

Understanding Online Communicative Language Features In Social Networking Environment

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Abstract

This paper discusses the findings of a research study that seeks to investigate the language features and patterns of online communicative language amongst young Malaysian Facebook users. The acquisition of online literacy might create a gap or linguistic disparity that distinguish the young online users from the older generations who are not used to online communication environment hence, it is due to the same concern that led to the departure of this study. With the corpus of over 500,000 words of Online Communicative Language derived from a one year of Facebook conversations among 120 young Malaysians from different ethnic groups, mother tongues, and cultural background, it is hoped that the study will shed light into the new patterns of Online Communicative Language among young Malaysians that somehow signifies a reconstruction of an online identity among the young users; regardless of their cultural differences and backgrounds. Virtual Ethnography was employed, which involved daily observations and documentations of actual conversations on Facebook in a period of 12 months. Data were analyzed using Content Analysis in examining the features and patterns employed by the participants. The findings of the study suggest that the features used by these online users are spelling innovations and modifications, combinations of letter and number homophone, reduction or omission of vowels, replacement of <s> with <z>, the use of one letter to represent a word, the use of playful jargons, the used of acronyms and abbreviations and the use of emoticons. As a conclusion, language evolution is seen as an ongoing process and the development of online communicative language is always unpredictable even though it might originated from a re-thinking process of some old spelling conventions in media and not language that derived on its own.

Keywords: online communicative language; social networking environment; Facebook; online literacy; online conversations

Introduction

Online Communicative Language, or also known as digital language, or even 'Netspeak' (Crystal, 2006), is described as a language that represents the concept of 'informalization', a concept introduced by Fairclough (1995). The concept describes the use of informal patterns of language in both formal and informal settings, serving various purposes and functions. Researchers who carried out studies on the patterns of online

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communicative language show some prominent features that seem to support the idea of 'informalization' (Murray, 1991; Maynor 1994; Uhlirova, 1994; Yates, 1996, 2000; Li Yongyan, 2000; Crystal, 2001; Lewin and Donner, 2002; Posteguillo, 2003; Johnova, 2004; Lotherington, 2004; Berman, 2006; Pérez-Sabater, 2007; Baron, 2008; Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim, 2009; Squires, 2010).

Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim (2009) found abbreviations and acronyms as the common features of online communicative language employed by Malaysians in their online conversations. Without giving any specific figure of their findings, Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim (2009) however suggest that abbreviations and acronyms such as 'ppl', 'abt', 'ttfn', 'whnvr', 'whn', 'pls', and 'thnks' (pp.43) normally occurred due to several reasons such as the nature of online conversation that is supposed to be short and quick, limited space provided for each online message as well as online users who are "socially motivated in that by using them, the users are indicating their membership in one particular group" (Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim, 2009, p.43).

Other common features such as the omission of vowels in spelling involving daily words such as *thanks* and *between* being reduced to *thx* and *btwn*, as well as the omission of letter *g*'s in *-ing* forms, as in *goin* and *thinkin*. Next, a common pattern is the use of letter 'z' instead of a double *r*, in spelling, producing forms such as *soz* ('sorry') and *2moz* ('tomorrow'). Another prominent feature is the use of acronyms. Some examples of common acronyms used are "*bt dt* ('been there, done that'), *rofl* ('roll on the floor laughing'), *lol* ('laughing out loud'; 'lots of love', depending on context), *brb* ('be right back'), *lmk* ('let me know'), *btw* ('by the way') and *tic* ('tongue in cheek'). Acronyms can, of course, use numbers as well as letters: *g2g* (got to go), *2u2* ('...to you, too'), or they may be a mixture of a reduced word and an abbreviated word, as in *nvr m* ('never mind'), *cya* ('see you') and *kthx* ('OK thanks')" (Ross, 2006, p.42).

