

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MODERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EVOLUTION: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This study investigates how digital communication platforms accelerate the evolution of the English language among university students in Uzbekistan aged 18–21. By analyzing social media discourse through a mixed-methods approach, the research identifies a significant integration of neologisms, acronyms, and altered syntactic structures into the students' daily linguistic repertoire. The findings conclude that social media acts as a primary catalyst for linguistic drift, necessitating a shift in pedagogical strategies to address the narrowing gap between formal and digital English registers.

Keywords: Digital linguistics, Social media discourse, Language evolution, Neologisms, Netspeak, Uzbekistan university students, EFL pedagogy.

1. Introduction

The acquisition of English in the 21st century is no longer confined to traditional classrooms; it is strongly influenced by the digital ecosystem. As learners engage with global platforms, they inevitably adopt the sound patterns, lexical habits, and informal rules of “Netspeak”. While traditional linguistics often focuses on structural mismatches between the mother tongue and the target language, modern evolution is driven by the rapid spread of digital neologisms. This study explores how these features shape the English proficiency of Uzbek students, focusing on both the lexical and pragmatic aspects of their communication.

2. Methodology

This study employed a comprehensive mixed-methods approach to investigate the impact of social media on English language evolution among Uzbek learners.

2.1. Participant Selection The participants consisted of 60 Uzbek university students enrolled in English language programs at Fergana State University. These individuals represent intermediate and upper-intermediate proficiency levels, ensuring they have sufficient exposure to the language while still demonstrating noticeable linguistic influence from their digital environment. The age group (18-21) was selected specifically due to their high engagement with social media platforms like Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok.

2.2. Data Collection Instruments Data collection involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure a holistic understanding of the phenomenon:

1. **Digital Corpus Analysis:** A systematic review of public social media interactions was conducted. Researchers analyzed comments, captions, and direct message samples provided by participants to identify the frequency of neologisms and syntactic deviations.

2. **Standardized Survey:** Participants completed a questionnaire designed to assess their recognition and usage frequency of 50 common Internet slang terms and acronyms.

3. **Spontaneous Speech Task:** Participants were asked to speak on familiar topics related to digital trends, allowing natural linguistic patterns and “code-switching” to emerge.

2.3. Procedures and Analysis

1. **Transcription and Categorization:** All audio and text data were transcribed and categorized into three main groups: Lexical (new words), Syntactic (shortened sentences), and Pragmatic (use of emojis/tone).

2. **Semi-structured Interviews:** To complement the quantitative data, interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to explore their perceptions of linguistic change.

3. **Statistical Evaluation:** The analysis combined statistical frequency counts of specific digital markers with a thematic analysis of interview responses.

3. Results

The findings revealed a profound and systematic influence of social media on the English language usage of Uzbek students:

3.1. Lexical Innovation and Neologisms

The data showed that 88% of participants frequently use social media-specific neologisms. The most common terms identified included “cringe,” “ghosting,” “slay,” and “aesthetic.” These words are often used not only in digital chats but have started appearing in oral classroom discussions, indicating a shift from digital-only use to general vocabulary integration.

3.2. Acronym Saturation and Syntactic Simplification

The study identified a high frequency of acronyms such as “POV” (Point of View), “IDK” (I Don't Know), and “FR” (For Real). Over 92% of students correctly identified these terms. Syntactically, the results showed a tendency toward “telegraphic” sentence structures, where subjects or auxiliary verbs are omitted for speed (e.g., “Going now” instead of “I am going now”).

3.3. Pragmatic Shift: Emojis and Punctuation A significant finding was the evolving role of punctuation. For 76% of participants, using a full stop (.) at the end of a short message was perceived as a sign of anger or excessive formality, rather than a mere grammatical

requirement. Emojis were consistently used to provide the “suprasegmental” emotional context that is usually present in face-to-face speech.

4. Discussion

The results provide clear evidence that the English used by Uzbek learners is being fundamentally reshaped by digital interference, leading to a shift in both lexical choice and communicative behavior.

4.1. Digital Language Transfer In light of contemporary research on digital multilingualism, students appear to map new social media trends onto their existing linguistic identity (Lee, 2023). Because these digital terms provide a “cool” or “global” social status, they are adopted much faster than traditional academic vocabulary. This mirrors how native phonotactic constraints influence pronunciation, but in this case, the “constraint” is the social pressure to sound modern and connected within a globalized digital culture (Mcculloch, 2019). This rapid assimilation suggests that the influence of social media is now as powerful as first-language interference in shaping the learner's output.

4.2. Impact on Intelligibility and Style While some educators fear that social media “ruins” language, recent findings in applied linguistics suggest that these changes may actually enhance global intelligibility among peers in non-native contexts (Seidlhofer, 2018). However, the difficulty lies in the “perceptual gap”—students often struggle to switch back to formal academic registers. This confirms that production errors in the digital age are often rooted in deep-seated perception gaps regarding register and context-appropriate language use (Derwing & Munro, 2016). Learners prioritize speed and emotional expression over the structural accuracy emphasized in traditional pedagogical frameworks.

4.3. Pedagogical Implications The persistent use of informal digital rhythm and vocabulary suggests that instructional frameworks in Uzbekistan must adapt to the 21st-century linguistic landscape. Instead of ignoring social media's impact, teaching should target “register awareness,” helping students distinguish between the “staccato-like” rhythm of digital English and the requirements of formal academic prose (Zappavigna, 2018). As emphasized in recent studies, the goal of modern EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education should be the development of “digital literacy” alongside linguistic competence, ensuring learners can navigate both informal digital platforms and formal professional environments (Gretter & Yadav, 2016).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social media significantly influences the English language evolution of Uzbek university students. The findings highlight challenges in maintaining academic standards while embracing the benefits of modern, fluid communication. As digital platforms continue to evolve, so will the English language. Educators must bridge the gap

between traditional instruction and the authentic spoken and written English that students encounter online.

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