

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE LINGUISTIC VARIABILITY OF ENGLISH IN SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES**ТЕОРЕТИЧНА ОСНОВА ДЛЯ РОЗУМІННЯ ЛІНГВІСТИЧНОЇ ВАРІАТИВНОСТІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖАХ ТА ОНЛАЙН-СПІЛЬНОТАХ****Stoika O.Ya.,***orcid.org/0000-0002-7695-6100**Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor,
Professor at the Foreign Languages Department
Uzhhorod National University***Cheypesh I.V.,***orcid.org/0000-0001-9225-8137**Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor at the Foreign Languages Department,
Uzhhorod National University***Kravets O.V.,***orcid.org/0000-0002-0949-1091**Assistant Professor at the Foreign Languages Department
Uzhhorod National University*

The Internet and social media have significantly impacted the English language, leading to notable changes in vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and communication practices. This article delves into the linguistic variability of English in digital environments, with a particular focus on the interaction between technology, culture, and language on social media platforms. Scholars such as J. Algeo (2019), G. McCulloch (2019), and A. Sa'aleek (2006) have examined how digital communication reshapes language, revealing how new linguistic forms and expressions emerge through online interactions.

The primary aim of the article is to develop a theoretical framework for better understanding linguistic variability in online communities. The key tasks of this research include defining linguistic variability within the context of social media, analyzing historical and technological influences on language change, categorizing emerging forms of digital communication, such as shortenings, acronyms, and emoticons, and exploring the cultural and technological factors that shape digital discourse. By employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the article offers a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic dynamics within digital spaces.

The findings of the research reveal that social media platforms not only facilitate but also encourage linguistic creativity. The rise of new terms such as "to google" and "to tweet," as well as the widespread use of abbreviations and emoticons, exemplify how online communication adapts to enhance user interaction. These changes reflect the global and culturally diverse nature of social media, where regional influences contribute to the continual evolution of language. Furthermore, the integration of non-verbal cues like emoticons helps bridge the gap between face-to-face and digital interactions, highlighting the need for more nuanced ways of communicating online.

The article provides valuable insights into the future of language as it continues to evolve in response to digital technologies. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the sociolinguistic implications of online communication, offering both theoretical and practical implications for those working with digital language use.

Key words: linguistic variability, social media, English language evolution, digital communication, neologisms, sociolinguistics, online communities.

Інтернет і соціальні медіа значно вплинули на англійську мову, спричинивши помітні зміни у лексиконі, граматиці, орфографії та практиках комунікації. У статті розглядається лінгвістична варіативність англійської мови в цифрових середовищах, зокрема взаємодія технологій, культури та мови на платформах соціальних медіа. Вчені, такі як Дж. Алджіо (2019), Г. МакКаллох (2019) та А. Саалік (2006), досліджували, як цифрова комунікація змінює мову, розкриваючи, як нові мовні форми та вирази виникають у результаті онлайн-взаємодії.

Основна мета статті розкрити теоретичну основу для кращого розуміння лінгвістичної варіативності в онлайн-спільнотах. Ключові завдання цього дослідження включають визначення лінгвістичної варіативності в контексті соціальних медіа, аналіз історичних і технологічних впливів на мовні зміни, категоризацію нових форм цифрової комунікації, таких як скорочення, аббревіатури та емодзі, а також дослідження культурних і технологічних факторів, які формують цифровий дискурс. Застосовуючи комбінацію якісних та кількісних методів, стаття пропонує всебічний аналіз лінгвістичних динамік у цифрових просторах.

Результати дослідження показують, що платформи соціальних медіа не лише сприяють, а й стимулюють мовну креативність. Поява нових термінів, таких як «to google» і «to tweet», а також широке використання скорочень і емодзі є прикладами того, як онлайн-комунікація адаптується для покращення взаємодії користувачів. Крім того, інтеграція невербальних символів, таких як емодзі, допомагає подолати дистанцію між фізичною та цифровою взаємодією, підкреслюючи необхідність використання більш тонких способів онлайн комунікації.

