Influence of Text Language on Students' Communication Skills and Social Relationship

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Abstract
This paper looks at the influence of text languages on students' communication skills and social relationship. It tries to find out how students use language shortcuts in their academic writings and its implications inform of threats to the present and generally accepted forms of English Language and how the use of text languages influence their spellings/grammatical skills. Using survey researeh design, the researehers purposively selected 100 respondents from the student and lecturer population of the University of Benin. Using questionnaires as data collection instrument, the study revealed, among others, that student's use of short codes in examination and assignments reduces their scores or grades and contributes to a poor performance in their accumulated grade. Also, examiners agreed that texting is affecting student's writing skills as the students are not able to distinguish between formal and informal writing anymore and are gradually allowing these short codes to creep into their formal writing. Based on the findings, the researehers recommend that a generally accepted format for using abbreviations and short codes be provided to eliminated the multiplicity of meaning where only the sender knows the meaning of the abbreviation he/she has formulated, punishment for the use of these short codes in examinations and assignments should be enforced and made known to students. This would make students put in conscious-effort and desist from the use of abbreviations and shortened words in their academic writing as usually obtains in their social interactions.

Keywords: Text language, Texting, Language shortcuts, social interaction

Introduction

This work is about language use in the Short Message Service (SMS) component of cell phones, mobile communication systems, and to a lesser extent, web.

According to Wikipedia, SMS language or textese (also known as txt-speak, txtese, chatspeak, txt, txtspk, txtk, txto, texting language, txt lingo, SMSish, txtslang,or txt talk) is a term for the abbreviations and slang most commonly used due to the necessary brevity of mobile phone text messaging, in particular the widespread SMS (Short Message Service) communication protocol. Cell phones are becoming a modern day necessity, to the point where they are a must have for every teenager and adult. Human beings are growing increasingly attached to these devices, depending on them more and more for their communications with other people, job duties, relationships, and other daily activities that they must accomplish.

One way that we are taking advantage of cell phone technology at a rapidly growing rate is through the use of text messaging. It seems that anywhere that you go where there are people, you will likely see some of them glued to their phone-screens, fingers typing away. In schools, malls, and cars we see them. On sidewalks, streets, and in bus stations we see them, heads down typing away. Sometimes we may be one of those people with our fingers glued to our phones keyboard or touch screen.

The terms 'text messaging' or just 'texting' refer to the brief typed messages sent using the SMS ('Short Message Service') of cell phones, 'Personal Digital Assistants[1] (PDAs), smartphones or web browsers. (Thurlow and Poff, 2011) Although messages nowadays often include images, videos and music (hence the newer term MMS 'Multimedia Message Service'), the basic text-based messaging service continues to be enormously popular.

Texting was initially developed and released commercially in the early to mid-1990s and has since seen a huge rise in popularity around the world following the rapid spread of mobile telephony in general. In 2009, the United Nations reported that more than 60% of the world's population - about 4.1 billion people - had access to a mobile phone. (International Technology Union's ICT 2010).

Most often used for person-lo-person communication, text messages are also increasingly being used to interact with automated systems (e.g. buying products, participating in television contests, recruiting voters or supporters etc). One interesting 'convergence' phenomenon is the use of short messaging services with interactive television, which confuses the boundary between interpersonal and broadcast messaging. As is usually the case, the technology is being continually transformed.

On this note, and in situating text messaging with reference to computer-mediated communication more generally, it is important to recognize always the interplay between what a technology itself allows and what the communicator herself or himself brings to the technology. Most obviously, in the case of text messaging, the equipment is small and, eponymous mobile; it therefore affords most texters an unobtrusive and relatively inexpensive means of communication. At the same time, text messaging is also technically and practically restricted, allowing only a certain number of characters per message. (Set by a worldwide industry standard, the limit is almost always 160 characters per message).

Standard SMS messaging uses 140 bytes (octets) per message, which translates to 160 characters (7 bits bytes) of the English alphabet using 7-bit encoding or as few as 70 characters for languages using non-Latin alphabets using UTF-16 encoding. (The commonly cited limit of 140 characters is imposed by some services like Twitter that reserve 20 characters for non-message content, like addressing.

