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EXPLORING THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF SHORT MESSAGE SERVICE (SMS) TEXTING ON ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

The present research aims to explore the negative impact of Short Message Service (SMS) texting on academic writing Skills at the university level. To highlight this, the present research examined five types of Short Message Service texting comprising vowel deletion, alphanumeric homophony, graphemes, short forms and emoticons, and smileys in paragraphs and answer scripts of their semester examination written by eighty BS-level students of Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur. The research findings indicated that the formal writing of the scholars was adversely affected by these texting features of Short Message Service. The research findings also indicated that university scholars use these Short Message Service (SMS) texting features in their writings without considering the formal and informal contexts. Based on these findings researchers recommended that scholars must evade the informal technological language of mobiles and computers in educational settings. The scholars essentially become accustomed to Standard English and distinguish between technological and formal use of the English language.

Keywords: *Academic Writing, SMS texting, Standard Language, Technologies, Informal context.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a very essential language skill to be learned by students in their academic lives. When appearing in any exam or attempting any class test, they need to pay very close attention to the accuracy, appropriation, and standards of language. Maintaining such language standards has become challenging in the modern era due to the increasing use of technology by students in their daily lives (Sadaf et al., 2024). The student's formal writing is being affected by SMS texting. Writing is considered a very significant mode of communication. It helps people to exchange information and share research done in any discipline in any part of the world (Maitlo et al, 2023). Over the years, there have been variations in linguistic systems which can be observed

through the diachronic study of any language (Ahmad, Maitlo & Jeevan, 2023). This phenomenon is discussed by linguists under headings like 'language evolution' and 'language change'. Such change in language is also evident in modern times due to globalization which has brought a large number of technologies into the global market (Shakir et al., 2011). The advancements in technology including computers, iPads, mobile phones, the text messaging have increasingly become very important for individuals. Text messaging is not only part of their social but also academic life. This exposure to text messaging is influencing students' academic writing in the classroom negatively. Technology has shaped students' attitude that they do not have to put more effort into their writing. Thus, they use the very shortened forms of language in formal settings that they use in their SMS text, Chat, or E-mails. As a consequence of such exposure to emerging trends in the English language due to technological developments, the students find it difficult to distinguish between formal and informal writing (Rao et al., 2023). Such influence of the technology on English language is observable in different parts of the world. As elsewhere in the world, the English language in Pakistan is also posed with a threat of technological lingo which refers to a particular set of words that are specifically used on the internet, mobile, and smartphones for communication (Jeevan et al., 2023). The students at the university level highly depend on mobile phones, laptops, and other forms of technology in both academic and social life. They use smartphones in classrooms to take notes of the lectures and share the necessary information with their class fellows. To do so, they use abbreviated language to save the time and energy. Consequently, this attempt of the students has resulted in harmful effects on their formal writing which is reflected in their assignments and examinations scripts (Rasheed, Sarwat & Shahzad, 2021). The present study, however, is an attempt to explore the ways SMS texting affects the writing skills of BS-level students at Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan.

Problem Statement

- Sending SMS text messages through the usage of modern technology hurts the academic writing skills of BS-level students in Pakistan.
- SMS text messages are harmful to the standard variety of English language.
- Consequently, there is needed to make policies to preserve the standards in formal writing.

Objectives and Questions

Firstly, the study aims to explore the negative impact of Short Message Service (SMS) texting on academic writing skills at the university level. Secondly, the study aims to examine the morphological and syntactic distortion in writing skills owing to the impact of SMS texting. Lastly, the study aims to examine whether or not linguistic distortion affects the clarity of a message. To find these objectives following research question was formed.

1. Which category of morphological and syntactical distortion takes place in writing skills and how does this linguistic distortion affect the clarity of the message?

Research Significance

Standard English Language (SEL) similar to the other languages of the sphere is naturally multifaceted and consists of a system of rules; having its spellings, pronunciation, meanings, and usage. It is essential to preserve the language standard in a formal setting. In an academic setting in Pakistan where English is used as a medium of instruction, the students need to differentiate between formal and informal patterns of writing. Informal English is not allowed in formal academic settings because it violates the orthography of the words and basics of the English language. Additionally, it disturbs the grammar and pronunciation of the English language. Therefore, the present research is important for the reason that it attempts to remove 'textese' from the 'Standard Written English' in an educational context; besides, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, which is the context of the present study.

