

Uses and Abuses of Netspeak

Rizwana Wahid¹ & Oveesa Farooq²

¹English Language Centre, Faculty of Languages & Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia

²Department of Functional English, Govt. College for Women, Srinagar, Cluster University, India

Correspondence: Rizwana Wahid, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia.

Email: rizuwahid@gmail.com

Doi: 10.23918/ijsses.v9i1p53

Abstract: In today's digital world, Netspeak has become an exigent that educators and net-speakers cannot ignore. It is a way of speaking or writing on the Internet. It is recognized by acronyms, abbreviations, emoticons and textism as well. It is a language pattern used in Media and the global Internet users are called Net-speakers. The English language is the most preferred language on the Internet. We come across new words and terminologies by using different apps for different purposes in social media. Netspeak has many uses and abuses as well. It has contributed a lot to English vocabulary. Every now and then we get to know new words like *selfie*, *techy*, *techno*, *yup*, *yo*, *bravo*, *fab*, *hip-hop*, *non-veg*, and so on. Oxford dictionary adds around 500 new words in each quarter. This contribution comprises of the words used in Netspeak and other terms are formed lexicographically. Different slangs like *lol* (lots of laughter or laughing out land), *brw* (be right way), *idk* (I do not know), etc. are in vogue. These slangs are popular. However, everyone is not familiar with these expressions and ultimately leading to confusion and frustrations for some people. In addition to this, it has affected mainly language skills largely among children under 12 years of age. Their writing and speaking consists of Netspeak and they seem to consider it a part of their language. This piece of work has focused on the terms used in Netspeak and how these language patterns affect media positively as well as negatively.

Keywords: Acronyms, Abbreviations, Emoticons, Netspeak, Net-Speakers

1. Introduction

Netspeak is an informal jargon commonly and frequently applied by people who are frequent users of the Internet. It is a way of speaking or writing on the Internet and is recognized by acronyms, abbreviations, emoticons, words and phrases as well. In fact, it is Internet slang or a type of slang that Internet users have popularized, and in many cases, have coined. These terms often originate with the purpose of saving keystrokes. Many people use the same abbreviations in texting, instant messaging, and social networking websites. Acronyms, keyboard symbols and abbreviations are common types of Internet slang. Netspeak is an alternative to Netlish, Cyberspeak, electronic language, electronic discourse, interactive written discourse, computer-mediated communication (CMC) and other cumbersome locutions (Crystal, 2006).

Received: January 21, 2022

Accepted: February 27, 2022

Wahid, R., & Farooq, O. (2022). Uses and Abuses of Netspeak. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 9(1), 53-59.

The term ‘Netspeak’ is an expression for the online language, mostly used in the social media platforms. It is a new medium of communication used in electronic media. Around the world, the Internet users are net-speakers. The English language is the most preferred language on the Internet and the global use of Netspeak has an impact on the English language with its variety of features. It is generally used as a system to modify the spelling of words so, to limit the keystrokes while typing. The messages which are typed, more often sound as if the person is conversing, where punctuations and grammar are not mostly taken into consideration. The electronic medium and the global use of the Internet have both positive and negative impact on the English language. We come across new words and terminologies by using different apps for different purposes in social media.

The global Internet users are called Net-speakers. We come across new words and terminologies by using different apps for different purposes in social media including, abbreviations, emoticons, acronyms and newly modified words and sentences. This new medium of communication labelled Netspeak has a major effect on our lives and is fast growing.

Words of Netspeak are quite in vogue through the widespread use of SMS among youth and are referred to as textisms. The expressions of Netspeak are in abbreviated forms or slang forms and are different from the full words in terms of spelling and grammar. Netspeak is also known as chat-speak, SMS language, text language, text-speak and textese. (Verheijen, 2013). Waldron et al. (2015) wrote more than ten types of “textisms”, and most of these textisms have various forms of orthographic or phonological abbreviations.

