The Impact of Texting/SMS Language on Academic Writing of Students

Abdullabekova Dilirukhsor

Second course, Master's degree, UzSWLU

Abstract: Technology is getting increased more and more these days, therefore it is concerned that people are getting engaged in texting or messaging in SMS and social media every day. This article is written to determine the presence or absence of SMS features in the academic writing. It is believed that texting may impact on writing and thus destroying Standard English. Moreover, the texting can be harmful for punctuation, word choice and formal writing. On the other hand, it is proven that the evidences of one punctuation mark used in place of another indicate there can be other factors like carelessness or lack of knowledge of students and the lack of training, feedback or emphasis by educators or the system. So the matter of concern should be the general neglect of punctuation even out of the context of texting.

Key words: Standard English, Writing, Orthography, Discursive practices, punctuation, texting, communication.

It is a fact that with the ever increasing use of text messaging among students, especially teenagers, there has been a growing concern among educators, parents, researchers and general public that this practice is damaging the use of language in speaking and writing and will affect the standard forms in the long run. As a result they have difficulty in formal writing of university students as most of our exams, assignments, reports and assessments are based on written work of students. It impacts on the spelling and punctuation the students use in such writing. It is believed that SMS is to be blamed for poor spelling and punctuation habits of learners.

As it is defined that SMS language is a term for the abbreviations and rebus-like slang most commonly used due to the essential pithiness of mobile phone text messaging etiquette[1].

The objective of SMS language is to use the least number of characters needed to convey an intelligible message as many telecommunication companies have an SMS character limit, allowing about 160 characters.

In the Hallidayan (1975) sense, the act of texting has both an interpersonal and textual function. Mobile phones are also fashion accessories themselves. According to Crystal (2008), the introduction of printing, telegraph, telephone, and broadcasting caused similar threats but the curiosity, suspicion, fear, uncertainty, opposition, charm, excitement and enthusiasm all at once that texting has aroused in such a short span of time is surpassed by no linguistic phenomenon. Crystal (2008) contends that numerous distinguishing features give novelty to written texts, but none of them is linguistically novel. Many of them were being used in chat room interactions much before the arrival of mobile phones. All communication is context bound and messages are sent between people who know each others' texting abbreviations and versions well. Texting involves immediate turn taking. So texters opt for abbreviated forms and omit punctuations and ignore capitalization which requires pressing extra keys and consumes more time and effort and costs the recipient extra patience in taking his/her

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[1] Rafi M. S. 2008. SMS Text Analysis: Language, Gender and Current Practices

turn and slows down the process of communication[2]. According to Sutherland (2002), it would be possible to text the whole of Hamlet. It may be unpoetic but quick reading. Sociologically, texting consolidates sub- communities like those of homebound women.

Ling, R. (2010) suggests that SMS is a life phase and not a cohort phenomenon. That is, its use is more concentrated among teens and more temperate among older age groups. British Broadcasting Company (March 4, 2003) reports that text messaging has long been blamed for declining standards of spelling and grammar, particularly in paper and pencil writing.

According to Mphahlele and Mashamaite (2005), SMS service has overcome the requirement in language versatility and it is being increasingly used in social communication, business transactions and even in advertisements. Technology plays an important role in communication today and SMS is popular especially among the young generation because it provides economy of money and time. Learners have a tendency to use it as an officially accepted and standard language and thus make different errors from incorrect spelling to even ungrammatical sentence constructions. The English language educators are facing a great challenge due to this situation. The language of texting does not observe grammatical and syntactic rules. So it is neither formal nor standard. Words are spelled as they are spoken. As a   result, educators penalize the learners for nonstandard spelling which causes loss to the students if this language is used in academic writing[3].

Mostly, the SMS language affects two aspects of learners' language proficiency i.e. skills to express oneself eloquently through writing and skills and ability to use words appropriately in context. Texters tend to write the spelling of some words as they are spoken and omit punctuation and overuse it in their tests, assignments and reports which sometimes hampers comprehension of the sense they want to convey. They are thus unable to differentiate the context and situation for the use of SMS language. They don't only mix these with Standard English but are blamed to consider them as correct since they are surrounded by this language in the form of text messages, television, billboards, comics, books, newspapers and sometimes circulars from their institutions. At the same time, texting has been considered as a sign of creativity and proficiency by some researchers. Thurlow (2011) calls young people's use of their mobile phones as a 'novel, creative' way of improving close relationships and existing social circles and claims that 'popular discourses about the linguistic uniqueness and incomprehensibility of this particular technologically-mediated discourse appear greatly exaggerated'. Keeping to the sociolinguistic 'maxims' of (a) brevity and speed, (b) paralinguistic restitution and (c) phonological approximation, young people's messages are linguistically unremarkable and communicatively adept.' According to research done by Dr. Nanagh Kemp of University of Tasmania, the evolution of 'textese' is essentially associated with a strong grasp of grammar and phonetics[4].

After having been investigated several articles based on this topic, some results and findings are being found. According to Shazia Aziz(2013) people's concerns about the impact of SMS language on the academic writing of students and about standard language being in danger of destruction are exaggerated or misplaced. Obviously, the writing is not destroyed due to technology and texting; Professor Eleanor Johnson who suspects the blame on texting for the widespread mistakes in writing; Baron's (2008) claim that texting helps develop vocabulary and reading skills instead of damaging language and Thurlow (2007) according to whom very few text messages are 'unrecoverable'. The students themselves may have the lack of training on punctuation and lack of feedback on the part of teachers comes as an automatic consequence of punctuation not being part of assessment because

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[2] Thurlow, C and Poff, M. 2011.Text Messaging Susan C. Herring, Dieter Stein & Tuija Virtanen (eds),

[3] Crystal, D. 2011. Internet Linguistics, A Student Guide: Routledge

[4] Ling, R. 2010. Texting as a life phase medium. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication

most of the instruction in Uzbekistan is assessment oriented i.e.¸ educators train students in the skills to be tested in assessments or exams. Students do not know how to put the punctuation correctly. Those who know punctuation well, they can write SMS correctly and writing too.

In order to solve this problem, educators and systems should place more emphasis on the instruction and assessment of punctuation. Educators need to think that focus needs to be given to this aspect also while teaching a language. So the use of texting is not a factor to panic about. The matter of concern should be the general neglect of punctuation even out of the context of texting and the instruction and assessment of punctuation should be given importance[5].

The educators in this situation need to build on the strength of SMS Language i.e. it improves rather than hinders literacy. The lexicographers also need to accept it as a language variety in use and add it in dictionaries just as other acronyms and jargons that have been coined are introduced in dictionaries.

In conclusion, however it is believed that test messaging can be blamed for the students' illiteracy in the sphere of punctuation, spelling, grammar, word choice, several linguistics maintained that the impact of texting on academic writing is less. Students' punctuation and spelling may be worsening because of less attention, and lack of feedback by mentors. As far as the students' general writing proficiency is well formed, their text messaging cannot impact on their academic writing.

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