In a straight and concise definition for the purposes of this researeh, Wikipedia says that, text messaging by cell phones or mobile phones should include all 26 letters of the alphabet and 10 numerals, i.e., alpha-numeric messages, or text, to be sent by texter or received by the textee. But now, the inclusion of symbols, single letters, word acronyms, smileys and emoticons both static and animated are ever present in text messages.

For instance, ":(" (Emoticon for sad), ">:/" (Emoticon for Talk to the hand), ="D" (Emoticon for Laughing), "({})" (Emoticon for big hug), ">:o" (Emoticon for Angry), suml (someone), wan2 (want to), b4 (before), h8t (hate), "B" (Be), "IWU" (I Want You), 4COL (For Crying Out Loud), Nevertheless, the invention of mobile phone messaging is considered to be the source for the invention of SMS language. In general, SMS language thus permits the sender to type less and communicate more quickly than one could without such shortcuts. One example is the use of "2maro" instead of "tomorrow". Nevertheless, there are no standard rules for the creation and use of SMS languages. Any word may be shortened (for example, "text" to "txt"). Words can also be combined with numbers to make them shorter (for example, "later" to "18r"), using the numeral "8" for its homophonic quality.

Communication patterns and styles are however changing and generally misunderstood, as different techniques are used by different texters. Nostandard format for the use of text message shortcuts or shorthand has been created. Texters are therefore left to their discretion in text language and since new technology is the major means of communicating in this era, the components, structure and varied nature/characteristics of language are therefore constrained upon.

Text messaging has become a vital part of students' social lives (Harley, Winn. Pemberton, & Wilcox, 2007). Today's youth are "avid users and consumers of wireless technology" (Pitfield, 2004, p. 5). Students may prefer this form of contact because it is often included within the cellular service package for free or at a minimal charge and it allows students to consider their responses before sending messages (Harley, Winn, Pemberton, & Wilcox, 2007, p. 234). The students use text messaging so frequently that an article by Carrington (2005) referred to them as addicts.

In addition, according to Pew Institute, the telephone call is a dying institution as the number of text messages sent monthly in the U.S. exploded from 14 billion in 2000 to 188 billion in 2010, according to a Pew Institute Survey, and the trend shows no signs of abating (Jeffrey Kluger, 2012). Not all of that growth has come out of the hide of old-fashioned phoning, but it is clearly taking a bite-particularly among the young as Short Message Services (SMS) are developing very rapidly throughout the world.

This study is therefore about the use of Text Language or Short Message Service (SMS) Language in components/devices and to a lesser extent, the web and the effects this evolving form of language is having on the existing communication pattern and structure.

Statement of Problem

In as much as Text Language is a form of shorthand allowing for brevity and cost minimization, it is in John Humphrys words "wrecking our language". As the Oxford English Dictionary ditches the hyphen, John Humphrys explains why texling is wrecking our language.

"The sixth edition has just been published and – I feel a small shudder as I write these words - it has fallen victim to fashion. It has removed the hyphen from no fewer than 16,000 words. It has happened because we are changing the way we communicate with each other, which means, says the OED Editor Angus Stevenson that we no longer have time to reach for the hyphen key".

It started with the smiley face and the gloomy face and now there are 16 pages of emoticons in the texters' A-Z. It has now reached a stage where computers and even telephones will not allow users to type the colon, dash and bracket without automatically turning it into a picture of a smiling face.

There's also the problem of ambiguity. With my knowledge of text language I had assumed LOL meant 'lots of love', but now I discover it means 'laugh out loud'

Instead of aiding communication it can be a barrier. I can work out BTW (by the way) but I was baffled by IMHO U R GR8. It means: "In my humble opinion you are great." But, once again, how would you know?

If the recipient of the message has to spend ten minutes trying to translate it, those precious minutes are being wasted. And isn't the whole point to 'save' ^{time}?

The danger of text language for young people especially - is that they will come to dominate. Our written language may end up as a series of ridiculous emoticons and ever changing abbreviations.

In social relations, habitual texters may not only cheat their existing relationships, they can also limit their ability tp form future ones since they don't get to practice the art of interpreting nonverbal visual cues. There's a reason it's so easy to lie to small kids ("Santa really, truly did bring those presents") and that's because they're functional illiterates when it comes to reading inflection and facial expressions. As with real reading, the ability to comprehend subtlety and complexity comes only with time and a lot of experience. If you don't adequately acquire those skills, moving out into the real world of real people can actually become quite scary. "I talk to kids and they describe their fear of conversation," says Turkic. "An 18-year-old I interviewed recently said, 'Someday, but certainly not now, I want to learn to have a conversation."