The next feature is the use of emoticons such as smiley, :) or :-); and :(or :-(which represent sad faces as well as ;-) that indicates a wink. Ross (2006) believed that these emoticons are internationally intelligible, regardless of the language use. As emoticons are internationally acceptable, it indicates the development of symbols in communication where language stands as a barrier in expressing certain emotions, feelings or messages. Another common feature would be what Ross (2006) described as a 'sensational spelling' phenomenon. It is believed that sensational spelling such as *hi* ('high'), *lo* ('low'), *rite* ('right'), *tonite* ('tonight'), *tho* ('though'), *thru* ('through'), *kool* ('cool'), *drinx* ('drinks'), *donut* ('doughnut'), and *Xing* ('crossing') are basically derived or influenced by the mass media such as advertisements, signs, lyrics and song titles, as well as band names.

As development of online communicative language might be different from one country to another, Ross (2006) believed that apart from borrowing some features from English, some of the features in online communicative language are actually homegrown, and display their own identity and cultural values. Language evolution is seen as an ongoing process, and the development of online communicative language is always unpredictable even though it might originated from a re-thinking process of some old spelling conventions in the media, and not some patterns of language that derived on its own.

Apart from respelling activities such as 'RU' (are you), 'der' (there), and 'gr8' (great), and the lack of vowels in many spelling, Squires (2010) found that the most popular acronyms among the respondents are 'LOL' (laugh out loud) and 'gr8' (great), 'brb' (be right back), 'omg' (Oh my God) and 'wtf' (what the f**k). Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) in studying the patterns of online language also found only two prominent acronyms in the entire corpus which are LOL (0.41% of the total words) and OMG (0.11% of the total words), but very few instances of other stereotyped forms, including BRB (0.04%) and WTF (0.02%). Altogether, these features only comprise 2.5% of the total words in their corpus. Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) found very few occurrences of 'u' (you) (8.6% vs. 91.41 %,) with 'u' (you) was actually used by only twenty-seven speakers out of fifty.

Johnova (2004) found that online communicative features only appeared at 20% of the entire conversations with 13% of the utterances containing sole acronyms. The research found 7.2% (279) of 'lol' (laugh out loud) as the highest number of acronym being used in the chat rooms. The other acronyms would include 263 acronyms of 'pml' (please message later); 37 'ffs' (for f**k sake); 23 'ty' (thank you); 16 'lmao' (laugh my ass off); 14 'wb' (welcome back); 14 'omg' (oh my god); 13 'wtf' (what the f**k); 12 'asl' (age,sex,location); 9 'brb' (be right back) and 7 'pc' (personal computer).

As the evolution of online communicative language is moving along with time, or even speed faster than the time, there are still ongoing debates on the 'acceptance' of online communicative language among the sociolinguists. Scholars express different concerns from different perspectives; some are in favor with its existence and some show approval but a bit conscious on the long term effects it might bring on students' proficiency skills.

The Study

As the emergence of online language has triggered concern and discussions from different angles and perspectives, it is due to the same concern that led to the departure of this study. With an aim to investigate and document the standard features and patterns of online communicative language used on Facebook among Malaysian youngsters, it is hoped that the descriptions and presentations of online communicative language patterns among the new generation will shed some lights on the issue of communication barriers that emerged among users from different backgrounds, ethnicity, cultures and age groups; pertaining to how it functions.

It is also hoped that the study will provide a set of authentic data that can be added to a corpus that represents the digital language being used by the new generations in online socio-networking environment. The naturalistic data derived from this study would be highly beneficial in initiating a Malaysian Online Communicative English Language Database, which may function together with the social networking website itself. The database may be valuable for language instructors or teachers from older generations in coping with the current changes in learners' patterns of communication; since a proper use of social networking tools such as Facebook can always be as a great platform for students to experience a real language learning environment that is proven to be meaningful and more effective.

