THE EFFECT OF TEXTISMS ON THE WRITINGS OF SELECTED FEMALE STUDENTS OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY BIRNIN-KEBBI

Sadiya Abubakar Gwandu[1] & Halima Abdullahi Aminu[2]

Abstract

Students are expected to, in formal situations, use language properly for effective communication and grammatical formulation. The growing concern about the use of texting endangering the standard forms of language prompted the research to determine the presence of SMS features in the academic writing of university undergraduates. The instrument used for data collection was essay writing which was written by fifty female English language levels I-IV students of the Department of European Languages, FUBK. However, the findings reveal that only ten out of the fifty essays contain textisms, (i.e., 20%). The research findings agree with Crystal's assertion that it is very rare to find textisms in schoolwork, contrary to the general belief that people have that textisms are used in essays and examinations. However, the work was also able to determine that if the use of textisms though rare, is not currently discouraged, it can lead to a poorer level of literacy in the English language as standard orthography could be lost.

Keywords: Effect, Textisms, Female, Students and Writing

Introduction

I cannot seem to walk across my university's campus without seeing at least one person glued to the phone screen typing away as fast as they can. Most people have probably texted on their phones at least once. The advent of text messaging made new forms of interaction that were

[1] Sadiya Abubakar Gwandu is of Department of European Languages, Federal University Birnin-Kebbi, Kebbi State. sirdeargwandu@gmail.com

[2] Halima Abdullahi Aminu is of Department of English Language and Linguistics, Sokoto State University, Sokoto State. Haleemahabdullahi5@gmail.com 08037007949

not possible before. The new system of writing is categorized as one of the electronic communications via GSM.

More so, history has shown that the language of text messaging (Textism) is believed to have developed out of shorthand used in bulletin board systems and later in internet chat rooms where users would abbreviate some words to allow a response to be typed more quickly, though the amount of time saved is often inconsequential. It is worth noting that texting became much more pronounced in short message service (SMS).

As more and more students worldwide acquire and use mobile phones, so do they immerse themselves in text messaging. Such is the situation in that some teachers, parents, and students themselves expressed concerns that students' writing skills stand the risk of being sacrificed on the altar of text messaging.

Concern has been expressed by teachers about the poor communication skills of students, as the Net generation has adopted textisms as shortcuts in electronic communication. Texters engage in text messaging on a wide range of topics or issues that are most personal or private. However, due to the word limit from SMS, one encodes the message he/she wants to send, and proceeding to opening a new page, attracts additional cost. By this, the writer of the text messages is compelled by the context of the situation which is not just to economize the number of words to use for the message but also forced in some cases, to violate certain rules of graphic representations, syntax and phonology as well.

So, this research is necessitated by the fact that most students in recent times have resorted to the use of textisms in their class work as well as examinations. This is not a good phenomenon as they eventually are the same people who will end up teaching the next generation of Nigerians. If the use of textisms is not currently checked, it will completely erode the proper use of the English language.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the impact text messaging has on students' writing (most especially females). The study has dual

objectives; one is to investigate the extent of the prevalence of textisms in students' written essays. Two, to establish whether or not Text Messaging affects students' performance in written English compositions. Specific questions that guide this research work are: To what extent are textisms prevalent in students' written essays? What are the effects of Text Messaging on the Students' performance in written English compositions?

By definition, SMS or Text Messaging is the text communication service of the mobile communication system using standardized communication protocols that allow the exchange of short messages between mobile phone devices. This view is supported by Crystal (2008) who maintained that: "Text Messaging is the practice where users of mobile & portable devices exchange brief written Messages via cellular networks". Crystal further buttresses that the original term was derived from Messages sent using the Short Message Services (SMS).

