

EDUCATION, VIRTUALLY A HUMAN RIGHT, ABBREVIATED ENGLISH AND FRENCH ABBREVIATIONS IN ADOLESCENTS' LANGUAGE

Prof. Iulia DRAGHICI, PhD

Profesor de limba franceză

Liceul Teologic Adventist Ștefan Demetrescu, București

alicadus@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Education, Virtually A Human Right, Abbreviated English and French Abbreviations in Adolescents' Language.

Education has been declared to be a universal human right, just like health. The global crises' context (pandemics, wars) proved that virtual education has failed its beneficiaries. The transition from in-person to remote education misspelled success. It spelled failure, only amplifying the already large inequalities that have plagued on-site education. Although it was designed to have democratized access, remote education has turned into a limit: limited access to electronic devices and printed material, limited access to electric power in the house, limited access to Internet connection (and devices enough for three or five pupils in the same house), limited help of adults with enough schooling? The present paper - a cry in the desert - tackles the current negative effect of virtual education as manifested in the growing number of abbreviations present in the language of children and adolescents.

Keywords: *abbreviation, digitalization, education, failure.*

Captatio benevolentiae

History is said to be repeating. Will mankind return to the cuneiform writing? Could pictograms write the future of human offsprings? Children and teenagers go to great lengths to avoid spelling out lengthy words. Their massive use of abbreviations tends to justify our preoccupied musings at the beginning of this paragraph. Pieces of writing done by 2023 teenagers may be similar to the following text message written by a Romanian girl, aged 13, to her friend:

Sal! Cff? Da'i lu Alex id'u meu ji zi k ne vdm maine k aj vrea sa vb cu el j cne jtie, poate iese cv.

*Ms. Xoxo*¹.

The text, provided no “translation” is produced, can be confusing, at least. How can language be reduced to this limited number of letters and why? We will start from the beginning in our search for the *Rosetta Stone* of digitalized language.

A Short History of Abbreviations

Abbreviations can be found under many forms as they have been discovered in ancient Greek inscriptions, in medieval manuscripts (e.g., “DN” for “Dominus Noster”) etc. However, it was the 20th century that witnessed the transformation of abbreviations in common practice for widespread communication.

Their history is a long one. It must have started at the dawn of written language with the earliest known writing systems. Proof of the earliest roots of writing is brought forward from around 3000 BC, in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian periods, and around the same time in China. These first written productions were numbers, singular signs, symbols or pictures.

The first pictograms to have ever been found were used in Mesopotamia, before the famous Sumerian cuneiforms². Other ancient civilizations, such as the Aztec, Mayan, and other South American empires, seem to have used pictograms. It is the Sumerian cuneiform script, which probably emerged around 3000 BC, that is considered the earliest known writing system³.

1 *Salut! Ce faci? Da-i lui Alex id-ul meu de messenger si spune-i ca ne vedem maine, pentru ca as vrea sa vorbesc cu el ceva, cine stie, poate iese ceva. Multumesc, pupici.* (Hi, what's up? Give Alex my messenger id as I would like to talk to him about something, who knows, something may come up. Thanks, kisses.) - <https://ziare.com/cultura/stiri-cultura/vorbite-mesagereza-cum-arata-limbajul-adolescentilor-din-generatia-messenger-1114801>

2 Cuneiform (pronounced “KYOO – NEE – IF – ORM”) is a system of writing invented by the ancient Sumerians around 3200 BC. It was used to write the Sumerian language. It changed over time, but basically used between 600 and 1000 symbols to write words or parts of words (syllables) - <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/how-write-cuneiform>

3 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuneiform>

The first evidence of an alphabet similar to the one we know today was the Phoenician alphabet. It implied the usage of symbols to represent consonants and was made notorious across the Mediterranean by merchants. Such a system was used for economic reasons as to keep records. It was from this alphabet that came the Aramaic script as well as the Greek alphabet, which led to the Latin one we use today that features symbols for both consonants and vowels⁴.

Abbreviations arise in both Greek and Roman past as it was common practice to reduce words to single letters. Some have survived and are still in use. For example, the Greek abbreviation k.o.k. means *and so on*. Latin is the origin for many of present-day abbreviations worldwide. Such examples are many:

AD	Anno Domini
a. m.	Ante meridiem
e. g.	exempli gratia (for example)
etc.	Et caetera
i. e.	id est (that is, that is to say)
NB	Nota Bene
p. m.	Post meridiem
P.S.	Post script

Some of the reasons why ancient people might have been inclined to use abbreviations could be with a view to save time and space - as many inscriptions were carved in stone - and also to ensure secrecy of their writing. We might find similarities with the predilection of nowadays youth for abbreviated language as time and space economy as well as confidentiality and privateness are, indeed, sought for.

