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The Features and Prospects of *Queen's English* in the Digital Era: A Study

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In the twenty first century, the digital citizens have entered in the *Web 2.0*. The demarking feature of this era is, as it is often noticed, the users are now the creators of data rather than its consumers only. The old, conventional world-view and human endeavour epitomized the existence of the great enterprises like the Encyclopedia Britannica, the new ways of human creation and consumption are well embodied in the idea and functioning of the Wikipedia. The digital technology has now become open for all to contribute and consume. Unlike the old techno-giants as the producers of the soft-wares, the new era permits and hosts the open ware soft-wares and the mobile applications made by users. The *Web 2.0* has transformed the traditional trading and business via e-commerce.

The Digital Technology is a very pervasively effective force that has shaped almost every field of human endeavour. Therefore, it's no wonder that the technology has shaped our ways of expressing ourselves. The effect of the digital technologies on the human expression is also widely discussed and studied. There are some aspects of the study which need to be addressed. The present paper is a study of the effect of the digital technology on the use of '*lingua-franca*' of the world i.e. English language. The features of English language in the digital era are studied here with examples. The anxieties about the use of English in an unconventional way have been seen as increasing in the course of the time. It is argued in the paper that the impact of the technology on the expression of the new digital citizens is limited to a few areas of English language. The impact on the languages is not as worrisome as some researchers have expressed before.

The scholars have already started to pay their attention on the use of language which is unique to the platform. The use of language on the internet is significantly different in some aspects from the conventional use of language. English is being used on internet with more flexibility in spellings, punctuation, and sentence construction. Leppanen and Varis have concluded that, "Scholarship on social media discourses and texts has started emphasizing the critical rise of English diversity and semiotic heterogeneity perpetuated by transnational youth members as some of the social media's fundamental textual characteristics (Dovchin 75). However, there are some aspects that it is mostly related to the use of English in the social media applications. The same users of English on other platforms are seen using the conventional ways of communication. There are some peculiar features of English being used on internet, especially on the social media platforms.

The Features of English in the Digital era.

- 1. Markers of Enthusiasm and Intensity:** Tannen Notes that in the language used on social media applications has more markers of speaker's emotional intensity and enthusiasm than they used to be in conventional conversations (104). Ex. : I miss you too!!!!!!!/ R you going to the party tonight?/ Hiiiiii. The speakers are afraid to be understood as cold and negative without such markers of intensity in a shared conversation.
- 2. Repetition and Capitalization:** There are such features as this that now there are people seen using the same words again to emphasize and add volume to the feelings expressed. In the conventional conversation the repetition was used so frequently. Ex. I am so so so sorry. Or FEELING EXTREMELY SORRY . or the stylized spellings like "I'm sooooooooooooo happy!"
- 3. Punctuation:** The markers of punctuation are being used quite differently than the conventional use of language. The use exclamatory mark '!' is on the top in use among all the other markers. It is followed by question mark '?' in the frequency of its use. More such markers are used in a row to add emphasis. Ex. "What???" or "Wow!!!!". : talk u later..... going home....bye....tc..
- 4. The Use of Emoticons:** The digital tool has this unique addition into the expressions of the users. The emoticons were composed by the people using the punctuation markers in the simple sms. Ex. :-) or ;-(Now there are so many other emoticons used by the speakers.
- 5. Word Reduction in Spellings:** Now there is less regard for the correct spellings. The use of language on the internet is such a private enterprise that the users are free to compose new short and innovative spellings. The words are spelled with those alphabets which are the most necessary in the word. Ex. 'gm' for 'Good Morning,' 'hv' for 'Have', 'sd' for 'sweet dreams', 'tc' for 'take care' etc
- 6. Letters Representing Words:** Now there are many monosyllabic words which are represented by a single alphabet in a conversation in the social media. Ex. 'u' represents the pronoun 'You', 'd' for 'the', 'k' for 'okay' etc.
- 7. Monosyllabic Words:** Now the sentences are composed with just a monosyllabic word. The most necessary words are chosen. The conventional demands of the formality are not followed. Ex. 'fine' for 'It is fine', 'nice' for 'It's nice' etc.

