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“Textspeak Speaking”

Linguists have long debated over what classifies a language and what classifies a dialect. Thankfully, it seems, a sort of conclusion has been reached. If two languages are “mutually intelligible,” meaning those who speak one form can understand the other, they are likely dialects of a common language.¹ This, doesn’t cover all there is to say—all forms of communication make up a complicated world—but it offers a good starting place.

One can also take this line of thinking and apply it to the forms of communication used inside of a language. For example, think of how similar the language of a speech and the language of a conversation are. Think of how different they are as well. These situations require different responses. These are known as registers or situational dialects.

The same thinking is relevant to the different forms of written communication. There is formal writing, such as this, and informal writing, which may never see the close eye of many readers. The two could easily be classified as registers, but for the sake of argument it is useful to think of them as dialects instead. A writer in formal English can often understand informal written English—or textspeak—and a textspeak writer can understand a formal writer, and thus they are mutually intelligible.

The subject is further complicated as the written inherently implies some level of forethought or control that the spoken does not always require. Writing, whether formal or informal, is a skill, learned and taught the same way one learns to ride a bicycle. As they grow, humans naturally acquire spoken language and the ability to use it. Writing doesn’t work the same way. Therefore, a writer must consciously apply their learned skill in one way or another.

*are u done?
can i talk now?*

Have you been trying to come up with what to say next this whole time? Please don’t interrupt.

*wtf i didnt interrupt
this is a CONVERSATION
so plz chill*

I hadn’t finished my thought. Let me say everything I have to say before you respond.

¹ Marc Ettliger, "What's the Difference Between a Dialect and a Language?" Slate Magazine, February 3, 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/quora/2014/02/03/what_s_the_difference_between_a_dialect_and_a_language.html.

*we'll be here forever if we wait that long...
its like u dont kno how to share lol 😞*

Excuse me?

A N Y W A Y

basically what all of this means is that textspeakers can understand normal english and formal writers SHOULD be able to understand textspeak (sometimes they just... dont tho)

and b/c of that they arent like different languages

theyre different forms of the same thing

u talk differently when you talk to your boss vs ur friends

Yes, that's what I was saying. Will you allow me to go on?

no lol

ive got more to say

#immediacy



as long

as

i

keep talking

like this

Say what you wanted to say. I will wait if I must.

okay cool thnx so

languages are rly complicated and like

dialects and languages are kind of the same thing? sometimes?

b/c in china they speak "dialects" but no one can understand each other

but in like norway and sweden they have "languages" that r almost the same.

its weird

whoever had the better military got to pick the language pretty much ²

² John McWhorter, "What's a Language, Anyway?" *The Atlantic*, January 19, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/difference-between-language-dialect/424704/>. McWhorter explains that, "Mandarin and Cantonese, for example, are more different than Spanish and Italian," and yet his Swedish friend can speak to someone from Norway in his native language with ease.

I believe the quote you want is, "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy," as said by linguist Max Weinreich.³

sure i guess

that sounds right

its just weird that the people in charge got to decide a whole language for everybody. and then in schools everybody learns that language so that they all speak the same and write the same and think the same or at least they do in front of ""the man"" so they dont get in trouble

(mayb im makin this up idk)

but wait

wait

jfc

the formal english ppl r in charge

r u gonna start coming after me w/guns and shit now?? to stay in charge???

b/c that's not ok



No, of course not. Especially not if you make an effort to help me understand you. You use so many new words and abbreviations that it's hard to know what you mean sometimes.

!!

let me live abbreviations have a lot of history

people abbreviated things in old manuscripts b/c it saved time/ink/effort

those old books were big my dude

gotta save time n space somewhere (#gogreen)

it wasn't just normal books too like they abbreviated in the bible ⁴...THE BIBLE



I suppose language hasn't changed as much as we might think, but it can't be denied that change is the norm. Esteemed linguist Walt Wolfram wrote, "The only language not in a perpetual state of flux is a dead language."⁵ If languages didn't

³ McWhorter, "What's a Language Anyway?". Ettliger, "What's the Difference?". Both McWhorter and Ettliger quote Weinreich in their exploration of dialects. Ettliger offers a shorter summary definition while McWhorter looks at the question from more angles and uses more examples.

⁴ Cameron Hunt McNabb, "The Truth about Internet Slang: It Goes Way Back," *Salon*, August 3, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/08/03/the_truth_about_internet_slang_it_goes_way_back/.