Netspeak affects the recognition of words and semantic decisions. It has been noticed that Netspeak word recognition is time-consuming and it takes more time to recognize these words than recognizing standard word-patterns. Some people have high Netspeak experience and some have low Netspeak experience. Netspeak is different from conventional text in terms of morphology, orthography and spelling. It is also worried that long term use of net speak may affect standard literacy of children. Many findings have shown that children using more Textese or Netspeak obtain higher scores on assessments of literacy skills (Waldron et al., 2015; Baihui & Fengjie, 2017).

1.1 Significance of the Research

The significance of this research lies to review the advantages and disadvantages of Netspeak because educators find it quite frustrating when students produce it in the formal settings or as a kind of hindrance in acquiring language/vocabulary development properly. Whereas some literature has claimed that there is a link between Netspeak and lexical cognition, and it assists in building vocabulary like full words. Netspeak has become a popular trend in the digital world of today. Therefore, this piece of work has focused on the words of Netspeak, its uses and abuses and how these expressions affect people positively as well as negatively. Moreover, it can be taught as a new strategy in the pedagogy of vocabulary, writing and phonology so that learners can understand the concepts in an innovative way and can get its optimal benefits.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This research attempts to focus on these objectives.

1. Introducing Netspeak
2. Highlighting the uses and abuses of Netspeak
3. Showing its impact on writing system whether positively or negatively
4. Its overall impact on language skills

2. Literature Review

There are many studies which dealt with Netspeak. The researchers here have tried to review some of them. Crystal (2006) portrays a number of highly distinctive features of Netspeak, which indicate that the language of communication is heavily affected in terms of graphology (emoticons, punctuation) and the lexicon (blending, compounding) with the areas where it is relatively easy to introduce both innovation and deviation. Similarly, Waldron et al., (2015) have observed more than ten types of Netspeak words and found that most of the speakers apply different forms of phonological or orthographic abbreviations like contractions (*msg* for message), phonological abbreviations (*thru* for through), initialisms (*omg* for oh my God), shortenings (*goin* for going), single letters (*u* for you), and so on. Abraham and Lawrence (2009) have also claimed that netspeak enhances lexical knowledge of its users. On the other hand, Lee (2002) has stated that educators find Internet communication negatively affecting students' writing.

Further, Head et al., (2013) investigated the priming effects of conventional words (TEXT), subset words (TXT, an abbreviated form of a word with one letter omission) and non-words (GRFT), and found that subset words were used significantly faster and more accurately than non-words.

Additionally, conventional words were produced faster and more accurately than subset words and non-words. The study has revealed that the participants who had more experience with Netspeak benefited more from Netspeak language than those who reported less experience. Further, this research showed that experience with netspeak supported to connect strongly between the orthography of netspeak words and their meaning. Whereas the relation between the orthography of conventional words and their connotation was stronger than netspeak language structure and its meaning. One more study by Verheijen (2013) has reviewed research of one decade on Netspeak and its correlation to literacy and concluded with mixed responses. Some studies have claimed correction between Internet language and literacy (reading, writing) positivity while other studies have reported negative effects.

Moreover, Thangaraj and Maniam (2015) have considered Netspeak problematic while producing in the formal settings, otherwise it is a habitual practice among youngsters. Then Chen et al., (2020) in their research have experimented on senior middle school students to investigate the recognition of pure Netspeak words and academic terms where they divided the sample into two groups: high experience group and low experience group of participants using Netspeak. The results have shown that the response time of the high experience group for Netspeak meaning-related words was slightly shorter than the traditional meaning-related words and the response time of the low experience group of participants was equivalent for both kinds of meaning-related words. They have concluded that the Netspeak use among Chinese teenagers may not disturb the processing of standard expressions. In fact, it may enhance the processing. Their study has proved that the use of Netspeak does not interfere with the processing of standard words but may be beneficial to the cognition of standard language.

