

## THE DYNAMICS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE CHANGE FROM THE OLD ERA TO THE DIGITAL AGE

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to discuss why and how English has changed, tracing from particular features such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and meaning from Old English era until Modern English, how the people's attitude toward the changes, and whether these changes ruin or contribute to the development of English as a global language. As a final remark, this article will also offer a few suggestions on how the phenomenon of language change should be treated particularly on the relation with English language teaching and learning.

**Key words:** language change, form, meaning, attitude

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini mencoba membahas mengapa dan bagaimana bahasa Inggris mengalami perubahan baik dari segi ejaan, kosa kata, tata bahasa, maupun makna, sejak dari zaman Inggris kuno hingga zaman modern. Pembahasan juga mencakup bagaimana sikap orang-orang terhadap perubahan yang terjadi pada bahasa Inggris, dan apakah perubahan tersebut merusak atau memberikan kontribusi terhadap perkembangan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa global. Pada bagian akhir artikel akan dipaparkan sedikit saran bagaimana sebaiknya menghadapi fenomena perubahan tersebut terutama dalam kaitannya dengan pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

**Kata kunci:** perubahan bahasa, bentuk, makna, sikap

“Language does change, and it is just as impossible to preserve the tongue that Shakespeare spoke as it is to stop cultural change” (David Crystal)

Language change is a phenomenon in which language features such as phonetic, lexis, syntax, and semantic **features** vary **because** of the changing needs. As a language used by many people throughout the world, English has undergone a series of fascinating changes since the era of Old English until now. The English expressions which hundred years ago were considered simple and colloquial might seem strange to today's generation. Below is an example from a work of Robert Mannyng written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as quoted by Aitchison (2001):

*In symple speche as I couthe,  
That is lightest in mannes mouthe.*

*I mad noght for no disours,  
Ne for no seggers, no harpours,  
Bot for the luf of symple men,  
that strange Inglis can not ken*

In the above lines, although Mannyng believed that his language was simple and easy to understand, it is very likely that the people now will have problem in comprehending the meaning completely. If those lines are compared with a headline found in the internet: *Txts n emails mk ppl stupid coz they R worse than smking pot & lead 2 a st8 of 'infomania'*, perhaps not many people could get the message as well. These are just two examples of how language could be very different in terms of spelling, vocabulary, sentence construction, and even meaning.

Despite the fact that language change is a natural and inevitable phenomenon, not all people are happy with it. Some linguists as well as journalists are concerned and even claim that the change tends to move toward negative directions, making language consist of flaws and ruining the standard (Anderson & Trudgill, 1990; Finnegan, Besnier, Blair, & Collins, 1992; Freeborn, 1992). Aitchison (2001) has presented examples of complaints about language change since 1960 to 1999, which mostly came from authors and editors. Among the complaints are “the growing unintelligibility of spoken English”, “the grammar is becoming coarser”, “the standard of speech and pronunciation has declined, and “a lot of maudlins and misusages.” The following section will discuss the underlying reasons as well as the process of language change.

#### **WHY AND HOW LANGUAGE CHANGES?**

Language may change slowly or rapidly. Some scholars refer to it as language evolution, and the cause of language evolution has been analyzed differently. A group of theorists believes that language is an adaptation, that is, language needs to develop or evolve in order for humans to adapt with others. One of the supporters of this theory is a psycholinguist, Stephen Pinker. In his book *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* (2000), he has suggested that language is produced as a combination of innate ability (that is, language is instinctively controlled by a part of the brain called cerebral cortex) and a pressure from outside (one of which is social interaction with community). In other words, language may evolve through natural selection. The human cognitive ability also plays an important role in the improvement of language. Another group such as one represented by Stephen Jay Gould and Noam Chomsky believes that language is not a product of natural selection or adaptation; rather, as Chomsky famously argued,

language is believed to be “emergent physical properties associated with the specific structure of the brain (<http://library.thinkquest.org/C004367/la1.shtml>). In practice, more people seem to espouse the first theory.

