

“2 b r nt 2b dat iz d Q” - Mind

BY MIKE STEVENSON

Language always develops and changes. Today's textspeak TTFN (Tata for now) was familiar to radio listeners of the 1940s, while most of us won't immediately recognise - *Fæder ure, thu the eart on heofonum, si thin nama gehalgod*; as the beginning of the Lord's Prayer in the English of Chaucer's times!

Reader's Letter

“...My youngest grandson has just started to write his first meaningful sentences and enjoys writing notes to me. I was quite surprised though, when I received a note with “cul8r” at the end. Being uncertain what it really meant I asked his teenaged brother. “It should really be ‘cyl’, ‘cul8r’ is old-fashioned”, the boy answered casually. He didn't even think that a translation is needed. Do I have to learn this new language or shall I try to teach them some standard English?”

Mrs. Johnson, Bramhall

The other day I asked my wife if she would “Stop off at Malik's and pick up some of my goodies”. She understood what I meant and kindly did what I asked, but I guess that most of you would struggle to carry out my request!

We all use language in several ways to communicate with each other and mostly we choose a style which those on the receiving end can understand. In our families we often use a condensed form of language which is perfectly understandable within that small group, but may be incomprehensible to outsiders. We may use one condensed form within our family, another in our friendship group, and yet another within our work group. The essential feature is that condensed forms work best within a restricted community.

In order to ask someone outside of my family group to do what I asked my wife, I would need to have said something like “On your way to my house in Manchester Avenue, would you please go to Malik's shop on Wilmslow Avenue and buy six gooseberry flavour Village Dairy yoghurts for me?” I am using an



elaborated form of language which is understandable by most people in the wider community.

Now, we have the complicating factor of textspeak, used mainly by young people to communicate exclusively with each other in text messaging and on-line chat forums. MOS (Mother over shoulder) warns your child's friend of your (unwelcome) presence! LMIRL TAM? TMB L&R (Let's meet in real life. Tomorrow morning? Text me back later) Maths 2Da-CWOT (Maths today - a complete waste of time) These are examples of condensed forms of communication which have developed to save time and effort in using keyboards, but are now accepted and used as a way of shutting out the uninitiated!

Within a select group, textspeak has many advantages, but there is increasing evidence of people using textspeak when answering exam questions or writing letters and CVs for prospective employers, or even in formal business reports. Most of us switch between condensed and elaborated forms throughout our daily lives without too many problems. However, because schools, colleges and workplaces are concerned with things which go beyond shared meanings, and are also institutions which can't share many

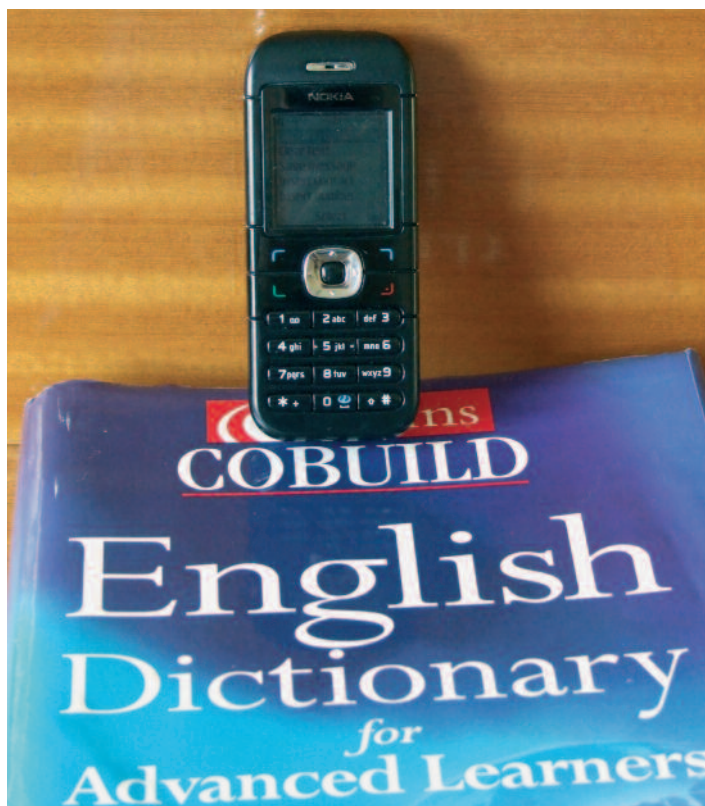
taken-for-granted meanings, they normally use elaborated forms. So the bottom line is that if you can't use elaborated forms, you are unlikely to succeed in the educational system or in most workplaces.