Another problem being that "tweens" who frequently use language adaptations - techspeak ~ when they text performed poorly on a grammar test, said Drew Cingel, a former undergraduate student in Communications, Penn State, and currently a doctoral candidate in Media, Technology and Society, Northwestern University.

Cingel, who worked with S. Shyam Sundar, Distinguished Professor of Communications and Co-Director of the Penn State's Media Effects Researeh Laboratory, said the use of these shortcuts may hinder a tween's ability to switch between techspeak and the normal rules of grammar.

Appalled teachers are now presented with essays written not in Standard English but in the compressed, minimalist language of mobile phone text messaging (Scotsman, Mareh 4, 2003).

It is in this light that the study seeks to investigate the influence of Text Message Language and its effects on Students, Communication, day-to-day acliviiics of humans and on English Language.

Researeh Questions

The following questions will guide the study:

1. How do students use language shortcuts in their academic writing?
2. How does Text Language serve as a threat to the present and generally accepted form of English Language?
3. Are there phonological and grammatical errors in Text shortcuts?
4. Is there a significant relationship between Texting and a decrease in person to person communication and thus, social interaction?
5. How do language shortcuts influence students'spelling/grammatical skills?

Conceptual Clarifications

Negative Impacts Text Language

Text messaging has brought a great deal of convenience, quickness, and a new language tp our society. Technology is the mark of our innovative world today. Many benefits have emerged from text messaging. However, many problems have risen with the development and prevalence of text messaging as well.

It is difficult and nearly impossible to distinguish language change from language decline. As text messaging — sprinkled with U, b4, brb, etc -gained popularity among youths, a considerable uproar predicting the decline of the English language ran rampant in the press. Headlines speculated that the abbreviations used in text messages and instant messaging would seep their way into English papers and speech:

A new language of the airwaves has been born (Guardian, June 26, 2003)
Texting is penmanship for illiterates (Sunday Telegraph, July 11, 2004)
Text chats are starting to bleed over into other aspects of life (National Post, January4, 2005)

The changes we are seeing taking place today in the language will be a prelude to the dying use of good English (Sun, April 24, 2001).

When a student sends an email that contains phonetic abbreviations and acronyms that are common in text messaging (e.g., "gr8" instead of "great"), it can influence how that student is subsequently evaluated. In a study by Lewandowski and Harrington (2006), participants read a student's email sent to a professor that either contained text-messaging abbreviations (gr8, How R U?) or parallel text in Standard English (great, How are you?), and (hen provided impressions of the sender. Students who useli abbreviations in their email were perceived as having a less

favourable personality and as putting forth less effort on an essay they submitted along with the email. Specifically, abbreviation users were seen as less intelligent, responsible, motivated, studious, dependable, and hard-working. These findings suggest that the nature of a student's email communication can influence how others perceive the student and their work.

Text messaging has had an impact on students academically, by creating an easier way to cheat on exams. The number of students caught using mobile phones to cheat in exams has increased significantly in recent years. In December 2002, a dozen students were caught cheating in an Accounting exam through the use of text messages on their mobile phones. In December 2002, Hitotsubashi University in Japan failed 26 students for receiving e-mailed exam answers on their mobile phones. In England, 287 school and college students were excluded from exams in 2004 for using mobile phones during exams.

Texting has been used on a number of occasions with the result of the gathering of large aggressive crowds. Instances of the 2011 fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, texting through social media was used to gather largesupport of the masses by individuals and bodies against the subsidy removal headed by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) which subsequently lead to the strike action and of course killings and violence in states all over Nigeria. Subsequently, Senate President David Mark warned Nigerians especially the younger generation on the uses of the social media in regards to "false message dissemination" and aggravating the masses.

Sexting is slang for the act of sending sexually explicit or suggestive content between mobile devices using SMS. A genre of texting contains text, images, or video that is intended to be sexually arousing. Last year the word 'sexting' (sending explicit images of you with a text) entered the Oxford Dictionary.