⁵ Walt Wolfram, "The Truth About Change," PBS.org 2005, <http://www.pbs.org/speak-ahead/change/change/>. Wolfram's essay is part of an online collection of essays and articles on language change under the title "Do You Speak American?" as gathered by PBS.

change perhaps we would still be using the pictograms of the first written communication, which were hardly translatable across cultures. It has taken change to make the written word more universal.

Perhaps, though, the change is moving too quickly now. With the rate of evolution of textspeak is it possible that its users are losing their sense of the rules? What sort of risk does this over-evolution pose?

*ok that thing about textspeak ruining english or whatever is #fake
so dont attack me for it.*

*ppl hav literally ALWAYS been complaining about language change. ⁶
throwin a fit over it now doesn't mean anything and it especially doesnt make me want
to listen to u. like at all.*

I was getting to that. I believe you, trust me. Multiple linguists have concluded that textspeak is not affecting its user's ability to write.⁷ A few, like linguistics professor David Crystal, assert that textspeak actually requires more skill and understanding of how language works. Crystal says, "Before you can write and play with abbreviated forms, you need to have a sense of how the sounds of your language relate to the letters."⁸ As the poet needs to understand grammar rules before they can break them, so the textspeaker needs to know their language before they can break it.

*ive been TRYING to tell you that its on purpose
sometimes its cause the medium needs us to write less (@twitter) but really that doesn't
happen anymore*



*b/c like when i have to write formal i will, i get theres different contexts for things.
theres a right place and a wrong place for everything*

As you said, one doesn't sound the same when they talk to their boss compared to when they talk to their friends. Presidents don't talk to their families the same way they address the country.

Imfao

⁶ John McWhorter, "Ttxtng Is Killing Language. JK!!!" (lecture, TED2013, February 2013), https://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_killing_language_jk. McWhorter, an enthusiastic linguist, features a list of these complaints in his talk. Around minute 9:45 he presents complaints written as far back as 1841, and an extraordinary example from 63 A.D. from a man complaining about the current trend in Latin. That trend would later become French.

⁷ S.A. Tagliamonte, and D. Denis, "Linguistic Ruin? Lol! Instant Messaging And Teen Language," *American Speech* 83, no. 1 (2008): 3-34. doi:10.1215/00031283-2008-001. Tagliamonte's work is a perfect example of this well established belief among linguists. See the other work of John McWhorter, David Crystal, and Derek Denis for more examples.

⁸ David Crystal, "2b or Not 2b?" *The Guardian*, July 4, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jul/05/saturdayreviewsfeatres.guardianreview>.

i hope not



imagine being the first spouse and having the president try to talk to you like that:



“Dearest, we are currently facing quite a difficult time, one fraught with a supreme lack of unity between me and my lunch. It is now more important than ever that we come together to solve this crisis, ideally with a grilled cheese sandwich.”

i kno they have cooks or w/e but... makes ya think

As you say, people tend not to speak the way they write. Linguist John McWhorter touches on this, saying, “In a distant era now, it was common when one gave a speech to basically talk like writing,” referring to the very formal speeches given in the past. He also introduces a very important phrase: “fingered speech.”⁹ This is a new way to classify textspeak rather than calling it proper writing. It is writing as if people were talking to one another.

*that shit took like 2 hours to listen to
not the talk but the old time-y speeches*

...

like the one before the gettysburg address took THAT LONG¹⁰

T W O H O U R S

we dont do that anymore

we've got places to BE



I though textspeak wasn't meant to save time these days. You said yourself that textspeak is used occasionally, “cause the medium needs us to write less...but really that doesn't happen anymore.” Even if it takes less time to write out abbreviations, isn't some of that time lost along the way? John Humphrys wrote, “If the recipient of the message has to spend ten minutes trying to translate it, those precious minutes are being wasted.”¹¹ Will you really get where you want to be faster after those wasted minutes?

so maybe it DOESNT take less time

but so what? it doesnt take longer than formal writing 😞 😞

...

⁹ McWhorter, “Ttxtng,” 3:00.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5:30.

¹¹ John Humphrys, “I H8 Txt Msgs: How Texting Is Wrecking Our Language,” *Daily Mail*, September 24, 2007, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-483511/I-h8-txt-msgs-How-texting-wrecking-language.html>. Humphrys argues mostly in the name of tradition throughout his article, but in places his arguments are sound, as is the case here.