As Meredith (1998) argued, “language change is not a superficial decision or event,” but rather as a way to survive in the changing world, and it is often as “the direct results of political, economic and cultural imperialism.” This can be seen from how English develops from its native country England and spreads to the whole world. First, it was because of colonialism, but then the people in the world just voluntarily adapt the language. In a similar manner, Mahoney (2008) has agreed that language changes as a result of social, economic, and political pressure. She added that the unique way that individuals speak may also cause the language to change. Her argument is based on the fact that no two individuals use a language in exactly the same way. The vocabulary and expressions people use depend on their age, education level, place to live, social status and other factors. Through social interaction, new words and sayings are picked up and integrated into everyday speech.

Furthermore, Mahoney as quoted from David Lightfoot, a linguist at National Science Foundation, has explained that the agents of language change are children as the new generation. Therefore, although language is passed down through generations so that parents and children can communicate with each other, in the process of learning a language, children often internalize it differently and develop a different variation of language (Mahoney, 2008). The language gap between previous generation and today’s generation often brings about a continuous debate on whether language has become deteriorated or become improved.

Ellis (2008) suggested that language changes as a result of usage. He gave an example of phonological change which is caused by the frequent usage of particular

words. High frequency of usage resulted in automaticity which leads to creative construction such as in the example of *gimme*, which is the sound reduction of *give me*. The frequent usage also underpins what Ellis labeled as grammatical erosion. The more frequent certain words are used, the more likely they will get shortened or even omitted. For example, *of, the, a, an, in, to, is, was, I, you, he, be, it, to, for, with, by, on, at, that*, which are the most frequently-used words in English, are often dropped by the speakers. The most frequent words also tend to be ambiguous in homophony and polysemy, such as *to, too, two; their, they're, there; I, eye, aye*, (Ellis, 2008, p. 234), so it is common to find their incorrect usage.

Regarding how language changes, Aitchison (2001) has outlined three possibilities: first, slow decay; second, slow evolution to a more efficient state; and third, language remains in a substantially similar state from the point of view of progress or decay. Slow decay happens when certain feature of language is losing, such as the case of European languages which gradually lose their old word endings. Slow evolution to a more efficient state or survival of the fittest occurs when existing language adapts to the needs of time, so old terms are discarded and replaced by new terms which are often in a much simpler and regular form. In the third case, language is viewed as being advance or decline from opposing forces, so different opinions exist.

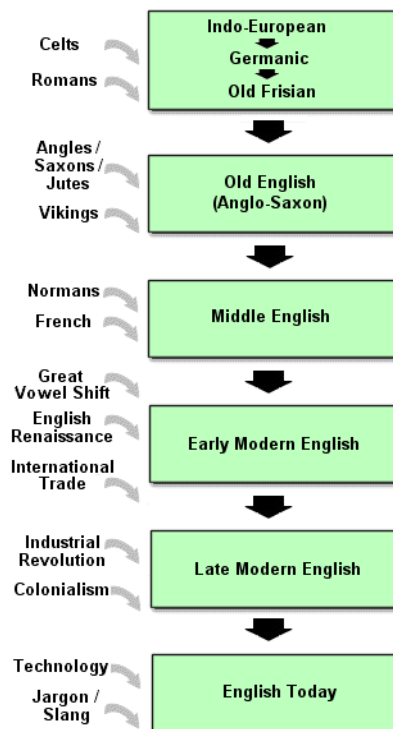
A number of people view language change negatively; whereas others view it positively, including the prominent linguist David Crystal. Crystal has written numerous papers and articles regarding language change. Based on his experience as a broadcaster at BBC, he had received unfavorable comments from the listeners

who wondered why the language used by the broadcaster seemed to have deviated from the standardized English. His response was that language was not a static system, and that changes either in grammar or pronunciation were not something new so that we should feel annoyed; instead, the changes recur and it had already started hundred years ago (Crystal, 1992).

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FROM HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Traced from the language family in the world, English is classified by the scholars as a part of one large group of language family called Indo-European. That is why, similar forms and meaning between English and other languages in the group can be easily traced, such as the words *father, mother, friend*, which are similar with German words *vater, mutter, freund* (Yule, 2006, p. 184). Interestingly, those words are also similar with Spanish and Italian *madre* and *padre*, which are in other branch of Indo-European. This proves that languages might have come from the same ancestor (known as proto-language), but then they diverge, develop and vary as people spread in the world.

Historically, English language development has taken place since thousand years ago. One of the causes is language contact which results from migration, in which the inhabitants of the world move from one place to another, establish their own community and develop new expressions in communicating with each other (Finnegan et al., 1992; Leith, 2003). The following figure outlines the development of English language from the ancient time to the modern time.



