

Research

A STUDY OF LANGUAGE FEATURES IN TEXTSPEAK ON FACEBOOK

Kanmanee Wanatishart

North Bangkok University,
Bangkok, Thailand
kanmanew@gmail.com

Abstract

The expansion and wide spread use of the Internet, will speed up the process of language change. Social networking on Facebook, is one of the interesting and popular mediums which can be used as authentic material for English language learners. The Textspeak site provides an opportunity for a lot of people who want to improve their English skills, share English knowledge, and use English. The main purpose of this present study is to provide some of the primary concepts of the linguistic characteristics of Textspeak. The characteristics researched consist of linguistics features based on Crystal (2008) and how they differ from Standard Written English. It is hoped that these finding will illustrate some of the basic characteristics of Textspeak so that English language teachers may be aware of their usage on the internet today.

Key words: Social Network, Facebook, Textspeak, Interactive Functions, English Teaching (ELT)

Introduction

Social networking is a popular and useful medium to communicate with other people in the era of globalization. Facebook is one of the popular social networking which is heavily used for connecting people, giving information, sharing thoughts, photos, videos and audio with others.

The arrival of electronic communication is bringing a whole new range of language use to study, mainly through the medium of English. Textspeak, is one of these and it exists as a social network; consequently it not only has impact on the society but also a potential impact on the classroom.

At present, many teachers encourage the use of Facebook in the classroom to teach and communicate with students: keeping in touch with them, submitting homework and sharing experiences with each other. The way students use language on Facebook is different from the way a student uses language in the classroom because students feel much freer to express themselves in terms of spoken language written down.

Especially in English Language Teaching (ELT), teachers and students have to know how to practice or adapt English language either to lessons or to the real world as social networking. Students usually lack exposure to authentic English in learning. In the classrooms, students may have low motivation in learning and have no 'real' reasons for using English. Facebook as a social networking website can encourage and help to motivate students to learn English from real world communication. Specifically, it suggests that the use of this form of texting may well be able to stimulate learners' use of English which will then be reflected in other areas of study.

Review of Literature

Cook (2003:29) points out that English as a Lingua Franca is a new variety of English and often is used in communication in which non-native speakers are involved with each other's. Crystal (2006:5) states that the world is composed of many different types of people who talk in many different ways. The importance of the many forms of communication has been expanded into a global form by the Internet as much of the communication is through English.

Crystal (2002: 127) states that a new technology always has a major impact upon language, whether written or spoken. He also mentions that the language of the internet cannot be identified with either spoken language or written language; it shares some common features of both. Graddol (2011:32) points out that "new forms of computer-mediated communication are closing the gap between spoken and written English which has been constructed laboriously over centuries. Crystal (2011: 1) states that Internet linguistics is a new field of language. The Internet

language is rapidly changed in terms of spelling, grammar, and so on.

Wardhaugh (2000: 34) points out that Standard English is that variety of English which is usually used in print, which is normally taught in schools to non-native speakers learning the language. Joguilon (2010:5) also states that Standard writing is important in formal transactions such as schools, government, business, etc. Wardhaugh (2000: 35) mentions that today, Standard English is codified to the extent that the grammar and vocabulary of English are much the same everywhere in the world. And he also states that Standard English is so powerful that it exerts a tremendous pressure on all varieties. So in this study, we asked the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of English which are used in the Englishclub.com on Facebook?
2. How do the characteristics of the Textspeak in the data compare to standard written English?

Description of the research context

According to a search with the key word “Englishclub”, five pages of results occurred. Englishclub.com is at the top page with the highest number of members. The users are English learners, teachers, and fans who want to use Facebook to communicate with others for their purposes of learning English, teaching English, and sharing experiences with each other in the English language. English club staff create the topics or questions and let members share their ideas and join with each other.

The topics on the site that will be analyzed in this study are the following:

- (1) “Do you remember your dreams in the morning? Share a dream you’re had that you’ll never forget”
: Jun 15 at 6.36 PM. = 33 comments
- (2) “What was the best part of your day?”
: Jul 4 at 3.32 AM. = 58 comments
- (3) “If you were a color, what color would you be and why?”
: Jul 16 at 10.04 PM. = 191 comments
- (4) “What are your plans for the weekend?”
: Jul 30 at 8.35 PM. = 53 comments

- (1) “Think back to when you first started learning English, how did you start? Share your tips for beginners”
: Sep 22 at 8.54 PM. =22 comments
- (2) “What is your favorite book and why? Share the title and author.”
: Oct 18 at 10.27 PM. = 20 comments
- (3) “What is your favorite English word and why? Can you tell us the word in your own language?”
: Nov 24 at 4:52 PM. = 51 comments

There are 7 topics in various amounts of comments.