Although sexting often takes place consensually between two people, it can also occur against the wishes of a person who is the subject of the content. A number of instances have been reported in which the recipients of sexting have shared the content of the messages with others, with less intimate intentions, such as to impress their friends or embarrass their sender. Celebrities such as Milcy Cyrus, Vanessa Hudgens, and Adriennc Bailon have been victims of such abuses of sexting. These days no celebrity sex scandal or political revelation is complete without embarrassing and incriminating text evidence, nor do any major event go by without instant text commentary.

Spreading rumors and gossip by text is also an issue of great concern. Text "bullying" of this sort can cause distress and damage reputations.

Harding and Rosenberg (2005) argue that the urge to forward text messages seems difficult to resist, describing text messages as "loaded weapons".
Texts have changed the way we write, obliterating conventional punctuations and replacing properly spelled words with abbreviations, initials and 'emoticon' smiley symbols. The average teenager or adolescent now sends around 50 texts a week and is more likely to text friends and family than talk to them.

Positive Impacts of text languages

Although negative aspects to the rise of technology exist, there are positive aspects as well. Many would argue that texting has dampened their children's ability to interact on a face- to-face level with their peers**,** but others would argue against that, and say that it allows people more freedom to contact those that they do not see regularly. Parents are thankful that they have that connection, but they also run the risk of being frustrated by how often their child uses their phone, causing many parents to put restrictions on how much their child can use their phone.

With the uprising of technology many are concerned about the social ramifications that texting holds, particularly on younger generations. Between teenagers and their friends "cell-phone texting has become the preferred channel of basic communication" (Lenhart) and it is becoming common for children to communicate with their friends via text messaging as opposed to phone conversations or even face-to-face. A majority of modern teenagers, defined by the Pew Researeh Center as ages 12-17, will text their friends at least once a day. A smaller percentage call theirs friends daily and an even smaller number talk to friends face-to-face.

Though texting might take some kids away from social interactions, it also opens the door for many other children to communicate with their peers through a way that makes them feel safer. Texting can be a good alternative for children that suffer from: social anxiety, loneliness, shyness.

How Texting is Destroying Language and Communication

Historically, Text language 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 was often inconsequential. However, this became much more pronounced in SMS, where mobile phone users do not generally have access to a QWERTY keyboard as computer users did, more effort is required totype each character, and there is a limit on the number of characters that may be sent.

The combination of letters, numbers and acronyms is ruining language, and promoting ignorance of grammar and spelling, say critics. But its supporters say it's clever, takes a decent level of literacy to invent and understand, and most can work out that gr8 is not how we spell great.

The use of text messaging has changed the way that people talk and write essays, some believing it to be harmful others are of a different opinion. Children today are receiving cell phones at an age as young as eight yearold; more than 35 percent of children have their own mobile phone. Because of this, the texting language is integrated into the way that students think from an earlier age than ever before.

Researeh by Rosen et al. (2009) found that those young adults who used more language-based textisms (shortcuts such as LOL, 2nite, etc.) in daily writing produced worse formal writing than those young adults who used fewer linguistic textisms in daily writing. However, the exact opposite was true for informal writing. This suggests that perhaps the act of using textisms to shorten communication words leads young adults to produce more informal writing, which may then help them to be better "informal" writers.

Cingel, who worked with S. Shyam Sundar, Distinguished Professor of Communications and Co-Director of the Penn State's Media Effects Researeh Laboratory, said the use of these shortcuts may hinder a tween's ability to switch between textspeak and the normal rules of grammar.

"Overall, there is evidence of a decline in grammar scores based on the number of adaptations in sent text messages, controlling for age and grade," Cingel said.

Not only did frequent texting negatively predict the test results, but both sending and receiving text adaptations were associated with how poorly they performed on the test, according to Sundar.

Theoretical Framework Conversation Theory

"Conversation Theory", proposed by Gordon Pask in the 1970s, identifies a framework to explain how scientific theory and interactions formulate the "construction of knowledge". Conversation Theory is based on the idea socialsystems are symbolic and language-oriented. Additionally, these systems are based on responses and interpretations, and the meaning interpreted by individuals via communication. This theory is based on interaction between two or more individuals, with unlike perspectives. The significance of having unlike perspectives is that it enables a distinctive standpoint: it permits the ability to study how people identify differences and understand meaning. Additionally, these differences create shared and consensual pockets of interactions and communications as discussed in Structure-Organization-Process. Another idea of Conversation Theory is that learning happens by exchanges about issues, which assist in making knowledge explicit. In order for this to happen, Pask organized three levels of conversation, according to:

