

Analysis of the Influences of Internet Language on Language Learners

Qiyao Guan

*Shanghai Starriver Bilingual School, Shanghai, China
alinaguan@126.com*

Abstract. The rise of the Internet around the early 21st century has revolutionized language by creating a new form of medium for discourse. The Internet creates a new mode of communication, which has become increasingly accessible and widely used over recent years. Combining the structures of written and spoken language to create its own distinct mode of vocabulary and word choice, Internet language emerges as a manifestation of contemporary language that is set apart from regular language. For the fundamental purpose of conveying information, Internet language alters the pattern and structure of regular language, thereby effecting the process of language acquisition and comprehension. The influence of Internet language, with its drastic differences from regular language, may prove to promote or hinder the process of language acquisition for learners. This study aims to identify the characteristics of language in use on the Internet and analyze the various influences this practice has on language learners when acquiring a specific language, focusing especially on the psychological and sociological impacts.

Keywords: Language acquisition, Internet linguistics, electronic discourse

1. Introduction

The Internet, which now takes up an ever-growing portion of daily life, has provided new means of communication that are more instantaneous and easily accessed. Internet language evolves from spoken and written language, and is a complex combination of graphology, speech, and writing. The primary purpose of making this connection is to convey messages with greater efficiency. Both spoken and written language are effected by Internet language in reverse, as the conversational format of Internet language makes the distinction between written and spoken language [1]. This influence may cause changes in the process of language learning, as learners adapt to the shift in language.

Researchers have proven that certain aspects or modes of Internet language appears to be global, and the vast influence of the Internet does impact students while communicating with or learning a language [2]. Due to the complex composition of the language used on the Internet and the lack of samples, however, present studies still require throughout analysis that provide more generalized results on Internet language to fill in the gaps.

This paper attempts to find a general conclusion to the different impacts of Internet language on language learners. It aims to present the distinct differences between regular and Internet language,

and predict the positive and negative psychological influences it has on the language learning process.

2. Definition and characteristics of internet language

Internet linguistics, or the study of Internet language, is the scientific study of all manifestations of language in the electronic medium [2].

Internet language has distinct traits that set it apart from regular language, some of which may pose as a challenge for researchers. According to a study on Internet linguistics, one distinct feature of Internet language is that it creates a kind of semi-speech that is between speaking and writing, and it has its own features and graphology [3]. In other words, Internet language combines speech and written content, thus creating its own distinct pattern and mode of expression. Specifically, another study done in 2021 points out that all the texts on the Internet are connected by hyperlinks and are organized in a huge interrelated text [4]. The interconnected quality of Internet language, as mentioned in Havrylenko's study, ensures its efficiency in communication, as well as its accessibility, to a certain extent. This quality, however, may prove to be challenging to researchers attempting to process the vast and diversified information that Internet language contains.

2.1. Vocabulary level

Internet language vocabulary has a high economy of words and receives combined influences of different cultures. Abbreviation is one of Internet language's common features, or "notable phenomena," that directly displays this characteristic [3]. Examples of abbreviations such as "sry" and "idk," which are acronyms of the short phrases "sorry" and "I don't know," are used at high frequency in daily communication for their efficiency in expression. Abbreviations create cross-language connections, as phrases are sometimes abbreviated according to the acronym of their phonetics: acronyms such as "xswl" and "dbq," the phonetic abbreviations of "die of laughter" and "sorry," are used on Chinese social media. Instances of numbers replacing parts or entire phrases according to pronunciation, such as "gr8" for English and "u1s1" for Chinese, can be seen on the Internet across the globe.

Internet language vocabulary also merges language with semiotics. Emoticons, such as ";;)" or "XD," are meaningless as letters or punctuation marks, but convey certain emotions according to their morphological likeness. The practice of emoticons originated in Japanese online culture, but Internet language in other countries also received its effect and created their own versions of emoticons.

2.2. Grammar level

Grammatical alteration is a common phenomenon in Internet language, and a characterizing example of the influence of oral language combined with written language. Common practices include inversion or omission of sentence components, using short phrases or even single words to express the meaning according to the context. "BRB," for instance, omits the subject "I" and the predicate "will," while expressing the meaning "I will be right back." While ensuring the message is directly readable through the logic or mode of spoken language, grammatical alterations also allow communication to become more efficient by making messages short and simple. "LOL," on the other hand, follows the same logic as the example above, omitting the subject and predicate while shifting the tense of the verb "laugh." This particular alteration is made to convey emotional

messages with greater effect by highlighting the action. The purpose of these grammatical alterations, in this sense, can serve to make communication as succinct as possible, while increasing expressiveness and emotional velocity.

2.3. Pragmatic level

Allusions to certain incidents or ideas, defined as “memes,” are widely used on the Internet for the sake of quick association of contexts. Memes connect a relatively well-known and recognized scenario and a new subject of conversation, providing individuals involved with neutral grounds and an established “safe” social distance. Memes, like satirical or sarcastic humor, are often delivered through contrast: the “Nobody:” memes, for example, dramatizes the subject scenario by contrasting it with ordinary occurrences.

A word or concept could also be associated with multiple meanings, for the same purposes as memes. “Cooked”, for example, originally refers to the state of being ripe but is truncated to generally mean “in a bad situation” on the Internet. The sub-level of meaning for a known word or concept, in this case, could be instantly understandable despite leaving the context of its original field for netizens.