Description of the research population

The numbers of members in Englishclub.com on Facebook are around 19,257. They come from many different countries as indicated in Table I. In this research, there are 209 users. The researcher the number of males is 72 users, the number of females is 128, and with no specific gender indicator 9. All users graduated from college or high school but most are still in college.

Table I: Country of Current Residence of Users

No.	Country	Users	%
1	Albania	3	1.44%
2	Argentina	1	0.48%
3	Azerbaijan	4	1.91%
4	Chile	1	0.48%
5	Colombia	1	0.48%
6	Egypt	8	3.83%
7	India	3	1.44%
8	Indonesia	63	30.14%
9	Italy	1	0.48%
10	Korea	1	0.48%
11	Laos	1	0.48%
12	Libya	1	0.48%
13	Morocco	4	1.91%
14	Pakistan	2	0.96%
15	Philippines	1	0.48%
16	Poland	1	0.48%
17	Russia	1	0.48%
18	Saudi Arabia	2	0.96%
19	Sri Lanka	2	0.96%

20	Sudan	2	0.96%
21	Thailand	8	3.83%
22	Tunisia	1	0.48%
23	Ukraine	1	0.48%
24	United States	4	1.91%
25	Vietnam	9	4.31%
26	Yemen	1	0.48%
27	Not Specific	82	39.23%
Grand Total		<u>209</u>	100.00%

Figure 1: The Gender of the Population

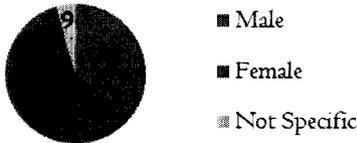


Figure 2: The Educational Level of the Population



Method of data collection

Data in this study are collected from a group of Englishclub.com on “Facebook”. The data comes from the 7 questions. When collecting the data, the researcher is an observer who does not enter the discussions or share ideas.

Method of analysis

The study analyzed the data for the linguistic features

The linguistic features frequently used on Facebook were analyzed. Then, these were compared with Standard Written English by using *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* and *Cambridge Grammar of English* as references.

Results

Characteristics of Textspeak features of English on Facebook

Based on the framework of the characteristics of Textspeak features of the English language on Facebook by David Crystal (2008), the general occurrence by users in the Englishclub.com and each type of the characteristics is presented in this section with examples.

The Linguistic Features of the English which is used on Facebook

Table I: The Characteristics of English used on Facebook

No.	Characteristics	Total	%
1	Adjective	2	0.34%
2	Adverb	1	0.17%
3	Article	23	3.95%
4	Capitalization	154	26.42%
5	Coherence	16	2.74%
6	Cohesion	53	9.09%
7	Conjunction	15	2.57%
8	Initialisms	4	0.69%
9	Logographs	11	1.89%
10	Logographs: Emoticon	37	6.35%
11	Nonstandard Spelling	48	8.23%
12	Noun	8	1.37%
13	Omitted Letter	2	0.34%
14	Parallel	10	1.72%
15	Pictograms	16	2.74%
16	Preposition	8	1.37%
17	Punctuation	314	53.86%
18	Repetition	4	0.69%
19	Run on Sentence	22	3.77%
20	Sentence Fragment	92	15.78%
21	Space	30	5.15%
22	Spelling	45	7.72%
23	Subject Verb Agreement	18	3.09%
24	Tense	12	2.06%
25	Verb	20	3.43%
26	Word Choice	21	3.60%
27	Word Order	5	0.86%
Grand Total		991	100.00%

Adjective

Example 1

User 27 (From question no. 3)

Blue....cos blue make me soft and comfort....

SWE = If I were a colour, I would be blue because it makes me soft and comfortable.

The characteristics of English = (Punctuation, Nonstandard Spelling, Sentence Fragment, Subject-Verb Agreement, Adjective)

In the example above, it shows that the users use the wrong form of adjective. An adjective is a word that modifies or describes a noun or pronoun. It limits or makes clearer the meaning. In *Example 1*, the word “comfort” has to be “comfortable”. The user also uses an adjective to modify a verb.

Adverb

Example 2

User 39 (From question no. 2)

the best part is morning because i .wakeup relax and restly

SWE = The best part of my day was in the morning because I was waking up relaxed and rested.

This example shows that the user uses the wrong form of adverb. An adverb is a word that modifies or limits the meaning of verb, an adjective, or another adverb. In *Example 2*, the word “relax” and “restly” have adverbial functions. “Relax” is verb and “relaxed” is an adjective and “rest” is noun and verb. But in this example, both of them have to represent predicate adjective which is complement to a copular verb.