**Figure 1. The main influences on the development of English language**

(Source: <http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/index.html>)

During 500 BC – 43 BC, England was inhabited by the Celts, who used Celtic language, which is totally different from today's English. When the Romans invaded and ruled England for about 400 years from 43 BC – 450 AD, they inherited Latin words, and Celtic language was no longer used except by the people in Ireland and Scotland, with six sub-language groups surviving: Cornish, Welsh, Breton, Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx (Meredith, 1998). Several distinct features of Celtic language are found in grammatical structure. For instance, in today's English the word order is normally subject – verb – object, whereas Celtic language took the order of verb – subject – object, so the sentence “the woman came” would be “Deth an venen” or “came the woman” (Meredith, 1998). In addition, Celtic language tends to use passive voice instead of active, such as “I teach” (*dysgaf*) is expressed as “is taught” (*dysgir*) and “I do/make” (*déanaim*) as “is done” (*déantar*). Another difference can be seen from how the sentence “I have a cat” is constructed as “there is a cat to me,” or “I

have an apple” as “There is an apple with me”, showing that ‘have’ is not commonly used for possession and replaced by preposition instead (Meredith, 1998).

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Anglo Saxon tribes from Germany came to England. The Anglo Saxon settlement had added certain features into Old English language. Some words survived until today with some slight differences. For example, today's words *man*, *wife*, *child*, *eat*, and *drink* originated from the Old English *mann*, *wif*, *cild*, *etan*, and *drincan* (Yule, 2006, p. 187). Here, the slight changes in both spelling and pronunciation are noticeable. The Danish invasion in 789 AD brought destruction to Anglo Saxon civilization. A great number of Anglo Saxon words were lost. King Alfred the Great was the one who tried to preserve the Anglo Saxon literary heritage. Some words which still survived were *cyning* (*king*), *cwene*(*queen*), *erl*(*earl*), *ladi* (*lady*), and *lord* (Mastin, 2011). Other Anglo-Saxon vocabulary which also survives into modern English is everyday words such as *earth*, *house*, *food*, *sing*, *night* and *sleep*.

At the beginning of the Middle Age (c. 1066 AD), the Norman conquest transformed England both culturally and linguistically. French was used widely among the Norman noblemen, and Latin was used as the language of science and education, while English had no official status and was treated like a third language as it was only used by the low class Englishmen. Fortunately, inter-marriage with native English nobility and everyday exchange between masters and servants had encouraged bilingualism. Many words adapted from French have added more specific forms of today's English, particularly for the terms used in government and law such as *judgment*, *court*, *parliament*, *verdicts*, *evidence*, *defendant*, *solicitor*, *juror*, or *jury* (Finnegan et al., 1992, p. 283). Some other words adapted from French are related to fashion and lifestyle such as *mansion*, *boot*, *beauty*, *mirror*, *jewel*, *appetite*, *banquet*. Another significant change brought by French was the plural ending "s", which replaced the Old English form of "en" ending such as in *housen* or *shoen*, so now they become *houses* and *shoes*. The 'en' ending which still exists today is in the words of *children* and *oxen* (Mastin, 2011).

During 1337–1450, England and French were involved in The Hundred Year War, leading to a higher status of English language, as French was regarded as the language of the enemy. The used-to-be low class English people gained a better economic and social status, and language division between the noblemen and the commoners was no longer observed. Middle English language had distinct feature, particularly in pronunciation. All consonants were pronounced, for example the letter "k" in the word *knight* had to be pronounced clearly, unlike today's pronunciation where the "k" is not pronounced. Another example is the word *child* was pronounced as *tʃild*, different from today's *tʃaɪld* (Mahoney, 2008). In addition, the long vowel was pronounced like Latin-derived Romance languages of Europe, so *sheep* was

pronounced like *shape*, *me* like *may*, *mine* as *meen*, *mate* as *maat*, *out* as *oot*, and *house* as *hoose*. In terms of spelling, Middle English mostly used the words ending with "e" such as *ende*, *ferne*, *straunge*, and the "e" had to be pronounced as well (Mastin, 2011). This can be noticed in the works of Chaucer, the most prominent poet during the Middle Age, who had played an important role in promoting English so that it became widely used in society.