Two research tools were employed in this study, Virtual Ethnography and Content Analysis. Based on the traditional method of ethnographic research, virtual ethnography focuses on the Internet, as a place where real humans' interaction and communication takes place. Transferring ethnographic research method to Internet research has been accepted as another way of studying humans' patterns of interaction and identity in online settings. Content Analysis is used to identify the occurrence of certain words, phrases, characters or sentences in the texts. There are several purposes of Content Analysis, including to interpret the attitudes and behavioral responses to communications and to discover one's meaning and purposes as well as the communication trends of an individual or community (Krippendorff, 1980). Analysis of the linguistic structures was made based on several criteria outlined by earlier researchers (see Murray, 1991; Maynor 1994; Uhlirova, 1994; Yates, 1996, 2000; Li Yongyan, 2000; Crystal, 2001; Lewin and Donner, 2002; Posteguillo, 2003; Johnova, 2004; Lotherington, 2004; Berman, 2006; Pérez-Sabater, 2007; Baron, 2008; Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim ,2009 and Squires, 2010) and this is done by identifying the innovation of lexicons and sentence structures.

As the purpose of this study is to investigate the linguistic structures and the patterns of online communicative language among the young Facebook users in Malaysia, analysis will be made based on several criteria listed below:

1. Spelling innovations and modifications
2. The use of playful jargons
3. Acronyms and Abbreviations
4. Emoticons

120 respondents from three major ethnic groups in the country (Malay, Chinese and Indian) took part in online communication as real social networkers on Facebook. The sample consists of 30 Malays, 30 Chinese and 30 Indians; equally divided into 15 male and 15 female participants for each ethnic group. The group of respondents consisted of both males and females with the range of ages between 18 to 24 years, and from different urban areas around the country. The sample is also a group of college students from various higher institutions around the country. They generally use English in their online communication but they also practice code-switching (mostly English-Malay or Malay-English, with a few occurrences of other ethnic languages like Tamil or Chinese). The rationale of selecting people from this age group as a sample of this study is because they are considered as the generation of IT who receive most Internet influence and online communicative language.

Daily observations were made in a period of 12 months and all conversations were documented as the raw data and analyzed using Content Analysis to identify the occurrence of certain words, phrases, characters or sentences contained by texts. There are several purposes of Content Analysis, which include to interpret the attitudes and behavioral responses to communications and to discover one's meaning and purposes as well as the communication trends of an individual or community.

Findings

The findings of the study will be discussed based on different types of online language patterns and features. As findings are numerous, and consist of few various parts, categorizations are made based on the following characteristics: spelling innovations and modifications, the use of playful jargons, acronyms and abbreviations and the use of various symbols and emoticons.

Table 1: Spelling Innovations and Modifications

	Spelling Innovations and Modifications	Frequency (Unit/word)
1.	Combinations of letter and number homophone	1560
2.	Reduction or omission of vowels in spelling	19,792
3.	Replacement of <s> with <z> in spelling	5273
4.	The use of one letter that represents a word	53,317
	Total no. of occurrences	79,942

The first feature under this category involved combinations of letter and number homophone in producing various words. The research study recorded a total of 1560 words made up of a combination of letters and numbers in respondents' conversations throughout the year. With the total of 24 features being used constantly throughout the year, words like 'b4'-before (419 units), 'on9'-online (249 units) and 'sum1'-someone (117 units) appeared to be the most frequent number-blending words used on Facebook among Malaysian youngsters. Combinations of letters and numbers are seen as a normal feature in online language (Squires, 2010; Berman, 2006; Crystal, 2006; Ross, 2006; Baron, 2004, 2008; Shortis, 2007; Lotherington and Xu, 2004; Gao, 2001). There are also some features that are less popular among Malaysian young Facebook users such as '2m'-them (5 units), 'g9'-good night (7 units) as well as 'str8'-straight (5 units). This goes in contrast with Squires (2010) who found the word 'str8'-straight as among the most popular among his respondents.

