
Impact of Text Messaging on Students' Writing Skills at University Level: A Corpus Based Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to investigate the impact of text messaging on the written aspect of student's learning of second language. For this purpose, Concordance software Antconc is used. The results indicate that text messaging language has impacted their language usage in informal situation, like language usage in emails and informal note takings, but when students are brought to their formal register, they do not deviate from the normal pattern of writing. Apart from this text messaging also enhances the confidence level of students giving them chance to express themselves without any hesitation. Spelling and punctuation mistakes are seen in their note takings but they generally come back to their original pattern when writing formal assignments and projects. Text messages help students to impart knowledge and information with a touch of finger in no time.

Keywords: Text messaging, student abilities, written abilities, textisms, Antconc

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INTRODUCTION

New technology has drastically altered the human life from every aspect. It has not only impacted their social, religious and educational vistas of life but also has left a huge impression on the usage of language of people belonging to this "modern electronic world". New technology is one of the variables which have impacted human language. In the past emails were used to transport piece of information from one person to another. Ever since, with the advent of mobile phones, text messaging has become extremely popular among people to convey their expressions or ideas in a blink of eye. What is text messaging? It refers to brief typed messages sent through short messaging services (SMS) of mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDA's), smart phones or web browsers. This kind of electronic communication scheme has reached over the apex of its fame over the past few years. Due to the excessive usage of this technological tool it has given rise to a new form of language (which is shorter and is generally devoid of grammatical structures) is called

as “text speak”, “SMS speak”, “textism” etc. Lieke Verheijen” used the term “textese” for it in his paper.

The technical limitations of text messages have resulted in the reinvention of words and construction of new language style, as far as its purpose is to convey messages in shorter period of time just to make the other person understand the general idea or thought. Elbert Einstein rightly claimed. “Any fool can know the point is to understand”. Its utilization is more usual among young generations. It increases the confidence level of students of timid nature as it helps them to deliberate their thoughts without any fear. A study has shown that young women uses text messages to deliver their ideas or thoughts more frequently as compared to men as its usage is more personal and conveys message directly to the person needed to be addressed (Erin ,17) noticed. “Thurlow” (2006, 2007) noticed that texting effects the use of literary and standard language, particularly that of youth.

The reason for it’s been more fashionable among teens is firstly, that it is cheap and is very personal thing, conveys a message in no time. Secondly, its available in emergent situations as everyone carries a handy phone in their bags or just around them, owing to its “mobileability”. So it plays a vital role to keep them informed and up-to-date every time. It is unobtrusive, as it does not interfere with their personal environment by noising up their surroundings. It seems that mobile phone has distinctive characteristics that make it popular technically and practically. Text messaging is also limited enabling only 160 characters per message. In addition to it, as texting is a personal custom, it allows people to rebel against the English grammar and spelling rules or has enabled them to

deviate from conventional English language features. Text messaging has been depicted as a “constant technological onslaught on formal English writing”. Consequently, linguistics can use this discussion to debate on text speak, to analyze the conversation of text messages, semantically syntactically and morphologically stimulating academic discussion to figure out the deviation from the original monosyntactic structures. It also evidently affects the reading ability of people as they become accustomed to the short forms used in textisms. Study has been performed that evidently proclaimed that grammatical abilities of adolescents remain intact; instead it gives rise to some language innovations, creativity and smart advancements. Ong’onda (2009) proclaimed “variation within text messaging depends upon the particular use of SMS”.

A profound study of instant messages informs us about language variation in the form of spellings, grammar and punctuation. The prominent elements that are of day-to-day use are “abbreviations”(msg), “contractions”(tmrw), “acronyms”(omg), “clipping”(feb), “number homophones”(2day), emoticons(:)), typographic symbols (<3), “slang”(yr), omission of punctuation etc. All these terms shall be discussed elaborately in this article. This type of carefree informal register lifts up an indifferent attitude among students and encourages them to deviate from the standard language rules, resulting in their deteriorated linguistic abilities. Noam. S. Baron describes this manner of students as “linguistic whateverism” which describes their “textiquettes”. However , its usage seems inevitable , what we can look into is to elucidate its effects on the formal register of students as it is often reported to be effecting their language-ability in written form ,in terms of spellings, punctuation and grammar.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are;

- to scrutinize the consequences of text messaging on the written features of English language
- to find out its effects on the syntactical, semantical and morphological aspects of language
- to figure out the degree of deviation from the formal register among students

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study will attempt to answer following questions;

- What are the outcomes of text messaging on different language features of students?
- Does the text messaging effect their morphology?
- Does the text messaging effect their sentence formation or syntax?
- What are the effects of text messaging on semantics?
- Does it interfere with their spellings and punctuations in written texts?

Significance Of Study

This study intends to supply a contribution in the development of linguistics. It will help to bring out the solutions to the supposed deviation in the formal register among students, if found any. Teenagers, students, men, women, educators and learners will be benefited by this research. This study will help to evaluate the writing skills of students and will figure out if it is affected by the frequent use of text messaging among students. This study will also bring light on the areas which are more affected by textisms in daily life of students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is believed that usage of text messages enhances the English language abilities of students but the problem here is that it also deteriorates their writing abilities by providing them with abbreviations, short forms and textisms without bringing in consideration the grammatical structure, syntax, morphology, spellings and punctuations.

