

An Investigation of the Common Word-Formation Processes Employed in the Newly-Formed Words in Internet Chat English

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Introduction

In retrospect, Internet was originally created to realize the perceived potential value of sharing pertinent information on research that may advance scientific and military developments in the 1960s. However, Internet, considered now as a friendly-user infrastructure, was not that simple to use during that era. In fact, users needed to adopt themselves in a very complex system to run it. These users were the computer experts, engineers, scientists, and librarians of yesteryear. Thus, home or office computers were not that prominent (Howe, 2010). Internet underwent a rapid phase of change. Since the aforesaid time, the usage of Internet has become more immense.

Internet, a U.S. government-funded project and exclusive to it then, has served and has continuously been serving mankind for years since its invention. The Internet has revolutionized the way people search for information, exchange data, connect with people, and perform other related endeavors.

Its impact is encompassing that may be observed in different fields of interest; hence, it has developed a culture distinct on its own. This is known as Internet culture. With an enormous number of users throughout the decades, the spread of the aforementioned culture propagates in a split second. It has improved the way users communicate with each other regardless of time, territories, customs, and nations. In this light, internet is a medium that cuts through the laws of time and space; breaks the barriers of color and tongue; and dissolves the walls of earlier conventions.

This phenomenon is universal in nature, thus requiring a medium that can support and maintain such universal impact. And this can only be English. For years, English has remained to be the lingua franca in various areas ranging from commerce, trade, industry, engineering, tourism, education, government, diplomatic affairs, and other disciplines. Hence, scholars claim it to be the most artistic of all the sciences, and the most scientific of all the arts.

As Kumar (2009) explains, English is one if not the single most significant language in the world. It is not undermining the other languages for these are all important in terms of their local value and function. English is important for a number of reasons on its own, thus truly linking and unifying the world. Over 700 million people speak English as their foreign language, while its native speakers sum to around 380 million. English is the most widely studied language to be an L2 due to the simple reason that a working knowledge of it is a requisite in most jobs (Englishlanguageguide.com, 2010).

English, being not just a universal language but also the Internet language, did not happen overnight. It is brought about by external global factors such as cinema, music, broadcasting, science, and the Internet as expounded earlier.

Although other languages aside from English are used in electronic discussions over the web, English remains to be a leader by far. Englishlanguageguide.com (2010) specifies the four factors on how a language is chosen for Internet use:

- “1. The number of users of the language
2. The extent of its use as an official language
3. The economic power of the language, and
4. The volume of information disseminated in that language”

All these four factors are present in the English language. Englishlanguageguide.com (2010) expatiates that English is widely studied by ESL and EFL learners and extensively used in the World Wide Web. Furthermore, of the 163 member nations of the United Nations, majority use English as its official language. In terms of economic influence, English is the language of top countries with high gross domestic products (GDP). People having English as their mother tongue may just be 10% of the total world population; however, they have over 30% of the world's economic force.

Thus, up to date, English remains to be the mother language in the web or the Internet language. Indeed, culture and language work hand in hand. They are complimentary to each other, may the culture be Internet-based. Parallel to the promotion of such Internet culture is the enhancement of the English language and its use as a medium in the web. The users use English to exchange information, messages, and ideas, thus resulting in what is known now as Internet communication. The increasing interest and prevalence in usage of the Internet has heightened the need for studying its impact. Of particular interest and complexity is the development of Internet communication, thus leading to what is called now as Internet English.

Internet communication has developed itself over the decades as mediated by the English language, yet it is still bombarded by imperfections and restrictions. Rumsiene (2004) explains that being a form of electronic discourse, Internet communication is affected by physical limitations like the speed of typing may not be of same rate or speed with speaking. In his study, he further explains that the amount of symbols, or the absence of prosodic and paralinguistic features in the language and the Internet culture itself may be issues as well, thus resulting in a language bearing a “specific code of symbols with its alternative lexis, syntax, and morphology.”

When it comes to culture, Rumsiene (2004) adds that although people get to enjoy a relative freedom in expressing themselves reflective of their geographical and cultural differences in the net, they still subconsciously follow a codex of general rules when they communicate in an electronic fashion.

However, several literatures suggest that the dominant Internet language – “English” may allow these variations. According to Ferrera (et al., 1991 in

Rumsiene 2004), “electronic communication is a ‘hybrid’ of spoken and written languages.”

In like manner, Hale and Scanlon (1999 in Rumsiene 2004) consider Internet language as “written speech” for one should write or type the way he talks. Furthermore, Boyd H. Davis and Jeutonne P. Brewer explain that writings done in electronic method are often read as they are spoken suggesting that the sender does writing talking (Davis and Brewer, 1997 in Rumsiene 2004). Having the qualities of spontaneity and being elliptical (Collot and Belmore 1993 in Rumsiene 2004) and having informal lexis (Trofimova, 2001 in Rumsiene 2004), electronic discourses are often done with a little or no emphasis at all in editing (Johansson, 1991; Ferrerra, et al., in Rumsiene 2004).

