

A Comparative Study about the Use of SMS in Formal Writing of the Students in Universities

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Abstract

Technology has revolutionized the way of communication around the globe. Its use and users are multiplying with every passing minute. The current study reveals the effect of SMS on the formal writing of the students. Students are the regular users of this service and have become addict to short language. This short language is understandable to a particular community and not to the whole as it does not adhere to the Standard English writing practices. Data has been collected from quiz, assignments text and through questionnaires' which supports this postulate that students are frequently practicing it in their formal writing. Certain corrosive measures needs to be taken to address the issue. Second language learners have been found it practicing to greater extent.

Keywords: communication, Technology, SMS

Introduction

As technology progresses, new forms of communication have become increasingly popularized. (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). With the advancement in technology new forms of communication are emerging which are making communications quick and the messages can be sent within the twinkling of an eye. Mobile as it is known in British English – mobile for short), or cellphone (in American English – cell, for short) (Crystal 2008:05) is employed as SMS service for rapid communication around the globe.

According to Crystal (2008) different names associated with mobile text messaging are: Short messaging, short mail, SMSing, person-to person messaging, mobile messaging, wireless messaging, text messaging, texting, txtng . . . whatever we call it, it is evidently here to stay. Human language get influenced much by the new technology particularly communication technology. The mobile phones with the special feature of texting are the modest way of communication in order to stay informed and connected with the friends and family as well as with the community. SMSing refers to the brief message typed on the mobile phones for the sake of communication or transmission of message.

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The features and technical character limit makes the users to go for word shortening and other usage of shorter forms and is leading to the development of language calling SMSing/texting. It has been called the asynchronous mode of communication as the sender and receivers are not interacting face to face and are infact miles away from each other but still getting the messages in seconds. Texting does encourage simple and shorter sentences.

The mobile phone seems to have unique features that make it popular. For instance, the equipment is small and, eponymously, mobile; it therefore affords most texters an unobtrusive and relatively inexpensive means of communication (Habluetzel, 2007; Thurlow, 2003; Thurlow and Poff, 2011).

In today's technological era, cellphone is one of the most effective, convenient and widely used instrument for communication around the world. It allows to communicate using Short Messaging Services (SMS) which is economical ins terms of money and time spent during communication process (Mphahlele and Mashamaite, 2005; Smith, 2003).

Text messaging, due to the constraints of space and time, leads subscribers to the usage of incomplete sentences, condensed expressions, letter/ number homophones and non-conventional spellings (Awonusi, 2004 and Chiluya, 2008). Peoples' written language begin to show certain features in order to make communication faster and also to save time which leads to new spellings and also deviation from the settled norms of standard English. This deviation leads to the practice of the following linguistic deviations according to Thurlow (2003)

- (a) Shortening
- (b) Acronyms
- (c) Letter / number homophones
- (d) Misspellings
- (e) Non-conventional spellings and
- (f) Accent stylization.

Literature Review

As more and more students are immersing themselves in mobile phone usage the text users are being multiplied every day. Despite of its numerous benefits, language researchers/linguists have found that the prolonged use of SMS has detrimental effects on the learners' language proficiency (Dansieh, 2011; Mphahlele and Mashamaite, 2005; Ochonogor, Alakpodia and Achugbue, 2012; Winzker, Southwood and Huddleston, 2009).

A profound effect upon our lives has been observed because of information technology and language is now no more an exception. Amongst many means of communication is the digital technology however the other side of the picture shows that it is having detrimental effects too upon the writing skills of the users.. In this study, the elements of SMS speak used by the students would be studied with relation to formal writings, case studies and the existing research upon the subject matter would be viewed to further come up with an evaluation and solutions. Students, parents and teachers would be proposed with a solution to tackle the monster.