This study will discuss whether the usage of text messages influence student's acquisition of second language and writing skills the extent of its effects of text messaging on student's academic and writing skills.

DELIMITATIONS

This study will solely focus on the effects of text messaging on the writing skills of students. To which extent the usage of some abbreviations and short forms have a significant impact on their writing skills and performance.

The students will be the English language learners at MPhil level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part discusses the important researches that have been performed under this topic. A study of children of Australia was performed by Catherine Bushiness, Nenagh Kemp and Frances Martin (2011) at University of Tasmania. In this study impact of text messaging on the spelling ability of children between the ages of 10-12 years was brought under investigation. During this study the text messages of students and their written notes were evaluated and it was found out that the children use of text messaging has no significant impact on their writing-ability of formal text. It was also witnessed that women use text messaging more than men do. A study was performed by Caroline Tagg (March 2009) at university of Birmingham regarding “Corpus Linguistic study of SMS text messaging. The purpose of this study was to determine how textures produce new words depending upon their interpersonal situation.

This research concluded that creativity and word frequency lists plays an important role to produce language variety in textisms. Kemp and Bushnill (2011) performed a study to conclude both the reading and writing skills of students, Students were asked to write a sentence as they normally do a friend. It was evaluated that their usage of text language variety was contextually controlled. For reading task 70% of the total text was consisted of textism. It was find out that the rate and accuracy in reading task was effected due to the textese. Thurlow (2003) find out that only one third of SMS conversation consisted of practical purposes and had some functional aspects while the rest conversation is concerned with friendship romance and other relation building goals, in university students.

Aziz et al (2013) conducted a study in an Information Technology institute in Pakistan considering students at bachelor level, aging between 19-25 years. He suggested that there was no interference of textisms in student’s formal register and they were able to switch to a proper register when they were supposed to write formally. At a University in Saudi Arabia, Mahmoud (2013) conducted an experimental study taking 40 students studying foundational courses at that university. These forty participants were divided into two groups of 20 students each. Among these two groups one was controlled group, which was taught using conventional strategies while the other was experimental group and was taught using the conventional approach plus SMS messages as a communication building source. An oral test and a written test was taken from student to determine the impact on the spoken and written skill of students due to frequent use of SMS among students.

The study concluded that the group of students who were also taught through SMS means, their writing and reading skills were interestingly ameliorated. Adebileje (2014) explored the morphosyntactic features of students in their text messaging at a university in Nigeria. 120 test messages were analyzed. This study aimed in bringing forth the student’s use of morphemes to form sentence structures (syntax). It was discovered that the students’ morphemes were greatly influenced by their phonics and Nigerian Pidgin English and other mother tongues.

METHODOLOGY

This is a corpus-based study which have features of both qualitative and quantitative research. All the students of English language studies who were in their first semester at

MPhil level from a private university were considered to be the population for this study. For the purpose of this study 20 students were selected which belonged to different areas of Pakistan, of ages between 22-35 years. In this study the main instrument which was used was computer aided concordance software, Antconc, version 3.5.8. For this purpose, a corpus of text messages, emails and notes was gathered and then analyzed with the help of Antconc software.

Since the research was on the use and effect of text messages in students' writing, two types of data was collected from them. One was their text messages, they were asked to provide 20 of their text messages each, which they have recently sent to their friends or teachers, thus provided us with 400 text messages to analyze. They were also asked to show 2 of their formal emails recently sent. The second type of data which was gathered from them was their academic notes or short notes they have taken during the lectures. The main purpose to collect this data was the fact that it was simple way to analyze since it has provided lucid and comprehensible proof of the required findings. The data was not only easy to obtain but also was easy to be presented. Simultaneously, numerical data was also gathered by compiling the errors committed by students and their frequencies in the form of a table and then transferring the data in the form of percentage.

Data of 20 students were collected and checked later using software to indicate the frequency of error in the student's writing. Specific errors were marked and classified into different categories. The analyzing stage considered the number of errors according to respective categories, before the comparison was made on the frequency of types of error committed.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter data and findings have been presented and analyzed. In table 4.1 the data is all about the influence of textism in students' text messages. Subsequently, table 4.2 shows the influence of textism in informal writing.

Table 4.1: Influence of textism in text

English Form	Textism	Category	Examples	Branch	Number of occurrence	Percentage
Busy tomorrow	Bz 2moro	Adjective Adverb	I am bzyar I'll come 2moro	Phonology	215	29%
Oh my God Right now	OMG RN	Sentence Compound word	OMG what a lovely surprise Come to me rn	Morphology	195	26%
Smile Sad	☺ ☹	Verb	☺ ☹	Semantics	207	22%
As soon as possible Thank you	ASAP TY	Verb phrase	Send me ASAP Okay TY	Syntax	326	44%

The above table shows the effect of textism in students' text. The table has been drawn by analyzing the text messages of the students. Results say that all aspect of writing (phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax etc) have been affected by textism. The use of abbreviation, emoticon, acronyms and initialling are the common used textism of the

students. Words like **bz**, **2moro** fall under the error of phonology. Similarly, words like **OMG**, **ILYSM**, **TY** etc are the syntactic errors. The use of emoticons to convey the feelings is the semantic error or semantic aspect of any written discourse.

