

Slang has been used by people for hundreds of years, dating as far back as the Middle Ages (Eble 11). As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, slang is, “The special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character; language of a low and vulgar type; The special vocabulary or phraseology of a particular calling or profession; the cant or jargon of a certain class or period; Language of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense” (“Slang,” def. 3a,3b,3c). Slang can be used to identify what kind of a group a person is in and who their friends are. Similar to this is jargon; however slang is not as exclusive as jargon is. While slang is typically used by the younger age groups, middle school age through college age students, more so than older adults, it is used by all different types of people. Part of this is because slang can be easily explained and used in many different settings. In the article, *We’re Cool, Mom and Dad Are Swell*, Moore discusses different criteria a word or phrase needs to meet in order to fit under the heading of slang. Some of the criteria discussed are: its usage lowers the seriousness or formality of the speech; its usage shows status or lack thereof and or how familiar one is with another; some sort of taboo is associated with it; and/or it is used to make explaining something easier or more comfortable (We’re). Many of the definitions overlap to an extent, to a basic definition of informal speech.

It has been said that slang is the linguistic equivalent to fashion, since it changes from generation to generation and terms and phrases can be hot this season and then next season they are out of style (Eble 14). Slang is not permanent and is constantly evolving. It is true that there are certain slang words that have become a staple in a person’s everyday use of language, but most slang would not be readily understood ten years after its popularity. Also, slang has primarily been used in oral communication, when talking to a friend or classmate (Eble 13). For most of the time that slang has been used, it has not had an effect on written communication. One possible exception would be a student writing something informal, such as a note to a classmate. Going along with this, slang has also been used in informal situations and rarely used in formal situations, such as a job interview, because it is deemed unprofessional by society. Slang fell under these perimeters for many years. However, the times have changed.

Technology has become an essential part of today’s world. Most Americans’ lives rely heavily on some sort of technology. Almost all aspects of a person’s life can be connected to technology from the past fifty years, especially the computer and the many things that work with the computer. For the most part, new innovations come to be conveniences that help make life easier. The internet is one of those conveniences that people just can not get by without now. With the leaps and bounds that have been made technologically, the way that we communicate has changed. Everyone is so much easier to get a hold of with e-mail, chat rooms and instant messengers. Teenagers and young adults have especially taken advantage of these new communication tools. No longer do they have to tie up the phone line just talking to only one of their friends. Now it is so easy to talk with more than one friend, no matter where they are and even surf the internet or write a paper at the same time. Simply stated, the internet is user friendly.

Just like most of the other aspects of life, communication in particular, it has been affected by technology. Going hand-in-hand with communication, slang has also been affected by technology, mostly the computer, in a very big way. Slang has been kicked

up a notch to include a new field of communication, the internet. This new slang is often called text speak, chat lingo or internet slang and is used in instant messaging programs, chat rooms and now on cell phones in text messages. Slang is now breaking barriers that it would once dare not cross. The slang that is used on the internet is almost exclusively used in written communication and used infrequently in oral communication.

This new slang has changed how people can communicate on the computer and internet. If a fairly new computer/internet user were to sit down at a computer and to chat with a few friends who have been instant messaging for a while, it is quite possible they would need a translator. An average conversation could go something like this, “hey, how r u? o im ntb, u? im gr8! well i g2g, ttyl! l8er.” In that short conversation, it can be seen that there is only one word, in the entire conversation, that uses correct spelling and grammar. However, this is how young adults are communicating every day in the United States and other westernized cultures. The internet slang is basically removing vowels and “extra” letters to make words and phrases as short as possible. I find it amazing and startling how little this can look like English, while still being English. However, since it is English at its most minimal form, it is easily picked up. It is not easy to decode all of the time, though. In fact, it can be quite confused at times. However, there are many internet web pages that have the equivalent of a translator that can take Standard English and translate it into chat lingo. A web site that I found was called transl8it.com. I typed in the phrase, “I hope you had a good weekend!” Transl8it.com, a part of the company msgNOW, then changes that into, “i hop u had a gud wknd!” . Even though words are sometimes dramatically shortened, for the most part, they are spelled phonetically. It could be said that people are writing the way that they talk (Hale 7). While it seems to me that a translation web page might be taking this a little too far, it is still humorous and could be used for fun. It would be unreasonable for this web site to be used for anything more than that though, despite the fact it does give a good example the differences in formal writing and the slang used on the internet. For example, if you were talking to the President of the United States, it is assumed that you would take on a different tone, vocabulary and appearance than if you were talking to your best friend. With the help of technology, this difference has now been taken into the world of written communication. It would not take an expert code-cracker to figure out that when a teenager wrote “thnx” to their friend, he was simply saying “Thanks”, in a more informal and casual way.

