



Thursday, 28 January 2010

## Everyone chillax, SMS isn't that bad

by Sue Butler

The 35th Annual List of Words Banished from the Queen's English for Mis-use, Over-use and General Uselessness was released by the [Lake Superior State University \(http://dailycontributor.com/the-15-banned-words-and-phrases-of-2010/10214/#ixzz0drO0rFUw\)](http://dailycontributor.com/the-15-banned-words-and-phrases-of-2010/10214/#ixzz0drO0rFUw) in the US this month. As expected, social networking jargon featured prominently.

Let me say from the outset – I do not believe that SMS is destroying the English language.

SMS is a code so it is merely a way of transcribing speech in contexts where speed and minimal keystrokes are important, as on mobile phones or in chat rooms online. In these contexts it is both functional and stylish. Like all codes it creates an in-group. The blogs and chat rooms of the internet which are the meeting places of the young are not intended to be viewed by the older generation and if the oldies occasionally stumble in and are horrified by what they see, well and good.

There is possibly a problem in schools with the transition from one writing style to another but this is one that teachers have already encountered as they try to persuade their students that the language of the playground is not the language of the classroom. The transition from informal language to a formal standard is difficult for some students. If there is one idea that teachers try valiantly to get across it is that of appropriateness of language to the situation. As parents we deal with that one too, usually by way of a desperate plea not to use swear words, however mild, in front of the grandparents because they will have a heart attack. Some children are adept at switching from one register to another, others have one speech style and that's it.

If a child of this rather intransigent nature is constantly using SMS, then some of it may creep into texts where it is not appropriate. I am not talking here about the use of a dash of SMS as a fashion statement. There is widespread use of the occasional emoticon – the smiley is ubiquitous – and the odd bit of SMS such as lol (laugh out loud) or btw (by the way). English – even standard English – will borrow from a variety of sources and SMS is just a current source for that touch of something different.

As with all fashion statements, you can get into trouble if you don't get it quite right. We have been rapped over the knuckles by chat room aficionados for listing noob among the new words listed on our [website \(www.macquariedictionary.com.au\)](http://www.macquariedictionary.com.au) for voting for the Word of the Year 2009. Anyone who inhabits those chat rooms knows that the spelling with double o is wrong, wrong, wrong. It should be with two zeros – n00b. Sorry, we said. We know we're not cool. (Just quietly, outside chat rooms the noob spelling is quite common.)

So we should relax. SMS will have its day, but, like cablese before it, if the circumstances that are its raison d'être change, it will fade away.

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