"Natural language": general discussion
"Object languages": for discussing the subject matter
"Metalanguages": for talking about learning/language

Ultimately, Pask found versatile learners neither favour one approach over the other. Rather, they understand how both approaches are integrated into the structure of learning. The similarity of Conversation Theory with text and Conversation Theory is that both focus on the foundational aspects of meaning = specifically, how and why meaning is established and interpreted amongst individuals. However, the difference between the two theories is Conversation Theory specifically focuses on the dynamics of two people. Text and Conversation Theory is typically applied to at least two people. Conversation theory emphasizes the construct of knowledge of meaning and the cause and effect relationship that occurs as a result of self-learning from communication, based on meaning.

Social Constructivism Theory

Social Constructivism, strongly influenced by Vygotsky's (1978) work, suggests that knowledge is first constructed in a social context and is then taken up by individuals (Bruning et al., 1999; M. Cole, 1991; Eggan & Kauchak, 2004). According to social constructivists, the process of sharing each person's point of view-called collaborative elaboration (Meter & Stevens, 2000)-results in learners building understanding together that wouldn't be possible alone (Greeno et al., 1996).

Kirschner et al (2006) describe constructivisl teaching methods as "unguided methods of instruction." They suggest more structured learning activities for learners with little or no prior knowledge.

The type of learner here is self-directed, creative, and innovative, that may modify existing knowledge and allow for creation of new knowledge. Social Constructivism not only acknowledges the uniqueness and; complexily of the learner, but actually encourages, utilizes and rewards it as an integral part of the learning process (Wertseh, 1997). Social Constructivism encourages thelearner to arrive at his or her version of the truth, influenced by his or her background, culture or embedded worldview.

Without the social interaction with other more knowledgeable people, it is impossible to acquire social meaning of important symbol systems and learn how to utilize them. Young children develop their thinking abilities by interacting with other children, adults, and the physical world. From the social constructivist viewpoint, it is thus important to take into account the background and culture of the learner throughout the learning process, as this background also helps to shape the knowledge and truth that the learner creates, discovers, and attains in the learning process (Wertsch, 1997).

Furthermore, it is argue that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner (Glasersfeld, 1989). Other constructivist scholars agree with this and hold that we make meanings through acting with each other and the environment. Knowledge is thus a product of humans and is a product of our social nature, and of our culture. Therefore meaning occurs through social actions.

The social constructivist paradigm views the context in which the learning occurs as central to the learning itself (McMahon 1997). Underlying the notion of the learner as an active processor is "the assumption that there is no, learning laws with each law applying to all domains" (Di Vesta 1987:208).

Methodology

The study used survey as the design. Survey researeh design is often used to assess thoughts, opinions, attitude, preference, and feelings of members of a population. The choice of this researeh methods is its ability to investigate problems of realistic settings in their natural environment, cost effectiveness, easy and comprehensive data collection.

The study area for this researeh work is the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State. This would enable the researehers draw inference from respondents in the universities to see their opinion on the influence of Text Language on students' communication and social interactions.

The University of Benin, Edo State has a population of 50,000 students and about 2,000 lecturers in all; it was from this population that the 100 respondents were picked for this study.

The sample size for this study consists of 100 respondents who comprise students and lecturers of the University. Questionnaires were administered to reach them. The purposive sampling technique was used in choosing the subjects based on their knowledge and understanding of text message, exposure to the social media, cell phone usage and social media accountholders.

Lecturers or examiners related to English Studies and Communication (phonographic and grammatical structures studies); were also purposively chosen for this study.

The instrument used is the questionnaire. Two sets of questionnaires were created, one for students/texters and another for lecturers/examiners. The two questionnaires were divided into two parts; Section A containing the demographic indices had three questions; Section B containing specified questions based on their category (Instructors or Examiners; 6 questions) and (Students or Texters; 19 questions). This section has questions from which this researeh drew inference. One hundred copies of the questionnaires were administered, 70 to texters or students and 30 to lecturers or examiners.

Data Presentation

Of the 70 administered to students, only 65 were retrieved representing 93% of the sample population for students. As stated earlier, the questionnaires were purposively distributed amongst students within the University of Benin.