The era between Middle English and Early Modern period was known as the Great Vowel Shift, in which long vowel sounds were made higher and further forward in the mouth. The change in pronunciation caused a change in spelling so that it reflected the sound of the words, such as *stan* became *stone*, *derk* became *dark*, and *herte* became *heart* (Mastin, 2011).

Early Modern period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, known as Elizabethan era, was marked by English Renaissance and international trade. English language even gained more popularity than the previous period, and again some changes occurred. During this era, there were a lot of borrowings from Latin and Greek, which were considered as the language of education and science, so words such as *genius*, *species*, *radius*, *specimen*, *apparatus*, *paralysis*, and *focus* started to be used. Many loanwords were derived as a result of international trade, such as *armada*, *barricade* from Spanish, *balcony*, *macaroni*, *piano*, from Italian, *noodle*, *muffin*, *kindergarten* from German, *breeze*, *tank*, *marmalade* from Portuguese, *yacht*, *cruise*, *dock*, *lottery*, from Dutch, *tea*, *typhoon* from China, and *almanac*, *algebra* from Arabic. In terms of sentence construction, word order had used subject-verb-object patterns. Interestingly, *to be* was still commonly used as the auxiliary rather than *have*, so the today's construction *I have come* was strangely written as *I am come*. The old verb ending "-en" was gradually replaced by "-eth" such as in *loveth*, *doth*, and *hath*.

Shakespeare, as the most phenomenal figure in English literature, had contributed a

great number of English words. In his works, he often experimented with part of speech and deviated the grammatical rules, for example making noun into verb such as in “he pageants us,” “dog them at the heels,” “the good Brutus ghosted,” “Lord Angelo dukes it well,” and “uncle me no uncle.” However, his extraordinary gift in playing with the language resulted in numerous invented terms are still used today such as *barefaced*, *critical*, *leapfrog*, *monumental*, *homicide*, *countless*, *premeditated*, *dislocate*, and famous phrases such as *love is blind*, *vanish into thin air*, or *flesh and blood* (Mastin, 2011).

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, English dictionary started to exist, consisting of grammar, pronunciation and spelling guides. The most famous one was written by Samuel Johnson. His *Dictionary of English Language* was considered the most eminent English dictionary before the more comprehensive one, *Oxford English Dictionary*, was published. The Industrial Revolution during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had boosted the emergence of new words that never existed before in English language. These words were used

for the new products and machines that developed during this time such as *engine*, *train*, *combustion*, *electricity*, *telephone*, *telegraph*, and *camera*.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Britain had gained its position as the world power with many colonies all over the world. The users of English language grew significantly and English has become the language spoken not only by its native users but also non-native users who live outside Britain. The English colonies also made a great influence to the language by adding loanwords to the English language. Therefore, words such as *as kangaroo* and *boomerang*, whose origin is Australia, or *bungalow*, *jungle*, *cot*, and *candy*, which are Indian words, are adapted into English. America as one of the colonies even developed its own terms, making American English tend to be different from British English, not only in lexis but also in semantics. Americans use *fall* for *autumn*, *hog* for pig, *trash* for *rubbish*, and *guess* for *think*. In terms of semantic, American words *lot* and *lumber* mean differently from the British meaning (Mastin, 2011).

## OUT-OF-DATE VS. UP-TO-DATE ENGLISH

*Ye knowe ek, that in forme speche is chaunge,  
Withinne a thousand yer, and words tho  
That hadden prys now wonder nyce and straunge  
Us thenketh em, and yet they spake hem so,  
And spedde as wel in love as men now do*

(Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*)

Chaucer, the greatest poet in the Middle Age had been aware that the language people spoke during his time was very different from the previous era. Today's generation would also find how Chaucer's language is strange to their ears.

Today, as language continues to develop and diverges, a number of old words may no longer be used, and new words emerge. Some words are even ‘mutilated’, a term used by linguists who feel unhappy of the seemingly ruined language and view them as

a decay. The linguists who intend to retain and reconstruct the pure form of language might come from the view that changes that have taken place over thousand years cause language to be separated and mutilated. If language had never changed, people in the world might have spoken the same language and no need to get confused with each other (Anderson & Trudgill, 1990). However, it can not be denied that humans continue to make progress, and so does language as a part of their life. New jargons and technical

terms are required to suit the ongoing development of education, science, and technology, not to mention the lifestyle as in foods, toys, and gadgets.

