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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH

A.S. Atayeva
Azerbaijan University, Jeyhun Hajibeyli 71, Baku, Azerbaijan
e-mail: asmaratasoy@gmail.com

Abstract. Social media has become an important setting for the production, circulation, and interpretation of contemporary English. This article examines how digital communication is associated with lexical innovation, abbreviations, grammatical and stylistic variation, multimodal meaning-making, and the construction of online identities. The study uses a qualitative, literature-based approach: key concepts and findings from research on computer-mediated communication, digital discourse, and sociolinguistics are brought together and examined through illustrative examples of online language. The analysis distinguishes between changes in the language system and context-sensitive choices made by users in particular communicative situations. It argues that social media can accelerate the circulation of expressions and expand the range of English registers, while the adoption and durability of individual forms depend on community, audience, and context. The article also considers implications for English language teaching, particularly the need to develop learners' register awareness and digital literacy. As the study does not analyse a newly collected social-media corpus, its examples are illustrative rather than statistically representative; further corpus-based research is needed to measure the frequency and spread of specific forms.

Keywords: Social media, contemporary English, digital discourse, sociolinguistics, lexical innovation, linguistic variation, computer-mediated communication.

Introduction

Language changes in response to social practices, cultural contact, and technological developments. Social media has become a prominent environment for communication in which users create and circulate text alongside images, audio, video, emojis, and other signs. These conditions make online communication different from many traditional forms of writing: it is often immediate and interactive, reaches audiences beyond the writer's immediate social circle, and allows expressions to be copied, remixed, and redistributed. Crystal [4] argues that internet communication should be understood as a distinctive linguistic environment rather than simply as a degraded form of writing. Research on social media likewise highlights the relationship between language, identity, and community [7].

English is especially visible in these environments because it is used by people with different first languages and cultural backgrounds. Its online use includes standard forms, informal expressions, abbreviations, localised usages, and combinations of English with other

languages. These practices do not all represent permanent changes to English. Some are temporary trends, some are restricted to particular communities, and others may become established in wider usage. It is therefore important to distinguish between the rapid visibility of a form online and evidence that the form has become a stable part of the language.

This article examines the influence of social media on contemporary English through five related areas: lexical innovation; abbreviation and linguistic economy; grammar and register; multimodal communication; and language, identity, and global English. It also considers implications for English language teaching. Its central argument is that social media provides conditions in which linguistic forms can circulate quickly and users can make context-sensitive choices, but these developments should not automatically be interpreted as either language deterioration or permanent language change.

Methodological Approach

The article adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach. It synthesises established work on internet language, computer-mediated discourse, social media, and multilingual communication, including Crystal [4], Herring [5], Baron [2], Zappavigna [8], Androutsopoulos [1], and Tagliamonte [6]. The sources were selected for their direct relevance to digital language practices, online interaction, lexical and stylistic variation, and identity construction. The analysis organises insights from this literature into recurring themes and uses familiar online expressions to explain the linguistic processes discussed.

The examples in the article-including forms such as “LOL,” “unfollow,” “doomscrolling,” and “ghosting”- are illustrative examples used to clarify concepts. They are not presented as observations from a newly collected or systematically sampled dataset. Accordingly, the article does not calculate frequencies, compare platforms statistically, or claim that a particular expression is more common on one platform than another. Its contribution is interpretive: it connects examples of digital language with concepts from sociolinguistics and digital discourse, and draws out implications for language teaching. A corpus-based study with defined sampling criteria would be required to test the prevalence, distribution, and development of particular forms empirically.

Social Media as a Linguistic Environment

Online communication complicates the distinction between speech and writing. A short post may be written but resemble spontaneous conversation through fragments, repetitions, contractions, direct address, and expressive punctuation. At the same time, the post remains visible and can be shared with an audience that the writer may not know personally. Herring [5] emphasises that computer-mediated discourse must be analysed in relation to both

technological conditions and the social practices of users. The platform provides possibilities for communication, but it does not determine language use on its own.

The participatory nature of social media also affects how language spreads. Users can repeat an expression, adapt it to a new context, or attach it to a meme or trend. A form that begins within a small community may become recognisable to a wider audience, although circulation does not guarantee long-term adoption. Seargeant and Tagg [7] show that social-media language is closely connected with audience, identity, and community. Therefore, the meaning and usefulness of an expression depend not only on its dictionary meaning but also on who uses it, where it appears, and how other users interpret it.

Lexical Innovation and Semantic Change

Lexical innovation is one of the most visible features of digital communication. Social-media practices have helped popularise words such as “selfie,” “influencer,” “unfollow,” “hashtag,” “doomscrolling,” and “ghosting.” These examples illustrate different relationships between technology and vocabulary. “Unfollow” applies a familiar word-formation pattern to a platform action; “doomscrolling” combines existing elements to name the repeated consumption of distressing online content; and “ghosting” has acquired a widely recognised interpersonal meaning associated with suddenly ending communication without explanation. These examples show that digital culture can create new terms and extend the meanings of existing ones.