Table 4.2: Influence of textism in informal writing (emails, handouts, class notes etc)

English form	Textism	Examples from students' emails
Have	Hv	I hv sent you
Thanks in advance	TIA	TIA ma'am
Just	Jst	Jst received ur mail
How are you	Hw r u	Hw r u sara?
As soon as possible	ASAP	Send me ASAP
You, your	U , ur	Thank u, ur welcome

In informal writing, the effect of textism was more as compare to formal writing. In their informal writings, students used contractions, initialization etc. As the social media sites, instant messages, mails grow popular, written language has become more informal. The reason behind this is the habit strength philosophy.

Influence Of Textism In Formal Writing:

Textism in formal writing was not influential as students were writing descriptive essays, assignments and projects etc in an academic style. This is because the students know the rules of writing and the effect of textism was very low in their essays and formal writings.

The results showed the number of errors were spotted that belong to each category of linguistics, Students in most of the e-mails missed the capitalization. This was also seen in their note takings. Like, the first letter should be capital but in almost most of cases it was not I.e "Ayesha coming". The account is generally stylized with the addition of extra words like "wanna" "cuz", "yupss", "Nopz". It was seen in emails and texts with sufficient number of occurrences. They usually missed punctuations, even in the emails and note takings. This deviation was also seen in their formal writings, to a little extent apart from note takings, emails and text messaging, where it was completely ignored contractions were prevalent in each text and e-mails. Note takings carried a huge amount of contractions, like "Txt" "Wknd" "plz" "bday", "gng", "frwd".

DISCUSSION

The study was set out to present the textual characteristics found in student's note takings, emails, texts and formal assignments/tasks. The results have shown the deviations which were more frequently used by students. It includes a number of morphological entities which were found generally in the form of contractions of words and excessive use of abbreviations "txt", "wknd" and "dnt" spellings were generally out of formal order but this kind of deviation was witnessed in their note takings and emails apart from the sample of text messaging. It was less frequent in their formal register. Words like "hv" for have 'dnt' for don't" " plz" for please etc were more frequently used and the errors of misspellings were not found in their formal register but their frequency was huge in the text messaging, emails and note takings. Morphologically, letter/number homophones were extensively used throughout the note takings like "2more". "ri8" e.t.c. Phonologically sentence was

stylized by students to enhance account of the words used by them. These include “wanna” “Nopz” “thnkz” these were seen with a good frequency. “Bz” for busy was frequently used by students in their note takings and emails, however this kind of deviation was not witnessed in their formal register. Semantically, use of emotion was used with a good number of occurrences, but these were used extensively in messaging and secondly in emails, these emotions were mostly used in their informal chats and included the emotions of happiness, laughter’s, and wonder at the very most. Sentences are shortened by the students by the contractions of clauses and phrases and sometimes number of words. Among these which were more extensively used are ASAP for “ as soon as possible”. “ TY” for “ Thank you” , “ OMG” for “Oh my God” and “BTW” for “By the way”.

These syntactic contractions were used everywhere in emails, in texts, in taking of notes but these were not found in formal writings which were analyzed by the sample of students ‘assignments and formal notes of study. “TIA” for “thanks in advance” was used by students in most of these e-mails which were sent for formal request taking emails.

Non-standard spelling is used by students with greater number occurrence. These kinds of errors are also found in their formal register somewhere but are mostly found in the e-mails and their hand notes. These are generally contractions, abbreviations, acronyms, number homophones style accentuation and general misspelled words. Punctuations were generally not found in hand notes and these were some of the mistakes regarding punctuations were used in a wrong way by them. Text messages were either completely derived of punctuations or use of commas and periods was more than usual and extraordinary. However, no proper deviation of other words pertaining to their morphological syntactical, semantical or phonological deviation was witnessed in formal register, but just a little divergence from punctuation was manifested in their formal texts but that is negligible and can be corrected by teachers giving more focus on this aspect of their writing abilities.

CONCLUSION

This study was performed to bring out the impact of the text messaging in the written abilities of students. Data was collected by the students and analyzed with the help of Antconc. Results concluded that divergence from the morphological, syntactic and phonological features of their language use was only observed in their hand notes, emails and of course the text messages were loaded with short forms, contractions and abbreviations etc. No deviation was seen in their formal assignments and projects, from any of these perspectives. Punctuations and spellings mistakes were however, negligibly witnessed in their formal texts but their occurrences were prevalent in their hand notes, emails and text messages. It gives us an idea that students use such contractions abbreviations, short forms etc. in their informal texts but when they are observed in their formal register, no evidence of such deviation is witnessed.

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