The distinctive system of language, with the reclusive background knowledge required to properly understand and use it, serves to leave out or distance those who are not involved in Internet culture. The pragmatics of Internet language constructs a triadic rhetoric structure of “drift-meme-contrast”: drift creates shared codes, contrast ignites humor, and memes provide a social disclaimer that bypasses certain norms.

3. The development of internet language

The emergence of informational technology, or IT, occurred in the early 21st century [3]. Up until the present, researchers identify the Internet as the most used form of medium for communication [5], a status that indicates the continuously rising prevalence of digital communication.

The term “Internet language” evolved from “computer-mediated communication”, “electronically-mediated communication,” and “digitally mediated communication” [2]. The other three terms are too broad when referring to a specific form of language, and are thus eliminated from use. Apart from “Internet language,” “e-discourse” and “computer-mediated discourse [2]” are also commonly used to refer to the subject of Internet linguistics. The evolution of terms indicate that Internet language is a connotation that has underwent numerous

4. Internet language on cognitive processing

The Internet, with its distinct mode of language as described above, is a significantly different language learning environment. For those who have little to no exposure to a certain regular language environment, the Internet has particular effect on cognitive processing.

The usage of Internet language in language learning, or studying in general, may affect the cognitive flexibility of the learner. In a study on the use of the Internet in online-learning college students during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, researchers note that using the Internet while learning can alleviate psychological stress by mediating the pathway of cognition. The study indicates that by providing information through multiple perspectives, Internet language molds the cognitive process of users, enabling them to respond to unexpected situations more easily [6]. The

diverse influence of the Internet, therefore, can mediate learners' cognitive flexibility, enabling them to process and encode new information more effortlessly.

That said, repetitive practice of the abbreviated form of language may also affect students' handwriting. In a recent study, researchers highlight the frequency of e-discourse in daily communication among students, and caution English learners to "raise [their] awareness of the linguistic variants between the language of electronic communication and the standard form" [7]. In other words, constant use or reliance on the economy-of-word and sometimes grammatically incorrect form of writing may negatively impact acquisition of proper written language, thereby hindering the language learning process.

5. Psychological factors of internet language

When language learners absorb the influences of a certain form of Internet language, they may be affected by the content psychologically. A study on English-learning Indonesian college students shows that motivation is positively related to achievements in learning [8]. Using the Internet, therefore, may increase the efficiency of language learning, in the sense that a majority of language learners are more inclined to use the Internet to learn language. The willingness to learn, through a given medium, may prove to influence the efficiency of language learning as a result. Results from a survey collected in 2014-2015 have shown that only a combined 5% of participants believe using smartphones and the Internet for learning English is unhelpful or harmful in 2014 [9]. In other words, most English language learners have a positive or neutral attitude towards using the Internet while studying the language. Using the Internet for these purposes, therefore, may prove to increase their motivation and enhance their potential achievements, correspondingly.

Regular access to the simplified and fragmented information and texts on the Internet, however, may reduce language learners' learning proficiency, in the sense that it prevents them from gaining the ability to read articles or formal literature. Although being accustomed to the environment of the Internet may help learners gain sufficient language skills for the purposes of daily use and regular communication, the ability to comprehend long texts is crucial to obtaining a higher understanding of the target language. Lacking the tolerance for complex reading comprehension, critical reading analysis skills, and sustain focus may prove to hinder further gain of language proficiency for learners [10]. When learners are exposed to the Internet language environment for the long term, they may struggle to adapt to the language environment of their target language in real life situations. This may lead to anxiety and insecurities in formal occasions, especially when the learner forms the misconception of proficiency when learning on the Internet. Furthermore, the learning experience online may not be as socially desirable as expected by learners. The pragmatic influence in Internet language of another culture may share similarities with learners' native Internet language, but each language system ultimately has its own cultural-exclusive form of irony, sarcasm, and humor. As a result, the subject language becomes increasingly hard to interpret for learners on the Internet, who are already excluded from the real-life language environment due to proficiency of language skills. The distance and social disillusion may negatively impact language learners, potentially causing them to experience discouragement or social anxiety, or even to withdraw from further attempts to learn the language.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Internet linguistics is the study of the particular language used on the Internet. Internet language exists as a special mode of communication that derives from the emergence of

electronics as a medium for discourse, with the need for efficient communication determining its economy-of-word yet expressive mode. In addition, Internet language inherits the Internet's purpose of fostering connections across cultures, a characteristic that makes the analysis on Internet language more conclusive, as the Internet languages in different regions of the world share similarities. Internet language combines written and spoke language with other features, and reversely causes a subtle shift in reverse in both written and spoken language, and causes an impact on the process of language learning.

The complex factors determined by the unique qualities of online media impact language learners in different ways. While learning a given language based on the Internet can provide great efficiency in reducing cognitive load, allow for promoted potential of achievement, and mediate learners' cognitive flexibility, learners should take caution not to overly rely on the Internet, and consider the balance between using the Internet and using traditional learning materials. The simplifications made for efficient communication on the Internet could sometimes be misleading and cause fossilization of mistakes. In addition, it may also affect proper use of the language in the long run, as learners' perceptions solidify to fit the fast-paced and less complex language environment on the Internet, and find difficulties in coping with complex texts required for further knowledge of the target language, as a result.

Although citing from multiple sources that are from different regions of the world, the conclusions of this paper are made with a main focus on only a few languages in online discourse, and certain sources cited are confined to a certain time period. Further analysis based on detailed research of the linguistic differences between other languages could be made, across different time periods, to validate the conclusion and results of this paper.

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