

SMS LANGUAGE IN STUDENTS' WRITING

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to determine whether SMS language could affect students' writing. It also aimed to find out whether English language learners face problems in differentiating between the informal and formal language usage in their academic writing. To obtain data for the study, two (2) instruments: survey questionnaire and text analysis, were employed. Twenty (20) essay scripts from Diploma in English Language Studies semester 2 students were analysed. Besides analysing the students' essays, the students were also asked to complete a questionnaire which consisted several questions to examine their texting behaviour. The findings of the study show that: 1) it is true that all the students use SMS language when texting, 2) the students can still differentiate between the usage of formal and informal language when they write a formal/academic essay, 3) the five (5) most used SMS language by the students while texting are 'emojis', 'capitalized letters to show emotion', 'unconventional spellings', 'interjection' and 'acronyms'. While in the essays analysed only one type of SMS language found which was 'apostrophes left out'. This strongly suggests that SMS language does not influence the students formal/ academic writing although they use it heavily when texting.

Keywords: SMS Language, Students' Writing, Diploma in English Language Studies Students.

Introduction

According to Crystal (2008) a new medium for language does not turn up very often and because of that the linguistic effect of electronic communication technology has attracted so much attention. Presently, mobile phones have generated one of the most idiosyncratic varieties in the history of language referred to as Textspeak.

Textspeak (Crystal, 2008) is a language phenomenon characterized by its distinct graphology whereby its chief feature is rebus abbreviations. In Textspeak words are formed in which letters represent syllables (e.g. 'b', 'ur' 'b4' and 'xcept'), use is made of logograms such as numerals and symbols (e.g. '&', '@', 'b4', 'abbrevi8' and 'face2face) and punctuation marks and letters are adapted to express attitudes (the so-called smileys and emoticons e.g. ':-D after the title *laugh out loud*').

Past Research on the Effects of SMS Language on Students' Writing

Saberi (2016) examined 6 articles where 3 studies studied the impact of SMS language on the native group, and studies on non-native group published in Scientific Journals in 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013 & 2015.

The first study on native group was conducted by Drouin and Davis (2009) aimed to find out whether the use of Text speak hurts literacy. The researchers aimed to measure the reading and spelling skills of the participants. Then conducted a survey to obtain the participants' opinions about the appropriateness of text speak in formal and informal communication and whether or not the use of text speak may have a positive or negative effect on memory of standard English. Their findings show that there were no deterioration of writing performance, decline in standard of English performance and no negative relationships between texting and literacy.

Another study on the native group was carried out by Rosen et al. (2010) to investigate the relationship between textism and formal and informal writing among adults. In this study, the researcher evaluated the writing skills of the respondents and their usage of communication tools. They came up with a detailed scoring rubric for writing skill. This scoring rubric measured the writing scale in levels from score 1 incompetent (lowest score) to level 6 that is superior and it is the highest score. In this study, the researchers found out that there was a difference between formal and informal writing. There was also negative impact in writing formal letter and There is positive relationship with informal writing.

The third and more recent study was by Grace et al. (2005) on undergraduates' attitudes to text messaging language use an instructions of textisms into formal writing. Questionnaire was the tool used by the researchers in the study to evaluate the formal writing capabilities of the participants. The study supports the results found in the previous studies. It showed that using Textism in text messages or any other form of computer-mediated communication such as social media has not undermined students writing ability.

The first study of non-native group was done by Shafie, Darus and Osman (2010) to study the effect of SMS language on college writing. In this study, The researchers created a corpus of text messages sent by the students during one semester and collected the English class assignment of the same students and compared the writings of the students using Typology of Texted English (Shortis, 2001) as their methodology. The study revealed that learners can easily distinguish between the formal and informal writing in their essays and most of them have used proper English. They knew that correct spelling is important in formal writing and in examinations, but there have been a large number of spelling errors in their assignments and examinations.

The other study is carried out by Tayebnik and Puteh (2012) on text message and its effect on English Language Literacy. The researchers used a semi-structured interview as their instrument. The results from this study cover a wide scope of both writing and speaking deficiencies and samples were provided. The participants admitted that the habit of using textism has intruded their writing and speaking skills.

Finally, the most recent study by Shaari and Bataineh (2015) on netspeak and a breach of formality to see the informalization and fossilization of errors in Writing among ESL and EFL Learners. The instruments were one questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The Study concluded that 46% of their participants admitted that their spelling ability is affected by textism habit in a negative way. Also, 61.3% of the participants reported that they cannot distinguish between formal and informal writing in English. These findings are in line with Tayebnik and Puteh's (2012) finding, in their research.

Other Studies (Native Group)

Cullington(2010) studies the effect of texting on writing on the native speakers of English. The main focus or the research question of this study is to see the use of acronyms and shorthand in the text messages whether they affect students' ability to spell and write well in academic writing. The other research question is do students struggle to convey emotion in their writing.

This debate became prominent after some teachers began to believe they were seeing a decline in the writing abilities of their students.

The methods of this study are survey and also text analysis. For the survey, the researcher surveyed seven students on their opinions about the impact of texting on writing and for the analysis the researcher analysed students' writing samples for instances of textspeak.

The research finds that texting actually has a minimal effect on student writing. It showed that students do not believe textspeak is appropriate in formal writing assignments. They recognize the difference between texting with friends and writing formally and know what is appropriate in each situation.