Table 1: Percentage of student's questionnaire returned

Questionnaires	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Retrieved	65	93%
Not retrieved	5	7%
Total	**70**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

The above table shows the percentage of returned questionnaires. Seventy copies of the questionnaire were randomly distributed to students in the University of Benin. Only 65 were returned. This implies that 93% of the questionnaire were filled and returned, as shown in the table above. However, 5 were not returned representing 7% of number administered.

Table 2: Percentage of students on social media

Students on social media	**Frequency**		**Total**	**Percentage**
	Male	**Female**		
Yes	31	32	63	97%
No	2	0	2	3%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source:Field Survey (2013)

This analysis shows that 97% of the respondents i.e. 63 students are exposed to social media which avails them the opportunity of tcxting, while only 3%i.e. 2 students did not tick that they are exposed to social media. The forms of social media which were specified includes; Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Pcpcronity, BBM (Blackberry Messenger), 2go, Eskimi, Nimbuzz, Myspace, Mjoy, Yahoo and Google messenger.

Table 3: Duration of student's exposure to social media

Duration of exposure	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
1 month- 1 year	1	2	3	4.6%
2years-3years	5	6	11	16.9&
4years and above	27	24	51	78.5%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

In gauging the duration of time students have been exposed to these social media, the data above shows that 51 (78.5%) of the respondents have been exposed to these social media for more than 4 years, 11 (16.9%) between 2-3 years and 3 (4.6%') less than a year.

Table 4: Effects of Text Language on student's written skills

Negative effects on students writing skills	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	28	30	58	89.2%
No	5	2	7	10.8%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

The data above shows that 58 respondents (89.2%) agree that the use of Text Language does have a negative effect on student's writing skills. However, the remaining 10.8%' i.e. 7 respondents are of the opinion that it doesn't affect students writing. The respondents who agree that texting has effects on students writing skills emphasized that most students no longer use correct spellings and with time they tend to forget the original spellings of these words, It becomes a part of them and they mistakenly make use of these short codes in examination scripts, they speak the way they write resulting in poor oral English and thus, impedes on the growth of their English Language, the use of punctuations marks and grammatical composition necessary to construct proper sentences suffers even in formal writing.

Table 5: Effects of texting on phone calls

Reduced phone calls	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	20	23	43	66.2%
No	13	9	22	33.8%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

The above table shows a decline in student's call rate since the advent of texting. Fort three students agree that their call rates have dropped due to an increase in their texting abilities, the other 22 students representing 33.8% insist that their call rate hasn't suffered due to their textins.

Table 6:Student's willingness to engage in a face-to-face conversation rather than texting someone about a problem

Face- to -face conversation?	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	31	24	55	84.6%
No	2	8	10	15.4%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source; Field Survey (2013)

Where 55 students i.e. 85% of the respondents admit they prefer having a face-to-facc conversation in dealing with an issue, 10 of the respondents i.e. 15% would prefer to text someone about a problem rather than confront them one on one.

Table 7: Student's take on stalling an online relationship

Preference of Online Relationship	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	4	1	5	7.7%
No	25	26	51	78.5%
Most likely	4	5	9	13.8%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

The above analysis shows that most students resent the idea of an online relationship. This idea is represented by 51 (78.5%) of the respondents, whereas, only 5 (1.1%) of the respondents prefer an online relationship to a real life situation. Nine (13.8%) however are uncertain of their stand on the question. Those who prefer starting an online relationship say they do because online relationships are used to pass time, no serious attachment, the use ol fantasies is ever present in online relationships, it creates an avenue to become familiar with the person before meeting them face-to-face, those who resent the idea however state that; online dating could be very deceptive, a lot of fake people are online, face to face relationships ean help detect an in sincere person.

Table 8: Respondent's ability to understand the short codes used by other students

Decoding of short codes used by others	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	13	20	33	50.8%
No	20	12	32	49.2%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

The table above illustrates that whereas 33 (51%) of respondents admit to understand short codes used by others in text messaging, the other 32 (49%) do not have an entire understanding of the many different codes.

Table 9: Effect of texting on written work

Preference of Online Relationship	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	9	8	17	26.2%
No	10	10	20	30.8%’
Most likely	14	14	28	43%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

Twenty (approximately 31%) respondents do not agree that lexting could be affecting their written work at school, 17 (26%) agree that textingcould be affecting their written work while 28 (43%) remain uncertain or think that texting could be affecting their written work. Those who agree on the effect texting is having on them specified that they have noticed less use of punctuation marks, the effect on their spoken English, mixing of pidgin commonly used while Texting and the Standard English in their academic work and an increased use of short codes in their school notes and assignments. Some others complained that they actually forget the spellings of some words and just settle for the abbreviated format in examinations and assignments.