What are abbreviations?

Abbreviations are shortened forms of words and phrases. Contrary to what some may consider, given the fact that many widespread abbreviations are informal and some even feature a certain degree of slang, a large number of them are appropriate in formal contexts as well. For example, two of the most common abbreviations are “Mr.” and “Mrs.” and they are almost exclusively used in formal contexts.

4 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pictogram>

The words “abbreviations” and “acronyms” are often used interchangeably, though there are some important differences between the two. There are several types of abbreviations:

- **Acronyms** - are made up of the first letter of a group of words and are read like a single word. For example, *UNESCO* is pronounced as a single word. Another example: *Gestapo* (GEheime STAatsPOLizei - the Nazi State Police)
- **Initialisms** – are similar to acronyms, except that each letter is read individually. For example, *CIA* is an initialism.
- **Portmanteaus** - combination of two words, such as *motor* being a *motor hotel*.
- **Clipped words** – as the name says, these are some of the most common types of abbreviations, they are merely shortened words. For example, abbreviating *November* as “Nov”.
- **Contractions**. Contractions are two or three words combined with the use of apostrophes, such as *won't* or *shouldn't've*.

From these shortened forms of words and phrases, over the past two decades, a unique type of abbreviated language has emerged, typically used by children and adolescents. A troubling phenomenon, the usage of this language proved more cryptic and inconsistent than the use of classical abbreviations as it eluded rules of formation. For example, from classical abbreviations and acronyms such as *ASAP*, *ATM*, *PIN* or *FAQs*, young people started coining *yolo* (you only live once), *2day* (today), (*ily*) I love you, *je c* (je sais), *cu* (see you). It seems new such abbreviations are regularly introduced.

Digital Digestion Friendly?

English and French Abbreviations in Adolescents' Language

If we were to compare abbreviations to pictograms in our digital world, we would conclude the latter make information digestible for users with different abilities. On the one hand, pictograms have proven valuable in bridging communication gaps, representing an inclusive means of conveying information. In today's globalized world, pictograms serve as a universal language, be it technology, healthcare or transportation industries. They simplify complex information and provide clarity and consistency.

On the other hand, abbreviations, especially, last-minute ones, prove the contrary. They do not enhance inclusion and understanding. They

complicate information and augment obscurity and inconsistency. One cannot but link this phenomenon to the worrying technology addiction that remote or virtual education has ushered into our century.

Post-pandemic sociological and psychological research pinpoints virtual education as *alma mater* for “coercive self-exile, some sort of desert where students must learn by themselves in an electronic relation with teachers and colleagues if they can”⁵ (Gomes and Sousa, 2022). And a new form of language is bound to appear in this “desert”. Otherwise, how does one get from

ASAP	<i>As soon as possible</i>
Erasmus	<i>EuRopean Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students</i>
OTAN	<i>Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique nord</i>
Radar	<i>RAdio Detection And Ranging</i>
FAQs	<i>Frequently asked questions</i>
N/A	<i>Not available</i>
DIY	<i>Do-it-yourself</i>
FIY	<i>For your information</i>
Q&A	<i>Questions and answers</i>
ATM	<i>Automatic teller machine</i>
VIP	<i>Very Important Person</i>
PIN	<i>Personal identification number</i>
SOS	<i>Save our ship (help)</i>

or

M.	<i>Monsieur</i>	Mr.
Mme.	<i>Madame</i>	Mrs.
Mlle.	<i>Mademoiselle</i>	Miss
RSVP	<i>Répondez s'il vous plaît</i>	
TGV	<i>Train à Grande Vitesse</i>	<i>High-speed train</i>
É.-U.	<i>États-Unis</i>	<i>United States</i>
SIDA	<i>Syndrome Immunodéficientaire Acquis</i>	AIDS
ADN	<i>Acide Désoxyribonucléique</i>	DNA
SDF	<i>Sans domicile fixe</i>	Homeless
CV	<i>Curriculum Vitae</i>	Resume
PV	<i>Procès-verbal</i>	<i>Summary report of an event</i>

