

**Course Topic: Language, Society and Culture****Course Instructor**

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**Course Synopsis**

The topic of a lot of debate today is how language use is changing as a result of the different technologies that have been developed, and are being developed, for communication. In this session, we're going to take a look at how the use of mobile technologies and social media is changing how we actually use language. We'll also explore how technology is impacting communication across language barriers. This is a topic that we don't have a lot of answers in, so we will, instead, focus on some of the questions that have come out of this fascinating area of debate.

**Course Agenda**

1. How are Mobile Technologies Impacting Language Use?
2. How is Social Media Impacting Language Use?
3. How is Technology Impacting Communication Across Language Barriers?

## 1. How Are Mobile Technologies Impacting Language Use?

When we're looking at mobile technologies, there are two ways that we can categorize the technology that is being developed: hardware and functionalities. The hardware that is being developed for communication purposes consists of tablets, smartphones, and so on. Within the combination of hardware and software, we have the different functionalities that are being developed. Currently, these are:

- Voice
- Text
- Email
- Recorded audio
- Recorded video
- Live video
- Images/photographs

Perhaps the biggest debate on mobile technologies and language use is centered around texting and messaging. Academics are looking at how our language use is changing as a result of the widespread exchange of short, rapid messages in society today. One side of the argument claims that texting and messaging are essentially ruining our use of the written language. Those on the other side of the debate believe that we still retain our ability to use standard written language; however, we are creating a new version of the written language to use with these particular communication technologies.

The following TED talk examines the topic of how texting is affecting language use.



**John McWhorter – “Txtng is killing language. JK!!!”**

[http://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_mcwhorter\\_txtng\\_is\\_killing\\_language\\_jk](http://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_killing_language_jk)

\* If the above link does not work, go to [www.TED.com](http://www.TED.com) and search for the title of the video clip.

There are a couple of interesting activities you can do to help you uncover some of the patterns that academics and researchers are finding in our use of language when we text.

### Language Use Self Study

Take a look at something you have written in your standard writing style and compare it with a text message you have composed. How does your language use differ from one form of communication to the other? What patterns can you identify?

**The Grandparents’ Guide to Texting**

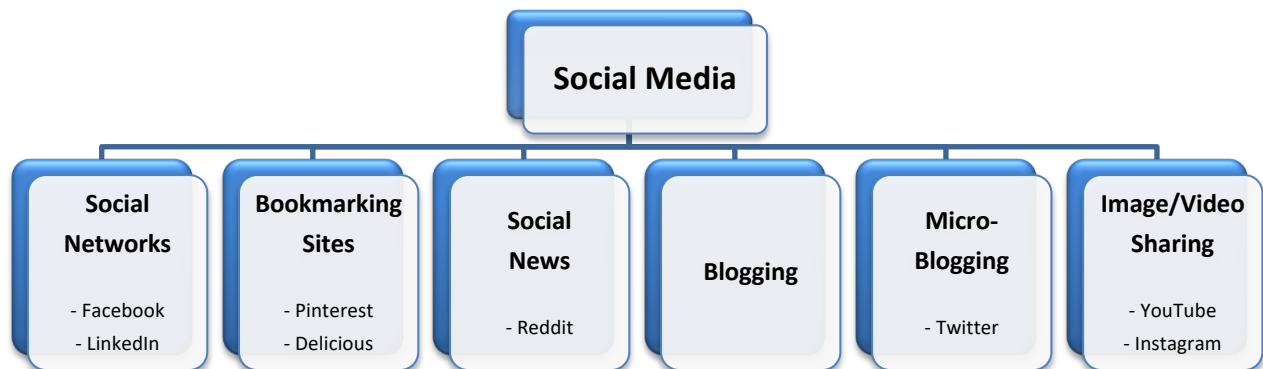
Imagine you have to explain texting to someone who has never used it before. What new vocabulary do they need to know? What abbreviations do they need to know? What other rules of use do they need to know?

Vocabulary	Abbreviations	Other Rules of Use

**2. How is Social Media Impacting Language Use?**

Technology doesn’t just provide us with new hardware and new functionality for our communication; it also provides us with new channels for communication. This is where social media comes in. Social media is a set of channels with which to communicate with one another. Each channel has different strengths and weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages. Researchers are arguing that these channels are also changing how we use language.

Within the larger category of social media, there are smaller subcategories that have been developed for different purposes and for different types of communication.



The debate about social media and language use is fairly similar to the debate we see about texting and language use. Researchers are looking at how our written use of language is changing with social media. Many social media channels require abbreviated written use of the language as well as hashtags and other specialized language. There are a couple of other debates occurring on the topic of social media and language use. The first is about how our language use is changing because we are now using images, both static and moving, to communicate more than we ever have. A final area of research when it comes to social media and language use is the impact of blogging. Blogging is a form of social media that allows everyday people to put their opinions out into the world for anyone to find, if they want to. Access to the general public used to be limited to established writers, journalists, etc. but blogging now allows people to circumvent the traditional publishing process and get their voices heard by a much wider audience. This, in turn, changes language use because language that is targeted at the general public is no longer exclusively controlled by editors.

The following TED talk is an intriguing look at the influence of blogging on Chinese society.



**Michael Anti – “Behind the Great Firewall of China”**

[http://www.ted.com/talks/michael\\_anti\\_behind\\_the\\_great\\_firewall\\_of\\_china](http://www.ted.com/talks/michael_anti_behind_the_great_firewall_of_china)

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### 3. How is Technology Impacting Communication Across Language Barriers?

There is a final topic to consider when it comes to technology and language use and that is the impact that technology is having on how we communicate across language barriers. Technology is impacting two areas in particular: language translation and language learning. Basic language translation is being covered by technology now; however, it still cannot handle the more nuanced, refined elements of language translation. This is an area to keep an eye on as translation tools become more and more sophisticated. The other area that technology is impacting is how we learn languages. We now have an enormous array of technology-based tools to choose from to help us acquire a language more effectively and more efficiently.

The following TED talk combines these two areas of interest and looks at the use of massive-scale online collaboration as a way to both bridge language barriers and to facilitate people learning a language.



**Luis von Ahn – “Massive-scale Online Collaboration”**

[http://www.ted.com/talks/luis\\_von\\_ahn\\_massive\\_scale\\_online\\_collaboration](http://www.ted.com/talks/luis_von_ahn_massive_scale_online_collaboration)

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**Thanks for participating!**

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