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It's happened yet again. While sitting in a cafe and catching up with a friend, I hear a faint buzz, a familiar vibrating ring. She glances at her pocket, pulling out a mobile phone and looks at it, scanning the text. For a brief minute, the conversation stops as she is distracted by the interruption.

"So anyway . . .", she utters, returning to our chat, back to the cafe, back to me. So rude. I internally roll my eyes. Until I realise in shock and horror that I've done it, too. In fact, many of us do it. These little pings and buzzes enslave us, demanding immediate attention, constantly disrupting the flow of conversation and thought.

It seems ironic really. We live in a world consumed by concern for the purported lack of literacy levels of new generations. There are constant complaints about how young people are no longer able to write "proper English", how language is broken and increasingly less eloquent and articulate.

Yet, we are now also communicating through written language more than ever. You might have thought we're getting



Let's talk

Language Matters

more literate in the process, too. Sending instant messages, posting on social media; this is what socialising often looks like today. Does anyone even speak in person any more?

Sure, Covid has not made things easy. But even though lockdowns have become a thing of the past, people are still living through their devices, from their bedrooms, communicating largely via screens. Perhaps Covid has accelerated what might have been brewing in the background for some time.

However, there is an upside to the increased volume of online language. This on-screen written word is no longer a

commodity exclusively available to a fortunate few, privileged individuals who might have otherwise not engaged with it much.

Now the written word is a currency in mass circulation, accessible to anyone with a mobile device. And according to my 9-year-old daughter, "everyone" has one of those.

But commodifying the written word has also decreased its prestige. Some may object that this sort of written word is not "proper" writing but a poorly articulated version of it. Not necessarily.

Recent research has uncovered some surprising findings. Young people who use texting language and play around with online communication tend to be more creative, seeing literacy as a fun

endeavour, as an opportunity to innovate and to challenge the status quo. However, the desire to flaunt formal language norms requires knowing what they are in the first place and there are indications that young people do acquire these norms.

The increase in online communication has resulted in society becoming more tolerant of linguistic variation, relaxing pressures to conform in certain contexts (though by no means in all contexts) and embracing different patterns of use.

Naomi Baron, a former professor from Stanford, terms the changing attitude towards a more indifferent view of linguistic consistency "linguistic whateverism". Linguistic whateverism affects all language levels, from spelling, to punctuation and grammar.

For hardened prescriptivists, linguistic whateverism epitomises the doom of language. However, the incoming laissez-faire attitude is another manifestation of what languages have been doing for centuries and what language purists – from Greek philosophers, to the Brothers Grimm, to modern language academies like l'Académie française – have been fearing for equally long: language change.

I still remember my first mobile phone. As a budding university student, how exciting and grown-up I felt sending and receiving text messages. How things have changed! Texts and instant messages have become the new emails: no more please, too many, too much. These days, I crave old-fashioned spoken conversation: let's talk.

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The Sydney Morning Herald

Review should examine mistakes

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by *Stuff* newspapers.

Most households with mortgages have a fairly simple attitude to the Reserve Bank of Australia: they like it when it keeps rates low and are annoyed when it raises them.

The question that will be at the centre of the review into the Reserve Bank – which Treasurer Jim Chalmers announced last week – is whether the RBA is getting the balance right.

Even the RBA admits that it has made mistakes. In the years before the global pandemic, it overestimated the risk of inflation and kept rates too high. Last year, the RBA may also have messed up in the opposite direction, by keeping rates too

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low for too long. Now it is scrambling and raising rates faster than it has for 30 years. Some households will suffer.

One of the most fundamental decisions for the review will be whether to broaden the RBA's mission statement. Some have suggested it should have to consider housing affordability, or climate change, or income inequality.

These are all important issues, but the review should be very cautious when considering any extension of the Reserve Bank's role in areas such as these.

The RBA already has its hands pretty full controlling inflation and keeping the economy as close as possible to full employment.