



Read AYOR (At Your Own Risk)

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Published: August 29, 2008

As a writer, I'm fascinated with words. I love studying them, and I always want to know, not only what a word means, but also the origins of it.

Have you ever thought about how the age of technology has changed our language? It has altered the meanings of many words. Example: "Virtual" used to mean "being something in essence but not in reality." Now it's commonly used to mean something that only exists online or the electronic simulation of something, as in virtual reality. A "web" used to be something a spider made, and a "blackberry" was a delicious fruit. Not anymore.

Technology has not only changed the meaning of familiar words, but also engendered a "virtual" lexicon of new words, many of which are simply two or three words combined. These days almost anyone can tell you what a "blog" is - a web journal accessible to the public. But how many people know that blog is actually short for web log.

"Cellphone" is an accepted word, short for cellular telephone. And is there anyone who doesn't know that a "laptop" is a computer that fits on your lap or that the fastest way to communicate is by "e-mail," short for electronic mail?

If you want to know how all-encompassing this language revolution really is, "logon" (there's another techno-word) to this "website" (oops, there's another one): www.techdictionary.com.

Technology has also changed the way some words are spelled, and in at least a few cases, how they are pronounced. But probably the single most sweeping language change brought about by technology is the proliferation of acronyms, those abbreviations where each letter stands for one word of a multi-word phrase. Example: TGTBT means "too good to be true."

This new mode of communication is really more of a code than a language, because it mixes letters with numbers and symbols – anything to get a point across in the fewest characters possible. Some of the phrases are easy to translate by just reading them verbatim, like "2moro" or "B4U." Others are a little less obvious to the novice, like "CUL8R" (see you later).

In all fairness, we can't blame the younger generation for this revolution. It started with the military and the evolution of words like RADAR, an acronym for radio detecting and ranging, and AWOL, absent without leave.

Today, our children can carry on entire conversations in "acronym," a whole new language that has arisen due to the proliferation of IM (instant messaging if you're using a computer, texting if you're using a cellphone). If this were not so sad I'd be LOL (laughing out loud) with my BFF (best friends forever).

If you want to learn some of this tech-speak, or just need to decipher what your children and grandchildren are saying, logon to: www.netlingo.com. IAWNW (It's a whole new world.) But be warned. A good share of it is X-rated.

Finally, if you really think all of this is tripe and should be stopped before it totally obliterates the English language, I'm with you. Let's all go and join the AAAAA (American Association Against Acronym Abuse) and establish an AFZ (Acronym Free Zone).