Texting has values worth recognizing even if one cannot appreciate them. Short messaging, short mail, SMSing, person-to-person messaging, mobile messaging, wireless messaging, text messaging, texting, texting… whatever we call it, is evidently here to stay. So, if it is causing problems, we need to be able to manage them. And if it is providing benefits, we need to know how to build on them. The surprising thing, about such a global phenomenon, is that so little reliable information about the language of texting has become public knowledge. Psychologists, sociologists, health specialists, journalists, and educators have had plenty to say; but hardly any reports provide details of what exactly happens to language when people create texts. As a result, huge popular mythology has grown, in which exaggerated and distorted accounts of what youngsters are believed to do when the text has fuelled prophecies of impending linguistic disaster (Crystal, 2008).

Crystal (2008:37) identifies six main kinds of distinctive features of text messages;

1. Pictograms and logograms: This is the most noticeable feature of text orthography where single letters, numerals, and typographic symbols

are used to represent words, part of words, or even –as in the case of x and z noises associated with actions Gr8 – great, B4 – before, @oms – atoms, 2day – today, Xxx – kisses, Zzz – sleeping etc.

2. Initialisms: This is the second most noticeable feature of texting reducing the words to their initial letters, technically called initialism, initialisms are familiar in proper names such as NATO, BBC, UNICEF, NTA, MDG etc. they are called acronyms though some scholars restricted the term to the forms that are pronounced as single words such as NATO and UNICEF, calling forms such as BBC, NTA, MDG. What happens in text messages, is that everyday words are reduced to their initial letters e.g. 'nd' stands for 'and', 'y' for 'why'. For elements of compound words: 'bf' – boyfriend,' wke'-weekend, HE- his Excellency. For words in phrases; 'NP' – No problem, 'FTF' – face-to-face, 'CWOT'- complete waste of time, 'AML' – all my love, for elliptical words or whole sentences; 'JK'- Just kidding, 'BRB'- be right back, 'CMB'- call me back, 'DK'- don't know, 'MMYT'- mail me your thought, 'FY'- for your information. For words in expostulations; 'AB'- Ah bless! 'OMG'- Oh my God!

We should note that most of these text message initialisms are not new, some have been used for hundreds of years even in offices e.g. 'HRH', 'MC', 'PA', 'VIP' Many of these old initialisms have been adopted by texters.

3. Omitted letters: Unlike initialism where all the letters of a word are omitted except the first. The omission is often noticeable, and certainly more common, where texters shorten words by omitting letters from the middle (often called contraction) or dropping a letter at the end (often called clippings) where vowels and final consonants are often dropped equally silent consonants, and double medial consonant are reduced to single ones e.g.

Rite – write
Xnt- Excellent
Textn- texting
Msg- message

Slpn- sleeping
Nite- night

4. Non-standard spelling: The non-standardization of text messaging is one of the commonest of its features, these deviant spellings we see in text messages give the impression that people are consciously manipulating the writing system, rather than making inadvertent errors. It is worth pointing out that texters are prone to misspellings, both unconsciously and deliberately. This is because they would not be able to use mobile phone technology at all if they had not been taught to read and write, and this means they all had a grounding in the Standard English writing systems. The list of non-standard spellings used in texting is not great, but they are certainly distinctive and one of the main irritants to people who do not like this genre. They include the following:

'cos' 'cuz' 'bcos' – because	'shud' - should
'bin' – been	'ova' – over
'U' – you	'skul' -school
'cud' –could	'thru' - through
'luv' – love	'tnx', 'tanks', 'thnks' – thank

5. Shortening:
Shortening is a kind of abbreviation where a word is shortened by omitting one of its meaningful elements, usually at the end (as in exam), but sometimes at the beginning (as in phone). In texting, the day's element is regularly omitted from the days of the week (Mon, Tues, Wed, Thurs, Fri, Sat, Sun) similar are the various month's endings (Jan, Feb, Dec) 'Uni(versity) 'hol'(idays) 'min'(utes) 'bro'(ther). This is very natural development for the technology with huge savings of time and money for several letters significantly reduced without loss of intelligibility. And it is so common among students who usually or normally shorten the names of their courses thus we have; Bio, Edu, Phy, Chem, Lit, Eng, Lin, His, and so on. The last distinctive feature is genuine novelty.