At lexical and semantic levels, some old words survive until now, some are no longer used, and many new words appear. For example, *nice* used to mean *ignorant*, *vulgar* used to mean *ordinary*, and *sophisticated* used to mean *adulterated*, *artificial*, *falsified* (Leith, 2003, p. 74). In one of his works, Shakespeare used *attorney* as a verb, meaning *carry out by a substitute*, as seen in this lines: “their encounters, though not personal, hath been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts” (Shakespeare, *The Winter Tale*). In the past, *aggravate* only meant *to make more serious*, but now it also means *irritate* (Anderson & Trudgill, 1990; Freeborn, 1992). In some groups of society, *bad* and *wicked* are now both different varieties of good (Mastin, 2011). This extension in word meaning should not make people become worried or bothered, because in fact, it can enrich English language. It is true that when new meaning appears for the first time, not many people would accept it easily and comfortably. However, what is considered non standard, uncommon, and corrupted in one time may become acceptable in a different era (Anderson & Trudgill, 1990; Burrige, 2002).

The alteration in vocabulary is logical because human lifestyle itself changes across generation. For example, old generation is familiar with *icebox*, *record player*, *studious young man*, while youngsters now would use the terms *fridge*, *stereo*, *nerd*. Similarly, new generation may use words such as *tank tops*, *six-packs*, *sitcoms*, which in the past might not even exist (Finnegan et al., 1992, p. 231). The language changes even faster during the recent century, so the words which used to be very common in the previous decade such as *walkman* and *OHP*, seem to be out-of-date now, as today's generation, are more familiar with *MP3*, *iPod*, or *LCD*. It is in this century that people get *doodlebugs*, *gasmask*,

*gobstoppers*, *miniskirt* and *mods* and *rockers*; enjoy *dim sum*, *cappucino*, *chicken tikka masala* and *pizzerias*; talk of *chavs*, *mingers* and *weirdos*; and are addicted to *tellies*, *websites*, *cybercafes* and *compact discs* (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/>). Neologisms (new word or expression in a language) also occurs by combining words, so now compound terms such as *fashionista*, *frenemy*, *metrosexual*, *sonfuzzle*, *bro-mance*, *sexting*, *flexitarian*, *gastropub*, *infomercial*, *dramedy*, and many others, are common (Mastin, 2011). All this proves how richly-growing English vocabulary is today. New words continue to be invented, and they often cannot be found in the latest dictionary.

In terms of grammatical construction, some may claim that English becomes worse. However, the sentence from Shakespeare “Goes the king hence today?” compared with the modern standard grammar “Is the king going out today?” (Finnegan et al., 1992, p. 232) brings the evidence that grammatical forms have improved. In addition, today's noun phrase can be formed with more word strings in front of the head word such as *never to be forgotten experience*, and there is an increasing number of phrasal verbs such as *run across* or *put up with*. From these features, Freeborn claimed that “English has become a much more analytic language” (1992, p. 198).

## LANGUAGE CHANGE AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

As social creatures, humans prefer to be accepted as the same with the community they live with. In their daily interaction, it is very likely that people would imitate their fellow's language. Aitchison (2003) has mentioned that language changes might happen “from above”, or conscious imitation, and “from below” or subconscious imitation, which both come from human desire to associate with others. Thus, when for instance, there is an increasing trend of

dropping the *t* at the end of the words such as in *hot*, *what*, *football*, or *a bit more* (Aitchison, 2003, p. 164) or how 'house' is pronounced *heouse*, *no* becomes *neow* and *kids* becomes *kuds* (Mackinnon, 2002, p. 340), it cannot simply be judged as a careless, sloppy pronunciation. It is likely that they occur because of the social influence.

The fact that English is used and adapted differently in many parts of the world should also be taken into consideration. Even in the native countries such as England and the U.S., there is a different perspective on the use of *hopefully* or "I've got to" (Trask, 2000) or in the expression "Did you buy your car yet?" and "Have you bought your car yet", not to mention English varieties in Asia or Africa (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 58).

It is also important to consider other aspects behind language alteration, such as the social context where it is applied, or whether it is used for oral or written, casual or formal setting. Some people might feel annoyed with the expression such as "I ain't seen him", "We done it yesterday," or double negative construction in "I ain't got none" or "I don't want none" (Anderson & Trudgill, 1990, p. 167) because they only view the language construction from the prescriptive grammar. However, if people have understood that some expressions are only a matter of variation and dialect that build up among certain community, they would not complain and regard it as a sign of language decay.