The problem is compounded when we use these forms inappropriately. It is not to say that elaborated forms are better than condensed forms. We all need to use both forms when appropriate. It is only when we are limited to one of the forms that we are likely to encounter difficulties. What is needed is to ensure that children are able to use both condensed and elaborated forms when appropriate, and recognise when some forms are entirely inappropriate and unacceptable to the recipient.

So, what can parents do during the summer break to ensure that young children widen their use of language and begin to develop expertise in elaborated forms? Most importantly we can realise that we are the models our children imitate and from whom their language will primarily develop. It is up to us to provide them with the richest and widest experience of language that we can manage.

We can:-

- Ensure that children hear us using a wide variety of language. Perhaps we can use more formal structures to speak with part-



ners, doctors, shopkeepers, bank employees etc. when children can hear us, and explain why it is sometimes necessary to speak differently to certain people.

- Ensure that children regularly see you reading and writing.
- Introduce the idea of different audiences - what would you say on a holiday postcard to a brother or sister; Grandpa; a friend; a teacher, the holiday company?
- Introduce the idea of special words or phrases. Children love getting their tongues around multi-syllabic words. One of our daughters spent several weeks identifying objects with many colours after learning the word 'multicoloured'.
- Introduce various forms of address – Dear Sir; Hiya Jane; Yo Broth; Good evening, etc
- Create games in which children have to give instructions on how to complete a task. The person (parent) receiving the instructions can only do what they are told. This will encourage children to think and speak accurately.
- Ask questions that help children relate stories/poems/TV to their own experiences. "Who do you know who does things like that?"
- Ask questions to encourage discussion about the details and sequences of a story- 'Who did it first?' etc.
- Ask children to describe events that happened when you weren't present.

- Tell personal stories and talk about things that interest you in order to model conversational skills for children.
- Model complex sentences and words for children.
- Include songs, poems, games, and stories with alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, and repetitions into daily routines.
- Encourage children to use written materials in their play - old correspondence, maps, catalogues, magazines, food packaging, menus, and appliance instruction sheets, tickets, travel brochures, labels, sales slips, shopping lists and receipts. Discuss why a shopping list might be less tidy than a letter from a bank.
- Encourage children to compare and contrast, predict, and ask why and how.
- Promote discussions to check children's understanding and memory of stories over time.
- Encourage children to write and then read back what they have written.
- Encourage children to write the same thing (party invites?) for several different recipients - a friend; a relative; The Queen; a teacher; Grandma etc.
- Provide opportunities for children to read/write many kinds of text for different purposes, such as lists, poems, stories, letters, text messages and instructions, and point out the differences.
- Learn text speak so your children know you can use it! n

Chorlton footballers playing soccer

This summer kids from Oswal Road (Timperley) and Chorlton Park (Chorlton) Junior Schools are going to play football in America.

Joint coach of Oswald Road JFC U11 Ian Whittell was on business in New York before Christmas, when the conversation with business partners got to the relative strengths of US and UK football (or 'soccer' as they call it over the pond). And the challenge was issued and accepted. "Soccer is the growing middle class game in the States, for boys and girls," sportswriter Ian commented. "They are keen to measure their progress against English teams."

The trip has caught the imagination of the wider Chorlton community. Restaurant Croma, with branches in Chorlton, Manchester city centre, Prestwich, Leeds and Boston, Massachusetts, has generously sponsored the team to the tune of £4000 to help make the trip happen. Manager Mike Hill added, "Not only has Croma very generously stepped in to sponsor our shirts and make the tour possible for the less affluent team members and their families, but local band *The Doves* have chipped in a few hundred quid as well."

It is hoped that the USA team Montclair will come to Manchester in 2009.



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