

## THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF THE FUTURE: THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Generally speaking, English is the Language on the internet and of the internet. Over the years, more and more people have continued to make use of the internet in several ways. The last few decades have witnessed the role the internet is playing in our everyday lives as well as how it is revolutionalising our world. This paper discusses the internet, the concept of development as well as evaluation of an English language of the future. It further discusses the influence of the internet on the development of the English language, paying particular attention to morpho-semantic, grapho-phonemic and lexical impacts respectively. The paper concludes that the English Language on the internet may be seen to be coarse, clumsy and misspelled English. However, these are likely to grow over time into a new kind of English language which will be thrown at users who would be compelled to conform to both its usage and orthography.*

**Keywords:** *English Language, Internet, Morpho-semantic, Grapho-phonemic impact.*

## **Introduction**

The history of the English Language is like that of any living language which is subjected to continuous changes. The English Language has developed through the Old English period (449-1100), the Middle English Period (1159-1500) and the Modern English Period (1500) respectively. For its very existence, it had to compete with other languages like Latin. Thus, it had been carried all over the world and had taken roots in lands and climates very far and very different from its original home.

The last few decades have witnessed the growth in the role the internet is playing in every sphere of our lives. The internet is arguably one of the most significant technological developments of the late twentieth century. It is well known that our lives nowadays are highly affected by the use of the internet. Omowon (2013) observes that the very origin of the internet is strongly linked to education, as was in universities and research institutes where electronic networks were initially developed. She maintains that these networks have since evolved from the sharing of research findings among scientists and scholars to accessing libraries, schools and universities worldwide. The internet also enables alternative teaching methods through virtual classrooms and long- distance education thus allowing more people to receive education.

Development is a complex issue with different and sometimes contentious definitions. According to the Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English (2009), the term "development" means the process of gradually becoming bigger, better, stronger or more advanced. Development also means the process by which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced. The discussion of the teaching and learning and the development of the English Language today cannot be complete without juxtaposing it with the role internet is playing in its development.

There is no doubt that the English Language has kept developing and expanding over the years and more importantly, the internet has been observed to play a prominent role in this development. This paper attempts to discuss the internet's role in the evolution of a new English language employed mainly by internet users thereby making it bigger better and seemingly more advanced.

## **The Internet**

The internet, popularly called the Net, can be conceived as a rich, multilayered, complex, ever-changing textual environment (Omowon, 2013). It provides several opportunities for teaching and learning. It is defined as a network of computers linking the United States with the rest of the world. It was created in 1969 for the U.S. defence department. Other countries began to in the 1970s and within another decade, it became widely accessible to researchers, administrators and students throughout the world. The internet grew as a fast pace in the 1990s as people began to discover the power of this new medium (West's Encyclopaedia of American Law, 2005). In the mid 1990s, the appearance of the World Wide Web made the internet even more popular. The World Wide Web (www)

is a multimedia interface that allows for transmission of texts, pictures, audio, and videos together known as web pages. These commonly resemble pages in a magazine. Gradually, these various elements have made the internet a medium for communication and for the retrieval of information on virtually all topics.

The internet is considered a confederation of thousands of computers from various sectors of society such as education, business, government and the military. It is a network of thousands of computer network. Each individual system brings something different to the whole (databases, library services, graphs, maps, electronic journals, etc), and the end result is a vast accumulation of information. It is a worldwide network of computers that internet on a standardized set of protocols which act independently of particular computer operating systems, allowing for a variety of access methods to the internet.

Although the internet has been available to most people, only recently have educators been realising the potential the internet can have in second and foreign language classrooms. During the sixties and seventies of the last century, English Language learning laboratories were being used in various educational institutions. The traditional language laboratory consisted of a number of small cabinets, provided with a cassette deck, a microphone and a headphone for each one. Teachers use a central control panel to monitor their students' interactions. While the computer is now used in some form or another in most language classrooms, and is considered standard equipment, the internet is also gradually being introduced in the second language classroom as teachers become more familiar with it.

### **The Spread of the English Language**

The spread of English as an international language across the globe has continued over the centuries. This started from the time the English first conquered the rest of the British Isle and many other parts of the world. Later, it continued to spread leaving more variants in its path. In the words of Brumfit (1995), English is no longer the exclusive property of speakers of English as mother tongue or first language. The ownership of English rests with the people who use it, however multilingual they are, or however monolingual they are.