3. Methodology

This qualitative study reviewed some of the past research about Netspeak. As the researchers are themselves teachers and they have dealt with the problem of the Netspeak use in their students' emails, course messages and written texts. So, based on the review of the literature and their observation, the researchers attempted to explore the uses and abuses of Netspeak among net-speakers. They also added their reflections upon its use and a tool of enhancing vocabulary building. They took into consideration mainly the language of WhatsApp messages, emails, Blackboard course messages and tweets. Then the whole data were transcribed and subjected to rigorous analysis. The subjects consisted of two groups; one was the students or the people who are frequent users of the Internet and the other was the people who use the Internet only for their work and do not stick to it all the time. The students group consisted of the students above 18 years of age and the students under 12 years of age.

4. Discussion

Having analyzed the data from two groups, it was found that Netspeak is not easy to understand for all its users. As we know it very well that Internet is a very important part of our life. It has changed our way of communication. Online chatting has become intensely popular in recent years particularly in the Covid-19 pandemic where people interacted with each other through Internet. Frequent use of Internet leads to the development of Netspeak words. These words are quite different from the conventional English words in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax and spellings. This type of text is easy to write and saves our time. It has become so popular that while writing some official script, one includes Netspeak words in it. However, it is also considered that people who use Netspeak words have a high level of language sensitivity and ability and use them creatively. These words are new, trendy and time-saving. The studies have observed that the use of Netspeak may influence the children's standard literacy.

If the value of Netspeak is discussed, it has contributed a lot to English vocabulary. Every day, we get to know new words like *selfie*, *techy* or *techno*, *yup*, *yo*, *bravo*, *fab*, *hip-hop*, *non-veg*, and so on. Oxford dictionary adds around 500 new words in each quarter. This contribution comprises of the words and expressions employed by net-speakers and other linguists. Abbreviations and Acronyms save time and speed up typing process. It has become a trend among youth. It is an informal use of language in the informal situations but is accidentally used in the formal situations sometimes. It is very obvious that it has contributed a lot to lexicography. Some of the Netspeak written expressions used frequently in the form of abbreviations are

thru (*through*)

uh/u' (*you*)

gi me (*give me*)

idk (*I do not know*)

ad (*advertisement*)

bcz (*because*)

bro (brother)

sis (sister), etc.

Some other Netspeak words in the form of contractions are *comfy* (comfortable), *admin* (administration), *info* (information), *univ* (university), *net* (network), *org* (organization), etc.

These words are used by a group of people among peers when communicating online. It also brings out the identity of certain groups as each group has some common Netspeak terms which could be understood by their group members. This way it has contributed to the English dictionary and lexicographers keep an account of new words formed by Netspeak. It is a modern way of online communication and has achieved wide popularity. The Internet users chatting online tend to use emoticons to express their feelings and attitudes. It saves their time to convey about their feelings and thoughts in the text form. It has led to technological inventions in the form of lexemes.

Besides its uses, it has influenced the standard language. It has a bad impact on our writing. When we are in a formal situation, where we have to write formally, we use Netspeak patterns and expressions. Netspeak writing influences young generation more. They accidentally use Netspeak in academic writing. Many teachers believe that Netspeak will distract the students from writing as per rules and regulations. Different slangs like *lol* (lots of laughter or laughing out land), *brb* (be right way), *idk* (I do not know), *shu* (sure), *Rofl* (rolling on the floor laughing), *BTW* (by the way), and others are in vogue. These slangs are quite popular, but everyone is not familiar with these words and ultimately leading to confusion and frustrations.

We often receive the text where the maximum words are the words of Netspeak and sometimes the situation arises when the reader consults the person who has sent a text to clear the confusion created by abbreviated forms of the text. Through this way, it has affected our writing system. Most educators have regarded its influence as undesirable and detrimental towards writing.

Netspeak has a bad impact on the development of language skills of children. The authors of this paper have themselves observed the impact of Netspeak on students particularly children who use net speak in their formal writing as well. While assessing students' papers or any kind of text, net speak is largely used. The texts observed in the form of messages, papers, conversations consist largely of Netspeak. Students above 18 years of age make less use of Netspeak in formal writing whereas students under 12 years of age frequently use net speak in formal as well as informal writing. Their speaking skills also contain net speak. They are observed to listen and comprehend Netspeak appropriately and are able to read net speak words faster than normal words. So, one needs to be careful using Netspeak particularly with children. They should not be encouraged for using Netspeak. Their writings should be highlighted and restricted for Netspeak use.

