***Альпхан Синав***

**Language Change in a Technological Context**

*“Always in motion the future is” – Jedi Master Yoda*

People might wonder why I’m beginning this article with a quote of a fictional character; well, it is because we are living in a world of motion. We are living in a constantly revolving, changing world and these changes, whether they are social, technological or cultural, go hand in hand with the changes in language. Like people, languages also change over time. Nothing is static, especially in this day and age of information being literally in the tip of one’s hands and tongues. It is only the speed of this motion that is constantly changing. In terms of language, for example, this change is relatively slow when compared with the speed of the changes in new technologies and way of life. One of the biggest reasons of this change in language is technological developments.

I will be discussing how technology affects language and whether or not these changes are positive or negative for the people and for the language in general. I will not try to take any particular side in the debate and will simply try to let you decide whether change in the language is necessary or whether it destroys the soul (root) of the language. Some of the things I will be discussing include the growing language of the internet (it now literally has its own dictionary), whether or not the usage of social networking destroys what we understand as proper language and if in the modern society the gap between formal and informal language is slowly disappearing as younger generations increasingly seem to forget the existence of formal language. In short do technology and the anonymity of the internet and the changes in the way we speak make us essentially ruder when talking with others?

Ever since the industrial revolution and the rise of newer, better, faster communication methods and technologies, people have started to coin new words for all the new appliances and ways of life. Up until recently though the speed of this change was relatively slow, although nowadays with the thunderous speed of technological change newer and newer words and changes in languages are emerging. After the information revolution of the 20th century, school systems started to improve. Schools became places for education not only for the rich and wealthy but for the common guys as well. As a result people started to become more literate and the changes in the language reflected this rise of literacy. Nowadays with the rise of the internet some people can even choose to educate themselves through the internet.

This growth led to the growth of the language of the internet. People suddenly started to change the way they speak on the internet by mangling and shortening words. Suddenly acronyms like LOL (laugh out loud), ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing) became part of our lives to show our emotions in an electronic setting. There is even an excellent website that defines all these acronyms that people “need” to know to survive in the cyber world. It is [www.netlingo.com](http://www.netlingo.com). These acronyms can be considered as a way of not so positive change in language because instead of forming proper sentences younger people find it easier to just use acronyms in their everyday lives as well. Believe me when I say that I actually saw students using these in schools. On the other side of the coin one can argue that in the fast-paced world that we live in today, people need to shorten their sentences to save time. Well, I leave the decision up to you whether this is good or bad, but my personal opinion it is one of the aspects that can degrade a language when not properly used. This can especially be seen if you take part in discussion forums on the internet, some of the spelling and grammar mistakes are so appalling that you wonder whether these people had proper school education. Apparently this phenomenon is not only a big problem in English but also in Turkish and Russian as well. It seems people are forgetting how to form proper sentences, even in their native tongues.

This rise of the language of the internet has led the way to the growth of blogging and social networking. This in turn has led to the addition of new words to the English vocabulary. The word “blog” for example is one of the best examples of language change in a technological context. It is actually the blending of the term “web log” into a single word “blog”. The short form of weblog was coined by Peter Merholz in 1999. Shortly thereafter, Evan Williams at Pyra Labs used “blog” as both a noun and a verb (“to blog” meaning “to edit one’s weblog or to post to one’s weblog”.) and devised the term “blogger”. As of December 2007, blog search engine Technorati registered about 112 million blogs on the internet. Despite being a relatively new word used to describe people writing and sharing their opinions on the internet, it is now officially part of most official English language dictionaries. This shows how a word can in 10 years go from being an obscure reference to web logging to one of the most widely used and popular words today and is one of the biggest technological changes in language.

Another very recent word addition to the English language with a basis in technology is “to twit”. Social networking site Twitter became so popular that it coined a new word in the English language. People now go around using the word “tweeting” when posting something on Twitter. Another new term that originated from twitter is “micro blogging” which defines only limited blogging by people. Since its creation in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Twitter has gained immense popularity and currently has more than 100 million users worldwide. More importantly in relation to our topic it has led to the creation of the verb “to tweet” as a means of describing the sending of a message through twitter. The two actual meanings of the word twitter are 1) “a short burst of inconsequential information” and 2) “chirps from birds”. As a result we can say that both blogging and twitting changed the language and the way we speak for a new generation. People suddenly lost the distinction between necessary and unnecessary information as most blogs and twits ended up being used for pretty useless information.

Another result of the change of language in a technological context is the gradual loss of the ability to write properly. This goes hand in hand with the extensive use of acronyms but that is not the only reason. Because Twitter limits the usage of the vocabulary to only 140 words, most of the stuff written on Twitter end up as gibberish or simply grammatically incorrect. This affects both the reader and the writer negatively. Reader because he has a difficulty understanding and writer because he is simply destroying the language and is not aware that he is actually destroying the language. This can lead to students making obvious grammatical mistakes in their school lives because most of them do not use proper English at all in writing on the internet. What this can eventually lead to is the degrading of the language, which can be considered as a negative result of new technology’s effects on language.

Another important result of the change in language because of technology is the loss of the distinction between formal and informal language. With the rise of the internet language the formal part of the English language is all but gone. This is mainly because of the anonymity and the freedom of the internet. There is a lack of spelling and grammar police in the vast world of the internets and because most people don’t know one another they believe nothing can happen if they speak informally. We can observe all these distorted, mangled words in internet forums, chat rooms and even in e-mails. This can also result in disrespect amongst the people chatting on the internet. I believe that no matter the atmosphere or the condition of the chat, people must use a level of formality when addressing others, especially if the person you are talking to is not a personal friend. This problem I believe can be solved by giving proper internet language lessons to children in schools as part of their computer literacy lessons. It is important to use the internet, to meet new people through the internet but the one thing we should not forget is to be formal and respectful in our interactions with others whether we are speaking to them directly or through a computer.

To sum up there are many changes in language in a technological aspect, but what is important is not to overwhelm ourselves and our languages with these changes. There is no problem if these changes occur smoothly and homogenously but if we force these changes then we’ll have a problem. We should leave the language alone and let it run its developmental course and because it is not static it will eventually change by itself to accommodate the needs of the modern generations. We should also not forget that everything is in motion and as long as our world is continuing to spin this motion will continue. Language change is a large part of this world of motion and we cannot stop this change no matter how hard we try. In the end we should embrace it but at the same time we should make sure that the soul of the language also remains intact, because a person’s language defines his culture and his personality and each and every language in the world must retain its uniqueness.

Литература:

1. The quote of Yoda taken from: Star Wars Episode 5 the Empire Strikes back, 1980 Lucasfilm production.

2. [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

3. [www.netlingo.com](http://www.netlingo.com) “The Internet Dictionary: Online Dictionary of Computer and Internet Terms, Acronyms, Text Messaging, Smileys”