THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCES OF TEXT MESSAGING ON FORMAL WRITING CONVENTIONS

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Abstract

Mobile telephony has rapidly spread all over the world faster than any form of communication technology and is now widely used around the world. This technology came along with SMS-short message service hitherto popularly known as text messaging which became fashionable around 1998. The popularity of the use of cellular phones among students from elementary schools to university level has increasingly become evident. With Attendant pedagogical and learning implications on the formal conventions of writing as aspect of the Second Language Learning (L2). This paper takes a critical look at the negative influences of text messaging on teaching/ learning of formal writing convention. The paper notes a historical sketch of mobile telephony and SMS Text Messaging as a background. The part of the paper situated. Then the paper investigates the linguistic features of Text Messaging/ SMS and its negative influence on formal pedagogical/ learning setting. While the next part of the paper is the Review of Related terms-SMS, Standard English formal writing conventions (Mechanics in context) and the Linguistic characteristics features of text messages. Then the theoretical foundations of the paper which is based on two cardinal theories. Language Acquisition within English as a second language (ESL) context and Technology conditioned approach to Language change and use (TELCU) as detailed in (Bisco 2007). The data for this paper consisting of (12) twelve text messages elicited from participants' inbox and outbox for a period of two months from 28th January, to 28th March, 2020, were presented and analysed. While the last part of the paper sums up the main arguments of the paper that Text messaging has negative influences on formal writing conventions. Which needs to be addressed in the future pedagogical directions in English as a second language (ESL) setting like Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Conventions, Formal Writing, Negative Influences, Text Messaging

Introduction

Mobile phone has rapidly spread all over the world, faster than any other communication technology, and is now widely used around the globe. Mobile phone text messaging, otherwise known as short message service SMS, was initiated in early 1990s by cellular service but did not become fashionable until about 1998 (Crystal, 2002). Originally, it was intended as 'a way for mobile providers to share alerts and other service-oriented information with their network users. It was conceived, then as a method of business communication and it was not imagined as a back-and-forth process" among texters. The popularity of the cellular phones among students from elementary school to college has become increasingly evident. Students use text messaging frequently such that many people, both inside and outside the academia question whether text

messaging language shortcuts – textisms or textese – influence students' academic writing competences. Text messaging has become one of the preferred methods of telecommunications for teens and young adults around the world today. To promote this system of communications, newer smart phones like Blackberry, iPhone and android make the process of sending a text easier for consumers.

Research has shown that text messaging is on the rise as a dominant form of communication among people today. Nelson company (2009 (cited in Wardyagya, 2012) reported that "the average US mobile teen now sends or receives an average of 2,899 text messages per month compared to 191 calls". These statistics hold true for most countries including Nigeria.

This qualitative study is set to investigate the extent to which the use of text messaging among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have negative influence onthe ability of students in tertiary institutions to adhere to the formal writing conventions in the category of mechanics – spelling, punctuation and spacing in writing tasks.

Statement of the problem

This study has been designed to investigate the linguistic features of text messages among Nigerian students. The study examines some SMS language as it is revealed in some of the text messages under study. The study is set within the scenario of English as a second language in Nigeria. Keeping in view the situational exigencies of English in the formal setting, with Standard English.

Text Messaging

Formality is the aspired model by learners/writers. The intention of this study is to describe and explain the negative influences that could arise as a result of the students' constant use of text messages. Though text messages are informal forms of writing that is used for colloquial communication among users especially the youth, but it is observed that its constant use could reflect negatively in the students' formal writing conventions. Scholars argue that texting (text messaging) is being blamed for hampering students' formal writing skills. Furthermore, the scholars claimed that texting (which is more conversationally based) is appearing in standard writing and this concern, often cited in the media, is based on incidents of text language used in school work (Flusterwood and Bell, 2016). This study hopes to answer the following research questions: What are the major types of text messages? What are the characteristics of text messages? To what extent do the text messages have negative influence on formal writing conventions? What are the specific implications as regards spelling, pronunciation and spacing? Do these influences affect writing conventions of standard formal English? Answers to the questions above will form the back bone of this paper

Theoretical Issues and Literature Review

The theoretical issues relating to this study are based largely on the underpinning of two main theories: Language acquisition within the Second Language (ESL) context and technology conditioned approach to language change and use (TELCU). This framework emphasises the obvious causal relationship between the emergence of new information communication technologies (ICTs) and new forms of language and literacy. TELCU, as a research framework, highlights the view that, with the emergence of new technologies, new concepts and ideas may emerge in due course. Consequently, in order to express the new ideas emerging along with the new media and tools, new forms of language literacy are often necessary. So, the ways in which people use their language may face changes due to the new media of communication (Bosco, 2007).

