

# An Analysis on the Forms and Characteristics of English Netspeak

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**Abstract.** As a new language variant, Netspeak has been a part of English, and plays a more and more significant role in modern communication. Therefore, the study of English Netspeak has a great practical significance in the age of Internet. In this paper, it is found that English Netspeak has four forms: homonyms, abbreviation, compounding and emoticons. In the aspect of features, the author concluded that there are innovation, conciseness, flexibility and humor in English Netspeak. In addition, the author points out the defects of English Netspeak.

## 1. Introduction

The birth of Internet initiates a new era for human to communicate. Internet is increasingly important nearly in all aspects of daily life, and it often replaces some traditional methods of communication. Internet, the information expressway, has already become a kind of necessity to modern people. In some degree, it is unimaginable to work and live without Internet.

As we know, the leading language online is English; about 80% of the information on the Internet is in English. No one can deny the essential place of English on the Internet. Therefore, it is necessary to explore this new born language form-Netspeak, the English language on the Internet. David Crystal, a professor of linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor, first substitutes Internet language for “Netspeak” in his book *Language and the Internet* (2001). And most people prefer to call it E-language casually. In a narrow sense, English Netspeak is a language used on BBS, QQ or WeChat. In a broad sense, English Netspeak refers to network-related language.

This essay looks into the English Netspeak used on the Internet, and attempts to study the new language variant. To know better this language form, the author makes effort to survey and analyze the forms and characteristics of English Netspeak.

## 2. The Forms of English Netspeak

### 2.1 Abbreviation

Abbreviation is a general word, which is the most common way to create Netspeak in the Internet world, especially the technical words. In this paper, abbreviation is classified into two categories as follows:

#### 2.1.1 Initialism

Initialism makes words easy for understanding and fastens the speed of recognizing and differentiating words. For example:

BBS=bulletin board system;	AI=artificial intelligence;
NOYB=none of your business;	VG=very good;
TYVM=thank you very much;	EOM = end of message;
TIA=thanks in advance;	PM=pardon me;
CPU=central processing unit;	UK=United Kingdom.



### **3. Characteristics of English Netspeak**

As a language variant, Netspeak not only has the common features of language, but also possesses some unique characteristics. According to the collection above of the popular words used online in recent years, this paper will summarize the characteristic of Netspeak from four aspects as follows:

#### **3.1 Innovation**

Innovation is a distinctive feature of the network buzzwords. Compared to the traditional written language, English Netspeak is more creative and productive. The innovation is mainly reflected in vocabulary. Innovation refers to the coinage use based on the words or expressions already existed, namely, entitling the existing words new meanings.

#### **3.2 Conciseness**

As society develops fast, people have a great sense of time. Netspeak seems to be simple and convenient to save time to communicate effectively. If one has conversations with several friends at the same time on Internet, the concise Netspeak can help him/her save a lot of time to maintain conversations with friends. English Netspeak tends to be concise and easy to understand, so just several words or signs could carry many meanings. No doubt it is shared as a fashion.

In addition, network buzzwords have changed some conventional word-formation patterns to create a new form of combination of sound and meaning, such as emoticons and figures talked above.

#### **3.3 Flexibility**

English Netspeak is flexible in creation and distribution. The word “flexibility” has two layers of meanings. Firstly, we can freely invent any form or kind of Netspeak. In other words, no authority can dominate the creation of Netspeak and everyone can create new words on the Net. For example, now everyone knows “B2B”, and we can follow the example and invent “B2W” (business to women), “B2K” (business to kids), “B2P” (business to parents), “B2Y” (business to youth) and even “B2A” (business to job applicants) and “B2D” (business to decision makers). Secondly, Netspeak is easy to be distributed, free of charge. With these kinds of favorable features, English Netspeak has no reasons for not being popular all over the world.

#### **3.4 Humor**

In modern society, people face much more competition and severe pressure. Many people tend to get rid of the pressure through all kinds of recreational activities. Netizens always deliberately use surprising language to cause a shock effect. They use different word patterns to interact with others, for instance, they use emoticons to show their facial emotions. No one will deny that the use of emoticons and homonyms in QQ will bring us a lot of joys.

The emoticons can shorten the distance between people in online interaction. Many people are attracted by the Internet and Netspeak. They think that Netspeak enriches the traditional language and bring people a lot of joys.

### **4. Defects of English Netspeak**

During the information times, there is a growth of informality in language use. Therefore people will concern about the deterioration in the quality of the language. Parents and many educators are becoming increasingly alarmed by the effect of English Netspeak on the writing skills. Teenagers spend much time online everyday, exchanging “instant messages” with friends mainly in Netspeak, showing little regard for formality. They may write like that: “can u plz write me a funny story about friendship cause i need it for school.” The little concern to grammar and spelling may become troubles in schoolwork and other formal writing, and even in communication. For example, the famous pop singer Avril Lavigne’s biggest hits “Sk&r boi” once puzzled many people, “what does it mean?” In fact, it means “Skater Boy”. She splits the word Skater into two parts: “sk” and “ater”. Because “ate” has the similar pronunciation with 8 (eight) and “boi” has the similar pronunciation

with boy, “Skater Boy” changed into “Sk8r boi” in English Netspeak. “Sk8r boi” indicates teenagers’ rebelling personality, but it does cause some troubles in communication, and it may mislead students in English learning.

In addition, some abbreviation in English Netspeak have many possible explanations, which will bring much difficulties to accurate understanding. For example, how do you know whether the term “B2S” implies “business to seniors” or “back to school”? And does “B2M” refers to “business to men” or “back to mom’s”? This kind of abbreviation will confuse people, and misunderstanding might happen.

## 5. Summary

There is a trend of the simplicity in English in history. At present, the trend of the simplicity of English appears in the cyber world. The short form and other simple grammar of Netspeak is increasingly accepted by people. As a new-born language, Netspeak is a part of English, and it is worth studying. The paper finds that there are four forms of English Netspeak: homonyms, abbreviation, compounding and emoticons. The paper concludes that English Netspeak has the characteristics of innovation, conciseness, flexibility and humor. In addition, the paper probes into the defects of English Netspeak.

Due to the limitation of time and knowledge, there are still some disadvantages in this paper. The paper only analyzes the forms and characteristics of English Netspeak, and does not research the reason of the emergence of Netspeak, which needs further study in the future.

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