

## Language vs Lingo: Testing the Dynamics of *Txtng*

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### Abstract

With the advent of new technologies, communicating has become easier, but the need for better communication still remains a big challenge. We are yet to overcome the barriers to effective communication, without leaving any room for ‘miscommunication. The question is: Is it possible to defy the laws of communication, not to include the elements required for it, and still communicate...?

This paper discusses the Forms of commonly used words/phrases in *Short Message Service, Instant Message Service, Real-time Chat* and analyses the forms of commonly used words/phrases preferred by the students and the impact of the use of SMS language on students’ written. Further, the study focuses on SMS language transformative impact on student’s written communication is identified through a self-designed and administered quantitative research conducted on 400 English Language Learners (ELL).

**Key Words:** SMS Lingo, English Language, Dynamics, Texting.

### Aim of This Study

1. Identification of the forms of commonly used words/phrases in *Short Message Service, Instant Message Service, Real-time Chat*.
2. Identification of the forms of commonly used words/phrases more preferred by the students.
3. Identification of the impact of the use of SMS language on students’ written communication.

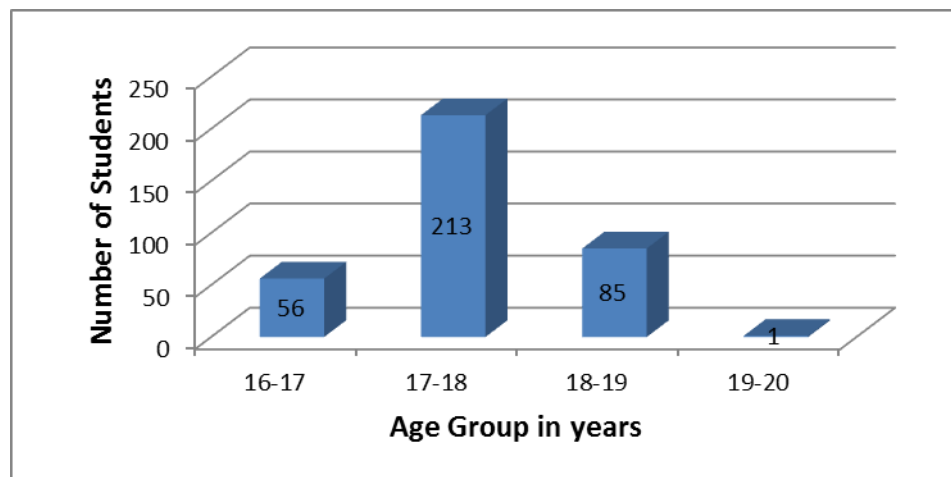
## Methodology

1. Machine-based survey using language laboratory consisting of two quizzes, viz.
  - (a) Diagnostic Quiz to identify the students' background.
  - (b) Quiz to identify students' preference of language.
2. Assessment of written answer sheets.
3. Assessment of written assignments based on picture comprehension.

The methodology used is a research analysis based on empirical data collected from two of the self-designed & administered language lab-based quizzes and on the basis of assessment of written answer sheets and written assignments based on picture comprehension. The first machine-based quiz conducted using language lab was a diagnostic quiz which gave a background to the subjects taking the quiz. The second quiz was based on the language usage comprising of elements from both, the formal & the SMS languages. The third part of it was based on assessment of written answer sheets and written assignments of the students in order to study the impact of SMS lingo on their written communication.

## Research Background

The survey was carried out on the students of B.Tech I semester in the age range of 17-20 years (Figure 1).



## Figure 1 – Background of students

### Regional Background

Majority of the students were from Western UP, Eastern UP, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, M.P., Haryana and Punjab. Some of them belonged to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal & Orissa.