Article

Example 3

User 13 (From question no. 4)

sleeping and get nerve to go to dentist

SWE = My plan for the weekend is sleeping and getting nervous to go to see the dentist.

Again the examples show the user did not use the article. An article is a type of determiner which makes a noun specific or indefinite. In English

there are three articles: the definite article “the” and the two indefinite articles “a” and “an”. In *Example 3*, “the” is used to refer to something that is the only or obvious one. “Dentist” is shown the specific person or profession. So, this example has to use “the” before “dentist”.

Capitalization

Example 4

User 25 (From question no. 1)

I remember when I have bad dream. I run far away from a ghost (pocong), i still afraid until now.

SWE= I remembered when I had a bad dream.

I ran far away from the ghost (Pocong),

I am still afraid even now.

In *Example 4*, the user did not capitalize the proper noun which names a specific ghost. A **proper noun** is the name of specific persons, places, or things. Proper nouns are always capitalized.

Coherence

Example 5

User 13 (From question no. 4)

sleeping and get nerve to go to dentist

SWE= My plan for the weekend is sleeping and getting nervous to go to see the dentist.

The coherence is the situation in which all the parts fit together in a coherent text. The text is coherent if its semantic and pragmatic meanings make sense in its real-world context. As in the example, this sentence is coherent because of knowledge about dentists administer pain-killing injections before dental treatment and that these can be painful and make some patients nervous.

Cohesion

Example 6

User 23 (From question no. 4)

I'm gonna spend the weekend with some friends in the Baptist church meeting for young people.

SWE= I am going to spend the weekend with some friends in the Baptist

Church and have a meeting of young people.

Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical means by which written sentences and speakers' utterances are joined together to make sense in the text. It is largely a grammatical property of texts. As in the example, this sentence is not cohesive because of parallel sequence of verb [+ to Verb I] "to spend" and "have".

Conjunction

Example 7

User I2 (From question no. 3)

i like green, when you get stress, see the green on the mountain, on the farm, walking in the park to feel the pure air from trees, you feel relaxing and serene

SWE = If I were a colour, I would be green because when you get stressed, you see the green on the mountains and farms. You walk in the park; you will get the pure air from trees. Then, you feel relaxed and serene.

Here the user did not use the conjunctions to complete the sentence. Conjunctions are items used to mark logical relationships between words, phrases, or sentence parts. There are two types of conjunctions: coordinating (and, but, or) and subordinating conjunctions (then, because). In this example, the user has to use "and" to add something (mountain and farm), "because" to give the reason why the user likes green, and "Then" to introduce the next item in a series of action.

Initialisms

Example 8

User II (From question no. I)

BTW-Do you dream in English?

SWE = By the way, do you dream in English?

User II uses initialisms technique. Initialisms are the reduction of words to their initial letters and are often called acronyms.

Logograms

Example 9

User I6 (From question no. 3)

I were be white because I can mix with every color & the result made every color softly.

SWE = If I were a colour, I would be white because I could mix with every colour and make each one a little bit softer.

User I6 uses logograms. Graphic units are used to represent some language characters.

Logograms: Emoticons

This table shows all logograms: Emoticons in the data.

Table 3: The Logograms as Emoticon on Facebook

No.	Characteristics	Symbol	Total
1	Angry	:(1
2	Confused	O.o	1
3	Happy	^^	1
4	In Love	*_*	1
5	Laughing	:D	2
6	Makes No Sense	:S	1
7	One-eyed smile	^_'	1
8	One-eyed smile	^_~	1
9	Smile (1)	:)	11
10	Smile (2)	:-)	2
11	Smile (3)	^^	2
12	Smile (4)	^_^	3
13	Smile (5)	=)	1
14	Very happy (1)	:-))	1
15	Very happy (2)	:)))	1
16	Very sad	:((((1
17	Winky (1)	;))	3
18	Winky (2)	;-)	1
19	Winky (3)	;D	1
Total			37

Example 10

User 6 (From question no. 2)

when i saw his smlie.....^_~

SWE = The best part of my day was seeing his smile.

A Logogram shows the nonverbal emotions called emoticons (or

smileys). It is the critical thing, not the visual shape, where the meaning is entirely a function of the shape of the symbols (when read sideways, with the head to the left or read straight ahead. In *Example 10* “^_~” means One-eyed smile.

Nonstandard Spelling

Example 11

User 21 (From question no. 2)

at evening, gathering with frens or my family. Nice weather & atmosphere.

SWE = The best part of my day was in the evening, I was with friends or my family.

It was nice weather and atmosphere.

In the example above, the user uses Nonstandard Spelling which can be a significant characteristic in Textspeak either conscious or unconsciously done. In *Example 11*, “frens” should be “friends” which is missing “i” and “d”.

