Impact of Social Networking on Language

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Abstract : *With the coming in of social networking and instant message services the generation's interest and ability to communicate efficiently with their peers has increased. With the growing years, social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace & Twitter etc. have become a rage due to which a new wave of communication is sweeping across the world.*

This research aims at examining and establishing the role and impact of social networking related variants on language and various other related issues which play an important and complementary role in affecting/influencing the communication skills of the youth today. It discusses the different notions regarding the impact of social networking on language, and the use of grammar in social networking and instant messaging.

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Introduction :

Social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a structured system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Nowadays with the exploration of the new-age media, social network caters to the growing needs of the people worldwide and has had a great impact on the language of its users, and has considerably affected the linguistic communications particularly used by the young generations. It is considered both as a threat and a benefitting tool for the language. With the aforesaid perspective, this project entitled 'Impact of social networking on language' proposes to explore the impact that the new-age media particularly social networking has on the linguistic communications both spoken and written as used by the youth

today. "**Written communication**" in instant messaging chat and other forms of electronic communication have generated a new language full of **incomprehensible abbreviations** and **acronyms word combinations** and **punctuations**. Participating on social networking sites and instant messaging are having a negative impact on the use of English language.

The younger generation is most at risk as they are being subjected to undesirable reading and writing habits due to which their regular formal literary skills are getting hampered. Children and youth of the future generation are being subjected to a new found communication skill which has left behind the grammar and its rules and is becoming a rage among the youth.

- There are now more than **800 million active Facebook users**, with over 200 million added in 2011.

- **Over 80% of all Americans** use a social network.

- Americans spend more time on Facebook than any other U.S.website.

- **Nearly 23% of online time is spent on social networks.**

- There are 900 million objects that people interact with (pages, groups, etc…).

Language is a way of expressing and recognising the many social identities people have. It is both acquired naturally and taught formally and both natural acquisition and formal teaching create, strengthen or weaken the links between languages and identities. An important language identity link is the one between 'national language' and 'national identity'. This link may be created, strengthened or weakened by formal teaching in schools, especially in language as subject. People acquire new identities and new languages or language varieties throughout life; it is a dynamic process. If young people become conscious of this process, they can play with their languages and identities, shifting from one language to another within the same conversation, signalling a change from one identity to another. Young people have been shown to be adept at this as they move from one social situation to another becoming consciously plurilingual.

The Internet has encouraged global use of English to such a degree that other languages have been crowded out. And indeed, in the mid-1990's, 80% of international Web sites were reported to be in English. Concerns about English used online have sparked new efforts to improve English language instruction in many countries. The internet has also proven to be a vehicle for written communication in dialects and languages that previously were used principally for oral communication. *The current study aims to examine the most significant Internet tools, Social Networking Sites (SNS) or online community specifically aimed at encouraging communication between young people and how social media is changing the identities and languages of young people.*

Influences and Impact

Electronic communication has gradually become a rage among youngsters and large cross sections of the society. Technology plays a very important role in communication today. The cellphone is one of the most effective, convenient and widely used technological instruments of global communication. It uses a communication facility known as the Short Message Service (SMS) which is relatively cheaper both in terms of time and money spent during the process of communication. One uses fewer and shorter words compared to direct communication over the cellphone.

Notwithstanding the myriad benefits provided by the social netwoks and other forms of written communication (SMS) in enhancing communication and improving global business, generally these have been found to have a *detrimental effect* on the language proficiency of learners. Learners use it as if is an officially accepted and standard language. They mix it with the standard language they learn at school, especially the English language and consequently commit numerous errors ranging from incorrect spelling to ungrammatical sentence constructions.

A few influences are listed below:

- **Spoils spelling** : There are high chances of developing grammatical errors. Communication misunderstanding is high. There is lack of clarity in sentence.

- **Influences on languages** and communication : SMS communication is used mainly in the private social environment. It offers an increased experience of psychological nearness between the text author and the text reader. The adept use of these personalised language short forms is an indicator of group affiliation and a component of group identity. The mass media labels SMS communication as the secret code of the youth or as the big SMS action against long sentences. A text message reflecting this would be one which combines features of a written medium with features of a spoken medium, but this combination is usually not intentional.

