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Research paper



The Interference of Online Texting Language in Essay Writing

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Abstract

Communicating through text is no longer seen as something peculiar nowadays. In fact, those who are not familiar with this medium will be seen as an outlier. Interference is viewed as elements transference of one language into another language at various stages of linguistics such as phonology, morphology, syntax and the orthography of the languages. Surprisingly, current studies have shown that the exposure to textese had effect on spelling. Thus, this study aimed to find out whether textese has influenced students' essay writing. This study was participated by 67 Form 4 students of an academy at one of the states in Malaysia involving 27 males and 40 females. All respondents are regular users of text messaging. Data collected were analysed using percentages. From the findings, it can be concluded that online texting language usage in messaging platform affects students' writing skills. Their responses showed that they use abbreviation in their writing and consciously do spelling mistakes. This phenomenon is alarming and certain measures should be taken into consideration in overcoming these issues.

Keywords: *English as a Second Language (ESL); essay writing; interference; online texting language; social networks.*

1. Introduction

Communicating through text is no longer seen as something peculiar nowadays. In fact, those who are not familiar with this medium will be seen as an outlier. Interference according to [1] is viewed as the elements transference of one language into another language at various stage of linguistics such as phonology, morphology, syntax and the orthography of the languages.

Referring to [2], text messaging, short messaging service (SMS) or "texting" can be referred as a transmission of text between mobile phones. The majority of this messages normally involves one to one, person to person SMS, with interlocutors who known each other.

Texting, a technologically mediated and text based, may also be considered as a type of computer mediated communication (CMC) as it shares many features of other types of CMC. In order to adapt to these technological advances, people has developed text messaging language or known as "textese" to quicken their communication with others.

[3] claimed textese has a structural difference from Standard English in which it is characterized by acronyms, emoticons, and the deletion of unnecessary words, vowels, punctuation, and capitalization. [4] have also provided a detailed explanation of the text features which involve the usage of emoticon (:-), typographic symbols (xxx), acronyms (BBC), initialisms (lol), letter or number homophones (I8r), shortenings (tues), contractions (wknd), "g" clippings (goin), other clippings (hav), non-conventional spellings (fone) and accent stylizations (gonna). Additionally, onomatopoeic spellings (woohoo), omitted apostrophes (cant), and hybrids (two or more of the above) are normally found in textese.

In their study on young adults in Ireland, they reported that 75% of message content involved standard spelling, with 17% of the messages contained no textese at all. Only 10% of messages contained more textese compared to standard spelling. However, in a study to investigate textese among 10 and 12 years, [5] found a higher rate of 34% that is being used. With the ever-increasing of these medium of text, concerns have been raised about their influence towards student's literacy skills. This practice is said to have both negative and positive effects towards students' writing skills, but to what extent?

According to [6], the exposure to textese had a positive effect on spelling. A study was conducted where participants were given two spelling tests. One was answered before the exposure to textese and the other was given after exposing them with textese. It was recorded that the scores for the second test were higher as compared to the first text.

Referring to a study published by the British Journal of Developmental Psychology that found texters displayed a wider range of vocabulary which may lead to positive development towards their reading skills, [7] claims that student's writing suffers little impact from textese. She also added, as soon as children can differentiate between formal and informal language, textese does not affect their literacy.

On the other hand, a study conducted by [3] which has a positive finding between texting and literacy found that more than half of the students in the sample (both texters and non-texters) advocated that they thought that the use of textese makes it difficult to remember Standard English. Another study by [8], they investigated teachers via qualitative research design to obtain the views on the frequency of textese usage in their grade 8 and 9 learners' written English.

They found that textese has a negative influenced towards selected South African secondary school learners in writing English such as g-clippings and non-conventional spelling as the categories of problematic textese use. Even though many studies have been done on the impacts of technology in education (e.g. [9] [10] [11] [12] [12]), yet, little evidence are found with regards to online language texting. This study has also investigated whether textese is to be blamed for poor writing habits among students or not.

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Therefore, the following research questions were developed in line with the research objectives of the study:

1. Does online texting language influence students' essay writing in terms of transliteration?
2. Does online texting language influence students' essay writing in terms of abbreviation?
3. Does online texting language influence students' essay writing in terms of spelling mistakes?

2. Method

This study was participated by 67 Form 4 students of an academy located at one of the states in Malaysia. The respondents comprise of 27 male and 40 female students. All respondents are regular users of text messaging. Quantitative research design was employed using survey. The survey was labelled as Section A, Section B and Section C. Section A focus on transliteration comprised of 5 open-ended items, Section B focus on abbreviation comprised of 5 open-ended questions allowing the respondents to rate their usage of shortenings, acronyms, symbols and numbers. Section C focus on spelling mistakes comprised of 6 open-ended questions, which are the frequency of wrong spelling in texting and essay writing, the usage of auto-correct, the reasons for wrong spelling in essay writing. Data collected were analysed using percentages.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Transliteration

Items 1-5 in under transliteration section of the interview questions are posed to identify whether transliteration influences students' writing. The findings are grouped into three large categories which are 'Yes', 'Sometimes' and 'No' that is analysed by percentage respectively as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Percentage of Online Texting Language Interference in Transliteration

No.	Item	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
1.	Do you translate Malay words to English language or vice versa directly in terms of spelling?	6	19	74
2.	Do you always use direct translation in texting?	3	19	65
3.	Do these direct translations influence the way you write your essay?	13	-	71
4.	Do you use direct translation to provide the real meaning to your teacher?	3	16	81
5.	Do you consider transliteration as one of your learning strategies?	19	6	61

From Table 1, it is inferred that transliteration do not directly influences students' writing which lead to the point that it does not caused deterioration in students' writing. Take item number 1 for instance, the percentage number of students who do not directly translate Malay words to English language or vice versa is higher than percentage number of students whom stated yes and sometimes.

