from *Spanish* and *English*), and we make them out of proper names (*Converse*¹² - e.g.: Jane bought herself a new pair of red converse./ *Levis*¹³ - e.g.: She was wearing her new pair of Levis and a white T-shirt./ *Audi*¹⁴ - e.g.: Their son's Audi looks brand new).

The Internet is predominantly an English-language space. Taking a look at social media and the effect it has on language, one can easily notice that the most of the information presented on social networking sites is in English. People posting messages and pictures on platforms such as Facebook or Instagram desire to be understood by as many people as possible and, in order to accomplish this, the use of English as online communication language is essential, which has an utterly radical percussion on

⁷ Two Swedish terms combined: *motor*, *pedaler* - very similar with their English equivalents. A moped is practically a bicycle with a motor.

⁸ Means 'spy' in Japanese.

⁹ A strong man.

¹⁰ A toy made of cardboard, filled with candy, usually used at birthday parties.

¹¹ Shortening of *web* and *log*.

¹² American shoe company.

¹³ (or Levi's)- jeans brand.

¹⁴ Audi AG is a German automobile manufacturer.

the used language. In an area where anyone can write, edit and publish their own work, it is definitely not shocking the fact that conventional grammar regulation gets to be taken over by a softer and more adjustable one and that new words are being invented and added to the vocabulary and that spelling mistakes can easily slip. Less literate internet users will not notice the misspelling, the incorrect grammar use or the improper language and sometimes they may even copy and distribute messages and texts full of errors and there might be a price to pay for such a language injustice.

Social media has an immensurable impact on the world, it led to a major language change; new words have been invented such as: *likes* – numerical measurement of popularity, *to google* – to search for information on the Internet using the search engine Google, *add* – sending an invite to connect Facebook accounts, *friend* - widely used as a verb which means ‘to add someone on the friends list on a social website’. We can actually notice a 1984’s Orwellian tendency on social platforms: the use of the terms *friending* (adding someone on the friends list on a social networking website) and *unfriending* (removing someone from the list of friends or contacts), approach George Orwell’s newspeak propagandistic language by substituting one word for another, such as *ungood* instead of *bad* and *uncold* instead of *warm*. This leads to a shrinkage of the language; people have the tendency of using less words.

Using non-formal languages the way they are shaped by the social media appears to have put pressure on English, making it less complicated, which impedes people from communicating deep thoughts. Slang employment on the Internet misleads individuals into using inaccurate spelling, imprecise grammar and

unofficial dialects. There are users who detect mistakes and mention them throughout comments and this leads to creating a better perception of language inaccuracy. The unsuitable usage of language can be intelligible among the younger population, while seniors may be in trouble when having to comprehend this present-day non-formal language. The difficult reading and understanding of the language may also be a cause of the grammar errors and misspelling, lack of punctuation, capitalization, apostrophes, capitalization, abundance of abbreviations and acronyms.

The language change is quick and drastic, especially since social media is the dominant global communication channel. Several questions immediately spring the mind: Is this taking us to an evolution or to an involution of language? Do we need new types of dictionaries? Is this language still English? Is it progress or decay? The Belgian linguist Joseph Vendryès considers that progress in its absolute sense is not possible. It is considered that the languages that are widely spread have the possibility to assimilate the social media consequence, while the small languages are threatened to be conquered by the English media-talk; but, since there is no right answer to our questions, further research is needed to help shed some light on this offering topic.

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