- **Influences on languages and communication** : Emoticons, such as J, J and :P are a representation of body language, which would otherwise be missing from non face-to-face communication. In terms of its linguistic characteristics, stereotypical speech is interactive, and dependant on shared space, time, and background knowledge; stereotypical writing has the opposite characteristic. SMS language conventions resemble speech in many of its prominent characteristics.

- **Confuses Non-Users**: Speaking or writing with SMS words can confuse those who are not familiar with the language. Many people within older generations, who do not use text messaging very often, may not understand a message if it contains SMS language, particularly acronyms. For example, someone who does not understand SMS language may receive a message with the acronym "**ROTFL**" which means "Rolling on the floor laughing" and wouldn't know that the message sender thought the subject matter was funny.

- **Gives Negative Impression**: Using the SMS language outside of text messaging, in speech and emails, can give the recipient a negative impression of the messenger. When a word from the SMS language is used in an inappropriate situation, such as a business email, it can seem unprofessional or simply be misinterpreted as a spelling error. For example, the SMS word "ppl" stands for "people" and could easily be confused as a spelling mistake by those who are not knowledgeable of SMS abbreviations. Furthermore, using SMS words instead of their English-language counterparts can convey to the recipients that the messenger is lazy and could not be bothered to complete the longer version of the word.

- **Deteriorates the English Language**: The spread of the SMS language has been criticized for deteriorating the English language and its rich history. Though languages continually evolve, the SMS language can be seen as not respecting the long-standing properties of the English language that has made it so strong. Furthermore, words within the SMS language that are very similar to their English-language counterparts can be confused by young users as the actual English spelling and can therefore increase the prevalence of spelling mistakes.

Hypothesis :

This research project assumes:

- Firstly,the majority of the College youths will be using SMS language in writing due to the popularization of the new age social networking and SMS language.

- Secondly, the College youth of today are using social networking and SMS language very often in their conversation.

- Thirdly, the youth perceive that social networking and SMS language will emerge as a new dialect as it is being used by the literary youths of today and therefore, influencing their language learning and identity.

Methodology :

Subjects : The study was carried out among 60 undergraduate students at Patna Women's College of Patna, Bihar known to be Internet users. The category of "undergraduate students" was chosen because it represents the generation of Internet users in India. The undergraduate students in this study were selected through personal contacts; the subjects may not be representative of all undergraduate students in India. "Undergraduate Students" were defined for the purpose of the study as people between the ages of 18 and 21 studying in Patna Women's College. Almost all had part of their education in English. As Instrument a written survey was developed that inquired about people's language online. The survey included 10 questions about language use online (e.g., *Do you think that you have come in the era of SMS and the social web?)*

Recipients were also asked to include voluntarily examples of any e-mail messages or online chats that illustrated the points covered in the survey.

Data Analysis :