Like all languages of the world, English has continued to evolve and change with the times coming up with variations as used by different sets of people. For example, the medieval English is quite different from the one we speak and write today.

Especially in the teaching and learning of English as a second language, it was commonplace for such teaching to be confined to the language laboratories where students will be expected to listen to tape recorded pronunciations of the English sounds which they were expected to imitate. However, Madhavajah (2013) confirmed that English Language teaching has been on for many years and its significance continues to grow fuelled, partially, by the internet. The advent of the internet changed the world and by extension, the teaching and learning and usage of English Language.

## **Impact of the Internet on the Evolution of the new English**

The internet has played a vital role in revolutionising our world- from politics to religion to social reconstruction and education. It has become an important linguistic medium. It has been added to every aspect of human life, including the learning of languages (Wu and Ben-Canaan, 2006). In different countries and cultures, English language has different positions. There are countries where English is the native language of the majority, there are countries where English is a widely known second language and there are other countries where English has no special position.

Previously, it was not important for people of other races other than the British and Americans to use the English Language to communicate and disseminate information. However, one will be isolated on the internet today if you are not familiar with the English language. This means that when you know or have learnt some English, you can learn more just by using it on the internet. The internet therefore serves as an indirect teacher to people who were hitherto not proficient in English language as the language is currently the language of the internet.

While some scholars view the global use of the internet as disadvantageous to the development of formal English (written) having broken several rules of the language, others see it as a blessing. This latter group of scholars believe that these various deviations are indeed innovative and allow people to explore the power of written discourse in a creative manner. The influence of internet on the development of English Language has therefore been overwhelming and is noticeable in various aspects of the written language.

Similarly, the internet has an ever-growing impact on the lexical, phonetic and syntactic standards of the language. For instance, this global technology has led to the evolution of an abbreviated English language. This is the type of language that has emerged in chat group in the virtual world. Some of the noticeable changes are discussed below:

### **Morpho-semantic Impact**

In this regard, words are compressed so much that the formal user of English may almost be unable to decipher the meaning of words. For example:

#### **Internet discourse**

RU2Cnmel18r?

RUOK?

JUS 2 RMD U ABT D DISKSN

#### **Standard English Discourse**

Are you two seeing me later?

Are you ok?

Just to remind you about the discussion

In the above examples, words have been reduced to a combination of almost incomprehensible graphemes and numbers. Nonetheless, the users are well able to understand the abbreviated expressions.

### **Lexical Impact**

Internet users of the English Language have also broken the rules of lexis as words are spelt in their own ways. For example:

<b>Internet discourse</b>	<b>Standard English Discourse</b>
so wot	So what
@ home	At home
2day	Today
B4	Before

### **Grapho-phonemic Impact**

In English Language, letters very often do not consistently represent sounds. However, in the use of the internet, the grapheme is usually made to represent the phoneme. For example:

<b>Internet discourse</b>	<b>Standard English Discourse</b>
LLPP	Long life and prosperity
Cu	see you
Brb	be right back

In most cases, the grapheme “c” is usually represented by the phoneme /k/ in English Language. In this case, the grapheme “c” is made to represent the phoneme /s/ in the expression “see you” However, even if the above expression is considered to be a bastardisation of the language, the meaning is not lost on the users.

### **Conclusion**

The world of the internet is a fast one where everybody in the world seems to be in a hurry. This nature of perpetually being in a hurry has come a long way to affect the English language as users of the internet communicate more using short words, short sentences, abbreviations and slangs. For the first time, the internet has made communication with other users of the English Language globally quick and inexpensive. Thus, a user in Nigeria can quickly and inexpensively reach another user in Japan.

The universal language of the internet may currently be seen to be clumsy, coarse and misspelled English, however, these are likely to grow over time into a new kind of English Language which will be thrown at users who would be compelled to conform to both its usage and orthography.

## **Recommendation**

E-learning involving the use of the internet is gradually getting a foothold in the educational sector today. It is therefore recommended that in order to continue to be relevant, today's teacher of English Language should be trained in the use of the internet as a means of imparting and impacting knowledge in language teaching and learning. It is also recommended that there should be further research on the evolving English language in order to be properly grounded in the orthography and usage of the English language of the future.

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