

English is Always Changing

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Many people know that languages change greatly over time. For instance, slang words that are only popular among a small group of people become widely used later on. Phrases that used to have a positive meaning in the past change to have a negative meaning for modern individuals. Here are some examples of how the English language has changed over time and is continuing to change at this moment.

Tomorrow

Did you know that the word 'tomorrow' used to be two words? In the past, 'morrow' had the same meaning as 'tomorrow'. Overtime, 'morrow' was often used together with 'to' which led to the two words being combined into a compound word. This is the same for other words such as 'today' and 'tonight'. If you read older books published up until the mid- to late 1800s, you'll notice 'tomorrow' will be written as 'to morrow' by separating the two words while books published later slowly start to hyphenate the two words as 'to-morrow'.

OK

OK originally started out as a trend among young people in the mid-1800s. At this time, it was popular to make incorrectly spelled acronyms such as KG meaning 'know go' (no go) and OK meaning 'oll korrekt' (all correct). While other acronyms fell out of fashion, OK continued to be popular despite many complaints from those who called the acronym improper English. It's interesting to think that one of the most recognizable English words today is actually slang from nearly 200 years ago.

Period

As you have learned in grammar classes, a period is often necessary at the end of a sentence. However, recently, many young people feel that using a period at the end of a sentence in causal text conversations feels too serious. This is because a period is thought to signify the end of the conversation. So, to many young people, the sentence "Let's have a chat." feels angry and scary. It seems that this change has been reserved mainly for text messages but emails between coworkers may begin to see this change in the future.

Emojis

Even emojis are subject to the change of language. For example, the smiley face emoji has changed a lot over time. Originally appearing as the emoticon :) in text messages, the smiley face emoji went on to have a newer appearance as 😊. While this emoji originally expressed happiness, nowadays the 😊 emoji has a passive aggressive meaning that shows you aren't genuinely happy. Similarly, the 🙄 emoji has been used to replace the 😂 emoji, which is also no longer considered cool.

Ultimately, it's impossible to avoid changes in language. What might be thought of as "incorrect" English or slang may be considered a commonly used phrase in the future. Similarly, phrases that originally were considered appropriate may change to have negative meanings in the future. Thus, it's important to keep up to date with changes occurring in the English language as time progresses. If you keep an eye out, you can notice these changes happening around you right now.