It is true that language change also causes few problems, such as confusion and misunderstanding in communication, especially among people who use different regional dialects, or among different generations. For example, the utterance "After all those ditzzy bimbo I thought I'd be a wuss to pass up this stonking part, even if it is an indie flick" (Trask, 2000, p. 89) will certainly make some people, particularly the elderly, frustrated. They would think that English has disfigured and mutilated. In contrast, the young generation who use it

can figure out the meaning easily since they are familiar with the context. People will vary their language depending on the situation and the person they interact with. The better they know their interlocutor, the less formal language they will use (Burridge, 2002).

Another illustration of how word meaning depends on the social context is in the utterance "The bakkie had to stop at a red robot." During his visit to South Africa, David Crystal was surprised to learn that *robot* means *traffic light* and *bakkie* means *truck* (Crystal, 2010). Those who have never been to South Africa or never learn from a South African-English dictionary might turn into confusion when they encounter such expressions.

It is evident that as a global language, English has undergone a lot of adaptation and influence at the place it is used and by the people who use it. In the countries where English is used as second or foreign language, local terms will influence the use of English. On the other hand, non-native speakers who live in an English speaking country will also enrich the English word repertoire. One instance is the growing spread of Islam which makes terms such a *halal* and *hijab* seem to have been accepted as English words. Another instance can be found in food names.

## **ENGLISH IN THE DIGITAL ERA**

The most influential factor of language change today is the sophisticated communication technology, particularly the internet and mobile phone. David Crystal has mentioned in one of his articles that the internet has brought a linguistic revolution (Crystal, 2001). Similarly, Mastin (2011) also argued that the digital age has brought English into a linguistic peak in terms of word acquisition. The Internet has produced numerous set of neologisms such as the terms *online*, *download*, *hacker*, *spam*, *emoticon*, *blogosphere*, *podcast*, and a whole range of acronyms, contractions and



shorthands used in email and social networking. The digital era also has allowed “verbification” of nouns as used to be applied by Shakespeare, which modern language purists often disapprove. So, now it is common to say *just email me, to text, or googling*.

The dominant users of the digital technology are undeniably young people. The language they used has been labelled “teen-talk”, or more specifically “textisms”, “textese”, “textspeak” in the case of SMS, “netspeak”, “netlingo”, and “weblish” in the case of computer-based communication (Farina & Liddy, 2011). The common features of textisms are nonstandard spelling, nonstandard capitalization and punctuation, abbreviation, and the use of emoticons. Crystal called it as the most extraordinary variations in the chronicle of English language (Crystal, 2006).

The nature of mobile phone which limits the texters to type long messages has led the use of abbreviation. So, in texting the short form such as “*cu l8r*” or “*RUOK*” is more commonly found than “*see you later*” or “*are you okay?*” The types of shortening include initialism, that is, by using only the beginning letters such as *BTW* for *by the way*, *OMG* for *oh my God*, *TTLY* for *talk to you later*, and the omission of vowels so the words like *people*, *texting*, and *homework* would become *ppl*, *txtg*, and *hmwrk*. Another feature is the combination of letter and number homophone, also called logograms or syllabogram, for example *NE1* for *anyone*, and *G8T* for *great*. Nonstandard spelling and accent stylization are also found in the language of text messaging, such as *sum* for *some*, *skool* for *school*, *dat* for *that*, and *thanx* for *thanks* (Farina & Lyddy, 2011). They even become shortened as *thx* and *plz*. Typographic symbols are also parts of textism. It is a single or multiple characters used to represent the whole word (Bieswanger, 2008 as cited in Farina & Lyddy, 2011), for example *x* to represent kiss, and *zzzz* to represent sleep or tiredness. Meanwhile, emoticons are used to represent feelings, emotion, or facial expression, such

as “*:-)*” for a smile and “*<3*” for heart or love.

