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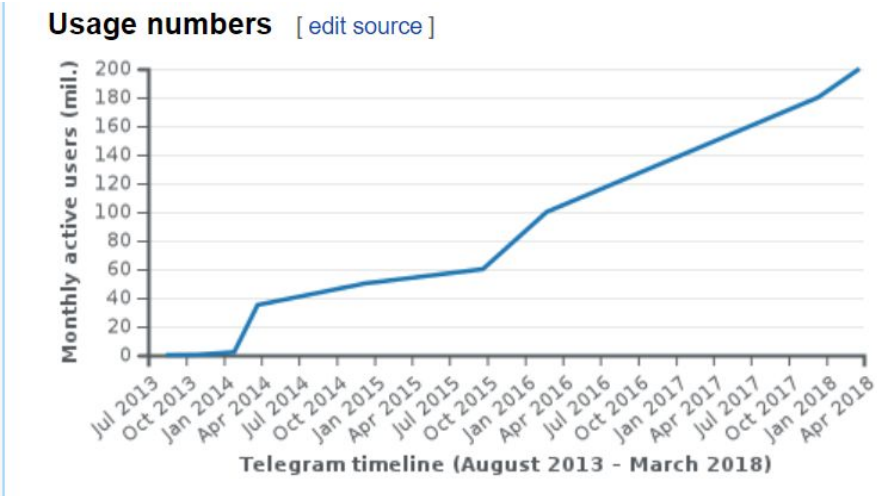
**Language, Technology and the Internet**

**Roshni Jaya  
U1731851K**

Describe one medium of communication not discussed in class and compare it to both speech and text.

Telegram is a cloud based instant messaging service that allows one to send messages, pictures, stickers, audio and files of any variety. It was launched in 2013 by brother Nikolai and Pavel Durov. The messenger is synchronous and shares features from both speech and written text. Since its launch in 2013, it has now rapidly garnered popularity and has close to 300 million monthly active users as of October 2019. A number of studies have been carried out that study the effects of the use of telegram in teaching and learning vocabulary as well as some of its functions on different communities of people.

Figure 1 : Growth rate for first five years since Telegram’s launch (Wikipedia, 2020)



According to the seven features that distinguish speech from writing as introduced by David Crystal, Telegram is seen to possess characteristics that draw from both speech and writing as will be discussed (Crystal, 2011). Firstly it is time bound and the speaker usually has the particular audience in mind. Telegram is also spontaneous when there is a time lag between production and reception. However, it can also be said to be contrived in circumstances for example formal messages are being sent out to groups which dictate the need for it to be carefully organized to be as clear as possible for the ease of reading. Furthermore, it is immediately revisable with the edit function, unlike other popular instant messaging applications like Whatsapp. It is also generally visually decontextualized unless the telescope function, a video messaging service, is employed which then allows face-to face communication to take place. It is only then that extralinguistic cues as well as gestures, facial expression and deixis can be used as both interlocutors now have a clearer mutual understanding of each other's context. Another feature is that it is loosely structured as it mimics informal speech. It is both socially interactive as it is able to fulfill phatic functions and at the same time it is also factually communicative as it possesses the pin function which allows one to keep important and possibly work related messages at the top of the chat for easy access and viewing. Thus, Telegram can be said to draw from both speech like and written characteristics and at times with the aid of certain features, can be more speech-like.

### **Stickers**

One significant and distinct property of Telegram is the use of telegram stickers that can also be made by the users themselves. On instant messaging platforms it can be said that topics of conversation are far more fleeting than they are in real life as it is subject to rapid change the moment another topic is brought up. Thus, Telegram is time bound where an individual may feel the importance and urgency to reply to the topic or previous comment before the topic changes. This is where the use of stickers have proved to be very useful in summarizing an entire range of emotions into a single picture. The use of actual human faces allows for one to understand and grasp the

context via the facial expression as well as any possible inside jokes or meanings surrounding the sticker used. In figure 1, the sticker is of famous songwriter, lyricist and poet Vairamuthu Ramasamy. Though he is smiling, the slight droop of his eyelids contribute to the aura of mischief that surround this sticker. Thus, in this way, as opposed to traditional smiley face emojis, there is a wider range of emotions which one can now access due to the flexibility of the sticker packs. This makes it almost similar to a face to face conversation as there is facial expression and gestures are now being employed to aid in feedback. Furthermore, due to the fact that one can make their own sticker pack, numerous sticker packs have sprung up containing stickers that only certain communities are aware of. For example, there is an animated sticker pack of the linguistic professors of Nanyang Technological University as can be seen in Figure 3. Sticker packs can be downloaded when a friend sends a particular sticker to an individual and thus it can be said that some sticker packs can be exclusive to certain groups of individuals. A student belonging to another course in NTU, thus, would not have much use of the Linguistics sticker pack and this therefore allocates a sense of in-group identity to those who possess the sticker pack.

Figure 2: Vairamuthu Ramasamy in a Telegram Sticker Pack



Figure 3: Francis Bond sticker in Telegram



## Telescope

Another distinct feature of Telegram is a function known as telescope which is a video messaging function where the videos can be up to a whole minute long. This allows the conversation to transcend the traditional boundaries of instant messaging and allows both interlocutors to converse as if they are having a face-to-face conversation. Figure 3 below shows an example of a group chat where each member communicates via sending a video message to the group. This may not be as efficient as it is time bound and by the time the video is recorded and sent, the contents of the video message may no longer be of use to the other group member who may have possibly moved on to the next topic

Figure 3: Telescope function used in Telegram



## **GIFs**

The Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) is a bitmap image format that is widely used among numerous instant messaging platforms. The multimodality of gifs 'allows for the inclusion of more than just stationary visuals' and can be used for the 'purposes of expression, commentary and conversation'. (Milner, 2016)

There have been tests conducted on the uses of telegram in the teaching and learning of vocabulary in Iranian EFL beginners. The results of the questionnaire proved that attitudes towards using Telegram as a tool for learning a language were all positive. Furthermore, the Telegram-taught words were seen to significantly enrich the vocabulary of the Iranian speakers as compared to the words that were taught traditionally (Heidari Tabrizi & Onvani, 2018). This is also supported by another study done where the teaching of vocabular via Telegram stickers were seen to be more effective as it encouraged 'recall cues and increase(d) the likelihood of retention of those words' (Ghobadi & Taki, 2018).

Thus, to conclude, Telegram has been proven to be resourceful in numerous areas as its versatility has allowed it to create new mediums of communication as can be seen through the use of stickers. Thus, it will be interesting to see where the use of such forms of communication will take us as this is still a fairly new medium.

## References

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