Стаття надає цінну інформацію про майбутнє мови, оскільки вона продовжує еволюціонувати у відповідь на цифрові технології. Це дослідження робить вагомий внесок у зростаючий обсяг знань про соціолінгвістичні наслідки онлайн-комунікації, пропонуючи як теоретичні, так і практичні рекомендації для тих, хто працює з цифровим використанням мови.

Ключові слова: лінгвістична варіативність, соціальні медіа, еволюція англійської мови, цифрова комунікація, неологізми, соціолінгвістика, онлайн-спільноти.

Problem statement. The rapid and remarkable growth of social media over the past decade has significantly reshaped the way people communicate and interact. Social media platforms provide users with opportunities to participate, access information, connect with others, and build relationships, effectively breaking down traditional barriers of communication. These platforms have become integral to daily life, influencing everything from personal relationships to professional networks. The language used on social media tends to differ significantly from traditional forms of communication, often embracing non-formal language, slang, sarcasm, abbreviations, emojis, and even internet-specific memes. The informal nature of this communication creates a unique linguistic environment where grammar, syntax, and vocabulary may be adapted or ignored entirely, leading to a divergence from “standard” language norms. One of the defining characteristics of social media communication is the fluidity and adaptability of language. Unlike more formal contexts, where language use is guided by clear rules, social media allows for a dynamic and sometimes chaotic blending of diverse linguistic registers. This freedom of expression can result in misunderstandings, the use of offensive language, and the erosion of traditional norms. Additionally, the prevalence of abbreviations, acronyms, and shorthand expressions can further complicate understanding, especially for individuals who are less familiar with online jargon. Furthermore, the global nature of social media platforms means that English, as the dominant language of the internet, is subject to constant variations and adaptations. English users from different cultural backgrounds, regions, and linguistic traditions contribute to the development of new forms of expression, making it a rich field for study. Despite this linguistic diversity, there remains a tendency to view internet language as a “messy” or substandard variant of traditional English. The rapid pace of technological change and the constant evolution of online communication practices make it even more challenging to understand and document these shifts in language use. Therefore, it is increasingly important to explore and analyze the variability of the English language on social media, as this research can provide valuable insights into how language adapts in the face of new media and global communication. Understanding these linguistic shifts is critical not only for linguists

but also for educators, communication professionals, and anyone engaged in digital interactions. Given the ongoing changes in social media platforms and the growing scope of international communication, the study of this phenomenon is timely and crucial for comprehending the future of language in the digital age.

The analysis of recent research and publications on the evolution and impact of language, particularly in the digital age, reveals a broad and dynamic field of study. Scholars like J. Algeo [1] and McCulloch [11] have explored how the internet and social media platforms have transformed language use, highlighting the rise of new linguistic forms and the globalization of English. D. Crystal’s works, such as *Language and the Internet* [4], emphasize how digital communication fosters linguistic innovation and challenges traditional norms. Researchers such as F. Lyddy [9] have examined language change specifically in the context of British English and the internet, while A. Sa’alek [11] addresses the impact of the internet on language learning and teaching. The increasing presence of slang and abbreviations in online platforms, as seen in sources like the Urban Dictionary, further exemplifies how digital communication encourages the rapid evolution of language, blending formal and informal registers in ways that were previously unthinkable. These studies collectively provide a comprehensive picture of how technology, social media, and global communication are reshaping the English language, pushing the boundaries of what is considered “standard” language usage.

Task setting. The article aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the evolving linguistic landscape influenced by digital communication platforms. The primary goal is to develop a theoretical framework that explains the nature and dynamics of English language variability in social media and online communities. To achieve this, the following tasks are outlined: to define the concept of linguistic variability as it applies to the English language in the context of social media and online communication; to analyze the historical and technological influences of the Internet on language, focusing on changes in vocabulary, orthography, grammar, and communication strategies; to identify and categorize forms of linguistic variation, including shortenings, contractions, acronyms, letter/number homophones, non-standard spellings, accent stylization, and the use of emoti-

cons; to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the interplay between language, technology, and social norms in digital environments.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods underpins this study, ensuring a robust and multidisciplinary approach to analyzing the linguistic dynamics of social media and online communities.