The percentage number of students who answer 'no' for item number two also left percentage number of students who answer 'yes' and 'sometimes' and huge gap which are 65% for 'no', 19% for 'sometimes' and 3% for 'yes'. According to the interview conducted, most of the respondents who answer 'sometimes' explained that they apply transliteration only when they do not know the real spelling for certain words.

The pattern of findings of the remaining items of 3, 4 and 5 is also synonymous like items 1 and 2. Take item 4 for example, there is 81% of students who responded 'no' to the question of whether they use transliteration to provide the real meaning to their teachers which mark the highest percentage of students. A similar finding is shown in item 5 too whereby 61% of students said they do not consider transliteration as one of their learning strategies which left a huge gap between percentage of students who answer 'yes' and 'no'.

The findings imply that students tend to apply transliteration more as linguistic strategies and in order to convey the intended meaning, these students literally translates the L1 lexical items into the target language.

3.2 Abbreviation

Table 2: Percentage of Online Texting Language Interference in Abbreviation

No.	Item	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
1.	Do you always shorten up some words when texting?	96.7	3.2	-
2.	Do you use acronym when texting?	87	3.2	9.7
3.	Do you use symbol when texting?	90.3	3.2	6.5
4.	Do you replace some words by using Number?	58	-	41.9
5.	Do these texting languages influence the way you write your essay?	12.9	3.2	83.9

Based on Table 2, it can be deduced that abbreviation has a minor influence towards students' writing which they tend to use it formal writing. The pattern of findings shows that more than half of respondents applied abbreviation in their texting through the usage of acronyms, symbols and numbers when they are texting. This finding will be further discussed as follows.

Item number 1 shows almost every respondent applied abbreviation in texting. As for item no 2, 87% of respondents responded to use acronyms in text while 9.7% responded "no". Item no 4 has the highest data recorded where 90.3% of respondents use symbol in texting with 6.5% of them did not use symbols at all in texting. This is also followed by item 4 where more respondents responded "yes" in replacing some words using number compared to those who responded "no" with almost half percentage of 41.9.

Overall this minor influence of abbreviation in essay writing can be shown from data collected in item no 5. 83.9% of respondents responded "no". This finding reflects that even most of the students used abbreviation in texting, they are still able to differentiate between both formal and informal context of writing. Probably, the reasons that lie behind 12.9% and 3.2% of respondents who answered "yes" and "sometimes" was because most of them have unconsciously used abbreviation in essay writing and some said it was because they are running out of time when writing the essay.

In conclusion, abbreviation plays a very minor influence when the students are able to distinguish the situation to use formal or informal language. This claim is supported by [7] who agrees that students' writing suffer just a little impact from textese. She also added, as children can differentiate between formal and informal language, textese does not affect their literacy.

3.4 Spelling Mistakes

Table 3: Percentage of Online Texting Language Interference in Spelling mistakes

No.	Item	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
1.	Do you always spell words wrongly when texting?	54.8	22.6	22.6
2.	What about in essay writing?	19.4	3.2	77.4
3.	Has anybody corrected your spelling?	74.2	0	25.8
4.	Do you still spell wrongly after that?	32.3	29	29
5.	Do you use auto-correct when texting?	48.4	0	51.6
6.	If auto-correct is not being used, do you still able to text with correct spelling?	61.3	9.7	29

Researchers have constructed six items in examining the third research questions, to see whether the influence of textese cause the respondents to make spelling mistakes in essay writing. From table 4.4, contrary to what researchers have predicted, only 19.4% of the respondents committed spelling mistakes in essay writing. This is a very positive response despite the high percentage of respondents agreeing to item 1 with 54.8% always text some words in a wrong spelling in texting. Also, this result correlates [14] that the students actually know when to use texting lingo and when to use the correct form of writing.

Item 3 and 4 elicit their responses on the usage of wrong spelling after being corrected. In item 3, 74.2% of them have been corrected for their wrong spelling, and for item 4, only 32.3% continue to use the wrong spelling afterwards. The reason is probably because they are trying to blend in with the trends due to peer-pressure. The next two items, item 5 and item 6 are concerned with the usage of an autocorrect feature in texting. First, is whether the respondents use the autocorrect feature in texting. Secondly, whether they still able to text the correct spelling without using it. From the data, a high percentage of 61.3% are confident with their own ability to spell correctly except when dealing with difficult words.

4. Conclusion and Implications

Overall, this study concludes that texting language usage in messaging platform does affect students' writing skills. Their responses showed that they use abbreviation in their writing and consciously do some spelling mistakes. The distractions of texting languages from WhatsApp, Instagram, and others are the main challenges that teachers need to take note of. Due to this situation, teachers need to play a bigger role to ensure that these texting languages are banned from the tests. In order to decrease or minimize errors in students' essay writing, the teachers need to foster awareness among the students so that they realize what is acceptable and what is not in a formal test. It is recommended that future studies focus more on the challenges of textese management for technologies such as social media, especially for teaching and improving writing, as well as teachers' perceptions.

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