*have u ever thought about how long it takes to find an emoji?
its a long time
l o n g
and like, memes? (lol ☕)¹²
unless u have that saved its just going to be a waste*

Then what are you really doing? What is the purpose of textspeak? It doesn't save time and its tradition in manuscripts is built on that. It is okay to admit you're wrong, sometimes. I've been trying to.

*fine.....
all of that is true
please be careful how you say it tho
a lot of the time people say that *im* exactly like textspeak
they say its a lazy language so i must be lazy¹³
you already told me that isnt true. everyone knows textspeak isnt a shortcut and it isnt
lazy and it doesn't make you dumb
😭😞*

...
*would it be fair of me to say that formal writers are stuffy?
or old fashioned?
or boring?
☕👁️*

Forgetting to see one another as communicators making conscious choices is part of the problem, so no. If you are making a choice, why choose it? Especially considering how divisive the choice has become.

*its like you said
textspeak is “fingred speech.”
i do it so i can *sound* more like myself or as close as it can b with writing
when i use an emoji u can SEE what i mean*

¹² Harley Grant, "Tumblinguistics: Innovation and Variation in New Forms of Written CMC" (Diss., University of Glasgow. Academia.edu. Accessed November 15, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/18612487/Tumblinguistics_innovation_and_variation_in_new_forms_of_written_CMC#_=_, 28-29.) This is mostly from measured personal experience, but Tumblinguistics also explains this in terms of the image response.

¹³ Ksenija Bogetić, "Metalinguistic comments in teenage personal blogs: Bringing youth voices to studies of youth, language and technology," *Text & Talk* 36, no. 3 (May 2016): 249-50, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost. Bogetić explains this phenomena called iconization: "a semiotic process whereby characteristics of a language are seen as an iconic reflection of essential characteristics of its users."

*as well as hear it/read it/whatever
(this is kind of confusing because u can only sorta read textspeak out loud even if it
SOUNDS like speaking in ur head. BRAINS ARE AMAZING)
and stuff LIKE T H I S shows how i would say the words out loud*

*paralanguage*¹⁴

and!!! different spellings can mean different things like

YAAAASSSSSS ✨ ✨ ✨

is different from

yeah.^{15 16}

...

can u see the difference?

can YOU see the difference?

*(that's got rules too but its weird and confusing and also fluid?? i use both u and you in
sentences, idk dude)*¹⁷

So it's about better showing your personality and adding flare to your words?

no no no dude

its that and also feelings

dont u FEEL the joy in YAAAASSSSSS ✨ ✨ ✨ ?

and if id said

yes.

wouldnt u feel different?

punctuation/capitalization/EVERYTHING matters

its more paralanguage n stuff

everything got all stern. serious. all of a sudden.

¹⁴ "Can You Speak Emoji?" YouTube Video, 12:39, Posted by "PBSIdeaChannel," April 13, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRNVf-1M7xQ>. Technically paralanguage is a part of spoken communication—nonverbal things such as gesture and tone—but as textspeak is "fingered speech" it can be applied as "textual paralanguage." My first introduction to the concept of textual paralanguage was "Can You Speak Emoji?"

¹⁵ Megan Garber, "How to Say 'Yes' (by Not Saying 'Yes')," *The Atlantic*, April 10, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/04/how-to-say-yes-by-not-saying-yes/390129/>.

¹⁶ Leonora Epstein, "The 21 Ways People Say "Yes" When Typing, Defined," *BuzzFeed*, February 12, 2014, https://www.buzzfeed.com/leonoraepstein/the-21-ways-people-say-yes-when-typing-defined?utm_term=.bcnAx5pOz#.lrq17M08v. This is a humorous examination of the concept of "yes" affirmatives and word choice, but it also proves that even the least academic writer is aware of their word choice.

¹⁷ Gretchen McCulloch, "What's the Difference Between "You" and "U"?" *MentalFloss*, May 7, 2015, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/63598/whats-difference-between-you-and-u>.

a period says "i don't want to talk about this anymore" (and other stuff tbh)¹⁸

Suppose I didn't see all the differences that you're talking about?

then you arent the same as me.

you dont rily kno my dialect like i have to kno urs

¯_(_/)_/_

...

that sounds mean

its just. textspeakers expect this sort of thing

and it comes with the community/medium we're a part of/using ^{19 20}

sounding super formal in a text is weird AF

...

the whole point of communicating is to bring us together.

make us understood.

y would i confuse/alienate/isolate my audience that way ²¹

???

