

Webies in Cyberspace

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In recent years, as a result of the uncertain linguistic identity of *Netspeak* and its various appearances on the Internet, a number of rule books, dictionaries and guides appeared in the market. David Crystal believes that *Netspeak*, as part of the new technology, provides a new niche for linguistic studies at academic level. According to him, this makes a unique opportunity offered by the new media and communication technology. Nowadays, scholars interested in *Internet Linguistics* should study comparatively the different styles of language and the course of their change in the framework of the new media. In this regard, the popularity of Internet is obvious among computer literate generations who are not afraid of its technical aspects, and as a result, the internet community emerged due to the collective use of keyboards and mice to steer. This technique abolishes the physical existence and identity, replacing them with identity created based on online

communication, i.e. typing and using a specific language. Here, there is no constrains that would be typically imposed by the physical presence, so that relationships between parties can be established in real-time.

In this medium, it is only the text itself through which participants can provide information about themselves to each other. Given the anonymity allowed by Internet, the information may not entirely reflect the reality. Namely, since the medium enables participants to *express emotions in graphics* (using emoji) and *simulate speech phonology* (phonetic spelling), this opens a possibility for the rise of online tension. In addition, it could be expressed through grammar, i.e. *punctuation, ellipses, syntax*, etc, or words through *relexicalisation* or *phrasal covert norms*. The lack of dynamics in the face-to-face communication, as well as the elevated control over the timing and content of interactions indicates increasing levels of sensitivity to

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the ways of reception of modes of communication. As a result, a situation can occur in which new Webchat users *Newbies* are inclined towards the excessive use of newly adopted norms in order to impress their followers in front of *Webies* (regular users). All kinds of abbreviated forms are used just to beat the constraints imposed by the medium itself. Word clipping, symbols, acronyms are all used merely to shorten the time and energy needed to communicate, i.e. for practical reasons. In this way, the commonly used base of phrases is turned into a hybrid, very narrow, secretive convention, such as BRB for *Be Right Back*, AFAIK for *As Far As I Know*, BFF for *Best Friends Forever*, FTFY for *Fixed That For You*, IDK for *I Don't Know*, IMO for *In My Opinion*, NBD for *No Big Deal*, OMG for *Oh My God*, TTYTT for *To Tell You The Truth*, or BAE for *Before Anyone Else*. It took years to become trendy and increase rapidly in use. Many of these online abbreviations and acronyms are formally part of the English language and thus, could be found in *Oxford Dictionaries*. It is weird, but it is happening. Moreover, *Oxford Dictionaries* decision to choose an emoji as its *Word of the Year* is not surprising. The company pointed out that the "face with tears of joy" symbol was chosen as the "word" that effectively denotes the "ethos, mood, and preoccupations of 2015." Oxford University Press supposed it was "the most used emoji globally in 2015, making up 20% of all the emoji used in the UK in 2015, and 17% of those in the US." In addition, Casper Grathwohl, President of Oxford Dictionaries pointed out: "You can see how traditional alphabet scripts have been struggling to meet the rapid-fire, visually focused demands of 21st century communication. It's not surprising that a pictographic script like emoji has stepped in to fill those gaps - it is flexible, immediate, and infuses tone beautifully."

A lot of people may rightfully dislike this, given the influence technology inflicts by its nature on human communication. We should agree with Ani Nazaryan and Alexander Gridchin who think that new linguistic rules and standards are dictated by the new linguistic reality. Internet, as a setting, can strongly affect the psychological aspects of human behavior. Here, human actions and interactions may seem rather unusual. Those unfamiliar with online communication may

perceive it as a place crowded by people with controversial views and ambiguous motives, a place where ordinary people need to be very suspicious. However, as indicated by a multitude of studies conducted in many years in the area of human behavior, only slight changes in the setting are enough for altering the behavior of ordinary people. In some situations, those considering themselves as cool may "*uncool*" in a blink of an eye. *Webies*, who are kind and considerate towards others in face-to-face communication, may explode in *Cyberspace* rage.

Netspeak is very similar to slang from linguistic perspective and people should know where and when to use it. However, the party we are dealing with is unlikely a human, it is a machine, and technologies affect human behavior in their direction. They are the accelerators in the development of humans, and provide new possibilities to those people who have the access to them, but others fall behind. It is a mighty tool which could be a magical experience or unethical practice. It depends only on us and the way we choose. If we want our off-springs to be better than us, they should inherit not only technology but good examples as well.