Developing an approach in analyzing the distinctive features of tools and media in information and communication technologies, Adams Bodomo and Carmen Lee has reported the pervasive changes in language forms and use (Bodomo and Lee 2001 in Rumsiene 2004).

(Bodomo and Lee (2001 in Rumsiene 2004) reports:

“New tools and media demand the creation of new forms and ways of communication, leading to changes in the way people use language in its various forms, including spoken and written forms.” (p. 48)

Internet language users are very aware of the interconnection of media tools and communication ways, thus leading them to the simplification of the traditional language code with the introduction of new language convention where members of the Internet society can skillfully use. Given such situation, the Internet language users can express themselves in less restrictive fashion injecting their individualization attempts through language styles. As an addition, these users get play with the letters of the English alphabet and words of the aforesaid language as a strong indicator of self-expression (Rumsiene 2004).

Majority of these Internet language users who tend to follow the observed patterns given are the young people of today. They are the ones who get to explore the Internet more often for their considerable schedules and priorities at hand. Furthermore, these are the people who yearn for their own places or niches in the society, hence making them more pro-active in expressing themselves in the most unique and “in” fashion they know.

Thus, it has paved the way for the formation of new words in the Internet English of today for these young people search for appropriate words to express their thoughts in the most vivid, efficient, and effective way possible.

In the study of Wang (2001), it is noted that the English language, particularly its vocabulary, has been enriched by the formation of new words on the Internet. These words are custom-formed to describe new things, while the common abbreviations done in the Internet are for easy encoding. The growth of newly-formed words in the Internet English indicates its features - proper, succinct, and understandable with consideration on swift input.

However, Rumsiene (2004) asserts that Internet English is a subsidiary branch of the English language, thus making Internet language a non-fully independent language unit. Rumsiene (2004) tries to explain that with the

prevalence of Internet culture and usage throughout the globe so as the language develops concurrently being a medium.

Halliday (1985) reports:

“...such transformation of language may be validated by general statements of language theories, e.g. by the principle that a language changes in response to the demands, which are made on it, and if the society of language users poses new challenges, the language also has to become different in order to cope.” (p. 82)

The study of Rumsiene (2004) depicts the status of Internet English. The aforesaid analysis is based on English chat conversations taken from 27 different sites, approximately of 2, 200, 000 words of conversations. He tries to explain that with the prevalence of Internet culture and use throughout the globe so as the language develops concurrently being a medium.

On the other hand, Yang's (2001) study, which attempted to investigate how Internet language comes into being, was meant to discuss the Internet English together with its distinguishing features as new style in English language. The aforesaid paper deals with six characteristics of Internet English and its Chinese meanings: 1. Formatted Internet language and its meanings; 2. Email language and its meanings; 3. Symbolic Internet English and its meanings; 4. Compound words of Internet English and its meanings; 5. Abbreviations of Internet language and its meanings; and 6. “e” wording, “cyber” wording, “hacker” expressions and their meanings.

Moreover, Wang's (2001) study, which highlighted the new vocabulary on the Internet, presents an investigation on the factors contributory to the development of new English word forms. According to Wang, the new vocabulary of Internet English is easy-to-understand, input-friendly, and metaphorical in nature. He also asserts that “the semantics of the English neologisms of network appears and upgrades fast and in large quantity” (Wang, 2001).

These aforementioned studies have focused on the description and development of the Internet communication and language (including vocabulary) at large. However, in the present study, it will be discussed how the Internet language continuously develops through the creation and addition of new vocabulary on it with a reference to the various word-formation processes employed to these words.

Framework of the Study

This investigation is informed by George Yule's discussions on word and word-formation processes in his book *The Study of Language*. Yule (2006) expounds on the set of regularity found in the word-formation processes in the lingua of English, thus allowing language users to understand and have a grasp of a new word in the language (neologism) and use it with function and linguistic style.

Etymology, derived from the Latin terms of Greek roots (etymon 'original form' | logia 'study of') is the study of the origin and history of a word. There are a

number of ways on how new words can pervade the language. It is bamboozling to understand how the words in a language evolve through time that words used before do not exist anymore in these contemporary times or, perhaps, has changed its original meaning to some extent. This scenario is not to sully or to do a direct assault to the languages particularly in English. Instead, it is a quintessential mark of the dynamism of language and its ever evolving nature. Furthermore, it is a positive indicator that English is alive with much vitality and creativity as dictated by the needs of its users.