The next feature that supports findings from other researchers (Ross, 2006; Baron 2006, 2008) would be the reductions or omissions of vowel in spelling. The study found a massive number of 19,792 common and regular words with reduced vowels being used on Facebook. As the number is quite huge compared to findings recorded by researchers from some countries of English native speakers, it is believed that reductions or omissions of vowels is a very widespread feature of online language among the young Facebook users in Malaysia. The following table illustrates the data:

Ross (2006) perceives the omission of vowels in spelling as a normal feature in online conversations. According to Ross (2006) the feature basically involves daily words such as *thanks* and *between* being reduced to *thx* and *btwn*, as well as the omission of letter *g*'s in *-ing* forms, as in *goin* and *thnkin*. This study however found some common words mentioned in many other studies concerning this feature such as the words 'bt' for 'but' (1082 units), 'hv' for 'have' (1118 units), 'nt' for 'not' (1439 units), 'ppl' for 'people' (1305 units), 'pls' for 'please' (1107 units) and 'snr' for 'senior' (1232 units). The word

'snr' for 'senior' (1232 units) however, was never mentioned in any other studies concerning the same feature, but seem to be quite popular among the young Facebook users in Malaysia. What is more interesting is that, this word is solely dominated by the male Indians users, with 1142 units occurred, 88 units occurred in female Indians' Facebook conversations and only 2 units occurred in male Chinese's Facebook conversations. Some of the excerpts are as follows:

Sample 1:

"Sundraj: fuyoo snr..i tink you just had yours during the break :-)"

Sample 2:

"Ramalinggam: i knw snr he tld like tht... bt my question is yen avaru poi sonnaru?"

Sample 3:

"Rajagopal: happy birthday snr.....have a blast"

As showed in the excerpts above, it clearly demonstrates that the word 'snr' or 'senior' is actually a popular pronoun being used by the Indian users to address their older friends or senior students in the college. A socio cultural explanation suggests that the use of this word might be an indication of one's sense of modesty or respect towards the oldest. This is supported by Valentine (1994) who observes how the traditional Indians preserve some cultural values in their norms of interaction such as face saving, politeness, and indirectness; the three important aspects that are closely related with their patterns of interaction. Valentine (1994) in her study of agreeing and disagreeing in Indian English discourse revealed that the element of politeness is very well marked throughout the Indians' daily conversations. Valentine (1994) describes the Indians as a community that is guided by the politeness principle, which obviously can be seen in their ways of interaction between each other. As Valentine (1994) believes that "certain patterns of language attribute to members of powerful or non-powerful group" (Valentine, 1994: 3), it is observed that an indication of hierarchy is still very much practiced among the Indian society in Malaysia. Findings also suggest a strong indication of specific communication patterns according to one's position of superiority or level of seniority in the society and this is very much reflected in their patterns of online interaction and behavior.

The omission of vowels also supports some opinions of others (see Ross, 2006; Baron, 2006, 2008; Gao, 2001; Uhlirova, 1994) who believe that the needs for speed and to be précised are some factors which lead to the varieties of short forms emerged in online communication. With limited space and an urgency for spontaneous feedbacks (Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim, 2009), many online users resorted to this online-writing behavior, which did not meet the requirements of standard writing form and structure. Findings also demonstrate that most of these 19,792 words are among common words that people use in their daily conversations.

Another common pattern is the use <z> instead of a double <r>, in spelling, producing forms such as *soz* - 'sorry' and *2moz* - 'tomorrow', (Ross, 2006). Apart from that, Crystal (2006) and Squires (2010) found the replacement of letter <s> with <z> in many spelling.

As Malaysian-young Facebook users might be following this particular international trend, it is however found that the replacement of letter <s> with <z> has been used differently in Malaysian context. Most of the replacements or modifications basically involved words that ended up with <s> or /s/ sound. With the total of 5273 units of this feature constantly used throughout the year by Malaysian youngsters from all three ethnic groups, it is significantly proven that Malaysian youngsters are localizing some of the trend in their use of English online communicative language.