Attached to the theoretical underpinnings are the assumptions that: (1) the student participants are considered to be rational and in normal health, and not suffering from any serious conditions that would influence their text messaging. (2) the students are conscious that text messages and formal writing are two different things. The topics related to this paper reviewed are: SMS Standard English formal writing conventions (mechanics in context), characteristics of text messages. SMS is one form of communication through mobile text messages, mostly thought to be one mode of computer mediated communication (CMC). The technology of SMS was first developed in Europe in the early 1990s (Crystal, 2004). The SMS protocol was developed as. -:

Text Messaging

Part of global system of mobile communications (GSM) networks. The GSM technology was introduced to establish a uniform mobile telephone system in Europe. According to Bodomo (2010), SMS was commercially introduced in 1995, He also states that the first SMS message was a Christmas greeting sent out in Britain in 1992. Within the decades of its invention, it has proved its position as one of the major mass media of communication, with an estimation of over one billion messages exchanged per day around the world. Text messages are created by tapping digits on the keypad of mobile phones. These number of stokes corresponds to the desired letters of Romda Alphabet. The modern feature phones and smart phones provide the full QWERTY keypads with reduced key strokes on keypads. As regards the features of the SMS, it is a language adopted in different situations, using fewer words and fewer characters (Baron, 2003). SMS also has specific linguistic features different from other forms of written language, its specific and unique lexical syntactic, typographical and graphical features. It is a form of hybrid of written spoken form, but written closer to spoken. In essence, the SMS language has already been established as a situational variety of written language, with its own specific mobile platform (Baron, 2008). Bodomo (2010), Crystal (2008), talking about the features of SMS, opine that it is very closely related to computer mediated communication (CMC), yet different in many other situational varieties and registers of written language due to specific linguistic features. Most text messages are not written in the standard written form, instead, users try to describe in written words what they want their readers to hear in their SMS voices as it were. Furthermore, through the written form of SMS, texts have developed a written form of intonation that serves the purpose of the spoken discourse. SMS essentially has invented a unique style and features of its own.

Standard English is also a very crucial related concept in this paper. Standard English is generally accepted as the correct or most appropriate form of English in use in formal settings, while non Standard English such as textese (language usage in SMS) is not (Campbell & Mixco, 2007). Crystal (2008) stated that Standard English is best defined as focused on grammar, vocabulary and orthography (spelling and punctuation) carries the most social prestige recognisable to well-educated citizens. It is also used in institutions such as government, courts and schools, understood by many produced by few: must reserve standard English for particular writing tasks such as formal business writing found mostly of print. Standard English has no local base. Standardization of a language (such as English) is a historical process that is always in progress. Whether written or spoken standard English, today it is not the same as it was a century ago and it will be different again a century from now. Like the view of Hudddleston and Pullum (2002). The definition of Standard English is a snapshot as its conception could change overtime. For the purposes of this paper, what is essential is that Standard English refers to (in this context) writing conventions and the model aspired to denote Standard English formal writing conventions used in the UK and the Commonwealth.

Now, we turn to the next issue here. Formal writing conventions refer to language facility and effectiveness, and grammatical clarity in the way writers express their idea to the reader. Good

writers make many choices about language use in formal context – they decide on what sentences to use and how to construct these sentences to convey the relationship between ideas. Good writers arrange their sentences to enhance the organisation of their writing and choose particular words to alter how emotion and voice are expressed and effectively communicate meaning. In other words, writers are expected in formal writing context tasks to have effective command of grammar – language ordering according to rules, usage – use established conventions of written language used in communication and mechanics such conventions like capitalization, punctuation and spelling. SMS has certain unique characteristics. These characteristics associated with the SMS are, according to scholarly researches on SMS, as follows.

1. Shortenings e.g bro – Brothers
2. Contraction – e.g – dot – don't
3. G – Clippings – e.g – doin – doing
4. Other clippings. e.g wil – will
5. Omitted apostrophes e.g cant – can't
6. Omitted articles e.g. the, a/an
7. Acronyms and initialisms e.g KD for Kaduna/ ATL – Atlanta
8. Symbols and emotions e.g. @ for at /# for number
9. Letter and number Homophones e.g b4 – before, w8 – wait
10. Non-conventional spellings e.g fone – phone /rite – right
11. Informal tone and Register e.g. Hi – Dear
12. Lack of capitalization at the beginning of sentences or proper nouns e.g. michael – Michael, good day – Good day
13. Lack of punctuation e.g. missing commas and full-stops.