Table 10: Willingness to discontinue the use of text

Discontinue the use of Text Language/	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	29	27	56	86.2%
No	4	5	9	13.8%
Total	**33**	**32**	**65**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

Of the 65 respondents, 56 (86%) say they would stop using Text Language if they find out that it was affecting them academically while the other 9 (approximately 14%) say they won't stop even after discovering that it was affecting them academically. Their refusal to stop is as a result of the brevity provided by Text Language, its cost effectiveness, 'it's trending, it's faster' as a lot can be in so little time and space while others say they would only reduce their use of Text Language rather than discontinue it completely.

Analysis of Examiners Questionnaire

Thirty copies of questionnaire were distributed to examiners i.e. lecturers. However, only 18 were retrieved representing 60% of the sample population for examiners. This information is represented in Table 18 below

Table 11: Percentage of examiner's questionnaire returned

Questionnaires	Frequency	Percentage
Retrieved	18	60%
Not retrieved	12	40%
Total	**30**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

Table 12: Examiner's awareness of increased use of Text Language

Noticed increase instudents useof Text Language	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	9	4	13	72.2%
No	3	2	5	27.8%
Total	**12**	**6**	**18**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

Of the 18 copies retrieved from examiners, 72% i.e. 13 agree to have noticed the increasing use of these short codes in academic work while about 28% i.e. 5 say these have gone unnoticed.

Thirteen (72%) of the 18 respondents agree that the scripts which they have noticed the use of Text Language is greater than 5% while only 5 (27.8%) say the use has been less than *5%.*

Table 14: Difficulties in reading scripts with Text Language.

Difficulties in reading scripts which include Text Language	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	6	3	9	50%
No	6	3	9	50%
Total	**12**	**6**	**18**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

Here, it's a 50-50 response. Fifty per cent of the respondents i.e. 9 examiners agree to experiencing difficulties in reading the scripts of students who use Text Language. The other 50% say they experience no difficulty whatsoever.

Table 15: Examiner's view of the effect of Text Language on academics

Affects students writing skills negatively	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	9	5	14	77.8%
No	3	1	4	22.2%
Total	**12**	**6**	**18**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

Fourteen of the 18 examiners representing 77.8% of the total respondents say that texting has a negative effect on students while the remaining 4 representing 22.2% say that texting would not have any sort of negative effects on students academically. Those that agreed that Texting has negative effects on students went further to highlight that: 'It goes into their subconscious and negatively tells on how they utilize the English Language, they spell the way the words are pronounced avoiding semantic composition, omission of letters from words and abbreviate unduly, they are unable to tell the difference between the use of language in official and unofficial writing and they allow it influence their official writing?

Table 16: Effect of the use of Text Language on communication with teachers/examiners

Hindered communication because students use text language	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Yes	3	1	4	22.2%
No	6	3	9	50%
Most likely	3	2	5	27.8%
Total	**12**	**6**	**18**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2013)

While 9 (50%) of the 18 respondents say they experience no hindrance whatsoever, 5 (27.8%) remain uncertain and the rest 4 (22.2%) agree that a hindrance is posed by students use of Text Language short codes.

Researeh Question 1: How do students use language shortcuts in their academic writing?

In response to section 16 of the students' questionnaire, students gave instances of how they use these short codes in their academic work. Stating that the use of numbers to replace words: '2' for to or too e.g. 2day, replacing words with single letters like 'd' for the, etc. O'Connor (2005) is of the view that the more students use tools like instant messaging, the less they are able to separate formal and informal writing techniques. This was confirmed in Tables 12 and 13 where 72% of the lecturers have noticed an increase in the rates at which students use these short codes in assignments and examination.

The utilization of text messaging language in the classroom is considered by many educators to be an inappropriate form of language that is "infecting"Standard English and leading to lower scores on writing examinations (Carrington, 2005, p. 168). Subsequently, students' use of short codes in examination and assignments reduces their scores or grades and contributes to a poor performance in their accumulated grade.

Researeh Question 2; How does Text Language serve as a threat to the present and generally accepted form of English Language?