Taking the shortening of words a step further is making common chat phrases and turning it into an acronym. For example, instead of writing, “I’ll be right back”, the person chatting could simply put “brb” and get the same point across. However, this is not a new trend. People have been using acronyms in speech for a long time, such as NASA, scuba, AIDS or DNA. Even in oral slang, acronyms have been present for quite a while as seen in the usage of S.O.L. or P.O.S. in common oral communication. Once again, the new slang on the internet has taken this aspect to a different level. The main reason for using an acronym is because it is a common phrase, not like in oral communication where as acronym is used to make a name of an organization easier to remember or to use for fun. It would be possible to carry on a short, but effective, conversation using only internet slang acronyms. That would be nearly impossible in oral communication. Another new aspect is the near complete absence of English grammar. Conversations are almost devoid of any sort of punctuation, except for the occasional patch of exclamation points. Capitalization is also used irregularly.

Following the observations I made and information I found, I started to speculate some of the events or changes that had some kind of effect on slang to make it into the internet slang that is commonly used today.

I was talking to a friend of my parents about how people, most often the students of today, are throwing away the rules of grammar in this relatively new way of communicating. Listening to him gave me a great perspective, especially comparing it to my educational experience. He talked about how when he was in college, in order to graduate, every student had to pass a writing exam. That sounds familiar to requirements that we have today, but he had more to tell. If a student were to make a handful of grammar mistakes (about 5) they would have to take the test again. In order to prepare students for taking this test, teachers would be much more strict on grading students' paper, especially in regards to grammar. This surprised me, considering I can not think of many instances where I have been graded that strictly on grammar. After that conversation, I believe that the education I have received does not put nearly as much of an emphasis on grammar as education has in the past. This may come into play with the grammatical laxness in chatting on the computer.

Another aspect of today's education that I put into question, or at least a part of my education, was how I was taught to spell. In my early elementary years, teachers encouraged students to sound words out when we were writing. This often resulted in atrociously spelled words, throughout elementary school up to even now. I do not know how wide spread this practice was in the early 1990's, but if it was common, I believe that may also attribute to changing words into skeletons of words. These word skeletons are only the bare minimum of letters needed to figure out what the word is; it may also attribute to so many people chatting phonetically.

Another possible factor in the coming about of chat lingo would be the transition from the typewriter, to the computer and then to using Microsoft Word with auto spell and grammar checks. In the days of typewriters, it was in the typer's best interest to do the job as near perfect as possible in regards to grammar, capitalization and spelling. Once you hit the key, it was on the paper and it was not easy to change. People would write out drafts and edit them before going to the typewriter in hopes of avoiding any mistakes. The contrast to today's writing process is almost that of night and day. When a student gets a paper, he or she rarely writes out the paper before they type it on the computer. Furthermore, many rely on the automatic spell and grammar check to catch any of the mistakes that they have made. If they do make a mistake, it is not a big deal, since it is so easy to change, especially when it is pointed out and the student does not have to do any of the work or editing. So, it is only natural that when a student is typing in something else that does not have a spell check, such as an instant messenger program, those mistakes slip through the cracks and are out in the open. However, it does not seem to bother most of the younger generation who uses this chat lingo and is accepted.

In introducing the computer, internet and instant messaging programs to my mother, I was able to see how the many years of using a typewriter and the importance of correct grammar in her schooling had affected her. When she and I began chatting online, it would take her a while to type out what she was saying. One reason was that her typing skills were a little rusty, but other reasons were that she wanted to be careful not to type something incorrectly, out of habit from using the typewriter. When I was able to watch her type, I was able to pick up on another thing, after she had typed her