In sum, the characteristic that defines text messages/SMS are also the examples of non-Standard English. This non-standard dialect of text messaging is perceived as having a corrupting influence on the presumed standard of formal written Standard English.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The total population of the research conducted in the two tertiary institutions in the North West – Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. (ABU) and Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. (UDUS) consisting of one hundred and twenty student subscribers of different networks – MTN, AIRTEL, ETISALAT AND GLO. The wisdom of using one twenty is to investigate both negative and positive effects of text messaging. However, this paper elicited from Students' inbox and outbox for a period of two months from (28th January, to 28th March, 2020) a representative text messages of those who frequently write messages. The twelve (12) text messages were randomly selected from the 120 excepts. One from each ten messages, which have features with negative influence onformal writing conventions.

In what follows, we present and analyse the data of the twelve representative samples of text messages. The text messages as they relate to formal writing conventions.

The Data

S/N	Text Messages	Problem of Spelling/Machanics	Implications for Formal Writing Convention
1.	Where r u? Just to inform that our ass will Ve a mtng.	'r u' 'you' ass 'Ve a mtng.' Gloss: are you association have a meeting	Spelling: e.g 'r, u, ass, Ve mtng. Machanics: eg 'uncapitalised 'ass'/capitalised 'Ve' Grammar: eg 'you' is omitted.
2.	Gud afternoon dady I call u may be u was busy I want 2 tell dt my neco result 4rom eng.	'Gud' 'u' 'u' ' was' dady Gloss: Good you you Daddy '2' you 'dt' '4rom' 'eng'. Gloss: to that from English.	Spelling: eg Gud, u, u, dt, 4rom, eng' dady machanics: e.g. Number and letter homephones, '2, 4rom'. uncapitalised 'd' for Daddy Grammar: eg 'was instead of are'. Wrong tense. 'you' is omitted. 'd' omitted in the word Daddy.
3.	A rain drop luk 2smol 2 eyzbr smwhr a thusty flower awaits its fall. A smol sms may seems 2smol 2U bt smwhr a hrt remembers u always. Have a ricoday.	'luk' '2' smol' '2 eyzbr, "smwhr" Gloss: look too small to eyes browse somewhere 'smol' '2 smol' 2 U' 'bt' smwhr' 'hrt' 'u'. Gloss: small too small to you but somewhere Heart you.	Spelling: eg 'luk, 2, Smol, eyabr, smwhr, bt, hrt, etc Machanics: eg Number and letter Homephones '2' 20'. Un-capitalised hrt'.
4.	Leaves may 4get special ppl lyk u, bt some x the strees of lyf makes us seem	"4 get' 'ppl' 'lyk ' u' bt' ' x'	Spelling: e.g., 'ppl, lyk, u, bt, lyf, ar x etc.

	as if we don't care u ar always remembered Happy Friday.	Gloss: forget people like you but ease 'lyf' 'u' ' ar'. Gloss: Life you are	Machanics: number and letter homophones.
5.	If u eva c dis msg, u luv me, if u save it u adore me, if u ignore it u're crazy abt me, if u txt me u cant do without me….	'u' 'eva' 'c' 'dis' ' msg,' 'u' 'luv', Gloss: you ever see this message you love 'u' 'u' 'u' 're' 'abt' 'u' txt' 'u' 'cant'. Gloss: you you you are about you text you can't	Spelling: eg 'u, eva, c, dis, msg, luv, abt, ext e.t.c Mechanics: No apostrophe to negate the word 'can'.
6.	Gud morn, Im in sok. 2 submit my appl 4 extetn of stod met the univ. so busy ……	Gud morn 'sok' '2' 'appl' '4' Gloss: 'Good Morning' 'Sokoto' 'to' 'Application' 'extetn' 'stod' 'met' 'in' 'univ Gloss: Extension Study Meet University	Spelling: e.g 'Gud, morn, sok, 2, appl, 4, extetn, stod, met, univ. e.t.c. Mechanics e.g The following letters are not capitalised e.g m, for Morning, s, for Sokoto. a, for Application. ex, for Extension. st, for Study. univ, for University Grammar: e.g. 'let us, in, were omitted.
7.	Xxx c disstobs? Xx is nevr dems it's a embl of the luv promise that good will nevr leave u, these ar ur hope 4 d new month……..	'Xxx c disstobs ? xx nevr' demsit's Gloss: see disturbs never them sits embl 'luv' Gloss: emble love	Spelling, e.g xxx, c, disstobs, nevr, demsits, u, ar, ur, 4, d. mechanics: e.g Number and letter Homophones '4'. No relevant punctuation marks that is why 'xxx is used. The tone has changed completely.