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Literature Review

Many researchers in the world have explored the technological effects on the writing skill of the Standard English Language (SEL). The relation between language and the internet notes that a new variety of English is coming into play 'textese' (Bushnell, Kemp & Martin, 2011). The new dialect is the result of the influence of continuous chats in chat rooms online and SMS messaging through mobile phones (Kalhoro et al.,2023). The linguists have coined several new terms referring to the study of technological language (Plester, Wood & Joshi, 2009).

There are two opposing views on whether SMS texting influences students' writing skills or not. The first viewpoint is that SMS texting does not negatively affect the English language. Crystal argues that from the studies conducted in different countries, it can be said that there is not much threat of SMS texting in 'standard English' For example, an American Study revealed less than twenty percent of participants who used abbreviated language in their formal writing; a Norwegian study showed lower population with just six percent using abbreviations; but another research study showed ten percent in United Kingdom (Wood et al., 2011). Using abbreviations is not a new phenomenon and students do not habitually use these abbreviated forms in assignments and examinations. The second viewpoint is that the SMS language is independent and new. Therefore, students must learn the basics of the English language in an academic setting as a result they can differentiate between slang texting, lingo, and accurate English (Johnson, 2012). The new emerging abbreviations due to technology are influencing the English language negatively (Plester et al., 2011). The new arrivals are yet to be recognized by dictionaries and the threats technological lingo would have on the standard variety of the English language. Generally, people are acquiring and using mobile phones as a result they cannot escape text messaging which is an integral part of their social lives. In this situation, a substantial number of people especially students are at risk (Maitlo, Abbasi & Ali, 2024).

Limited research has been conducted in the present context of the study to examine the impact of SMS texting on the writing skills of students:

- Grace et al. (2015) studied the undergraduates' attitudes to text messaging language use and intrusions of textisms into formal writing.
- Aguta-Ofoha, (2021) studied the impact of SMS language and abbreviations on the academic writing of Secondary School Students.
- Ahmad, Farhat & Choudhary, (2022). Investigated the students' insights about the influence of text messaging on academic writing skills.
- Mensah, Atuahene & Nti-Adarkwah, (2023) studied the effects of text messaging on the academic writing of pre-service teachers of a Ghanaian college of education.
- Yassaf & Melit, (2023). Investigated the effects of texting on students' academic writing.
- Batool & Azam, (2024) studied the impact of Short Message Service language on Second Language Learning habits among University Graduates.

The present study adopts a different from the studies done previously in the sense that it observes writing samples of eighty students in a classroom setting and also examines their final assessment copies. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by investigating the influence of SMS texting on the writing skills of BS-level students at Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan.

Material and Methods

The present study used a qualitative approach for the collection and analysis of data. The qualitative approach helps the researchers to understand the phenomenon in more depth. Qualitative research can be any method other than a survey i.e. participant and non-participant observation, interviews, the collection of documentary materials, etc. (Ramzan et al., 2023; Arshad et al., 2024). The data was collected from the written paragraph of eighty BS-level students of the English department of Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan. The content analysis method was used to investigate the SMS features i.e. vowel deletion, alphanumeric homophony, graphones, and short

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forms. The use of emoticons and smileys was also taken into account during the analysis of the scripts of the population under study. Content analysis helps the researchers to codify qualitative data into themes and categories (0).

The following categories were formulated for analysis of the effects of Short Message Services (SMS) texting on the academic writing skills of the BS level students at Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan.

Explanation of the Key Categories Under Investigation	
Vowel Deletion	A process referring to the exclusion of vowel letters from a given word which is used in Short Message Services (SMS) texting for brevity. Example: 'pls', and 'kds' are used for 'please' and 'kids' respectively.
Alphanumeric Homophony	A blending of letters and numbers used to give meaning to any word, phrase, or sentence. Example: '4 U' for 'for you', '2day' for 'today', 'n8' for 'night' etc seen in everyday texting.
Graphones	Short Message Services (SMS) feature in which words are written the same way they are pronounced. Example: 'Y' for 'why', 'U' for 'you', and 'R' for 'are' are commonly seen instances in SMS texting.
Short forms	Short forms are the abbreviated spellings used in SMS texts. These are sometimes reflected in the formal writing of the students. For example, 'GM' for 'Good Morning'. 'GN' for 'Good Night' is used in Short Message Services (SMS) texts.
Emoticons and Smileys	Are icons and different faces used to express feelings of happiness, sadness, surprise, annoyance, and wonder? This is the everyday practice of the SMS texters to convey their feelings through emoticons and smileys.