Noun

Example 12

User 4 (From question no. 4)

I don't have any plan...may be i'll stay at home and read book..oo

SWE = I don't have any plan. Maybe I will stay at home and read books or (a book).

User 4 use the wrong form of noun. Both of these examples focus on Common Nouns which consist of Countable and Uncountable nouns. Countable nouns refer to entities which can be counted; they have both singular and plural. Uncountable nouns refer to entities which cannot be counted and do not vary for number. In *Example 12*, “book” refers to singular nouns but in real life, people do not read only one book in their life. This mistake is wrong for logical reasons.

Omitted Letter

Example 13

User 22 (From question no. 4)

I dont have a plan, who will acmpny me in the weekend?

SWE = I do not have any plan. Who will accompany me in the weekend?

The example above, the user uses Omitted Letter. Initialism is a word where all the letters are omitted except the first. by omitting letters from the middle which are often called contractions, dropping a letter at the end which are often called clippings. In *Example 13*, “acmpny” is “accompany” which is missed of “c”, “o” and “a”.

Parallel

Example 14

User II (From question no. 2)

when i go shopping with my mother, ate ice creams with my boy friend and of course sleeping with my doll

SWE = The best part of my day was going shopping with my mother, eating ice creams with my boyfriend and of course sleeping with my doll.

Here the example shows the mistake of parallel construction in the sentence. In the sentence, the user has to use Past Progressive to answer the question. Therefore, the parallel verb to be used is the “-ing” form: going shopping, eating ice creams, and sleeping with my doll.

Pictograms

Example 15

User I6 (From question no. 4)

this weekend will be a nightmare 4me cz i hv 2 finish all d messy stuff in my work, dateline, confusing form, paper, and so on...

SWE = This weekend will be a nightmare for me because I have to finish all the messy stuff of my work, it is a dateline, confused form, paper and so on.

User I5 uses the text orthography which uses single letters, numerals, and typographic symbols to represent words, and parts of words. A rebus is a representation of words by pictures of objectives whose names sound like the word. In the example, there are 6 points which used pictograms: “4”, “cz”, “i”, “hv”, “2”, and “d”.

Preposition

Example 16

User 2 (From question no. 5)

write your diary with english.....

SWE = You start by writing your diary in English.

In this example the user shows the wrong choice of preposition. This example, the verb “write” would normally use the use preposition “in” with a language. However, prepositions are a major problem for L2 learners even in the formal written form.

Conclusion

The examples above show the characteristics of Textspeak compared to Standard Written English. In terms of the English used in Englishclub.com on Facebook, there are many characteristics which are different from Standard Written English: adjective, adverb, article, capitalization, coherence, cohesion, conjunction, initialism, logographs, logographs; Emoticon, nonstandard spelling, noun, omitted letter, parallel, pictograms, and so on.

Each characteristic of English Textspeak used on Facebook reflects that users communicate as Spoken language. Users frequently used emoticon, punctuation to express their feeling. Standard Written English tends to be more formal in style and focuses on the exchange of information while Textspeak, especially as reflected in Facebook is more interpersonal in that it more about personal communication and to some extent stresses the identity of the user.

At present, with the Internet, a new revolution of human communication has appeared. It has become an important part of study language, especially, as the use of social network is rapidly increasing. It is possible for a teacher to use this medium to motivate the students as well as teach English. In particular, Facebook can provide an opportunity for learners to communicate directly with others.

The changing nature of English can thus provide the language teacher with an abundance of data for relating Textspeak issue to pedagogical concerns, seeing language as an *event* rather than simply a *thing*.

References:

- Austin, J. L. 1962 *How to Do Thing with Words*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Cook, G. 2003 *Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. 1997 *English Language : A guided tour of the language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. 2001) Language on the Internet. http://www.davidcrystal.com/DC_articles/InternetII.pdf. (Last accessed 7 Sep 2010).
- Crystal, D. 2002 *The English Language : A guided tour of the language*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. 2006 *Language and the Internet*, 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. 2011 *Internet Linguistics*. New York: Routledge.
- Gleason, H.A. 1956 *Linguistics and English Grammar*. New York: Ronald Press.
- Graddol, D. 2001 English in the future, in A. Burns and C. Coffin (eds) *Analysing English in a Global Context* pp.26-37. New York: Routledge.
- Hatch, E. 1992. *Discourse and Language Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Joguilon, C. 2010 Text speaks and its effect on adolescents' spelling proficiency. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/43502286/Text-speaks-and-its-effect-on-adolescents-spelling-proficiency-Ma-Christine-joguilon>. (Last accessed 7 May 2011).
- Wardhaugh, R. 2000 *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 4th edition. Black well Publisher Ltd.