5 <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3995/399574837014/html/>

ONG	<i>Organisation non-gouvernementale</i>	<i>Non-governmental organization</i>
ONU	<i>Organisation des Nations Unies</i>	<i>United Nations</i>
UE	<i>Union Européenne</i>	<i>European Union</i>
RDV	<i>Rendez-vous</i>	<i>Appointment, meeting</i>

and these

CEO	<i>Chief Executive Officer</i>
CFO	<i>Chief Financial Officer</i>
PM	<i>Project manager</i>
VP	<i>Vice president</i>
Prof	<i>Professor</i>
BA	<i>Bachelor of Arts</i>
BS	<i>Bachelor of Science</i>
BFA	<i>Bachelor of Fine Arts</i>
MA	<i>Master of Arts</i>
MBA	<i>Master of Business Administration</i>
PhD	<i>Doctor of Philosophy</i>
TOELF	<i>Test of English as a Foreign Language</i>
IELTS	<i>International English Language Testing System</i>

and

UN	<i>United Nations</i>
OECD	<i>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</i>
UNESCO	<i>The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</i>
FIFA	<i>International Federation of Football Association</i>
NASA	<i>National Aeronautics and Space Administration</i>
NATO	<i>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</i>
WHO	<i>World Health Organization</i>

or

HDD	<i>hard disk drive</i>
GB	<i>gigabyte</i>
FBI	<i>Federal Bureau of Investigations</i>
CIA	<i>Central Intelligence Agency</i>
POTUS	<i>President of the United States</i>
SCOTUS	<i>Supreme Court of the United States</i>

LA *Los Angeles*
 NYC *New York City*

or even

BBC *British Broadcasting Corporation*
 Manc *Manchester*
 DOB *Date of birth*
 VAT *Value-added Tax*
 GMO *Genetically modified organisms*

to these?

lol *Laugh out loud*
 thx *Thanks*
 btw *By the way*
 yolo *You only live once*
 2day *Today*
 2moro *Tomorrow*
 b4 *Before*
 l8r *Later*
 cu *See you*
 gr8 *Great*
 ily *I love you*
 pls *Please*
 DM *Direct message*
 h8 *Hate*

and these?

Bjr	<i>Bonjour</i>	<i>Good Afternoon</i>
Bsr	<i>Bonsoir</i>	<i>Good Evening</i>
Bcp	<i>Beaucoup</i>	<i>A lot</i>
QQC	<i>Quelque chose</i>	<i>Something</i>
Je c	<i>Je sais</i>	<i>I know</i>
QDN	<i>Quoi de neuf?</i>	<i>What's up?</i>
NRV	<i>Énervé</i>	<i>Irritated</i>
Vazi	<i>Vas-y</i>	<i>Go ahead</i>
MDR	<i>Mort de rire</i>	<i>Dying of laughter, LOL</i>
Tt	<i>Tout</i>	<i>All</i>
Jms	<i>Jamais</i>	<i>Never</i>

<i>Ajh</i>	<i>Aujourd'hui</i>	<i>Today</i>
<i>Tjs</i>	<i>Toujours</i>	<i>Always</i>

As various mental health researchers, both pre-pandemic as well as post-pandemic (Spitzer, 2012; Gomes and Sousa, 2022) have been pointing out, formal remote education impacts mental health and sometimes also the physical health of students, their families, and teachers. Complaints over hardly understandable classes and procedures, time mismanagement, and excessive homework demand form a massive mental and physical burden. Teachers overwork to assist pupils, often in small groups to a better use of time, extending their working days⁶. Hence, there is a growing inability of coping in the real world, translated into the coining of this new type of abbreviated language.

Our own observations made over the past two years during our school interactions with teenagers confirm the grim perspective presented by neurospecialists, sociologists and psychologists: limited span of attention, fretiness when disconnected from virtual reality, inability to focus on more laborious tasks of work.

Dr. Manfred Spitzer, with references on neuroscience has been warning that the use of computers in schools leads to poor performances, causing dependence and obesity (Spitzer, 2012). Gomes and Sousa comment upon a specific negative effect of digitalized education, in the context of these changes and hardships: a new form of boredom that reaches adolescents and other age groups. It seems that the subject feels disconnected from its bonds to others and to objects, something that (...) makes room for emptiness.

Their study results show that previous achievements in schooling access, quality and equality took steps backwards. Mental health and student motivation have suffered negative effects. Abbreviated language may serve as a means of better expressing what happens inside: distorted world vision, confusing feelings of alienation and misfitting.

Specialists have been warning that technology blurs the bond of presence into the void. Space and time take on other dimensions; space is translated into a dynamic screen, full of information, with no empty slots, that is a school curriculum in the rapid blossoming of contents. Time has the speed of light. During remote education, from one week to the next,

6 *Ibidem.*

teachers and pupils had to adjust ways of thinking, acting, and feeling⁷. The language they tend to construct and to use must be a reflection of these harsh realities.

Conclusion

As a result of specific studies as well as personal experience, it is worth warning that the *use* of technology by children and adolescents can easily and speedily be turned into *abuse* on these vulnerable categories and all steps that decrease this abuse must be taken, at all levels.

Finally, our best message is that education⁸ is at its fullest when made in the very presence of both educators and students.⁹

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7 *Ibidem*.

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