Most of the current literature on text messaging has focused on sociological links (Taylor & Harper, 2003; Faulkner & Culwin, 2005; Igarashi, Takai, & Yoshida, 2005) and emotional connections (Reid & Reid, 2007; Igarashi, Motoyoshi, Takai, & Yoshida, 2008; Lin & Peper, 2009), impact on literacy (McWilliam, Schepman, & Rodway, 2009; Plester, Wood, & Joshi, 2009; Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier, & Cheever, 2010), and the modus operandi to enhance education by using the technology (Harley, Winn, Pemberton, & Wilcox, 2007; Hill, Hill, & Sherman, 2007; Naismith, 2007; Buczynski, 2008). A positive correlation has been identified amongst the students who text and in their intimacy levels of communication (Igarashi, Takai, & Yoshida, 2005).

SMS has been appealing to the youth because of its brevity and many other contrasting features its users are being multiplied with every passing day and it is more common in the social circle who are more acquainted with each other's abbreviated/SMS particulars. In a very limited time (December, 1992 to 2012) text message language has aroused a great deal of interest amongst the scholars, teachers and parents to look for its possible impact upon the young generation. According to Gold stuck (2006) mobile phones were introduced to the youth market in the late 1990's. Thurlow (2011) studied the cell phone users, SMS character and its length and the factors behind text language which are making users to go for rebus writing, for short spellings and for other grammatical lapses. While Crystal (2008) is of the view that texting is a way to increase the literary skills of a particular language and also a way of practice which would ultimately increase the proficiency of a language. "Txtng the Gr8 Db8" by David Crystal is so far the most comprehensive work on SMS text language. Newspaper and the internet are arguing about the impact of the language upon communication skills of the students. While one school of thought is calling the service a curse as it is affecting the written skills and is posing threats to the real grammar with its excess usage. Another school of thought led by David Crystal is of the view that texting is not a threat to the language rather

it's a means to flourish it. Texting is not harmful to the student literacy rather it enhances it (Crystal, 2008).

Different researchers have been working on SMS about its prevalence among teenagers amongst them Lindley he has reported “ for many teenagers, texting is replacing talking on cell phones, according to a new online poll of 2,089 U.S teenagers” (Lindely,2008,p.19). Texting and SMS are called as a speech ‘talking in writing’ (Collot and bellmore 1996:14). This trend is continuously expanding with every passing day and bringing new users in its circle. The list of researchers is being added up on the daily basis as the impacts of SMS upon formal writing are far reaching and not without consequences upon the formal aspects of writings.

Results and Methodology

The data was collected from the different the BS and master students from the different departments of The Islamia University Bahawalpur. The results were compiled through Questionnaire and an analysis of papers which are checked by the teachers. All the students were fully matured and they used SMS on the daily basis and they are able to manage their writing skills during their exams. A questionnaire was developed, in which there was 10 statements about the use of SMS and effects of the SMS on formal writing. A simple Qualitative method used for data analysis through the use SPSS and simple frequencies are found. The results show that students were well aware of, how to use SMS in their daily routine work and used for chatting. But there were found many effects of SMS language on formal writing and the figures of these mistakes are used in the paper.

Table 1

Gender of the Participants					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	23	46.0	46.0	46.0
	Female	27	54.0	54.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The participants were from the different departments of the Islamia University Bahawalpur and total 50 participants, 23 male and 27 female students.

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Table 2

Qualification of the Participants					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BS	20	40.0	40.0	40.0
	MA	30	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The participants were from the different departments of the Islamia University Bahawalpur and 20 BS students and 30 MA students.

Table 3

Age Group of the participants						
			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 to 22	16		32.0	32.0	32.0
	23 to 26	28		56.0	56.0	88.0
	above 27	6		12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	50		100.0	100.0	

This was very crucial question for the participants especially for female students but according to their answers the result shows that 88 percent were in the range of 23-26.

Table 4

Teachers promote to use Texting for education.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	80.0	80.0	80.0
	No	10	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The results are unexpected because in Pakistan there is no permission to use mobile during the classes, but student gave responses about 80 percent that they can use texting for education.