English, like other languages, is a very complex system of rules in which sound structure and meaning are integrated for the purpose of communication. The language follows general principles called rules of grammar (Taiwo, 2012). These rules guide the combination of words that covert complex meanings according to the ordering of such words. No doubt, Awoyemi (2013: 34) views it as a complex part of human psychology, a phenomenon which is orderly, meaningful and creative. The creative nature of the English language is seen in the fact that though standardized, it is very flexible, that is it can have variation and can be subject to a complex dynamism (Awoyemi 2013). These variations may occur in its use in the level of formality of the language to suit the occasion (formal and informal use). Baron (2008) contends that the use of SMS language manifests the creative use of letters, punctuations, and numbers and it increases phonetic awareness in children. It is also observed that different people have their unique texting styles.

Thurlow (2011) opines that on the one hand, the orthographic or typographic choices made by young people in their messages are sociolinguistically and communicatively intelligible. At the same time, text messages are not without character or interest. He further asserts that pragmatics proposes that form and function are mutually dependent and text messages have a distinctive feel due to the combination of; their comparatively short length, the relative concentration of non-standard typographic markers and their regularly 'small-talk' content and solidarity orientation all at the same time.

***Textism*:** Textism is the language used in text messages characterized by the use of abbreviations, single letters, and symbols. Textisms are changes in spelling as compared to the conventional written code. This new word "textism" describes this new 21st century language used by teens all around the world when it comes to communication through text. It is crazy when parents see with their own eyes the way their kids speak, read, and write has changed so drastically in a short number of years. Teens all around the globe have traded proper nouns, correct spelling, grammar, and the correct use of punctuations for what is the

new way of writing, in which they practice shortening their words such as "bros, sis, tues, which really should be written as "brother, sister, and Tuesday".

Teens love to use non-conventional spelling instead of the grammatically correct ways they were taught as kids. It is sad to say teens are writing more recklessly when it comes to words such as "fone, rite, and skool" which as children they learned to spell them as "phone, right, and school". (Dolliver, 2010). Some parents read these findings and say their kids only write in this new "textism" way at home or during off time from school. The language of texting is jumping from kids' cell phones right into the classrooms and onto school assignments, just as (Dolliver, 2010) posits: kids are counting school assignments in textism, it is as if they have forgotten to use verbs, pronouns, and basic writing rules, something as simple as spelling and grammar are lost when it comes to writing.

The use of text language is very prominent in today's society, and this has had a profound impact on the development of language skills in young people. Texting like other forms of electronic communication can be time-consuming and addictive which may lead to inappropriate language use. The degree to which texting positively affects all students in the development of language skills is debatable, as some believe texting is mostly used by students with a strong phonological background who feel confident in forming and using new words. By referring to research done on "the effect of texting on language development skills, text language in education, and texting in society", it showed that writing including the use of texting does indeed encourage the development of good language skills in young people. It could therefore be said here that the positives to be attained when using text language far outweighs the negatives, as the user can freely express themselves and this can be seen as helping in the development of good language skills.

However, appreciating text message is important, because it is cheaper than placing a voice call and can bring people together and create a sense of community through chat. These are part of the advantages of text messages. Given the moral panic that has

surrounded texting since it became popular. There is a widely held belief that texting is a 'new language', highly deviant in character, which is fostering bad spelling practices in children, inappropriate use in essays and exams, poorer literacy results, and a general deterioration in written language standards. Research by linguists, psychologists, and educationists, has shown that the belief has no factual basis. It is an urban myth (Crystal 2010).

Table 1. Showing the Myth and Reality of Texts

The myth	**The reality**
Texts are full of abbreviated forms.	Only a small proportion of the words used in texts are abbreviated.
Texting is a new language.	Most of the abbreviations were in use long before mobile phones were invented.
Texting fosters bad spelling in young people.	People have to know how to spell before they can text; if young people think it 'cool' to leave letters out; they have to know they are there in the first place.
Textisms are used in essays and exams.	It is very rare to find textisms in schoolwork and examination scripts.
Texting leads to poorer literacy.	The more children text, the more they are getting practice in reading and writing, and the better their literacy scores will be.
Texting causes language deterioration.	New creative genres, such as text-messaging poetry, show how the expressive richness of language is increased.