The importance of such forms lies not simply in their novelty but in how they become useful within communities. A new expression can offer a concise label for an experience that users repeatedly discuss. Social platforms make it easy for people to encounter and reproduce such labels, but the long-term status of a word cannot be inferred from visibility alone. Some forms remain tied to a trend or community, while others enter broader informal or mainstream usage. Research on language online encourages attention to the practices and contexts in which digital texts are produced and interpreted [3].

A useful distinction is therefore between lexical creation, diffusion, and conventionalisation. Creation refers to the appearance of a new form or meaning; diffusion concerns its movement between users or communities; conventionalisation occurs when it becomes established enough to be recognised and used beyond its original setting. Social media can accelerate diffusion, but establishing whether conventionalisation has occurred requires evidence from usage over time, not a few isolated examples.

Abbreviations and Linguistic Economy

Abbreviations such as “LOL” (laughing out loud), “OMG” (oh my God), “BTW” (by the way), “IDK” (I do not know), and “TBH” (to be honest) are familiar features of informal digital communication. They can save space, signal shared knowledge, or establish a conversational tone. Shortened forms such as “info” and “admin” also reflect broader processes of clipping and abbreviation that are not exclusive to social media. Digital communication may increase the visibility and frequency of these forms in particular settings, but the forms themselves belong to wider patterns of language economy.

Brevity should not automatically be equated with limited linguistic ability. Users may select an abbreviation in a private message but avoid it in an academic essay or formal email. Tagliamonte [6], in their study of youth internet language, show the value of examining online language as patterned usage rather than assuming that it is simply a deterioration of grammar. Baron [2] similarly argues that the effects of electronic communication on language are complex. The relevant question is not whether abbreviated language is inherently good or bad, but whether a form suits the audience, purpose, and communicative situation.

Grammar, Syntax, and Register Variation

Informal social-media posts may contain sentence fragments, omitted subjects, lower-case writing, repeated punctuation, or non-standard spellings. For example, “literally cannot deal with this” omits the subject “I,” while a formal version might read “I literally cannot deal with this situation.” In a conversational post, the omitted subject may be recoverable from context and may help create an immediate, expressive tone. The example illustrates a register choice; by itself, it does not demonstrate that users are unable to produce a complete sentence.

Register refers to language choices associated with a communicative situation, including audience, purpose, and level of formality. Social media makes several registers visible side by side: a user may write a humorous comment, a professional announcement, and an academic explanation on different occasions. It is therefore more accurate to discuss variation and appropriateness than to classify all informal online forms as incorrect. At the same time, informal digital conventions do not replace the expectations of academic and professional writing. Users need to recognise when standard punctuation, complete sentences, and formal vocabulary are required.

Claims that social media has caused a general decline in English require evidence that compares language use across contexts and over time. The illustrative examples discussed here cannot establish such a causal relationship. They support a narrower interpretation: digital communication offers contexts in which informal and expressive forms are common, while

users' choices remain sensitive to context. This distinction avoids treating a visible stylistic feature as proof of a broad change in linguistic competence.

Multimodality: Emojis, Hashtags, and Memes

Social-media meaning is often multimodal: words operate together with images, symbols, audio, video, layout, and platform-specific features. Emojis, for example, can indicate emotion, reinforce a statement, soften criticism, or signal irony. Their interpretation is not fixed, however. The same emoji may be read differently depending on the relationship between participants, the surrounding text, and community conventions. Emojis can support interpretation, but they do not remove ambiguity from communication.

Hashtags organise content and connect posts to wider conversations. They may identify a topic, frame an evaluation, or signal affiliation with a community. Zappavigna [8] explains how searchable social-media language can create affiliation and make social relationships visible across networks. Hashtags can therefore function both as practical labels and as rhetorical choices. Their interpretation depends on the topic, the intended audience, and the discourse in which they appear.

Memes provide another example of meaning-making through the repetition and adaptation of text and images. A phrase may become recognisable because it is repeatedly attached to a particular image or situation. When users adapt it, the expression can acquire new meanings or humorous effects. Such meaning is often context-dependent and may be difficult to understand without knowledge of the original reference. These practices demonstrate that contemporary digital communication cannot be analysed through words alone; visual and cultural knowledge also matters.

Social Media, Identity, and Global English

Social media provides multilingual users with opportunities to use English alongside other linguistic resources. Users may switch between languages, borrow words, or combine expressions associated with different cultural settings. Androutsopoulos discusses [1] networked multilingualism as a set of language practices shaped by digitally connected audiences and communicative purposes. These practices challenge the idea that online English is used only according to a single native-speaker norm.

Language choices can also signal identity and group membership. Slang, humour, spelling, hashtags, and recurring phrases may indicate age, profession, shared interests, or affiliation with an online community. However, these signals should not be interpreted mechanically: one linguistic feature does not reliably identify a person's background. The meaning of a form emerges from its use in a particular social context. Research on social media

and identity highlights the relationship between language practices, interaction, and community formation [7].

The resulting picture is not that English has become a single uniform digital variety. Rather, online communication creates contact between diverse users and allows different Englishes and multilingual practices to become visible. This diversity can expand the resources available to users, while also producing misunderstandings when participants do not share the same cultural references or conventions.