Table 5

Do you use SMS to communicate with fellows?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	37	74.0	74.0	74.0
	No	13	26.0	26.0	100.0

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Total	50	100.0	100.0
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The results show that participants used SMS for communicating. The valid percent is 74.

Table 6

Have you noticed that you are using SMS language on your answer sheet of the papers.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	21	42.0	42.0	42.0
	No	29	58.0	58.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The results show that there were very less effects of SMS language on the students' formal writings. The valid percent is 42.

Table 7

Do you agree with standard language of SMSing.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	35	70.0	70.0	70.0
	No	15	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The results show that participants want that SMS language should be standardized. The valid percent is 70.

Table 8

Have you ever told by your teacher to avoid SMS language.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	28	56.0	56.0	56.0
	No	22	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

This is another very important question for the students, but results were unexpected. The valid percent is 56.

Table 9

Have you Find any impact of Texting on you spellings?.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	38	76.0	76.0	76.0
	No	12	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

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The results shows that participants were fully aware of the effects of texting on their spellings. The valid percent is 76.

Table 10

Do you understand the Individual differences of spellings during chat.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	29	58.0	58.0	58.0
	No	21	42.0	42.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Students sometimes able to understand and sometimes they are not able to understand the individual use of different spelling for a single word. The valid percent is 58. As SMS' short abbreviation may be understandable to a particular community but not to the whole.

Table 11

Is there any impact of using smilies in the Texting.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	34	68.0	68.0	68.0
	No	16	32.0	32.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Participants were fully aware of the use smilies in the texting. The valid percent is 68.

Table 12

Is there any deduction of marks due to use of SMS language.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	35	70.0	70.0	70.0
	No	15	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Students know the effects of SMS language on formal writing. The valid percent is 70. Despite this awareness they are habitual of using it in their formal writings.

Table 13

Do you agree that everyone should have liberty to use SMS language in the exams?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	29	58.0	58.0	58.0
	No	21	42.0	42.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The last statement is a view point of the community about its practice in the L2 Community.. The valid percent is 58.

Analysis of samples of papers

The samples have been taken from The Islamaia University Bahawalpur, and the students were from different departments and all were regular. The samples consisted of various assignments, Examination papers and of free writing.

The following are the samples which show different mistakes like Punctuation, mis-spelling, Rebus-writing, non standard abbreviations, Chunks, Shortening of the words, smilies and Grammar mistakes. There are many types of free writings are common among the students and sometimes they try to write free as they speak. But due to this reason, they made a lot of mistakes and the use of SMS language and the language of social media. This language named given by David Crystal ‘Netspeak’.

Netspeak and SMS speak can be described as writing that looks like speech, or “talking in writing” (Collot and Belmore 1996: 14). Netspeak and SMS speak are similar to writing, in that it is typed on a keyboard or keypad, yet it is a quicker form of communication than letter writing, and the way that language is used is more informal, just as it is in speech. In other words, participants “must use language as if they were having a conversation, yet their message must be written.” (Collot and Belmore 1996: 14). This means that SMS speak and Netspeak rely on creativity and typology, using whatever the keyboard or keypad can produce, and many of the traditional rules of grammar and style are ignored (Thurlow et al. 2004: 124).