The questionnaire comprised of ten questions. The respondents just had to mark the option which they found to be correct as it was a closed questionnaire. The data analysis was done on the basis of the responses provided by the the respondents.
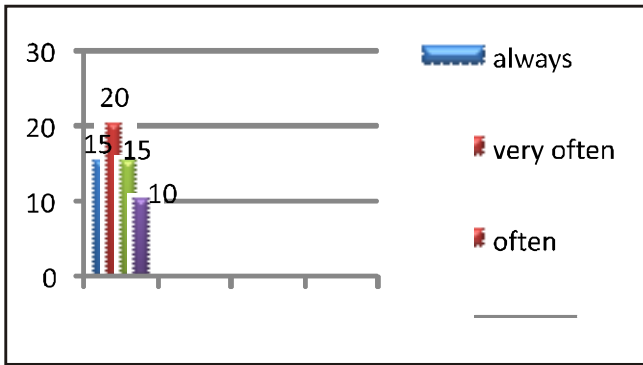
**Q.1. How often do you use Social Networking Language in your conversation?**
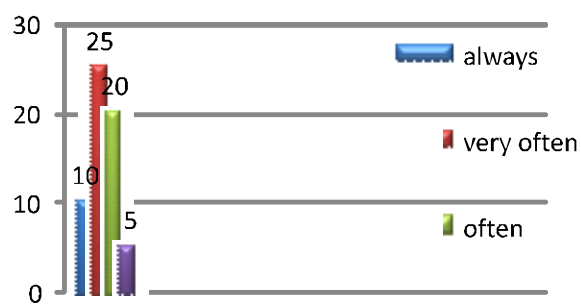
Q. 2. How far do you think email, SMS, and social media communication tools have irreversible impacts on the way we write?
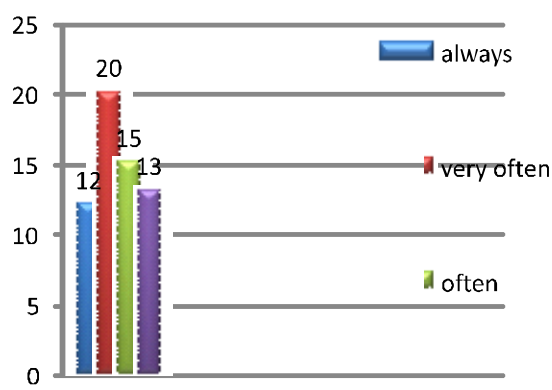
Q.3. How often do you think that you are tempted to use '18r' and countless other SMS abbreviations to save time and space?
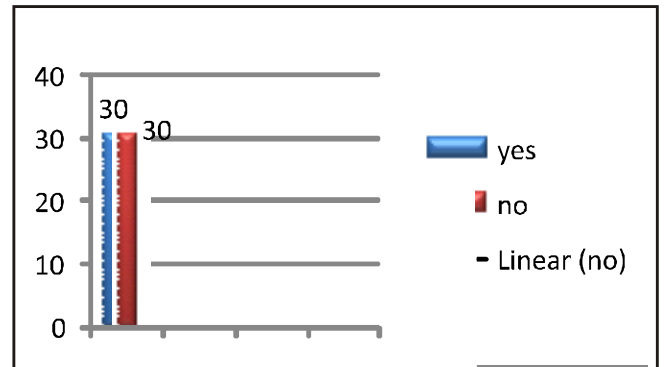

Q. 4. Do you think that you have come in the era of SMS and the social web?

Q.5. Do you think that the emergence of new dialect is perceived as a threat to teenagers 'literacy' and therefore, the future of Standard English?