Yule (2006) discusses in toto the following word-formation processes:

Coinage. It may be referred as the process of inventing or generating totally new terms. One example of this process is the generalization of a term applied to any types of products related to a trade name (e.g., aspirin, kleenex, and Xerox) *Under the huge umbrella of coinage comes eponyms. These are new words based on the name of a person or a place (e.g., sandwich from the eighteenth-century Earl of Sandwich who insisted for his bread and meat to be together while gambling; jeans from the city of Genoa, Italy where such type of cloth was first made).

Borrowing. As the term suggests, this process involves the take over of words from other languages (e.g., boondocks from Filipino 'bundok,' an elevated terrain; croissants – French).

Compounding. The process deals with combining two separate words to produce a single form (e.g., bookcase, fingerprint, and sunburn).

Blending. It is described as the combination of two separate forms to produce a single new one. The combining process is done by taking only the beginning of one word and joining it to the end of the other (e.g., brunch – breakfast/ lunch; motel – motor/ hotel).

Clipping. It is the process of making a word of more than one syllable to a shorter form (e.g., influenza – flu; gasoline – gas).

Backformation. It is a specialized type of reduction by reducing a word of one type (usually noun) to form another word of different type (e.g., emote – emotions; donate – donation; babysit – babysitter).

Conversion. It is a process that changes the function of a word without art reduction (print out – printout; take over – takeover).

Acronyms. It is the process of forming new words using the initial letters of a set (CD – compact disc; VCR - .video cassette recorder).

Derivation. This process involves the affixation of word, may it be the prefix, infix, or suffix (boyish, terrorism, unhappy).

Multiple processes. Opposite all the aforementioned processes in isolation, multiple processes may be at work in the creation of a particular word. (pp. 53 – 59)

These words vary not only from the processes employed to form them but also to their life-span. It seems that the language users have a power to dictate and mold the change in the language depending on their demands and needs.

Noam Chomsky attempts to explain such transformation within the language. As Chomsky claims:

“Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation.”

And as Wolfram (2010) adds, “Language sows its own seeds of change, and social context offers fertile ground for its growth and spread.” Hence, conducting studies on the ever growing vocabulary in the Internet English today together with the various processes employed to them appears to be timely.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to investigate the “creation” of newly-formed words in today’s Internet English and their means of coming into being. Following are the specific points to be studied:

1. What are the newly-formed English words being used in the Internet language?
2. What is the most frequent word-formation process employed in these words preponderant in electronic discourse?

Methodology

Participants

A total of sixty (60) high school students currently enrolled in Chiang Kai Shek College Manila of both male and female genders whose ages range from 15-17 were involved in the study. The participants were from the junior and senior years of high school specifically III-1, 5, 7, and IV-2. The gender distribution of the participants can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants’ Profile in Terms of Gender

Year and Section	Gender	f	%
IV- 2	Boys	6	10
	Girls	9	15
III-1	Boys	6	10
	Girls	9	15
III-5	Boys	6	10
	Girls	9	15
III-7	Boys	6	10
	Girls	9	15
Total		60	100

As can be seen, majority of the participants belong to the junior level; as an addition, more than half of the participants sampled are from the female gender.

Data Collection and Analysis

These students were asked to submit their own printed Internet Chat transcripts. From these sampled transcripts, the newly-formed words were extracted and given an analysis as to the word-formation process employed in creating them. Newly-formed words are words not typically found in a conventional dictionary but are commonly used in electronic discourse nowadays.

These sampled words were tabulated and computed to display the frequency, mean, and percentages to determine the most frequent word-formation used in the electronic discourse highlighting Internet Chat English.

The aforesaid newly-formed words regularly recurring in Internet chats will be categorized using the following processes discussed by Yule (2006):

- Coinage – words based on the name of a person, place, or product
- Borrowing – taking over of words from other languages
- Compounding – joining of two separate words to produce a single form
- Blending – taking only the beginning of one word and joining it to the end of the other word
- Clipping – reducing a word of more than one syllable
- Backformation – reducing to form a word of another type (usually a verb)
- Conversion – changing the function of the word; known as “category shift”
- Acronyms – formed from the initial letters of a set of other words
- Derivation – accomplished by adding ‘small bits’ of the English language described as Affixes
- Multiple Processes – operation of more than one process at work in the creation of the new word

Results and Discussion

Extracted Words from the Internet Chat Transcripts

Table 2 displays the summary of the newly-formed words used in electronic discourse as extracted from the Internet Chat transcripts submitted. It can be noted that majority of these words may be unfamiliar to some especially to a person who is not fond of exploring the Internet or a member of the Internet society. This finding is similar to that of Rumsiene (2004) who investigated English chat conversations taken from 27 various sites. He tries to explain that though people engaging in these Internet chats may be of different geographical and cultural origins, they seem still to follow a certain general codex to communicate which may appear incomprehensible to non-users.