Punctuation

mistakes:

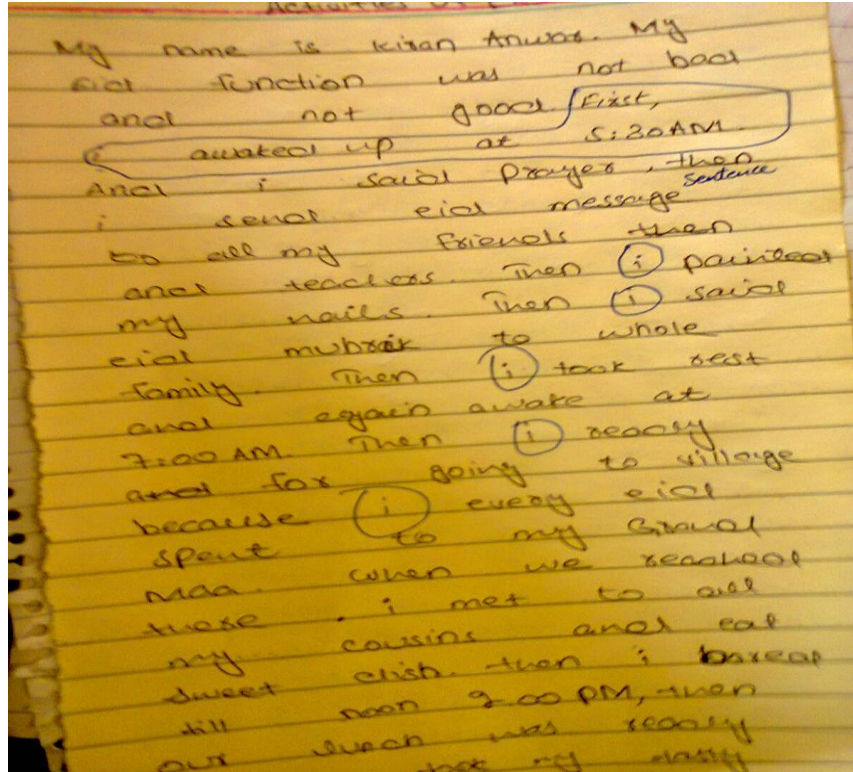


Fig no.7.1

This figure shows that students make punctuation mistakes in the exams, assignments and in free writing as well. Sometime these mistakes are done rationally and sometimes irrationally. But in all cases these punctuation mistakes are the part of formal and informal writings due to the frequent use of SMSing.

Grammatical Mistakes:

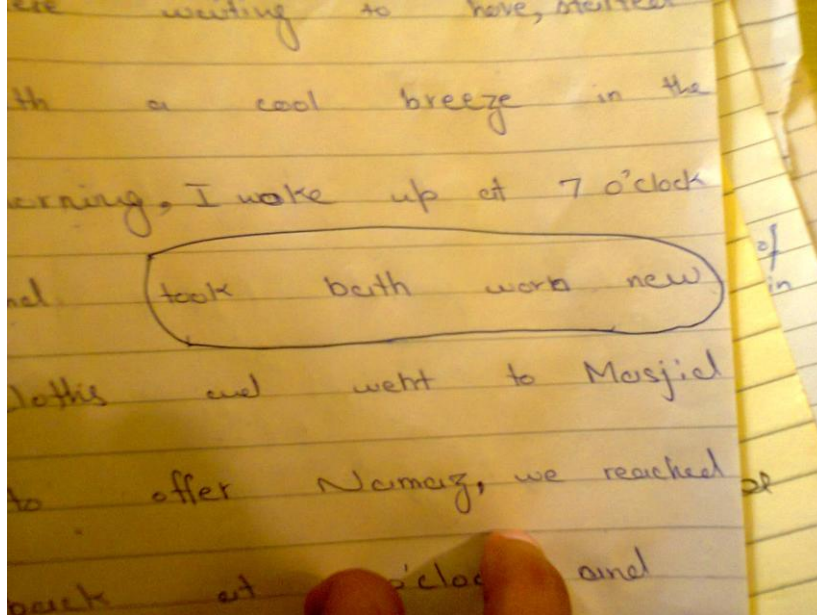


Fig no.7.2

This figure shows that students make grammatical mistakes in the exams, assignments and in free writing as well. Sometime these mistakes are done rationally and sometimes irrationally. But in all cases these grammatical mistakes are the part of formal and informal writings due to the frequent use of SMSing and English as a second language.