Further, the Netspeak words need to be applied carefully while handling its components. These words need deeper comprehension and frequent users of Netspeak are well acquainted with these words. It is linked to literacy development as well. Abbreviations and acronyms can speed up the writing process, but they have become a trend among the young generation. They are highly influenced by Netspeak and make its use in formal writing accidentally. It helps linguists to know about the words which they did not come across before. They introduce a list of Netspeak words to English vocabulary. It has its syntax, semantics,

phonology and morphology. Semantically and phonologically, they are very rich. Syntactically, they are comprehensible as well, but morphologically, they are poor. They are portions or elements of words that satisfy the semantic purpose.

Netspeak varies from one social setting to another. Some scholars consider it innovative and inexhaustible language learning.

5. Conclusion

Netspeak is an informal language and has achieved popularity also. The construction of Netspeak terms results because of the widespread use of SMS among youth and are referred to as textisms. The words of Netspeak are in abbreviated form or slang form and are different from the lexical patterns in terms of spelling and grammar. This language is mostly used with peers informally in online communication and is observed in formal writing among students.

Its use is innovative and entertaining, but sometimes it is frustrating for the readers who do not employ Netspeak terms. The young users of the Internet regressively practice the Netspeak terms in their writing, but only at the time of communicating with peers. Sometimes their peers are not aware enough of the Netspeak terms. They find it problematic to get the meaning of these terms. Hence, its use should be restricted to informal situations only. The English language is the most preferred language used on the Internet and its global practice has an impact on the English language with its variety of features. It has influenced the writing system, sometimes accidentally, people use the Internet language for academic writing, then it creates a problem. One should be very careful in handling Netspeak in writing especially in the formal situations. Students under 12 years of age should be restricted to use Netspeak as it has affected their language skills especially writing.

Netspeak should be a resource that can be integrated while teaching because it deals with the daily usage of students' language. It is an innovative way of teaching taking Netspeak into consideration. This kind of vocabulary can be taught to be applied online and in informal situations. It is a helpful textism that saves time, but it should be handled carefully with the consideration of context. Children should not become used to Netspeak. They should have full understanding of the knowledge of Netspeak. It is a preliminary study with its limitations. Therefore, much further linguistic research works are required in the field of Netspeak.

Acknowledgements

The authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Khalid University for funding this work through a research program under grant number R.G.P. 1/361/43.

References

Abraham, L. B. & Lawrence, W. (2009). *Electronic discourse in language learning and language teaching*. Amsterdam: Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co.

- Baihui, S. & Fengjie, L. (2017). The analysis of anti-language from the perspective of current situation of Netspeak. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 5 (2), 50-56.
<https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijll.20170502.14>
- Chen J, Huang S. & Luo R. (2020). Does Netspeak experience interfere with the processing of standard words? Evidence from Netspeak word recognition and semantic decisions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1932. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01932>
- Crystal, David (2006). *Language and the Internet (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Head, J., Neumann, E., Russell, P., Helton, W. S. & Shears, C. (2013). New Zealand text-speak word norms and masked priming effects. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 42(2), 5-16.
- Lee, J. (2002). *I think, therefore IM: Text shortcuts invade schoolwork, and teachers are not amused*. New York Times, September 19, E1.
- Thangaraj, S. & Maniam, M. (2015). The influence of Netspeak on students' writing. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(1), 45-52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v9i1.963>
- Verheijen, L. (2013). The effects of text messaging and instant messaging on literacy. *English Studies*, 94(5), 582–602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2013.795737>
- Waldron S., Kemp N., Plester B. & Wood C. (2015). Texting behavior and language skills in children and adults. In Rosen L. D., Cheever N. A. & Carrier L. M. (Eds.), *The Wiley handbook of psychology, technology, and society*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.