The conclusion is there is more proof that texting is not interfering with students' use of standard written English and has no effect on their writing abilities in general but it has to be noted that these studies were conducted on the native speaker.

Other Studies (Non-native Group)

Odey, Veronica(2014) did a study on the effects of SMS Texting on the Writing Skills of University Students in Nigeria. This study obviously focused on non-native speakers of English. This study's objective is to explore the influence of technology, particularly the SMS texting and the use of English language by Nigerian university students, in a typical pedagogical situation. The population or subjects of this study is 50 third year students of the institution, the College of Education, Akamkpa in Nigeria.

This study combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches for the collection and the analysis of numerical and qualitative data. The method of this study is text analysis. The researcher analysed 250 SMS messages of 50 third year students of the institution and answer scripts produced in an examination situation by these students.

The study found out that Texting influenced the students to consciously or unconsciously change the pattern of proper writing to SMS language (textism). This study also came out with a very important finding which is the 5 most dominant features of textism found in students' writing that include vowel deletion , graphemes (letter homophony) , alphanumeric homophony, punctuation 'errors' and initialisation (in decreasing order).

The conclusion reveals that constant use of SMS language by student has high potentials of negatively affecting their writing skills. However it has to be noted that these studies were conducted among non-native speakers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Native speakers of English can distinguish between formal and informal writing and the habit of using IM applications in native group did not affect the quality of their writing badly. However, the scenario is different with the native group where majority of the studies discovered that there is an intrusion of SMS language in students' writing.

Research Methodology

This research used survey and data analysis as instruments. The main instrument used is text analysis that is in order to see whether there is evidence of SMS language in students' writing. While the second instrument, questionnaire, is used to find out about the texting behaviour of the students.

In order to obtain the data, 20 essay scripts from language studies students were analysed. Besides analysing students' essays, they were also asked to complete a questionnaire which consisted several questions.

The respondents of the study were Diploma in English Language Studies students from semester 2. These students were taking two English Language Proficiency courses, Intermediate English Proficiency (MDLS 1063) and Skills for MUET (MDLS 1072). One of the components taught in these courses was writing.

Analysis and Findings

Questionnaire

Table 1 shows the respondents' answers to the question in the questionnaire 'Do you use SMS language when texting? All respondents responded that they did use SMS language when texting..

Table 1: Do you use SMS language when texting?

Do you use SMS language when texting?	Frequency
Yes	20
No	0
Total	20

Table 2 shows the respondents' answers to the question in the questionnaire 'Do you use SMS language when writing? Majority (18 respondents) answered no, while only two respondents answered yes.

Table 2: Do you use SMS language when writing?

Do you use SMS language when writing?	Frequency
Yes	2
No	18
Total	20

Table 3 illustrates the SMS language that students usually use when texting. Three most used SMS language are emojis, capitalized letter to express emotion and unconventional spelling, and Interjection with the frequencies 38 times (21.71%), 29 times (16.57%) and 25 times (14.29%) respectively. In contrast, the three least preferred SMS language are apostrophes left out, removed letters, Letter/Number homophones and accent stylization with the frequencies 6 times (3.43%), 0 time respectively.

Table 3 SMS language that students use when texting

Classification of SMS language	Frequency	Percentage
Shortened words	16	9.14 %
Removed letter	2	1.14%
Acronyms	19	10.86%
Symbols	11	6.29%
Emojis	38	21.71%
Apostrophes left out	6	3.43%
Capitalized letter to express emotion	29	16.57%
Letter/Number homophones	0	0
Unconventional spellings	29	16.57%
Accent stylization	0	0
Interjection	25	14.29%
Total	175	100%

Text Analysis

Table 4 shows the result obtained from the text analysis which is the second instrument in this research. There were 20 essays analysed by the researcher, and the number of words for all those essays are approximately 6000 words. Out of 20 essay scripts analysed by the researcher, only 4 SMS languages were found which came from 2 essay scripts. The IM/SMS languages found are the words 'wont', 'don't', and 'didn't' which came from 'apostrophes left out' group. From the text analysis, the researcher also found out that there were many spelling errors occurred in students' writing.

Table 4: SMS language that students use when writing

Classifications of SMS Language	IM/SMS Language Found	Number	percentage
Shortened words	-	0	
Removed letters	-	0	
Acronyms	-	0	
Symbols	-	0	
Emoticons/ Emojis	-	0	
Apostrophes left out	Wont, dont, didnt	4	0.07%
Capatalized letters to express emotion	-	0	
Letter/number homophones	-	0	
Unconventional spelling	-	0	
Accent stylization	-	0	
Interjection	-	0	
Total		4	

Conclusion

Thus the conclusions that can be drawn based on the findings of the study are :

1. Yes, the students use SMS language when texting.
2. No, because they still can differentiate the usage of Formal and informal language when they write a formal/academic writings.
3. The 5 most used SMS language by the students while texting are “emojis”, “capitalized letter to show emotion”, “unconventional spellings”, “interjections” and “acronyms” while the most used SMS language by the students in writing is “apostrophes left out”.

This finding is in line with the finding from the study conducted by Shafie, Darus and Osman (2010) which also found that the non-native students were able to differentiate between formal and informal writing which explained why there was no or very little effect of SMS language on the students’ writing.

Recommendations

Since this study is only focused on DELS (Diploma in English studies) which almost everyone in that course has a good command of English, the researcher feels that the same study needs to be conducted with students from other courses from the same college or other colleges and universities to see whether it will bring a different outcomes.

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