Spelling Mistakes:

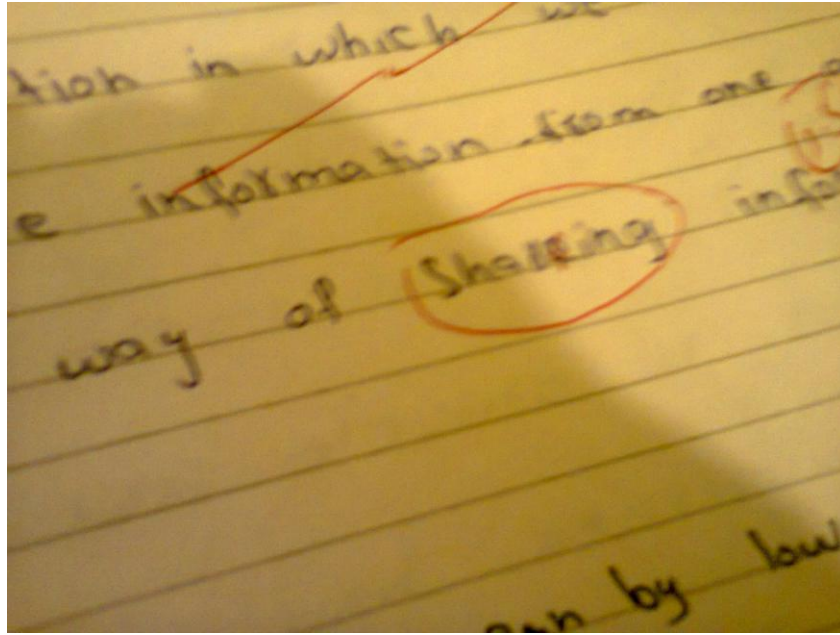


Fig no.7.3

This figure illustrates the fact that students make Spelling mistakes in the exams, assignments and in free writing as well. Sometime these mistakes are done consciously and sometimes unconsciously. But in all cases these spelling mistakes are the part of formal and informal writings due to the frequent use of SMSing and English as a second language.

Rebus Writing

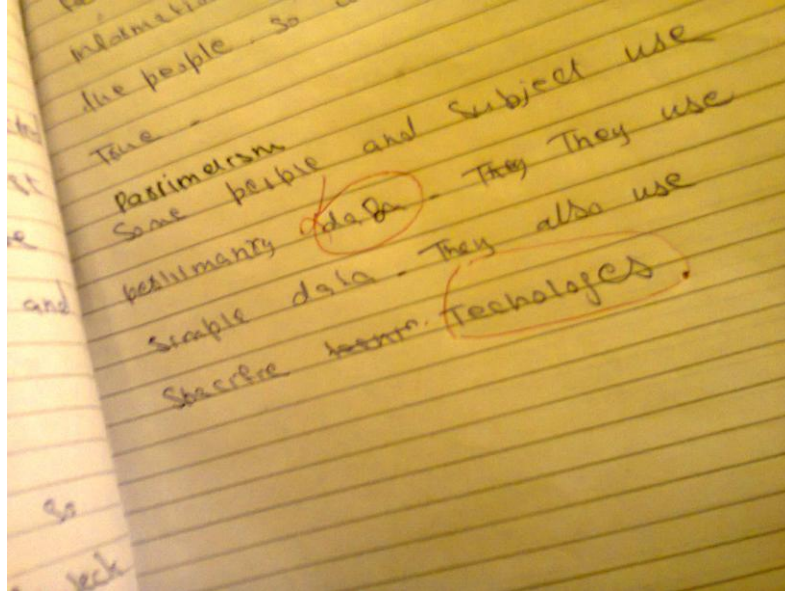


Fig no.7.4

This figure shows that students practice rebus writing mistakes in the exams, assignments and in free writing as well. Reason behind such mistakes seems obvious that studnets use smsing for the most most of the time so they cannot stop themselves from using it.