Presentation of the Main Findings. Despite the fact that the Internet just emerged in the latter part of the 20th century, its impact on language started to grow about 1990 [3, p. 64]. It has drastically changed the way people communicate and use English both in writing and speaking. Consequently, the world has become increasingly interconnected through synchronous and asynchronous communicational scripts, such as SMS, online chat, Yahoo messengers, emails, blogs, and wikis, which have become retrievable as accessible corpora for analysis. The emergence of Web 2.0 tools and applications, such as Viber, Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, and Twitter, can also highlight current changes in the English language. The Internet has given rise to what is arguably a new variety of English that differs from standard varieties [7, p. 34].

From the eighteenth to the twentieth century, colonial and economic expansion saw the English language spread rapidly across the world to become a global language when the Internet was conceived [11, p. 203].

While all languages change over time, the Internet has introduced a new medium for these changes to take place. Since the Internet became publicly available, English spelling, pronunciation, vocabularies, and grammar, have changed, resulting in conflicting views and debate among language researchers and pundits.

Traditionally, the history of the English language has been divided into three major periods: Old English (450–1100), Middle English (1150–1500), and Modern English (1500-onwards). During these times, the language has undergone considerable changes since it was first transplanted to the British Isles by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the fifth century. The language these settlers spoke was called Englisc (= English) by them, but it could not have been very different from the languages spoken by those they had left behind on the mainland of Europe [8, pp. 1–2].

After successive waves of Old English and Old Norse speakers immigrating to the British Isles, another major shift came in 1066 after the Norman invasion and defeat of the English [9, p. 3].

The Middle English era was greatly impacted by this shift in governmental authority. The upper classes and the new ruling elites spoke French as

their primary language, which led to a proliferation of French vocabulary in English. By the fourteenth century, English became dominant again but retained the large influence of French loanwords. About 40% of the words in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* published in 1388, for example, had a French origin [9, p. 138].

Today, it seems to be difficult for the layperson to understand Middle English without translation into modern English. The period known as Modern English, which roughly spans from 1500 to the present, saw English continue to develop and change. It was set apart from Middle English by the Great Vowel Shift, standardization, and a fresh infusion of vocabulary from other languages. This period is often subdivided into Early Modern English and Late Modern English. After the sixteenth century, English speakers fanned out to establish colonies and trade throughout the world. Contact with the local languages of the colonies resulted in further waves of loanwords entering English. New words were also coined to meet the changing needs of the country. During this time, numerous commentators called for standardization [8, p. 6].

In the twentieth century, English expanded, becoming the national language not only of the British Empire, the United States, and their colonies but a global language. The international exchange of information between academics and 8 professionals as well as the rise of the United States as a commercial and diplomatic hub also made the globalization of English possible. As a result, many countries chose English as a language of education, diplomacy, science, and technology as well as to remain competitive in the global job market. The IT sector, for instance, is one of many industries that have adopted English as its mother-tongue, and due to this position, English became the most common language on the Internet. Cultural imperialism is another factor that has helped making English an international and global language [1, p. 98].

In the twentieth century, British and US political and economic power coincided with the growth of science and international commerce. Large number of words, such as electron, proton, neutron, quantum and relativity in general physics and x-ray, infrared, CT-scan, genetic code, test tube, and AIDS in the medical sciences, were added to the language. As touched on above, the English language has witnessed several changes in the way it is written and spoken throughout its history [2, p. 67].

When you think about important inventions in the 20th century which had a profound effect on our life, the computer and then later the Internet come to mind. The Internet was originally set up as a shared information space for government and academic institutions. In the first days of the Internet, it was not

expected to develop into a means for people all over the world to communicate with each other. Millennial generations have always been the ones to bring about language changes.