Q.6. Do you think that SMS language not only hampers formal writing but also oral skills, as texting undermines student's capacity to use words in the appropriate context?
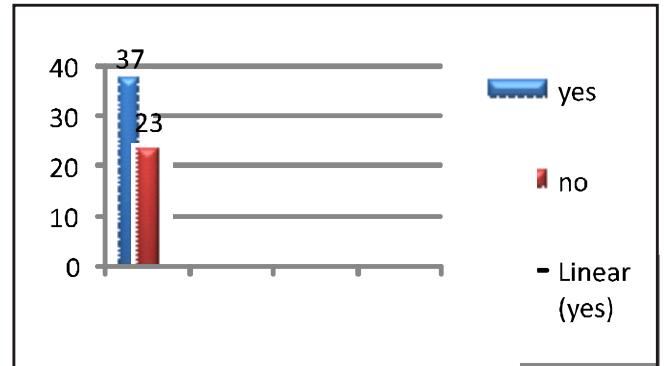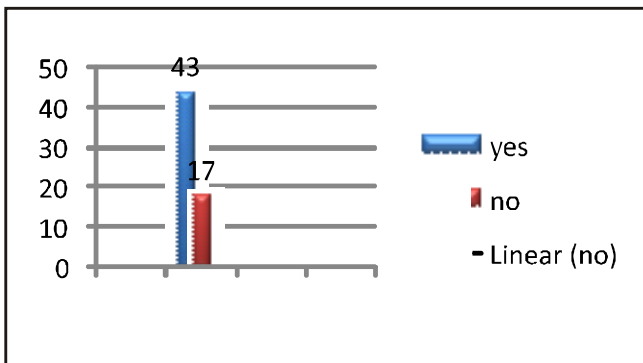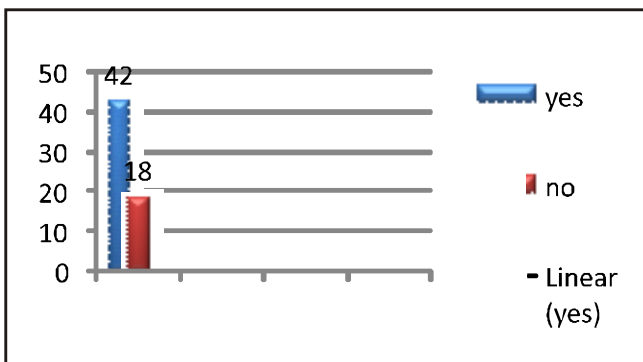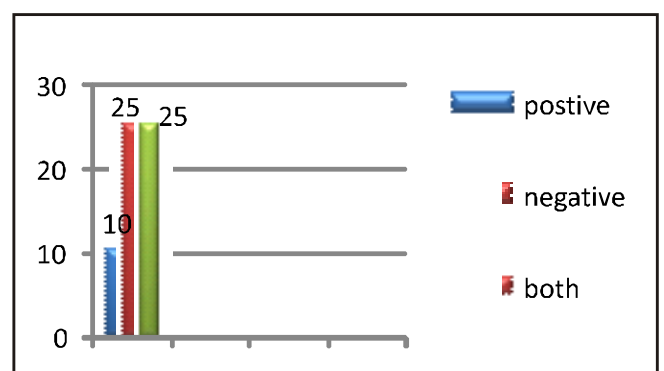

Q.7. Is the emergence of Internet language a threat to the people of old generation, Non English User and even to the English Users?

Q. 8. Do you think Social Media and Internet Language has a positive /negative impact over the language.Give your opinion?

Q. 9. Do you think that the evolution of language from Shakespearean English to Internet English can be treated as a subject for teaching?
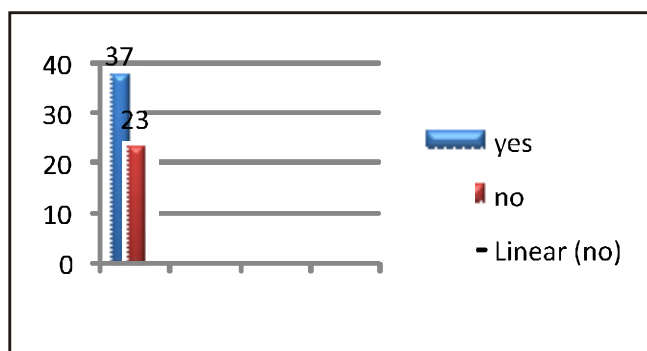
Results :

English was seldom used by any of the 60 participants in their online and SMS chatting. Many of the respondents feel that its having an adverse effect on the language. Rather, online communications featured a new and unusual mix and match of regional languages, English, and several forms of Hindi. This might to a great extent confuse the learner.

Therefore, the particular aspects explored in this study :

- the online written languages,
- SMS language, and
- its impact on language learning and identity.

The study proves the three hypotheses.

Limitations :

It is important to point out the limitations of this study. The sample size is small and was selected through personal contacts of the researcher, and is thus non-random. In addition, no systematic attempt was made to assess participants' fluency in English. For these reasons, the results of the *study cannot be assumed to be generalizable to other populations beyond this group of subjects.*

Rather, this study should be considered an *exploratory investigation that had the goal of identifying possible issues and trends for further research.*

Conclusion :

This research paper has highlighted the impact of social networking and SMS language on the language proficiency of learners. These languages do not conform to grammatical or syntactic rules of the English language, nor do they conform to spelling rules.

In addition, this research shows that the language is achieving new colours and tones in the world in which we live. Through this study it has also been indicated that the English language proficiency of the learners is negatively affected by learners' exposure to social networking and SMS language both through the print and the electronic media.

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