Abbreviation Mistakes

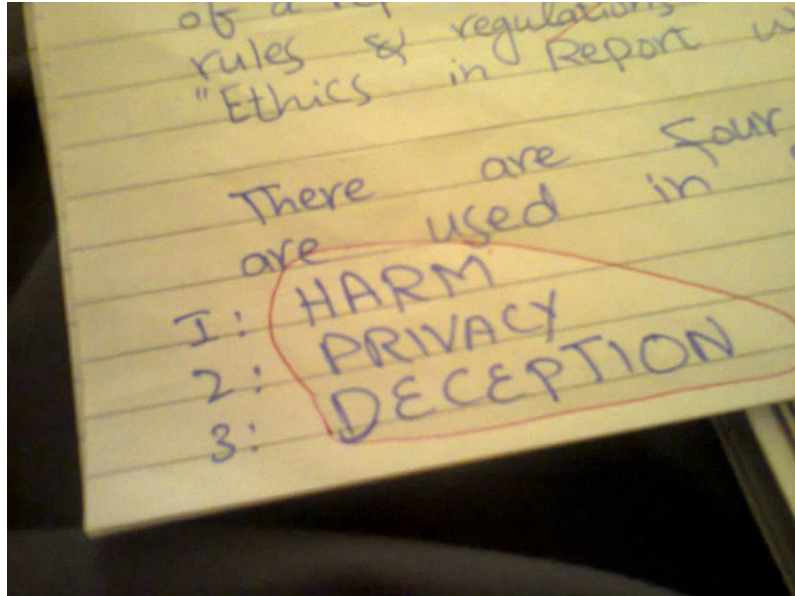


Fig no.7.5

This figure shows that students make abbreviation mistakes in the exams, assignments and in free writing as well. These shortcuts may be understandable to a particular community but not to all those who are not part of that circle.

Use of Chunks

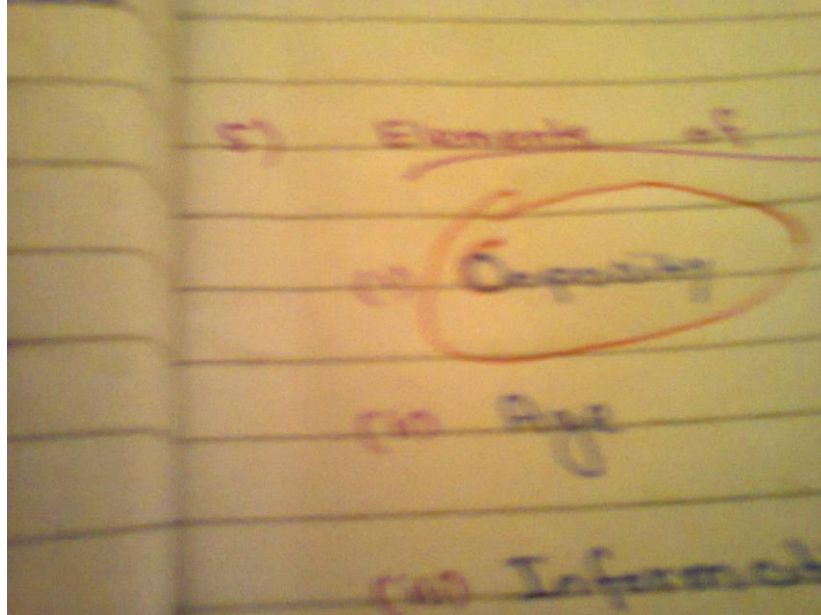


Fig no.7.6

This figure shows that students make chunks mistakes in the exams, assignments and in free writing as well. Sometime these mistakes are done rationally and sometimes irrationally. But in all cases these chunks mistakes are the part of formal and informal writings due to the frequent use of SMSing and English as a second language.

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