The last feature that comes under spelling modifications would be the use of one letter to represent a word. All together, 53,317 units of this feature has been recorded with 'u' (you) appeared to be the highest number (32,465 units). Regardless of its huge number, the use of one letter feature is considered as not that popular compared to other features as there are only 13 different letters being used in representing certain regular words.

The findings of this research, however, are in contrast with the findings with some other researchers from English speaking countries. Baron (2006) for instance, did not report on the use of letter 'u' in representing the word 'you' among a group of college students in America. Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) also found very few occurrences of 'u' which was actually used by only twenty-seven speakers out of fifty. In contrast with Baron (2006) and Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) this study found 32,465 of 'u' (you), being used by young Malaysian-Facebook users. In fact, the entire twelve months observation reports revealed very rare occurrences of the full spelling of 'you' being used by all 120 participants.

Sample 1:

"Yap: y u care wat i said n look on u??"

"Syeriza: y i feel d same? lol"

"Manian: me 2 hope 2 c u man....^_ ^"

"Chin: magic...tipu!!! only show me once ur magic skills...cheh!!! eh eh dun kakak here n there ahh...im only erm....1-2 yrs gap w u ahh!! pls!!"

Ross (2006) suggests several factors that contribute to the emergence of many short forms in online communicative language such as the need to be fast in responding to others.

"Speedy communication allows less time for careful, organized thought. Partly for this reason, emails, text messages and broadcast messages (instant messages, chat messages) are in many ways stylistically more similar to spoken language than traditional written forms" (Ross, 2006, p.41).

As it is more convenient and quicker to express thoughts in a spoken manner, informality is always seen as another aspect in online communication.

Another factor proposed by Ross (2006) is the need to be brief and concise. This somehow correlates with Baron's (2008) idea of multitasking. Activities like checking and writing emails, reading, web-surfing, online gaming or maybe other daily activities such as while having dinner at a fast food restaurant or waiting for the laundry to get ready are among the common daily routines people normally perform while going online

using their mobile phones or other communication devices. As suggested by Baron (2008), multitasking is very common for someone while going online as internet offers many other activities apart from just communicating with others. Therefore, the need to be fast and concise is highly needed as one is basically occupied with many other things while communicating online.

The Use of Playful Jargons

The second main feature is a list of playful jargon used by participants on Facebook conversation. As most of these words are only understandable by users of the same group, it is believed that playful jargons might signify certain identity and norms shared by users of the same speech community. Playful jargon is also another unique feature of online communicative language found by Baron (2008). The following table illustrates a list of regular playful words being used in Facebook conversations among Malaysian youngsters, which carry certain purposes and meanings:

Table 2: The use of playful jargons

	Word	Meaning	Frequency (unit/word)
1.	Gambateh	Japanese word (means good luck/all the best)	161
2.	Pfftt	Whistle	18
3.	Yezza	Yes sir	7
4.	Muah	Kissing sound (I am kissing you)	459
5.	Muax	Kissing sound (I am kissing you)	52
6.	Lalink	Darling	3
7.	Sobs sobs	Crying sound (I am crying)	39
8.	Biatch	Bitch	6
9.	Ngee	I am happy	145
10.	Woot woot	To announce	36
11.	XOXO	I am signing off	64
12.	Gee	Well	41
13.	Wink wink	Eyes blinking	67
14.	Chillex	Chill	3
15.	tsk tsk	Crying sound (I am cring)	68
16.	Grrr!	I am angry	130
17.	phew!	I am relief	20
18.	tett..	Secret (cannot reveal)	19
19.	Yaaw	Yeah!	8
20.	Pffh	Relief	13
21.	geez!	Happy	19
23.	doink!	Something bad happened	38
24.	Mangkuk	Colloquial Malay word means stupid	57
25.	Lepaking	A Malay word with an English suffix ('ing') which means loafing.	7