8. **Combination of Letters and Numbers:** The new words and graphic representations are being invented by the users through a combination of letters and numbers. The numbers are selected on the basis of their resemblance of sounds with the words they are using. Ex. fine= f9 before= b4, for you = 4 u, forever= 4ever, forget= 4get
9. **Code Switching and Code Mixing:** The users are seen switching from one language to another and mixing the two or more languages in their conversations more than before. They use the language as per the necessity. The easiest way of communicating the ideas is chosen irrespective of whether it is in the same code or not.
10. **Transliteration:** The words are transliterated from other languages into Roman alphabets. The English equivalents are not searched to maintain the same code in use. The words from other languages are spelled into English and used. The practice is so common that the instances of this phenomenon are even not needed to be cited.
11. **Acronyms and Initialisms:** The new words are being used to represent the whole phrase or sentence. The initials are used in arrow to make a sentence for ex. 'LOL' for 'Laugh out loud', 'gnsdtc' for 'Good night. Sweet dreams. Take care.
12. **Letter/number Homophones:** A phenomenon called Letter/Number Homophones is also used by the netizens. For example just '2' for 'to' and '4' in place of the word 'for' (Barton 36)

The language used this way creates a peculiar way of communication. A change however slight it may be can create a change in the tone, intensity, or emphasis laid by the speaker. Ex. 'Good' is different from 'GOOD' in emphasis. A change in such seemingly non-significant aspects of the conversation can cause havoc as it is mentioned by Lauren Squires in her interesting article. She calls such change in the punctuation and markers as discrepancies (Squires 3-23). The features of such kind as mentioned above are used in the daily casual talks however, in the sensitive matters a slight modification can lead to serious consequences.

Though the users can choose to write in their native languages on the net, still the dominant trend of writing online is mostly English. Thus, English is still the most common language on the internet. Many scholars have expressed a concern over such above-mentioned unconventional use of English in which grammar, spellings, and punctuation are highly disregarded. Aitchison mentions the concern raised by some literary critics who have cautioned that contemporary patterns of education and technology may be altering our earlier relationship with the written word. (93). There are many others who think this fear that the technology and the use of English in the digital era can have transformative effects on the language.

Deborah Tannen quotes Turlow and Crystal: "Much of what is being done by young people using new media is not, as their elders often perceive and fear, fundamentally different from what has always been done with language in social interaction" (100). Naomi Baron has a similar opinion in this regard that he fear of the generation which is now being called as 'Digital migrants' is undue. She believes that most people who are using the language this way would most probably would return to the normative principles of writing. She argues that, "Historians of English know that language communities go through normative and *laissez-faire* cycles, sometimes caring inordinately about such issues as dialect and prescriptive grammatical rules, other times reveling in the sheer inventiveness of a linguistically unconstrained citizenry" (93). Those who use English this way are often seen self-evaluating their levels of proficiency on the internet (Lee 74). The digital generation has a meta-linguistic discourse about their levels of proficiency in English. These comments are mostly negative about their levels of proficiency. The users have anxiety about their communicative competence in English. Their tone of expressions regarding their self-evaluation of linguistic proficiency is noted by Lee as frequently apologetic and forgiveness seeking (Lee 77). Thus, the conditions of the use of English on the internet this way are of necessity. The users are not using it on purpose; they are using it as they have no other option in the absence of the communicative proficiency.

The use of English on the internet does not just bring challenges for the conventional ways of communicating in English. It also brings new opportunities and new possibilities of growth and invention in the language. Prescriptive norms are always unwelcome for a growing and lively growth of a language. The restrictions imposed on the use of language cannot always make the language more long lasting. Often, too much insistence on the rules kills the living spirit of a language. The digital technology has brings with it some new inputs into the use of the language. It adds into it the newer ways of expression, new tools, and cultural ideas. Sender Dovchin quotes Li and Zhu in this regard, "English can be re-invented through the combination of other linguistic, stylistic, and cultural resources used by social media users interacting and negotiating across different semiotic and stylistic repertoires (11). The unconventional use of English on internet is not a threatening condition; rather it is a new dimension to the language. It only adds into the language those ideas and tools of expression which are unprecedented.

To conclude, it is noteworthy that since the advent of the digital technologies of communication there has been an addition of many new words into English but hardly any unprecedented modification in the syntactical structure of English. The conventional rules of grammar, pronunciation, and semantics have undergone no change. The use of English on the internet is marked by necessity and in order to match the pace of communication with the in-person talks. The modifications are only in the morphology and lexicon of

English. The fundamentals of language are not changing nor is the syntax being modified. There is no apparent change in the pronunciation of the English words. The most apparent impact of the digital technology on the use of English is visible on the spellings of the words. There have been some additions to the lexicons of English after many additions of technological words along with other words ex. # or 'hash tag' etc. Interestingly, the use of conventional style is still intact on all the websites and apps. The modifications, inventions mentioned above are strictly limited to the social media applications and tools. There are no evidences that it has created any impact of note on the phonology, semantics, or syntax of English. Thus, when most of the aspects of language are still unaffected in the digital era, the concerns over the prospects of Queen's English are invalid so far.

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