

## 'Net Language Part I: Vocabulary and Conversation

I am no stranger to the wonders of the Internet. In fact, my work as a virtual assistant depends on it. The changes this "information superhighway" has brought us have permanently colored our almost every facet of our lifestyles. When I was a child, the idea of shopping for practically any imaginable item without leaving home was unheard of; "telecommuting" was not even in our vocabulary; school reports necessitated trips to the library, sometimes planned frantically to take advantage of limited open hours; written conversation with family and friends required several days' delivery time; and long-distance telephone conversation was too expensive to indulge in frequently. All that has changed as 'Net technology has matured.

But despite the Internet's constant presence, and my belief that 80% of what it offers is good, I still find myself fervently resisting some of the changes it has wrought on our vocabulary. Some shifts are easier to accept than others. The word *Internet*, for example, is a bit odd by the usual capitalization standards. But it is also easy to justify as it is a one-of-a-kind medium and thus a proper noun.

Accepting the word *blog* was a little harder. Is it really necessary to abbreviate a word already as short as "weblog"? And why abbreviate it so that what remains sounds like the noise a person makes while choking? The word simply sounds unpalatable. Like it or not, though, this term has very quickly become a staple in our electronic vocabulary. And as I've come to appreciate the viewpoints offered in select blogs, I've even become immune to the gaggingness of its pronunciation.

In some ways, though, I'm still a purist at heart. Some widely-accepted 'Net language is too much for me to swallow. I refer to the alphabet-soup conversations that are so prevalent in blogs and forum posts. I just can't bring myself to use this shorthand. Despite their familiarity, the abbreviations feel false in my written voice. Consider these common ones:

--*LOL* for "laughing out loud" (or the more extreme *LMAO*, or the outright frantic *ROTFLMAO*)

--*DH/DW/DD/DS* for "darling husband/wife/daughter/son" (or their kin *DF/DBF/DMIL*, etc.)

--*KWIM* for "know what I mean" (No...please explain!)

--*HTH* for "hope that helps" (And if it doesn't...?)

--*TIA* for "thanks in advance" (invites my smarty-pants side to come out with comments like "YWIA"--even though it's no longer *IA*)

These are some of the most general ones. Plenty of other abbreviations are unique to the type of message board on which they are used: jargon exists in cyberspace just as it does in the real world.

Recently Mark Liberman of Language Log [reported](#) on the use of *wev* and its variants. This is a 'Net abbreviation that grates on my nerves doubly: not only is it short for *whatever*, which can be borderline impolite to begin with, but by using an abbreviated form, the writer doesn't even grant the reader the minimal keystrokes required to spell out his underlying rudeness in full. While I can appreciate its cleverness, I don't see *wev* ever entering most of our personal lexicons.

It is entirely possible some 'Net shorthand will either enter our English vocabulary for the long term or evolve into real words as other abbreviations have occasionally done (*scuba*, *snafu*, etc.). But I can't help but think the vast majority of these other abbreviations are passing usages that will ultimately fall out of favor and be replaced--no doubt by equally fleeting abbreviations as technology continues to evolve.

October's article will focus on 'Net Language, Part II: Emoticons.

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### About the Author

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