26.	sob-sob	I am crying	54
27.	Sobz	I am crying	22
28.	Whoa	I am impressed	64
Total			1620

One remarkable finding concerning this feature is that the uses of certain words or jargons are normally dominated by certain group of users. Words like ‘muah’ or ‘muax’ that indicate a kissing sound are only used by both Malay and Indian female participants (370 units or 72.4 % from the total of 511 units). As kissing is also another way of expressing love and showing one’s affections, it is believed that female respondents are more expressive in sharing their intimate feelings and fondness towards others. This is actually supported by Brown and Levinson (1978), who suggest that women are more concerned on having good relationships and like to seek for others' approval. Women also have a tendency of using language as a “weakening tool to express uncertainty” as well as a way to “soften an utterance” (Zaini Amir, Hazirah Abidin, Saadiyah Darus, Kemboja Ismail, 2012, p.120).

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronyms and abbreviations are among the key features being looked upon in online communicative language studies (Johnova, 2004; Baron, 2004; Tagliamonte and Dennis, 2008; Lotherington and Xu, 2004; Squires, 2010; Greenfield and Subrahmanyam, 2003; Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim, 2009). As supported by the cited studies, this research found 14,182 units of acronyms and abbreviations employed by all 120 participants in one year.

Among the most popular acronyms are LOL-‘Laugh out loud’ (5619 units), OMG-‘Oh my God’ (1375 units), TQ-‘Thank you’ (2182 units), and TC-‘Take care’ (1374 units). This is very much similar with online language acronyms found by many early researchers such as Squires (2010) who found some popular acronyms such as ‘LOL’ (laugh out loud) ‘brb’ (be right back), ‘omg’ (Oh my God) and ‘wtf’ (what the f**k). Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) in studying the patterns of online language also found only two prominent acronyms in the entire corpus which are the LOL and OMG, but very few instances of other stereotyped forms, including BRB and WTF.

One interesting finding regarding the features of acronyms and abbreviations is that the total number of them (14,182 words or units in over 1 million words) is relatively small compared to the huge corpus involved in this study. This shows a similar pattern with the other findings from various online communication settings employed by English native speakers (see among others, Baron, 2004, 2006; Tagliamonte and Denis, 2008; Squires, 2010; Lewin and Donner, 2002). Baron (2004) for instance, found a very small amount of acronyms i.e. 90 acronyms in 12,000 words of online conversations among a group of American students with most of the features occurred only once in the entire conversation. With only thirty-one abbreviations altogether, it is believed that the use of abbreviations and acronyms is not a convenient feature among the English native speakers.

Therefore, it is significantly proven that acronyms might be a common feature in online communicative language but the use is actually not preferred by most English native speakers in various online communication settings. As findings of this research also show the same results and tendency, it is concluded that acronyms and abbreviations are not a prominent feature of online communicative language among young Malaysian Facebook users. It supports Squires (2010) as he concludes that the patterns of online communicative language are basically not related to certain group of users or influenced by the features of the internet itself. "The construct of internet language glosses over many different patterns of variation in an extremely large sphere of discourse with many different types of speakers, the heterogeneity of which is typically erased" (Squires, 2010, p. 483).

The Use of Various Symbols and Emoticons

Emoticons are seen as an important feature in online conversations among young Facebook users in Malaysia. With the total number of 58,845 units of emoticons being recorded throughout the year, it is assumed that emoticons carry some very prominent functions that convey certain messages and hidden meaning in online conversations. Emoticons are also seen as a compliment to a message as they appeared in almost every sentence being produced online. With the traditional smiley, :) dominated the entire conversations (14,637 units), there are also some other unique emoticons employed by the respondents that are not recorded in other research. The use of emoticons somehow signifies Malaysian-youngsters' creativity in playing with the symbols displayed on the keyboard in expressing their feelings and emotions. Some of the emoticons are used to strengthen the message, while others represent certain tone of voice such as surprised, anger, disappointment, sadness and astonishment.