Implications for English Language Teaching

For English language teaching, the main implication is the importance of register awareness. Learners encounter English in comments, captions, short videos, memes, and online conversations as well as in textbooks and formal texts. Teachers can use selected examples to help learners identify abbreviations, informal syntax, implied meanings, and the role of emojis or hashtags. Comparing a social-media message with a formal email or academic paragraph can make differences in tone and structure explicit.

Such activities should be designed around clear learning objectives rather than the assumption that social-media language is automatically authentic or educationally useful. For example, learners can classify expressions by formality, rewrite an informal message for a professional audience, or explain how an emoji changes the interpretation of a sentence. Teachers should also discuss audience, privacy, reliability, and the possibility that online expressions may be ambiguous or inappropriate in other contexts. These tasks can support digital literacy and pragmatic competence alongside vocabulary development.

The effectiveness of any particular classroom activity should be evaluated rather than assumed. The present article proposes pedagogical applications based on the reviewed literature; it does not report classroom experiments or learner outcome data. Future teaching research could compare learner performance before and after register-awareness activities, or examine whether students become more accurate in choosing language appropriate to academic, professional, and informal contexts.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This article is limited by its literature-based design and does not present a newly collected corpus of social-media posts. The examples are selected to illustrate linguistic processes discussed in the literature; they cannot establish the frequency of forms, their distribution across platforms, or changes in usage over time. The article also does not compare particular age groups, language backgrounds, or national contexts. Consequently, its conclusions are

interpretive and should not be treated as statistical generalisations about all social-media users or all varieties of English.

Further research could address these limitations through a transparent corpus design. A study might define a sampling period, select public posts from specified platforms, establish inclusion and exclusion criteria, and code examples for lexical innovation, abbreviation, syntax, multimodality, and multilingual practice. Frequency counts could then be combined with qualitative analysis of context and communicative function. Interviews or classroom-based studies could further investigate how users understand these forms and how register-awareness teaching affects learners. Such methods would make it possible to test claims about prevalence, platform differences, and educational outcomes more directly.

Conclusion

Social media influences contemporary English by providing highly visible environments for lexical innovation, abbreviated forms, informal syntax, multimodal communication, and multilingual interaction. The examples discussed in this article show how digital practices can give new meanings to existing words, circulate expressions across communities, and make language choices part of identity and affiliation. These processes do not mean that every online expression becomes permanent or that informal digital usage has replaced standard English.

The analysis supports a contextual interpretation of digital language. Linguistic forms should be understood in relation to audience, purpose, platform, and community, and broad claims about language decline require systematic evidence. For educators, the practical priority is to help learners move flexibly between registers and interpret multimodal communication critically. Because the present study is based on existing literature and illustrative examples rather than a new empirical corpus, future corpus-based and classroom-based research is needed to measure the distribution of particular forms and evaluate pedagogical interventions.

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SOSİAL MEDİANIN MÜASİR İNGİLİS DİLİNƏ TƏSİRİ

Ə.S. Atayeva
Azərbaycan Universiteti, Ceyhun Hacıbəyli 71, Bakı, Azərbaycan

Xülasə. Sosial media müasir ingilis dilinin yaradılması, yayılması və şərh olunması üçün mühüm kommunikativ mühitə çevrilmişdir. Məqalədə rəqəmsal ünsiyyətin leksik innovasiyaya, ixtisarlara, qrammatik və üslubi variasiyaya, multimodal məna yaradılmasına, eləcə də onlayn identikliyin formalaşmasına təsiri araşdırılır. Tədqiqat kompüter vasitəçiliyi ilə kommunikasiya, rəqəmsal diskurs və sosiolinqvistika sahələrində mövcud elmi ədəbiyyata əsaslanan keyfiyyət xarakterli təhlildir. Ədəbiyyatda müzakirə olunan anlayışlar tematik şəkildə ümumiləşdirilir və onlayn dil nümunələri izahlı məqsədlə nəzərdən keçirilir. Təhlil göstərir ki, sosial media ifadələrin yayılmasını sürətləndirə və ingilis dilində istifadə olunan registrlərin çeşidini genişləndirə bilər, lakin ayrı-ayrı formaların yayılması və dilə uzunmüddətli daxil olması auditoriyadan, icmadan və kommunikativ kontekstdən asılıdır. Məqalədə ingilis dilinin tədrisi üçün registrlərarası fərqləri anlamağın və rəqəmsal savadlılığın əhəmiyyəti də vurğulanır. Tədqiqat yeni toplanmış sosial media korpusuna əsaslanmadığından, nümunələr statistik baxımdan reprezentativ deyil. Konkret dil formalarının tezliyini və yayılmasını müəyyənləşdirmək üçün gələcəkdə korpus əsaslı empirik araşdırmalara ehtiyac vardır.

Açar sözlər: Sosial media, müasir ingilis dili, rəqəmsal diskurs, sosiolinqvistika, leksik innovasiya, linqvistik variasiya, kompüter vasitəçiliyi ilə kommunikasiya.