

Research finds that chatspeak has no impact on children's spelling ability

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Parents, get ready to say OMG and watch your teens roflol.

This will prolly comes as a bit of a shock to UR system, but findings from a group of University of Alberta researchers show that the language commonly used in instant messaging has no effect on your child's [spelling](#) abilities. If anything, says study author Connie Varnhagen, using language variations commonly used in instant messaging and texting is actually a good sign.

Varnhagen's findings come from a class-based study that was recently published in Reading and Writing. A group of third-year psychology students proposed and designed a study to test whether new [Simple Messaging Service](#), or SMS, language - also known as chatspeak - which refers to the abbreviations and slang commonly used when [texting](#), emailing or chatting online, had an influence on students' spelling habits. The group surveyed roughly 40 students from ages 12 to 17. The participants were asked to save their instant messages for a week. At the end of the study, the participants completed a standardized spelling test.

Students' use of chatspeak is only one shared concern between parents and educators about children's spelling abilities. But, with a growing usage of connected resources such as Skype, Facebook and Twitter, understanding the relationship between this virtual dialect and use of the Queen's English is of significant importance.

While the researchers expected there to be some correlation between poor spelling and chatspeak, Varnhagen said they were pleasantly surprised by the results.

"Kids who are good spellers [academically] are good spellers in instant messaging," she said. "And kids who are poor spellers in English class are poor spellers in [instant messaging](#)."

What was surprising, though, was how chatspeak use and spelling played in the battle of the sexes. Girls used more chatspeak than boys, who preferred to express themselves through repeated use of punctuation. However, the study found that boys who used chatspeak and abbreviations more frequently were poorer spellers. Conversely, girls who used more abbreviations were better spellers than girls who did not use many abbreviations in their messages.

Nicole Pugh, a student researcher and one of the study's co-authors, was amazed at the complexity and volume of chatspeak that the students were using.

"Going through the participant conversations, it was interesting to note how many new words that children are using online," said Pugh. "We would have to decipher the meaning of the language with online dictionaries or by asking younger siblings."

Varnhagen and Pugh both agree that the results of their study should ease some concerns and even open up discussion on how this language can be perhaps be embraced within an educational or academic context.

"If you want students to think very precisely and concisely and be able to express themselves, it might be interesting to have them create instant messages with ideas, maybe allow them opportunities to use more of this new dialect in brief reports or fun activities," said Varnhagen. "Using a

new type of [language](#) does require concentration and translating it to standard English does require concentration and attention. It's a little brain workout."

Provided by University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

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