

GIFs, Cinnamon Rolls, and Gratuitous Reflexivity:
Internet Linguistics in Fan Communities on Tumblr
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Every year, the editors of the Oxford English Dictionary declare a "Word of the Year," imagined to best reflect that year's "ethos, mood, and preoccupations" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). Their choice for 2015 was actually not a *word* at all—it was a pictograph. To be more specific, it was an emoji—the "Face with Tears of Joy" emoji, which according to Oxford Dictionaries (2015) was the most-used emoji globally in 2015. While some reacted to the announcement with amusement or enthusiasm, it also—perhaps inevitably—provoked a new round of lament over the English language, ruined by the rise of the internet and digital, computer mediated communication.

The study of computer mediated communication has been in progress for about as long as people have been communicating via computers, and I'm sure the hand-wringing started within a very short period of time after said study began. Despite this, we've had computers for several decades now, and emoji word of the day notwithstanding, the English language seems to be doing fine. Could linguistic innovation and development on the web be... not so bad after all?

This research explores the state of computer mediated communication, or internet linguistic strategies, in the fan community on Tumblr. Ultimately, it shows that the Tumblr fan community's use of linguistic strategies constitutes a functional system of grammar and that this is a positive rather than negative development which researchers should embrace and explore in order to gain new insights into both language and the communities using them.

In this preliminary study of posts on my Tumblr blog which I had flagged as being interesting for "internet linguistics" reasons, many features of the community's use of language

stood out to me. I have found that in addition to the basic strategies such as punctuation and letter spacing play, shifting between all-caps, mixed case, and all-lowercase writing, and the use of well-known initialisms and phrases, there are some more Tumblr-specific behaviors (and Tumblr-specific employments of the previous strategies) which are worth looking into. These include manipulation of Tumblr's chat post format to present "conversations" that are nothing like any conversations that might really happen and to utilize dramatic pauses, the use of GIFs and JPEGs to facilitate conversation, the "Title + GIF" post construction, and the evolution of the usage of tags such as "about me" and "GPOY."

Although language prescriptivists may be inclined to panic, the development on Tumblr of a functional system of grammar that differs from that of so-called "proper" English is more positive than it is negative, and so is the naming of an emoji as the word of the year. Language evolves; language is *meant* to evolve. We cannot stop it, nor should we. Instead, we should embrace the changes and explore them. In these changes there are fascinating insights to be found regarding the communities which are fostering them.