

# The un4tUn8 life of an endangered SMS mutant

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IS IT possible that I might be classified a threatened species? Is there anyone else out there who shares my sense of increasing alienation? Do you too believe — as you rack your brain to decode an e-mail, SMS or blog — that you cannot keep up with the cyber-pace at which new e-lingo pings, pongs and chimes into your inbox?

I acknowledge, as American editor Boyce Rensberger pointed out in an article on the subject in The Washington Post, that “language is a living thing that evolves”. However, he went on to say, “Like species, words gradually may shift their meanings. This is no problem if meanings are clear, but can be trouble if the usage confuses or misleads people. After all, evolution of species commonly produces mutants that live briefly, but become extinct because they are not well adapted to their environments.”

Indeed, as I stared cluelessly at a new text message on my cellphone recently, it occurred to me that I may be an endangered mutant, and I fear my days are numbered.

The SMS blinked at me mockingly: “APYR DOC AQR8 GJ CWUL8R WBAK BT TIP GOWI STK N TFX ATM”. I looked around anxiously for my IT consultant, but he was not yet back from school. Until then, I was stumped.

The emergence of e-lingo, also called “blargon” when it is used by bloggers, is not insignificant. In fact, forget evolution: Erin Jansen, founder of online dictionary NetLingo, calls it a language revolution. She regularly adds acronyms, words and phrases that have been accepted in the mainstream to the site.

Jansen believes that people are writing (electronically) more than ever and they like to use “in terms” because “it makes them feel like they are in the know” and “gives them a sense of empowerment that they are contributing to this language”.

But, while these e-linguists excitedly empower themselves, I feel rather disempowered.

On arriving home, my still-satchelled IT expert contemplated my dilemma: “Mom, your problem is you do not use text terms enough. You’re never going to learn. You’re losing touch because you’re too finicky when you write.”

He is spot on. I am pathetically pedantic in all my written communication. Forget acronyms: I abstain even from lower case e-mailing, and shun those dreadful emoticons and smilies. I am arguably the world’s slowest, but most grammatically correct, SMSer. (You may have lost interest in my reply by the time you get my message, but you can be sure it will be perfectly worded.)

Lecture over, the patronising little buff decoded the message for me: “As per your request, document accurate. Good job. Chat with you later, when back at keyboard. But, to insure promptness, get on with it. Stuck in traffic at the moment.”

He smiled at me condescendingly and added, before leaving the room: “I suggest you respond with WIBAMU.”

It took me some days, but I worked it out with the help of the texting words dictionary at [www.collins.co.uk](http://www.collins.co.uk): Well I’ll be a monkey’s uncle.

In the process I learned that my IT expert is actually a SNERT. You know, a snot nose egotistical rude teenager.