Regardless I worry that there is exclusion in your choice. If you choose to write the formal way, it will be easier for everyone to understand you.

what if i dont want everyone to understand?

Why wouldn't you want everyone to understand you?

idk

i guess

...

¹⁸ Ben Crair, "The Period Is Pissed," *New Republic*, November 23, 2013, <https://newrepublic.com/article/115726/period-our-simplest-punctuation-mark-has-become-sign-anger>.

¹⁹ Grant, Chp 2.3-2.4. Grant discusses the way community affects what topics are discussed in a medium and how a user might adapt their own language to match the overall tone of the medium and the community.

²⁰ Bogetić, p 261-62. Bogetić examines how one textspeak user defines his choice as a way of identifying with the rap community. Additionally, this user suggests that, "on here," (meaning on the internet and in textspeak mediums) grammar rules are different, and so users should expect more informal forms.

²¹ Jen Doll, "Why Drag It Out?" *The Atlantic*, March 2013, March 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/03/dragging-it-out/309220/>. While not strictly an article on the concept of alienating the recipient of messages, Doll ends her article with an observation after an activity proposed by Tagliamonte. Not using elongations (adding extra letters to words) in texting often gets a "What's wrong?" response as the tone has suddenly become formal.

*im not trying to talk to everybody
that isnt what this is FOR, y'know?
when im using textspeak im probably talking to one other person mayb like 4 max
and they already know ME*



*hey.
we're supposed to be like, related or something.
u understand me right?*

I just worry that you don't understand how to communicate effectively now. I want you to be able to say what you want to, but I want you to do it in the best way.

i mean

...



I can still do this, with the long sentences, and the correct grammar and spelling. I can go on, and I can sound smart and be understood. You know that.

*but u know what i mean like this too
y force myself to do that when i dont have to?
i dont sound like myself when i do that.
i sound like you.^{22 23}*

*and this way u know how i *feel* which means more to me
we feel closer, not like we're writing across time or distance or on the internet but in the
same place
talking.
together.
there isnt rlly a BEST way
just the way that we pick for where we are and what we're doing*

...

*y do u even bother sticking to formal if its just convention?
dont you want to relax sometimes?
do u just like being ""better"" than me?*

No, that's not the point. I just believe formal language is more universal. As we've established, someone who writes in textspeak can understand formal English, and

²² Bogetić, p 261-62. Users recognize the way they are writing, and suggest that it is simply a part of who they are. Elsewhere in the study it is shown textspeakers may choose formal written language as a way of presenting a more intelligent self.

²³ "Can You Speak Emoji?" 2:00. Textspeak is a way of presenting one's identity not just in the context of community but on one's own. Emojis can also be used to represent oneself in conversation (by means of skin color, gender, or other identifier).

formal English is more easily translated into other languages. This way more people can access my work. I also think I can argue more effectively and better represent my sources. That allows me to be more inclusive in my conversations. My readers can find the material I've read without having to seek me out and ask for a list. I've already given it to them.

Formal writing will likely be around much longer than textspeak forms. Slang comes and goes incredibly fast.²⁴ Even if some slang words remain and are adopted, the sticking power of formal English lends me credibility. Credibility is essential to my ability to persuade a reader to listen to me. You already have a captive audience ready and willing to hear you out. The formality of my words might make me "sound smarter," but it is also a sign of the additional work that I had to put into them

I don't think you really want me to argue this, though. You know what formal writing is for because you know how to use it, just as I know how to use textspeak. Both of us simply choose not to write in one or the other.

fair

i guess



lets just agree that there ARE different places to use one or the other and we've got reasons to write like we do

i wont ask u to write your smart papers like this

just dont ask me to talk to my friends like its a research study

this is cheesy AF jesus

sorry

So long as you don't start calling me stuffy or old fashioned. Demonizing either side isn't going to get anything done.

tru

so i guess this is..... over?

Maybe for the two of us talking this time but I'm sure that you'll come up with all sorts of new forms for people to be upset about in the years to come. Then we'll be meeting again.

i plan on it

for sure can't wait

lmao 😂😏

²⁴ Adrienne Lafrance, "Teens Aren't Ruining Language," *The Atlantic*, January 27, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/01/blatantly-budge-and-other-dead-slang/431433/>. This is a fairly well known phenomena, but Lafrance offers an article that contains a good series of examples on the subject with focus on the modern and how technology has affected the process.

communicating is more fun that way

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