The language change includes changes in vocabulary, orthography, grammar, pragmatics, and style. Hundreds of words and neologisms have been added to the English lexicon. A common change is the 'verbification' of nouns, such as to google, to text, to email. Since people frequently communicate online more than in person and because the lines between online and offline communication are blurring, it may not always be easy (or necessary) for everyone to distinguish between standard and non-standard English in today's faddish, Internet-savvy age. We also bring our communication strategies and presumptions from the "real world" to the keyboard and vice versa [10, p. 10].

The Internet has ushered in new varieties of English with changes in vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation. The Internet has increasingly been used for language learning and teaching, gradually becoming a necessity for language program worldwide. Under the auspices of the Internet, a flood of new words has been created and used. This has been true of every major invention or event throughout history, though. Technological developments in the era of WWI and WWII and the 'space race' spawned countless new words. For instance, all the people using online communication are net citizens (abbreviated as netizens). Under the influence of the wider use of computers and online communication, it is remarkable that such computer-related words are very common today, such as software, windows, monitor, motherboard, keyboard, inkjet, laser, printer, file, modem, the Internet, e-mail, formatting, mouse, and the list goes on. Not only have these additions enriched the English language, but have also affected cultural identities. CMC has probably resulted in more than other historical events, but the phenomenon is not unique to the development of e-technology [9, p. 16].

Changes in form and usage have caused some linguists to think of it as a new language called Internetese. In terms of frequency and scope of use, Internetese is currently the most prevalent medium for intercultural communication. For this reason, it has attracted a good deal of attention from all areas of linguistic enquiry (e.g., sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, and psycholinguistics). The ever-evolving English language is always unveiling new words and phrases, something even more evident since the rise of ubiquitous social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media has been also responsible for giving new uses to some existing words. For instance,

today it is common to use the word 'friend' – which is a noun – as a verb such as 'to friend/unfriend somebody on FB'. Other examples include 'google it', 'twit on twitter', and so on [6, p. 198].

Many terms are associated with the software which enables people to use the Internet, and which routinely appear on screen. Some have a permanent presence, in the form of the labels used to designate screen areas and functions, and to specify user options and commands: file, edit, insert, paste, format, tools, window, help, search, refresh, address, history, stop, contact. Some terms appear only at intervals on a screen, depending on circumstances – usually, when things are going wrong, in the form of error messages (there seem to be no positive messages to tell us that everything is going right): forbidden, illegal operation, error, not found, 404 error. The same applies to the use of the affixes 'cyber-' and 'hyper-' in words like 'hyperspace', 'cyberculture', 'cyberian' or 'hypertext' [4, p. 264].

Over the past twenty years, the Internet has radically transformed the way people communicate, both locally and globally. There are many forms of variation in the English language, including the following:

- Shortenings (missing end letters), e.g. 'lang' for 'language'
- Contractions (missing middle letters), e.g. 'gd' for 'good'
- Clipping (final letter missing), e.g. 'goin' for 'going', 'hav' for 'have'
- Acronyms and initialisms, e.g. 'v' for 'very'
- Letter/number homophones, e.g. '1' for 'one'
- Non-conventional spelling, e.g. 'sum' for 'some'
- Accent stylization (speaker tries to represent a particular pronunciation, for example regional speech), e.g. 'wivout' for 'without'
- Non-alphabetic symbol
- Emoticon

The shortened word is short compared to the source word and has only one meaning which makes this type of word formation easy and useful. Shortening is a unit or written or spoken language which is created by using some parts of the word or words, in some forms of shortenings separate letter(s), sounds can be taken. Abbreviations (and acronyms) have long been part of the written language tradition, appearing both in handwritten manuscripts and print. Their most common function in both offline writing and CMC is to conserve energy and/or space. In the case of medieval manuscripts, for example, use of abbreviations allowed additional words to be inscribed on a single page, reducing the number of animal skins needed to produce a book. In the case of CMC, saving time and energy is often a motiva-

tion when writing chat, IM, or SMS messages. Most CMC users are familiar with some of the basic CMC abbreviations, e.g.,