		'nevr' 'u' 'ar' 'ur' '4 d'	
		Gloss: never you are your for the	
8.	Never mean anytn in mind but only to discova dt u are bizy dt is y I socorn am very sorry if my reactn sound daughty pls kind 4give n 4get let's role on.	'anytn' 'discova' 'dt' 'u' 'bizy' Gloss: anything discovered that you busy "dt 'y' 'socorn' 'reactn' 'pls' '4give' Gloss: that why so concern reaction please forgive 'n' '4get Gloss: and forget	Spelling: e.g., 'anytn' discova, dt, bizy, so corn, reactn, pls, y: 4give, n, 4get. Mechanics: e.g unpunctuated text, No commas, full stops etc Number and Letter Homophones. Grammar: e.g the letters 'ly' were omitted from the word Kindly.
9.	I deful u' ve won the trophy congrats really ur drms cum 2 ru.	'deful' 'u' 've' 'congrats' 'ur' 'drms' Gloss: dayful you have congratulations your dreams 'Cum' 2ru'. Gloss: Come true	Spelling: e.g 'deful, u, ve, congrats, ur, drms, cum, 2ru. Mechanics: e.g change of tone by using pidgin. i.e 'dayful'. Number and letter Homophones. The word trophy, congratulation, and dreams are not capitilised.
10.	W8 4 Mi i'll com @ 8 2 continuu our discussns of the mata.	'w8' '4' 'mi' 'I 'll' 'com' '@' '8' '2' continuu Gloss: wait for me I will come at 8 to continue	Spelling: e.g 'w8, 4, mi, i'll, com, @, 2, continuu, discussns, mata.'

		'discussns' 'mata' Gloss: discussions matter	Machanics: e.g., Number and Letter Homophones use of symbols and change of tone by using pidgin. i e 'mata' instead of matter.
11.	Oboy, no be dis gell wey carry ur money dat dey? C him d luk like kwabra.	'Oboy' 'dis' 'gell' 'wey' 'ur' 'dat' Gloss: Oh boy this girl way your that "dey' 'c' 'him' 'd' 'luk' 'kwabra' Gloss: day see the look Cobra.	Spelling: e.g 'oboy, dis, gell, wey, ur, dat, dey, c, luk, d, kwabra'. Machanics: e.g. The tone has change to pidgin. Capital letters are not use in words like 'boy, girl. Grammar: e.g., distortion 'him d luk', 'no be dis'
12.	Go 2 m house W8 till he comes then giv him the buks hand to hand.	'2' 'w8' 'giv' 'buks'. Gloss: to wait give books.	Spelling: e.g., '2, w8, giv, buks'. Mechanics: e.g., no punctuations of comma.

Data Analysis

English in a second language situation such as Nigeria is taught with Standard English as the goal. That is why it is the formal English that is taught in the form of spoken and written English. The standard form is generally accepted as correct and most appreciated form of English used in formal settings. This study on text messaging and it's negative effects on formal writing conventions isolated 12 twelve text messages from a larger chunk of 120 as representative samples to illustrate how their linguistic characteristic and features could affect in a negative sense the formal writing conventions of the students of the two Universities – Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto as earlier stated, Text messages have some features and characteristics which are anathema to the formal conventions of English writing. Such unique characteristics of SMS Text message are: -

1. Shortenings – [swhr – NO 3]

2. Contractions – [Gud NO 2 abt NO]

3. Clippings – [Bt NO 4]

4. Other clippings [Ur NO 9]

5. Omission of Apostrophe – [Wont No. 10]

6. Omission of articles – [Xxx c No. 7]

7. **Omission of Words-[No. 1,2,6,8]** Symbols and Emotions – [@ No. 10]

8. Acronyms and Initialisms – [neco No. 2, msg No. 5]

9. Letter and Number Homophones [W8 – wait No. 10, 4get No. 4]

10. Non-conventional spellings [4mi No. 10]

11. Informal tone and Register – [O boy no be dis gel, dat dey No. 11]

12. Lack of capitalization – [ass No. 1, neco No. 2, and sok,appl, stod univ No 6]

13. Lack of punctuation – [xxxc dis ters instead of a relevant punctuation mark]

14. Grammar (wrong use of tense) – [No 2 ' was' instead of 'are',]

From the instances and representative samples presented and analysed above, it is clear that the act of text messaging would negatively affect the formal writing conventions of the students who participated in the search that provided this paper. This effect would also affect the goals of teaching and learning of Speech, Comprehension and Fluency in the aspects of writing, which are critical skills in teaching and learning of the English language in Nigeria.

Concluding Remarks

This paper set out to investigate the negative influence that text messages have on the formal writing conventions. Twelve (12) Text messages were isolated for the study in this paper, which

were taken from the inbox/outbox of students' from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto. This paper showed from the unique characteristics of text messages studied that they tend to affect negatively the writing proficiency of the students.

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