

Adolescents' perceptions of social media writing: Has non-standard become the new standard?

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Abstract

The present study examines adolescents' attitudes and perceptions with respect to writing practices on social media. It reports the findings of a survey conducted among 168 Flemish high school students with various socio-demographic profiles. The survey examines linguistic attitudes and awareness of sociolinguistic patterns in computer-mediated communication (CMC), as well as relevant language skills. Moreover, the present research uniquely combines the study of both adolescents' perceptions and their production of informal online writing, as the participants' responses to the survey are compared to their peers' actual online writing practices (see Hilte et al. 2018a, 2018b, in press). The respondents appear to have a fairly accurate intuition with respect to age and gender patterns in social media writing, but much less so with respect to education-related patterns. Furthermore, while typical chatspeak phenomena are easily identified as such, ordinary spelling mistakes often are not. Strikingly, the teenagers do not claim a high standard language proficiency, although they do state to care about standard language use in formal contexts. Finally, some significant differences were found between participants with distinct socio-demographic profiles, e.g. girls and highly educated teenagers appear to be more sensitive to the potential negative connotations of linguistic features and that sensitivity seems to increase with age.

References

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