Short Introduction to Internet Slang

Oana VOICHICI
"Valahia" University of Târgoviște

Abstract: While chatting, writing in a forum, or getting email from friends we often come across Internet slang, slang that Internet users have developed and promulgated. Such terms typically originated with the purpose of saving keystrokes, and many people use the same abbreviations in text messages. They are also very commonly used in instant messaging. Emoticons are also an internet invention, used to make facial expressions. These punctuation marks serve as shorthand for emotions, and are also useful as they garnishes one's words, indicating that one is sad, or joking, or angry, etc.
Key-words: Internet slang, emoticon, acronym

Have you ever received an e-mail or an instant message containing a series of letters you're embarrassed to admit you don't understand? BFN, AFAIK, or LOL? By its nature, the Web makes communicating faster and easier. Because of this, a kind of Web language has emerged, using symbols and acronyms to express larger phrases and feelings - on cyber time. Unless you live in a chat room, you probably do not know what they all stand for.

The abundance of Internet slang is a prime example of how the Internet has affected our culture, going so far as to affect the very way we speak. Some words, like email, that originally started as slang have become so prevalent that they are now considered proper words, and with a generation of people growing up with Internet slang in their everyday vocabulary, its not difficult to imagine a time soon when many of the words we currently consider slang are accepted as proper English.

It is hard to show emotion when you're typing. Sometimes the things you write can be taken the wrong way because the reader cannot hear the tone in your "voice". That is where Internet slang comes into play. Without Internet slang, chatting on the Net would be pretty boring[1].

Internet is everywhere nowadays, from our modern media to our modern workplace. Every few months or so, a new word seems to enter the lexicon. One thing that is commonly confusing to people new to the Internet is the language used by others who are more experienced in that aspect of communication. There are several slang dictionaries online, of course, and much the jargon used is explained here.

Most Internet slang begins from acronyms used in online messaging. Acronyms are letters that stand for several words, almost always the initial letters of the words. This makes it pretty easy to guess what they are, from the context, in most cases. Abbreviations are probably the most used kind of Internet slang. A simple three- or four-letter abbreviation can be used instead of a string of words. Some of the acronyms substitute numbers for words based on their pronunciation (e.g., "2" in place of "to", or "4" in place of "for")[2].The habit originates from the shorthand required both to save time, and to fit on the small screens - cell phones, personal organizers, often used for sending text messages. An example is the acronym 'lol', one of the most pervasive Internet slang terms, used to mean 'laughing out loud' or 'laugh out loud'. Naturally, there are hundreds of these, but I shall list here only the most common[3]:

224 – "today, tomorrow, forever"
2B – "to be"
2L8 – "too late"
4 – "for"

[1] Linda Roeder, *Internet Slang - Chat, Forum, Email, Internet Slang and Terms: LOL, BTW, EG, FYI, IDN*, http://internet.suite101.com/article.cfm/internet_slang , May 21, 2007
[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_slang_phrases
[3] Kemmer, Suzanne, *Modern Usage of English*, www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words04/usage/

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4ever – “forever”
10q – “thank you”
10x – “thanks”
AFAIK – “as far as I know"
ASL – “age, sex, location”; used to request general info about a fellow user. Also used as an introductory phrase, usually when that info is expected up-front.
B4N / BFN – “bye for now”
BRB – “be right back”
BTW – “by the way”
CU – “see you”
CYA – “see ya”
Gr8 – “great’, sometimes spelled ‘gre8t’, even though it doesn’t make the word any shorter.
IM – “instant message”, can be used as a noun (“Send an IM”) or a verb (“I’ll IM him”). Past tense is “IM’d” or “IMed”.
IMO – “in my opinion”
IMHO – “in my humble opinion”, or “in my honest opinion”
L8 – “late”
L8R / L8ER – “later”; as in “see you later”, often used together with ‘CU’, as in ‘CUL8R’. It is commonly used in chat rooms and other text based communications as a way of saying good bye.
LOL – “laughing out loud”
NE1 – “anyone”
NP – “no problem”
OMG – exclamation, “oh my God!”
plz or pls – “please”
u – “you”
ur – “you’re” or “your”
W/ or W/O – “with” or “without”
Y – “yes”, “why”

Slang on the Internet incorporates all slang used in real life, but adds much to it. Similar to Internet abbreviations, these are largely created and popularized for their time/letter-saving qualities, but as with all slang, they are also useful to convey a complicated concept in a quick word.

sux: sucks
rox: rocks
thx: thanks

As you can see, just about any “ck” or “cks” or even other similar letters making the same sound can be replaced with an "x".

When writing a message, people sometimes fail to grasp sarcasm or satire, and this is where emoticons come in handy. Emoticons (smileys, or smiley faces) are facial expressions created by punctuation symbols. The word *emoticon* is a combination of the words emotion and icon. Therefore, emoticons are used online to covey intonation or voice inflection, bodily gestures and emotion behind statements that might otherwise be misinterpreted[4].

The most common emoticon is a smiley face, made with the colon for eyes, and the left parenthesis as the smile, viewed at a 90-degree angle, “:)”. Sometimes a dash is used between the eyes and mouth to indicate a nose, “:-)”. This emoticon is normally used to convey lightheartedness, happiness, facetiousness or joking. To see the difference an emoticon can make, let us consider the following two statements:

Yeah, James, you looked like a real geek.

or...

Yeah, James, you looked like a real geek. :)

[4] *What are Emoticons?,* http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-emoticons.htm

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Whether or not James would consider a being a "geek" a badge of honor or an insult, the first statement minus the emoticon is surely intended to be an insult. The second statement, however, with its smiling face is very clearly intended to be taken in a playful manner and is not likely to cause offense[5].

Emoticons play an important part in online communication because the vast majority of people communicating have never met and do not know each other well, if at all. Misinterpretation of intentions is all too easy, in the absence of the facial expressions and verbal inflections that face-to-face communication affords.

A few common emoticons include:

:), – the classic smile. “I’m happy” or “my meaning is positive”. Also =) or :-)

;) – wink, often to indicate a joke or sarcasm. Also ;-)

:(– frown, unhappy. Also =(, :-(, etc.

;-* – kissing face.

:-P – smiling and sticking out your tongue

:-D – laughing hard

In Web forums and instant messengers, text emoticons are often automatically replaced with small corresponding images, which came to be called emoticons as well. Here are some of the smiley used on Yahoo! Messenger[6]:


:) happy

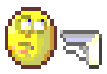

:(sad


;) winking


:D big grin


:P tongue


:-O surprise


:-@ chatterbox


\:D/ dancing


$-) money eyes


:-" whistling


;)) hee hee


:x love struck


:)) laughing


=)) rolling on the floor


:((crying


;;) batting eyelashes

Similarly, in some versions of Microsoft Word, the Auto Correct feature replaces basic smileys such as :) and :(with a single smiley-like character. Originally, these image emoticons were fairly simple and replaced only the most straightforward and common character sequences, but over time they became so complex that the more specialized emoticons are often input using a menu or popup windows, sometimes listing hundreds of items. Some of these graphical emoticons do not actually represent faces or emotions; for example, an “emoticon” showing a guitar might be used to represent music. Further, some instant messaging software is designed to play a sound upon receiving certain emoticons[7].

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