In addition, one can firmly say that texting actually helps the development of communication skills, such as the ability to summarize and express oneself concisely, it equally motivates people to sharpen their diplomatic skills for as with all written activity, it allows more time to formulate thought and express them carefully.

In conclusion, texting has become an everyday task that many teenagers engage in on a day-to-day basis. Many of the text messages sent often contain textisms. The use of textisms is starting to become more accepted among the younger generation. There have been suggestions from both media sources and educators that texting may have a negative effect on the literacy skills of students. Perhaps the biggest problem is that students do not distinguish between times when they need to write formally without using textisms, and when they are writing informally and the use of textisms is acceptable.

Methodology

The instrument used for data collection was essay writing, as discussed earlier, the focus of the research is on textisms; as such the researchers decided on the use of essay writing as a tool for data collection, as it gives room for a possibility of having textisms in the essays. The subjects of the research were given three different essay topics to choose from and write an essay of not more than two hundred and fifty words on any of the topics. This was done to test the subject mastery of the English language and to determine if the possible textisms committed in the essays affect students' performance in written English compositions and lead to a poorer level of literacy in the English language among other things. It is, therefore, hoped that this instrument was the most relevant and efficient for the collection and analysis of data.

Results and Discussion

This segment presents the result as well as the discussion on the data obtained via tables and figures.

Table 2 Analysis of Frequency and Percentage of Textisms in Students' Essays

Features	Occurrence	Percentage
Shortening	08	20.51%
Omitted letters	05	10.26%
alphanumeric homophony	01	2.56%
Graphones	04	10.26%
Initialization	00	00
Lack of inter-word space	03	7.69%
Logographic emoticons	00	00
Punctuation	20	48.71%
Total	40	100%

Essays.

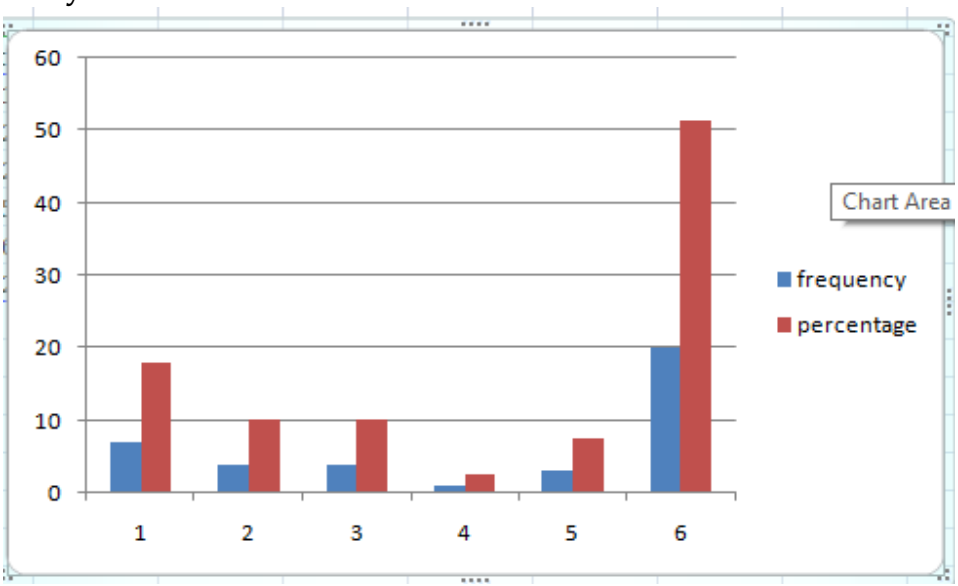


Table 3 Frequency and Percentage of the Distinct Features of SMS found in each Essay

Essay number	S	O	G	A	L	P	Total
2		1			1	1	3
3	2						2
4	1	1				1	3
6	2				1	8	11
7		1					1
8	1		1		1	2	5
9			1	1		3	5
13	2		1			2	4
30		2				1	2
33			1			1	3
Total	8	5	4	1	3	20	40
percentage	20.51 %	10.26 %	10.26 %	2.56 %	7.69 %	48.71%	100 %