Brb – *be right back*

Imho – *in my humble opinion*

Btw – *by the way*

irl – *in real life*

cul8r – *see you later*

lol – *laughing out loud*

gr8 – *great*

rotfl – *rolling on the floor laughing*

Emoticons first appeared in 1982, the creation of Scott Fahlman who was at Carnegie Mellon University [5, p. 34]. Fahlman wrote at the time: "I propose ... the following character sequence for joke markers: :-). Read it sideways. Actually, it is probably more economical to mark things that are NOT jokes, given current trends. For this use :-(. Emoticons are constructed by combining punctuation marks (sometimes along with characters or numerals) on the computer keyboard to represent emotions or semantic nuances such as happiness, sadness, or qualification. Among the most commonly used emoticons are:

:-) happiness, humor

:-o shocked, amazed

:-(sadness, displeasure

:(crying

;-) winking

:-] sarcastic

Among the most commonly used shortenings are:

– **Godda** = (have)got to – I've godda go now. -We godda do that. – Have they godda work?

– **Gonna** =going to – Nothing's gonna change my opinion. – I'm not gonna tell you. -What are you gonna do?

– **Wanna** = want to – I wanna go home.

– **Wanna** = want a – I wanna book.

– **Lemme** = let me – Lemme go!

– **Letcha** = let you -Why don't they letcha go and rest?

– **Musta** = must have -I musta cost him an arm and a leg.

Conclusions. In the article it is demonstrated that the Internet and social media have profoundly influenced the evolution of the English language, introducing notable changes in spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and communication practices. Initially designed as a shared information platform for government and educational institutions, the Internet has grown into a global communication tool that reshapes linguistic norms and practices.

One of the most significant outcomes of this transformation is the emergence of linguistic variability, characterized by new forms of expression such as shortenings, contractions, acronyms, and emoticons. These innovations not only enhance efficiency in digital communication but also mimic non-verbal cues to convey emotions and tone, bridging the gap between face-to-face and text-based interactions.

Furthermore, the integration of new words and neologisms, such as "to google" and "to tweet," into everyday language highlights the reciprocal relationship between technology and language. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become catalysts for this linguistic evolution, fostering creativity and adaptability in language use.

This research underlines the importance of understanding linguistic variability in digital environments, offering theoretical and practical insights for educators, linguists, and communication professionals. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how the English language adapts to technological advancements, providing a framework for analyzing future changes in digital communication.

In conclusion, the dynamic interaction between technology, culture, and language underscores the necessity of continued exploration into the linguistic variability of English in online communities. This study lays the groundwork for further research into the sociolinguistic implications of the digital age.

REFERENCES:

1. Algeo J. The Origins and Development of the English Language (6th ed.). Wadsworth. 2019. 364 p.
2. Baugh A., Cable T. A History of the English Language. *Pearson Education*. 2002. 459 p.
3. Crystal D. English as a Global Language. *Cambridge University Press*. 1997. 229 p.
4. Crystal D. Language and the Internet. *Cambridge University Press*. 2001. 256 p.
5. Crystal D. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language (2nd ed.). *Cambridge University Press*. 2003. 245 p.
6. Danet B., Susan C. The Multilingual Internet: Language, Culture, and Communication Online. *Oxford University Press*. 2007. 362 p.
7. Graddol D. The Future of English? *The British Council*. 1997. 66 p.
8. Hogg R. An Introduction to Old English. *Edinburgh University Press*. 2002. 162 p.
9. Lyddy F. Language change in the age of the Internet: The case of British English. *Journal of Linguistic Evolution*. 2014. 30 p.
10. McCulloch G. Because Internet: Understanding How Language Is Changing. *Riverhead Books*. 2019. 336 p.
11. Sa'aleek A. The impact of the Internet on English language learning and teaching. *International Journal of English Linguistics*. 2006. 303 p.