Table 2

Summary of Newly-Formed Words from the Internet Chat Transcripts and their Meanings

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Extracted Words	Meaning
IMO	In my opinion
bb	bye bye
wth	What the hell?
nvm	never mind
IKR	I know right?
LOL	Laugh out loud
LMAO	Laughing my ass off
LMFAO	Laughing my fat ass off
FTW	For the win
FYI	For your information
jk	joke
STFU	Shut the f*** up
gtg	got to go/ gotta go
BTW	By the way
l8r	later
OMGPOP	Oh my gosh (pop as in sound effect)
LPU	Low pick up
WTF	What the f***
AFK	Away from the keyboard
ROFL	Rolling on the floor laughing
IDK	I don't know.
K	Ok
Dkdc	don't know...don't care
bc	busy
W8	Wait
L8	late
Nyt	night or good night
L8r	later
Nyc	nice
Txt	text
Gr8	great
Yep	yup
Fwend	friend
Pls	please
Dp	display picture
C2C	care to chat?
ASL	age, sex, location
Mf	mutual friend
IMY	I miss you.
ILY	I love you.
SLR	sorry...late reply

Clipping	-	-
Backformation	-	-
Conversion	1	2.17
Acronyms	27	58.69
Derivation	-	-
Multiple Processes	-	-
Other Process Categories not Offered by Yule	-	-
(Alpha-Numeric Combination)	6	13.04
(Sound-Based Text Code)	8	17.39
Pseudoeponthesis	2	4.35
Repetitive Typing of Letter/s	1	2.17
Total	46	99.98

The table strongly suggests that a majority of newly-formed words being used in electronic discourse today belong to the category of Acronymy. It is not surprising that Acronymy leads in terms of statistics for it simply validates that Internet language or electronic discourse has one major physical limitation – the speed of typing vs. the speed of speaking. Henceforth, users of Internet chat tend to resort to forming new words using acronymy than the other word-formation processes to keep up with the velocity of speaking and continuity of communication avoiding too much time gap in chat conversations.

However, there are other word formation processes used in forming these newly-formed words in a very minimal frequency based on the words sampled. These are Blending (e.g. netizens) and Conversion (e.g. google, used as a verb).

Nevertheless, what is really interesting and surprising is the emergence of new words that may not be categorized using Yule's discussion (2006). These words were categorized using the suggested labels of the researcher:

- Alpha-Numeric Combination – words that combine letters and numbers such as w8, l8, l8r, gr8, and C2C. Others may refer to it as “jejemon.”
- Sound-Based Text Code – sound-based forming of words as attested by their spellings (e.g. jk, k, nyt, nyc, bc, pls, ryt, txt).
- Pseudoeponthesis – words that insert a sound or a new letter in the middle part of the word by omitting letter/s in the middle position (e.g. – friend –fwend)
- Repetitive Typing of Letter/s – words formed through the intentional repetitive typing of a letter to create emphasis (e.g. helllllllllllllllllooooooooooooooooooooo).

To describe this observed phenomenon on word-formation, it is important to take note the users of Internet language. Majority of these users belong to younger generation. It seems that Internet language does not only serve its purpose of sending ideas and thoughts but also used to show how “in” they are in

the Internet society. It seems to be a method of self-expression and individuality in a hip, trendy, and techie fashion they know.

Conclusion

The absence of other categories for newly-formed words coming from the Internet English implies the dynamism and vitality of the English language. The discussion of Yule on word-formation processes in his book, *The Study of Language* (2006) is undeniably recent in terms of time. However, the findings of this study show how fast English can change in considerable short period of time having new categories for newly-formed words out of Internet chats. Wang (2001), asserts that neologisms in English appears and upgrades fast and in large quantity.

Internet communication or electronic discourse is hindered by certain physical limitations. One of which is the speed of typing vs. the rate of speaking. Hence, newly-formed words having features like being succinct and understandable especially among Internet society members on the web continuously emerge considering faster input. These words are formed generally to facilitate easy and swift encoding ensuring a more successful electronic communication.

According to Halliday (1985), "Language changes in response to the demands of its users, and if the society of language users poses new challenges, the language also has to become different in order to cope"; moreover, new tools and media demand the creation of new forms and ways of communication (Bodomo and Lee, 2001 in Rumsiene 2004). And with the prevalence of Internet, language responds actively by enriching itself with new word additions to it.

It can be implied that Internet language suits the expectations of its users, thus allowing the formation of new words in distinct ways. These word-formation processes allow the Internet Chat users and Internet society members especially the younger generation to create new words without any reference to grammar, unmindful of syntactic structure and having the feeling of belongingness to the "in" crowd of today.

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