As supported by Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow (2008), findings also show how emoticons help users to have more control in terms of the tone of message they would like to convey. The following sample shows how the use of emoticon ':-p' helps to soften serious argument about a lying behavior. The guy in the following excerpt who is literally not happy with his friend's opinion that seems to go against his own belief used the emoticon ':-p' to soften his argument after saying that she's an arrogant. He also used the same emoticon to soften his strong opinion that men are better than women in certain situations. The girl at the same time also employ the same emoticon of ':-p' after stressing that she's just being honest with her opinion.

Sample 6:

Azam: a man forgives a woman's lie..

Myra Sham: but we don't easily forgive a man who lies. :D

Azam: hahahaha...arrogant!it should be likewise..or i think u should just type 'same here'..its called manner...:P

Myra Sham: erk.haha well, im just being honest. :-P

The excerpt significantly demonstrates how the use of emoticons both help convey certain emotions as well as act as politeness strategy to protect one's face and to indirectly convey certain messages. It supports Derks, Bos, and Von Grumbkow (2008)

argument in which they suggest that certain emoticons might help soften some negative statements or messages conveyed by online users. “A negative message accompanied by a wink for instance, conveys less negativity than a negative pure message” (Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow, 2008, p. 380). As online users normally communicate at their own pace and time, they have an advantage of having their own time to consider the suitable online facial expressions to compliment their messages. Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow (2008) believe that online users basically have clear intentions or reasons for using certain emoticons in their conversations in both synchronous and asynchronous online conversations. Some of the reasons or what they describe as ‘motives’ would be “expressing emotion, strengthening the message, regulating the interaction, and putting into perspective” (Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow, 2008, p. 386).

Conclusion

Language evolution is seen as an ongoing process and the development of online communicative language is always unpredictable even though it might originate from a re-thinking process of some old spelling conventions in media, and not some patterns of language that is derived on its own. It is also interesting to note how English language in Malaysia is taking a step further by evolving and adapting its usage in online communication settings. One surprising fact revealed by studies cited is that the influence of online communicative language and its distinctive features is actually very limited among the English native speakers in western countries. As illustrated by many researchers (see Baron, 2006; Tagliamonte and Denis, 2008; Lewin and Donner, 2002), the frequencies of each feature under online communicative language are relatively small compared to the large number of corpus involved in the studies. Even a recent research concerning the same matters conducted by Squires, (2010) has actually showed the same results and tendency. The findings however, show a massive use of various features and characteristics which leads to a conclusion that Malaysian Online Communicative English corresponds well with the concept of ‘informalization’, which acts as an informal language used in online communication settings. It is assumed that online communication settings might also serve as a new platform that allow users to ignore the need to be accurate in spelling which could be an advantage for those who are actually having problems in spelling words accurately.

As spelling errors and other language inaccuracy are perceived as an acceptable norm in online communication, it somehow gives a room for non native English speakers to employ such features at ease; without having to worry about being judged by the others, on their real language proficiency and capabilities. Through the emergence of thousands spelling innovations or perhaps spelling misbehaves; it is perceived that online communication is actually a platform that gives its users a chance to practice the language with no fear of displaying mistakes and a huge freedom to be creative (Crystal, 2006) with the language. This is supported by Baron (2008) who believes that the current situation indicates a beginning of a new set of language rules and cultures as people are adapting themselves with a more “casual attitude towards linguistic consistency” (Baron, 2008, p. 169).

Another conclusion that can be made is that even though the participants seem to duplicate most of the common online language patterns and features given by early researchers, it is also observed that some of these features are highly localized and commonly used by one particular gender or certain ethnic group and not the others. It is therefore, concluded that there is no specific models in leading the development of online communicative language as it grows hand in hand with users' environment, daily experience as well as different linguistic community they are involved in.

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