

Americans are finding new ways to "chew the fat"

by Bruce A. Love

Throughout history, each generation has made contributions to the English language. Some of these have survived the test of time and have been incorporated into mainstream vocabulary. Other words and phrases were short-lived expressions of the day, and are no longer "hip" to use.

New words, and the new uses of existing words, frequently originate with creative contributions from geographic, ethnic, cultural, or technological sources. For example, I have learned many new terms after moving from eastern Pennsylvania to Blair County. In fact, I had never heard of the term "yunz" before coming here. I drink soda (not pop). From my perspective, it seems as though "you guys" speak in a different language!

Ethnic groups have also influenced the American vocabulary. For instance, the Yiddish terms "shmooze," "shtik," "klutz" and "chutzpah," are now commonly used by many non-Jewish Americans. The African American community has contributed such terms as "I can dig it," "jazz," and "krunk" (a term frequently used to mean everything from pumped up, to awesome, or exhilarating). More recently, global events have introduced us to the word "Jihad!"

Technology and the medical community have given us terms such as "fax," "chemo," "nuke," "dirty bomb," and "AIDS." Personal computers are responsible for a whole new vocabulary, and in fact a whole new language. These have contributed to a new generation gap, and a widening chasm between the "haves" and "have-nots."

Instant messaging (or IMing), is quickly becoming the language of choice for online communications. This shorthand typed language uses a combination of phonetic spellings, acronyms, and techniques similar to those used to select vanity license plates. This blend of alphanumeric characters enables our youth to communicate at phenomenal speeds with the added benefit (from their point of view) of being encrypted against parental comprehension (of course, it does nothing to prepare our youth for spelling contests). Consider the following online conversation between two teenage girls who shall remain nameless:

Teen A: hey gf ut?
Teen B: yea hig?
Teen A: ok wut u doin?
Teen B: n2m iming ppl n history hw lol
Teen A: lol howz ur bf?
Teen B: ok y?
Teen A: cus hes a qt. j/k. I jus lhlab
Teen B: OMG pos gtg ttyl
Teen A: lol cya l8r
Teen B: cu

Here's the Interpretation:

"Hey girlfriend! Are you there?"

"Yes. How's it going?"

"OK, What are you doing?"

"Not too much. Instant messaging people and doing my history homework" (laughing out loud)

(Laughing out loud) "How is your boyfriend?"

"He's OK, Why do you ask?"

"Because he is a cutie. Just kidding! I just love him like a brother!"

"Oh my gosh! I have a parent looking over my shoulder! I have to go! I'll talk to you later!"

(Laughing out loud) "I'll see you later!"

"See you!"

As my contribution to bridge this widening communication gap, I invite Altoona Mirror readers to join me for a "Virtual Open House" on Monday, July 5th, at 7pm. This event will be held at www.LoveConsulting.com. Follow the links and directions to enter our "Chat." I will be happy to entertain questions about business, computers, e-commerce, or we can just chat. You may use conventional English or try using the IM language as you talk with me, and others, in the room. An IM dictionary will be available for anyone who wants to refer to it. Previously published articles will also be available for downloading.

If you yearn for some of the phrases of yesteryear, try reintroducing our youth to some of the classics of your generation. Maybe you can even find ways to make those expressions IM-friendly! Until next time, "CU L8r G8r!"

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