message, she would go over it and look for spelling and or grammar mistakes and correct them before sending the message. While typing, my mother would always use capital letters, correct words and correct punctuation. However, after chatting with my sister and me online for a period of time, I gradually noticed her loosing the use of correct grammar and punctuation. No longer does she capitalize all proper nouns and words at the beginning of sentences. She still uses punctuation markings, but not nearly as much as she used to. At the beginning of her usage, she did not use any internet slang; however, she has picked some of it up and uses them regularly in instant messaging. The aspect that she uses most is acronyms. One of her favorites is ttfn (ta-ta for now). She also takes the liberty to make her own acronyms and if she types, “well, i think it is time for me to gtb”, I know that she is going to “go to bed” soon. She is just starting to use emoticons, and like acronyms, she has a few staples. Internet slang is easy to pick up on, and appeals to the lazier side, if you will, of people. I believe that the process I watched my mother go through is similar to that of many people who start using internet slang. When I was introduced to instant messaging, I am sure that the process was similar, although, I do not remember specifically. It is quite interesting to see how my mother’s writing has changed to encompass internet slang, and often times humorous.

As it is clearly seen, there are many characteristics of internet slang. It could almost be called a dialect of English, because it is specific to a group of people; it is used by many of the people who communicate on the internet. Along with calling it a dialect, slang used on the internet is going a step beyond slang. There are unsaid rules and guidelines that are followed by the users of internet slang. These rules have become so prominent, that there are people who are offended when these rules are broken; however most try to abide by the unwritten rules. Many adaptations have been made to this slang to help it be able to communicate feelings, ideas and emotions that would not have been as easily expressed in regular, conventional text.

Internet slang has brought about new rules for communication, what is polite and customary online. For example, when two people first start chatting online, it is not unusual for them to exchange their “a/s/l”, which is their age, sex and location. These three pieces of information are usually not evident in a chat environment, while most of that can be picked up on fairly quickly in a conversation where the people are physically in the same area. Another example of the etiquette used online is to not use the caps lock unless you are angry or upset and yelling at the person you are talking to. Someone new to the online chat environment might not realize they are basically yelling if they are typing in all capital letters, while someone who has used chat rooms before would take offense to someone doing that throughout the entire conversation, even if it is unintentional. After using chat slang for a little while, the user picks up on the unspoken policies and uses them regularly. In a lot of chat rooms there are people to monitor the conversations and make sure that people are abiding by these rules, along with other rules to protect the security of the people chatting.

There are problems with students using internet slang being used outside of the internet and in formal writing situations. With most programs used for writing, such as Microsoft Word or Works, there is an auto correct feature that can help to point out most mistakes. However, it would not be able to pick up everything. It would let “r”, used instead of “are”, slip by in a sentence, along with other shortened words and abbreviations. It is my thought that since a student uses chat rooms and instant

messengers so frequently that they would unknowingly use it in their formal writing. More advanced writers might be able to make the switch more smoothly between chat lingo and formal writing, but I thought that it would still have some kind of affect on the writer, and I was correct. I have heard and read several personal accounts from teachers who find these kinds of errors in formally written papers, handed in for a grade. The habit has been formed and computer programs, such as Microsoft Word – which many students rely on to catch their mistakes, have not been able to fully translate their internet slang back into Standard English. Also, I have listened to my high-school aged sister talk with one of her friends and I actually heard my sister's friend say, "LOL" in oral conversation. I originally thought that would be a very rare occurrence, but after asking them if any of their friends used internet slang while talking, they said it was not uncommon.

I mentioned earlier in the paper that slang helps to identify people to a group or a certain type of people. This can be taken advantage of and used to hurt people. Since a majority of the users of internet slang are teenagers or close to that age, people who are trying to take advantage of them can easily pick up on it and pretend to be someone they are not. All children who use the internet and meet and talk to people should, by now, know to never give out personal information or agree to meet with someone they do not know, especially alone. Many people have heard stories of children meeting someone on the internet who was lying about their real identity and the children are abducted. Part of the reason some of the abductors are able "befriend" the child is by using the same kind of rules and slang that the teenagers are using. Someone who communicates the way they do will give the impression of being friendlier than someone who would chat as if they were writing a term paper. Also, a person typing in Standard English would probably have more of a parent-like image associated, someone most teenagers are trying to avoid and would not go out of their way to talk to. Even though internet slang is not for an exclusive group of only teenagers, bad people are able to use it for their gain and take advantage of a fairly unsuspecting child.

