

Keeping up with the times: lexical creativity in electronic communication

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ABSTRACT

In the last decades mobile phones and the World Wide Web have revolutionized communication, providing fresh evidence that language is a dynamic instrument which can evolve with the times and adjust to new contexts. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the extent of that capability by examining a corpus of linguistic material used in electronic communication: on the one hand, ready-made text messages (*AFAIK*, *CWOT*) and widely-used vocabulary items (*Gr8*, *B4*, *pls*); on the other hand, lexical creations relating to the general field of electronic communication, for example, terms such as *WiFi*, *blog* or *cyberslacking*. The study covers three aspects: the morphological mechanisms used to create these novel formations, the motivations underlying creativity, and the implications of this field-restricted creativity for everyday language.

The analysis shows that electronic communication is a fertile ground for new vocabulary, since it uses productive word-formation processes which already exist in the language (compounding, derivation and different types of shortening) and contributes to the popularization of new items which may eventually enter the lexicon (for example, *to text*: “to send a text message to”). Finally, as regards the reasons behind the use of the above mechanisms, two types of motives (system-derived and user-derived) are identified and discussed. The former refers to the need to speed up communication by saving time and space; it is related to the features and requirements of the message, the channel and the context. The latter combines ludic and sociolinguistic needs, and is in turn connected with the characteristics of the primary users of the system, in-groups that may be defined by age, occupation and interests.