Findings & Discussion

In the present research eighty paragraphs samples and eighty answer scripts of BS level students at Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, were analyzed to highlight the Short Message Services features including vowel deletion, alphanumeric homophony, graphones, short forms, emoticons, and smileys. The study aimed to investigate these features which in turn affect students' formal academic writing skills of students at the university level. The study indicates that students' formal writing is highly affected by Short Message Services features.

Vowel deletion used for brevity purposes was the most dominant SMS feature found in the samples collected for the present study. The texters mostly omit vowels and use the rest of the letters to represent a word. The formal writing of the students is thus affected by such habits. The present study found many instances of the same nature in students' answer sheets & paragraphs. These examples include 'pls' for 'please', 'the' for 'their', 'gd' for 'good', 'BCS' for 'because', 'wt' for 'what', and 'from' for 'from' among others. These words were found with the omission of vowels in students' sentences. For example, they wrote 'There are many benefits of mobile phone', and 'We can gain many things in life bcz of knowledge.' Likewise, many other instances present throughout paragraph samples and answer sheets were found by the present researchers.

Another dominant SMS feature found in the samples was alphanumeric homophony which relates to the blending of numbers and words to represent the word. The students blended letters and numbers considering it as a word. A few instances found by the present researcher include '2day' for 'today', 'w8ng' for 'waiting', 'b4' for 'before', 'n8' for 'night' etc. The students wrote a few sentences in their paragraphs containing the alphanumeric feature of SMS texting. Students as they are more habitual in their daily life to use this feature in their SMS texting, wrote sentences like 'In 2day's world, a man is technologically more advanced than the past', and 'During n8, the people use cell phones excessively'. The use of such blending in students' write-ups is purely the result of their regular use of alphanumeric homophony in their SMS texts.

Graphones which refer to the use of a letter or number to represent a word were the third most dominant feature found in the present study. The common and frequent instances of graphones in the samples used in the present study include 'U' for 'You', 'Ur' for 'Your', and 'C' for 'See'. For example, a student in his answer copy of the

semester exams wrote 'It is important to **c** the audience in writing any draft'. This SMS feature was more present in students' answer sheets attempted in their exams.

The Short Message Services features which were found in very little quantity from the corpus of the samples were short forms, emoticons, and smileys. The students wrote some short forms in their answer scripts and paragraphs. These short forms were less general. They used jargon-like initializations in their samples. For instance, they used 'MUET' for Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, and 'pkg' for 'package'. Besides short forms, some students also used emoticons and smileys in their writings to express their feelings and emotions. A female student used the completion of the answer in her copy. However, this feature was not apparent in the samples.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The present study aimed to investigate the morphological and syntactical distortions in students' formal writing caused by SMS texting. Besides, the study also attempted to seek the answer of whether this distortion in formal writing affects the clarity of the message or not. The five SMS features including vowel deletion, alphanumeric homophony, graphones, short forms emoticons, and smileys were investigated in students' written paragraphs and exam answer scripts to reach the objectives of the study. The study found that students' formal writing is affected by the above-mentioned SMS features. The corpus from the sample showed the presence of vowel deletion (the most dominant feature in the sample of the present study), alphanumeric homophony (second most dominant SMS feature), graphones (third most dominant feature), and short forms and emoticons which were less evident in the study. The findings show that the regular use of SMS texting by the students in their daily lives affects their formal writing. The students consciously or unconsciously bring in the 'textese' in their write-ups which leads to distortion of language (morphology and syntax) of the English language. Thus, it affects the standards of the English language. However, the present study found that the clarity of the message is not affected despite morphological and syntactical distortion in their write-ups. The intended meaning of the students in their writing is clearly understood.

Based on the findings, the present study recommends that students need to be very careful about the use of formal and standard language in their writing in an academic setting. They need to avoid SMS language in formal contexts including classroom activities and examinations. This violates the standards of the English language. The study suggests that the teachers should play their role by getting students familiar with the use of SMS features in their writing and guiding them to avoid such input at their best.

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