While the evolution of internet slang has its negative sides, it also has positive, fun and useful aspects to it. Writing used to lack in showing how the writer was feeling. The reader had to rely on the skills of the writer to accurately figure out what the feeling was behind the text. Often, sarcasm or humor could be easily over-looked and often times, deep analysis would be needed to figure out the mood or feeling of the writing. Now, users of internet slang add in many ways of showing how they feel. It is common for the typer to use the acronym, "lol" or one similar to it to tell the other that they are laughing or find something amusing. However, the strange thing about "lol" is that it has evolved to become a space filler or a phrase to end a thought or idea with, instead of showing that the writer is actually laughing out loud. As mentioned earlier, writing out a word, phrase or sentence in all capital letters shows either its importance or it shows anger or frustration. This is another way that slang on the internet has changed to show how a person is feeling.

One very important step in showing emotions was the beginning of the use of emoticons. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, emoticon is defined as, "A representation of a facial expression formed by a short sequence of keyboard characters (usually to be viewed sideways) and used in electronic mail, etc., to convey the sender's feelings or intended tone." ("Emoticon"). Essentially, an emoticon is a basic picture that

conveys an emotion or feeling. For example, the most basic emoticon is the standard smiley face, :-). It can be clearly seen what is trying to be conveyed, someone is happy or smiling. From this example, many different emoticons became prominent. Most of the time, an emoticon is a face with some kind of expression or defining trait. However, there are many emoticons that are animals or objects, along with other things. Some examples of different types of emoticons are: ;-) a winking smiley face, O:-) an angel, :- {) someone with a mustache, (: [] :) a band aid (for someone who is offering help or condolences to a hurt friend), @-->--->----- a long-stemmed rose and finally *(<):o) a clown. As one can tell, much time, effort and creativity have been put into coming up with these different emoticons for different occasions.

Since the creation and spread of wide-use of emoticons, instant messenger programs (AIM, MSN, Yahoo etc...) have made it so when the user types in the keys to make an emoticon, the program will show an animated and sometimes even moving emoticon. Something similar to this is also true with more recent editions of Microsoft Word. When the user types in : -), without any spaces, Word will automatically change it into ☺. While this may seem to be a fun convenience at first, I came to the conclusion it might not be the best idea. Students are already having a hard time separating the two writing environments, casual internet communication versus writing formally. It makes the distinction between the two areas more and more fuzzy, if Word makes it possible for a student to use an emoticon in their English paper.

Most people are able to tell when their friends are not in a good mood when they are talking. Some of the signs that give away are the tone, rate and volume of someone's voice. Another is the body language they are using, along with any facial expression. About the only way a person can have this is if they are standing next to each other and carrying on a conversation. With the telephone, some of these aspects are still present, mostly the characteristics of the voice and one is able to judge how someone is feeling from that. However, while chatting on the internet, all human characteristics are removed and it would be seemingly very difficult to tell the mood of a person. However, it is not unusual for friends to pick up on another friend having a bad day while talking online. Similarly to the rate, volume and tone of the voice, people online have the same for their writing. If someone is answering questions online with short, basic answers, it is quite possible that the person is uninterested in the subject or they have something else on their mind that is bothering them. In online conversations much more attention has to be paid to what the person says, instead of how they say it. Usually when you can pick up on a difference in the way someone writes if you have talked to them before. Another sign is their use of emoticons. Many upbeat girls use emoticons excessively and when they are upset, one might notice the absence of them, or the nature of their emoticons not being as upbeat.

In conclusion, slang has come to a completely new level with the common use of internet and communicating on the internet. This new slang has had to stretch the definitions of slang as we knew it. Slang can now be written just as much as it is used orally. Rules for writing are being turned upside down and ignored with the intentional misspelling and shortening of words and the absence of grammar and punctuation. Many different factors have contributed to the laxness of internet slang, including the differing standards for grammar and also the change from stiff typewriter to the flexible computer. Internet slang has definite traits that make it stand out from other types of slang and even

has its own rules to follow. Internet slang has adapted to compensate for the lack of personal contact in different ways, such as emoticons helping to convey one's emotions and feelings easier. While it is hard to definitely say whether or not the effect of internet slang is mostly beneficial or detrimental, there are very important positives and negatives. While it has lessened the use of correct grammar, it has made writing more popular among the younger generations. Internet has definitely made its mark in popular culture and will most likely be prominent for quite some time, maybe for as long as the internet exists. Internet slang will continue to evolve and meet the communication needs of its users, despite any criticism it may receive. 18r

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