

Language study essay



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The aim of this study is to investigate the ways in which online communication reflects real speech. Web-based communication has developed many new features which replicate and make up for spoken language, at the same time, it has also led to the creation of many new features which have become well-established in online communication. From using my own data, collected from a text conversation I had with my friend, I shall be exploring these features.

Firstly, I will be looking at the online spoken language feature of initialisation and rebuses. Initialisation is the use of the single, first letter of a word to represent the whole word e. g “ lol” standing for laugh out loud as well as “ wtf” which stands for what for f*** also using the feature of taboo (inappropriate language). Similarly, rebuses are the use of letter and number homophones to represent whole words, with well-known examples including “ u” and “ 2” for to. In some cases, these features are combined to form full phrases such as “ wyu2? ” which stands for what you up to? This phrase does not make grammatical sense either, as it should read “ What are you up to? and this is an example of deletion.

Both rebuses and initialisation are sole features of web-based communication which revolve around the idea of shortening text. Although, they may make the writer seem lazy, it does tone down the formality of the conversation thus causing it to seem more casual especially amongst friends and is a way of showing the reader that you are being more open towards them to prove the familiar relationship you have. However, the uses of initialisation, rebuses, taboo and deletion are highly dependent on the audience; the person you are talking to. If, for example we were to look at a

text conversation between my tutor and I, there are few, if any of these features as a level of formality, based on the relationship, must be sustained.

Although many people believe that the use of rebuses and initialisations are wrecking our language as it acts as a barrier for communication, David Crystal, a linguistics professor, argues the opposite. Writing in an article, he thinks that the use of these features will in fact “ improve children’s writing and spelling” and that the use of text in this way “ In short, it’s fun. He expresses the fact that texting and using these linguistically complex features, makes the use of language entertaining to effectively play with. These features are innovative creations which have developed as a result of us playing with the sounds and spellings of words.

His argument is based on the idea that these features are linguistic phenomena which are a part of the forever changing English language. Next, I will be looking at the replication of non-verbal features used in online communication including the use of capital letters and simulated laughter. Both these features play a part in compensating for prosodics which are non-verbal signals that contribute to the meaning of what is being said. In spoken language, prosodics include the use of yawns, grunts and giggling which cannot be presented in online communication but the use of simulated laughter (“ hahahahaha” and “ kekekekeke”), for example, acts as onomatopoeia to replicate the sound of laughing therefore making it possible for the reader to know how the writer feels.

Furthermore, capital letters are used to recreate the idea of shouting and an angry tone which add effect to how the writer wishes to express himself. By

writing in capitals, the words are bold and stand out, adding emphasis to the point alike how shouting intensifies what is said. Although, online communication does not have the prosodics, the replication of non-verbal features creates a similar effect and achieves the same purpose. Emoticons are a relatively new feature which has been created as online communication has popularized. They consist of a selection of smileys which convey an emotion that the writer wishes to express in their text.

It is evident from my data that emoticons appear regularly in web-based communication and they play an essential part in making the conversation more interesting to read as well as fun to write. Alike rebuses and initialisation, the presence of emoticons create a friendlier atmosphere with the person you are talking to. However, the main reason emoticons are used are to compensate for the lack of paralinguistics that is lost from not being face to face with the person you are talking to. In spoken language, paralinguistics play a huge part in reinforcing or refuting what is being said by using hand gestures and facial expressions. Where this is not possible in online communication, emoticons are used to replicate the facial expressions that would be displayed and to strengthen how the writer feels.

As we can see, although emoticons itself are not seen in spoken language they do play a very important part in compensating for the paralinguistics that we do see in real speech. Nevertheless, not everyone agrees with the use of emoticons or their significance in web-based communication. John Humphreys, journalist for the Daily Mail, wrote in his article about texting, that emoticons were “ absurd little faces with which texters litter their messages”. The writer expresses his belief that emoticons are a part of an

effectively different language in which it is used too excessively and is becoming a terrible habit of youths. He strongly criticises them and clearly does not understand why they are used, branding them simply stupid.

In the article he also expresses the concern that they will become dominant feature in our language and that “ Our written language may end up as a series of ridiculous emoticons and everchanging abbreviations. In conclusion, I have realised that web-based communication does have features which replicate the paralinguistics and prosodics used in spoken language. These features include emoticons, simulated laughter and capitals which are different to real speech but manage to create comparable affects. On the other hand, there are also features which are specific to online communication such as initialisation and rebuses which are used to aid the tone of the conversation.