

SMS a language with its own rules, says study

OMG! LOL. TTYL. For many past the age of 40, these groupings seem like meaningless jumble, but for Generation Next, they embody a world of meaning.

"Instant messaging, or IM, is not just bad grammar or a bunch of mistakes," said Pamela Takayoshi of Kent State University.

"IM is a separate language form from formal English and has a common set of language features and standards."

Takayoshi and her colleague Christina Haas examined IM conversations produced by students and identified its non-standard features, or places, where writers had used language features diverging from standard English.

They found that what looked like non-standard features of written language were, actually, the standardised features within the IM language.

The language of IM was informal, explicit, playful, both abbreviated and elaborated - and, most importantly, emphasised meaning over form and social relationships over content.

"When we look at the kinds of technology young people are using today," said Haas, "we see that many of those technologies - IM, blogs and Facebook - are writing technologies. Even the phone is used for writing now."

Currently, the Kent State team is extending their analysis of IM to the popular Web site Facebook.com to determine whether the site's language is similar or different to IM standards.

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