Some people are fascinated about this new phenomenon; some others are worried that it would deviate from the standard language. Back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, people used to have similar concern over English language change. The admiration toward Latin led an attempt to use the correct form of language according to the rules (Aitchison, 2001). Today, what worries some people, especially the elder generation, is that the language change may ruin the standard language and affect literacy. As the abbreviations often contain ambiguous and undecipherable sentences (Farina & Lyddy, 2011), they may also lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

In his article “*I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language*”, published in *Daily Mail* on September 24, 2007, the journalist John Humphrys (2007) expressed his concern and disappointment on how the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of *Oxford English Dictionary* has made several changes on the way certain words are written, which Humphrey complained as the “victim of fashion.”

Those who are on Humphrey’s (2007) side would prefer to see the language written neatly, following the standard. This includes Dr. Bernard Lamb, an Emeritus reader of Genetics at Imperial College London, who proposed that Standard English or Queen’s English is the one which must be used. He showed the evidence how today’s generation has moved away from the correct standard English in the job applications sent by the graduates which contain errors in their CVs and cover letters, despite their good university background. Furthermore, Lamb mentioned that deviations from the Queen’s English may include errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and word choice. If someone says: “*Me and him gets on great*”, or “*Me an’ Jim is runnin’ late*”, it is considered a deviation (Lamb, 2010).

It is understandable, then, if there has been an intention “to reconstruct the full, pure form of an original stage from the variously disfigured and mutilated forms

which are attested in the individual languages” (Curtius as cited in Yule, 2006, p. 192), since the existing language seems to deviate. The habit of using abbreviation or sloppy language will possibly lead the people into the ignorance of using the language appropriately, such as when communicating with a teacher or a supervisor or in other formal writings. In case of children, it may influence their literacy.

However, some research revealed that textism does not hamper literacy. In studies by Coventry University during 2006-2007, pre-teenage children who were better at spelling and writing were found to use the most texting abbreviations (Crystal, 2008). Textism even correlates positively with word reading, vocabulary and phonological awareness in children, and some aspects of language performance in young adults. This may reflect skilled use of metalinguistic knowledge, which allows the texters to switch between differing language systems (Farina & Lyddy, 2011).

In addition, Crystal is convinced that 90% of language used in texting is written in normal, standard English. He also believes that textism adds dimension and new dynamics to the English language, and suggests that it encourages creativity and wordplay. The creative ingenuity of some texters, such as AGM which stands for *Ahm Gannin Yem*, meaning *‘I’m going home’*, even featured dialectal variation (Gregory, 2011). This might be observed as well among the texters in Indonesia who use their distinct form of English as the influence of the local language.

## CONCLUSION

The contested views of language change continue as the English language keeps evolving, involving phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and semantic features. The question remains: “Is it possible to distinguish bad and good changes?” (Aitchison, 2001). Moreover, does language

change ruin or contribute to the development of English as a global language? The judgment that English is ruining often comes out from comparing the Standard British English with varieties of English which exist today. If the non-standard English is what linguists or journalists refer to as decay and must be refined, it appears to be a misleading attitude. In terms of academic setting, it is relevant and necessary to use the Standard English. However, in terms of daily language, the use of non-standard English is acceptable, and there is no need to claim that English becomes deteriorated as long as people can successfully interact with each other. Moreover, judging that English used by certain community as low or impure would only lead to the thought that one’s language is superior than the other (Mackinnon, 2002). The distinct feature of recent language which roots from digital technology should even be viewed positively as it may actually enrich the English language.

The fact that language is dynamic should be treated wisely by its users by being aware of appropriate situation in which particular language feature should be applied. In the context of English teaching and learning, it is the role of the teacher to expose the students to different varieties of English, spoken and written, formal and informal. Teachers should also be able to make the students aware about appropriate and inappropriate English, so they know how to use the language appropriately in particular context. For example, in a formal forum, even if it is only in an email or a *facebook* group discussion, it might not be favorable if the shortening such as ‘u’ is used in addressing other people.

Ultimately, language differences between one generation to another and varieties of English that exist in the world today prove that English will continue to evolve. It is the nature of human language, and, thus, cannot simply be judged as decay. Colloquial and invented terms used by youngsters or media, social dialects caused by nativisation, and initialisms boosted by

textism, perhaps, display that English has deviated from its pure, standard forms. However, language change in the world has created a variety of communities, living with their own identity, culture, values, and ideas. English has developed in order to meet the demands of the modern world. Therefore, “rather than worrying about variation and change, we should rejoice in the cultural and linguistic diversity they represent” (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 53).

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