However, of the forty (40) textisms found in the (50) analyzed essays, the most common occurrence is that of violating punctuation rules which appears Twenty (20) times, representing 48.71%. This is followed by shortening occurring Eight (8) times which represents 20.51%. Then, followed by omitted letters five (5) times which represents 20.27% and graphones appearing four (4) times which represents 10.26% and this is followed by lack of inter-word space which appears on three (3) occasions representing 7.69% and lastly alphanumeric homophony appearing only one time representing 2.56%.

In conclusion, it could be noted that even though the students were aware of the implications associated with the use of textisms in formal writing especially during examinations they found it difficult to stop because they seem to be using it almost unconsciously.

Summary and Conclusion

The problem that motivated the conduct of the research, its objectives, significance, and the methodology employed for the research have all been clearly mentioned. The data for the research was gathered by administering a test to the levels I-IV female students of the Department of European Languages FUBK. This was done in order to find out the prevalence of textisms in students' essays.

The presentation and analyses of the data show that with varying rates of frequency, all the distinct features of text messages were found with the exception of initialization. However, of the forty (40) textisms found in the (50) analyzed essays, the most common occurrence is that of violating punctuation rules which appears twenty (20) times, representing 48.71%. This is followed by shortening occurring eight (8) times which represents 20.51%. Then, followed by omitted letters five (5) times and graphones appearing four (4) times representing 10.27% and 10.26% respectively, Lack of inter-word space which appears on three (3) occasions represents 7.69% while alphanumeric homophony appears only once representing 2.56%.

The summary of the findings of the research is:

1. The research was able to determine that because of frequent and profound engagement in technological or computer-mediated communication- through chat rooms or SMS and the like, students especially females are often influenced to use linguistic deviations (Ungrammatical forms of language).
2. The research work was able to find out that contrary to the expectation, there were few instances of textisms in the sample. It seems to be proficient in standard forms, these students are context-conscious and can switch to the appropriate register when writing formally.

Conclusion

The study was designed to investigate the occurrence of textisms and the extent to which they are rampant in students' written essays, the levels I-IV female students of the Department of European Languages FUBK were used as the subject of the research. After the gathering of

data, its presentation and analysis, the study reveals that instances of textisms were found in the essays though they were not rampant but they need to be checked and stopped if not the students may continue to use them and they may no longer realize the need for standard English construction even in writings that are supposed to be formal.

References

Awoyemi, T. (2013). Emergent Trends in English Usage: Language and the Internet. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture.* 1 (2), 33-40.

Barasa, S. and Mous, M. (2013). *The Oral and Written Interface in SMS:* Technologically Mediated Communication in Kenya. 16 (2), 5470665.

Baron, N.S. (2008). *Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World:* Oxford.

Crystal, D. (2008). *Txting the gr8 db8:* Oxford University Press, London.

Crystal, D. (2010). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language:*3rdEdition Cambridge University Press.

Dolliver, M. (2010). *In word sense.* An Online Dictionary (23rd December, 2015).

Fig.1 Bar chart showing the frequency and percentage of textisms found in students' essays.

Richardson, J. and Lenarcic, J. (2009). *The Blended Discourse of SMS Communication in a Mobile Student Administration System in Same Places*, Different Spaces. ACIS 2009 Proceedings. 49.

Table 1. Showing the Myth and Reality of Texts.

Table.2 Analysis of frequency and percentage of textisms in students' Essays.

Table 3 Frequency and Percentage of the distinct Features of SMS found in each Essay

Taiwo, R. (2012). *Language and Mobile Telecommunication in Nigeria: SMS as a Digital Age Lingual- Cultural Expression*. Obafemi Awolowo University Press Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Thurlow, C. (2011). Text Messaging Susan C. Herring, Dieter Stein & Turja Virtanen(eds.), *Handbook of the Pragmatics of CMC*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.