As more and more students are being exposed to the use of social media, the use of text language is on the increase as shown in Tables 2 and 3. The components of the English Language is fading gradually as more punctuation, capitalisation and omissions continue to re-occur as seen in the analysis. Table 21 shows that (78%) of the examiners who agreed that texting is affecting student's writing skills stated that students are not able to distinguish between formal and informal writing anymore and are gradually allowing these short codes to creep into their formal writing. This view is supported by Cingel (2012), who said that the use of these shortcuts may hinder a tween's ability to switch between techspeak and the normal rules of grammar.

Also, the essence of using English Language is to have a generally accepted language. However, text language is not generally understood. This can be seen in Tables 8 and 14. Table 8 shows that 49% of the respondents are not able to decode every shon hand message sent to them. Likewise Table 14 shows that while 50% of examiners can read and understand these short codes, the remaining 50% do not understand the abbreviations used by students. This results in a communication gap between the sender and receiver.

According to Sean O Cadhain (2002), abbreviations and acronyms elicit a sense of group identity as users must be familiar with the lingo of their group to be able to comprehend the SMS language used within the group. In essence, those outside this group will not have an understanding of the codes used.

Researeh Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between Texting and a decrease in person to person communication and thus, social interaction?
This researeh question is answered in Tables 5, 6, 7 and 16. Where Table 5 shows that 66$ of students have reduced the rate of voice calls, Table 6 also indicates that only 15% (i.e. 10 out of 70) would rather text their friends about an issue instead of having a one-on-onc conversation wilh them. Table 7 on the other hand indicaics that 8% would like to start a relationship over the internet so they can talk about their fantasies as well as say certain things they would not be able to say to the persons face. However, from Table 16, we can deduce that 50% of the examiners disagree that texting could be affecting their oral communication with students. The rest are mostly not sure about this.

The implication of this finding as propounded by scholars remarked that texting in defining social boundaries through shared linguistic codes (e.g. Ling 2008; Androutsopoulos and Schmidt, 2002; Spilioli, 2009), also emphasizing that speech styles constitute different types of social relationships, with style shifting providing a contextual cue for relationship maintenance and conflict management (Schmidt and Androutsopoulos 2004). Texting can therefore be said to be making more teenagers shy away and avoid voice conversations (the voice is known to carry emotions) and facial interactions (which are important ingredients in communication).

The effect may be minimal, but it still is present and with time, more and more students would reduce their call rates as well as reduce their face-to-face conversation.

Researeh Question 5: How do language shortcuts influence students' spelling/grammatical skills?
Table 4 and 9 justify this researeh question. In Table 4, 89% i.e. 58 respondents agreed that texting has negative effects on students writing skills stating specifically that these effects are in the areas of using correct spellings, making use of these short codes in examinations, speaking the way they write resulting in poor oral English. They also fail to use punctuation marks and grammatical forms necessary to construct proper sentences.

Table 9 personalizes these effects and relates them to the respondents. Here respondents say they have noticed the effects of texting on them especially as it affects their academic writing. They emphasize that they now mix pigin commonly used while texting and the Standard English in their school notes and assignments, others complained to actually forget the spellings of some words and just settle for the abbreviated format.

Also, the content analysis data shows that there has been an increase in the decline of punctuation, spaces in between words and after punctuations, and the use of capital letters. There is also heightened reduction of words and omission of vowel sounds.

This conforms with researeh by Rosen et al. (2009) who found that those young adults who used more language-based textisms (shortcuts such as LOL,2nite, etc.) in daily writing produced worse formal writing than those young adults who used fewer linguistic textisms in daily writing.

Recommendations

This researeh has broadly unraveled how texting affects students academically and otherwise. It has also covered how texting affects social interaction among the younger generation.

Therefore, based on these findings, the researeher makes the following recommendations:

- It is important to recommend that a uniform and generally accepted format for using abbreviations and short codes be provided to eliminate the multiplicity of meaning where only the sender knows the meaning of the abbreviation he/she has formulated.
- Punishment for theuse of these short codes in examinations and assignments should be enforced and made known to students. This would make students put in conscious effort and desist from the use of abbreviations and shortened words in their academic writing.
- Social media developers as well as service providers should increase the number of characters allowed per message. This would help on the long run by reducing the rate at which short codes and abbreviations are used.

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