### Gender Ratio

Male-Female – 80:20 (approximately)

### Introduction to SMS Lingo

Humankind is gifted with various new modes of communication and better accessible ways of communicating with people as well as with machines. In the present scenario SMS or Short Message Service is not merely a tool of communication using 160 characters including space but it has surpassed all the other forms of communication all over the world in terms of its popularity & people's inclination towards it. Cell phones have become so much an integral part of human lives that now to imagine one's life deprived of technology-based communication seems a completely unconceivable thought. Text messaging or *SMSing* is all the rage among the teenagers. SMS is the most widely used data application on mobile phones which has grown epidemically, especially among the youth. The SMS service started in the 80s and has made its way to its explosive popularity particularly in past less than a decade's time.

The idea of a point-to-point short message service (or SMS) began to be discussed as part of the development of the Global System for Mobile Communications network in the mid-1980s, but it wasn't until the early 90s that phone companies started to develop its commercial possibilities. Texts communicated by pagers were replaced by text messages, at first only 20 characters in length. It took five years or more before numbers of users started to build up. The average number of texts per GSM customer in 1995 was 0.4 per month; by the end of 2000 it was still only 35. (Crystal, Txtng The gr8 db8, 2009)

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Every language takes time to emerge, evolve and establish its credibility and usage. The kind of language referred to here has also taken decades to evolve though it has no defined structure/grammar as yet; it has claimed its pattern which is universally accepted and is popular amongst its users.

Texting is developing its own kind of grammar. Take *LOL*. It doesn't actually mean "laughing out loud" in a literal sense anymore. *LOL* has evolved into something much subtler and sophisticated and is used even when nothing is remotely amusing. Jocelyn texts "Where have you been?" and Annabelle texts back "LOL at the library studying for two hours." *LOL* signals basic empathy between texters, easing tension and creating a sense of equality. Instead of having a literal meaning, it does something — conveying an attitude — just like the -ed ending conveys past tense rather than "meaning" anything. *LOL*, of all things, is grammar. (McWhorter, 2013)

### **Types of Comparison Operators**

Within the same language we see several forms of the same expression which is again replaced by another so often which probably & fairly depends on the level of knowledge and feasibility of expression of the *texter*. In order to understand the most popularly used forms of *textspeak*, let us first talk about various patterns of Comparison Operators in SMS language which would help us understand the evolution of SMS lingo.

**Phonetic Substitution (Phonemes)** – in this kind of comparison operator, phonemes are substituted in order to make the words shorter in form. Examples of this kind are words 'psycho' and 'then' which could be transformed as 'syco' and 'den', respectively.

**Phonetic Substitution (Syllables)** – in this kind of comparison operator, syllables become the target and get substituted. Examples are 'see' and 'tomorrow' which could be represented by 'c' and '2morrow/2morow/2mrw'.

**Truncation** – in this style of representation, the tail of a word is deleted. For example – ‘introduction’ could be written as ‘intro’.

**Informal Pronunciation** – Language evolution has been a very slow but gradual process. Language is never free from the influence of formality and informality. Example of this kind is ‘because’ represented by ‘cause’ as informal usage, sometimes also written as ‘cuz’ (vowel deletion’).

**Code mixing and Code Switching** – The word ‘late’ is written as ‘l8’ [alphabet ‘L’ and digit ‘8’]; similarly in order to represent the word ‘greatest’ we furnish the combination ‘gr8st’. When we talk about code mixing, it becomes evident to discuss its types; let us take this sentence (an example of code mixing, both Hindi & English):

***Yahan kriket ball hai.***

The italicized words are taken from Hindi (Devnagari), and the word ‘Cricket’ is represented by ‘kriket’ – an example of Potential Code Mixing. Although, the word ‘ball’ (which is an English word) is mixed in this sentence, it retains its original anatomy – an example of Genuine Code Mixing.

Code mixing and Code switching, demand working knowledge of the languages used for expression. Incompetency in any of the languages may lead to incomplete understanding of the expression or even mar the purpose completely.

Now the question is – if we transform the words to their Lilliputian best, is it possible to add expressions while using them? Is this kind of language competent enough to convey the message and the intensity of expression that has always been lacking in written communication as compared to verbal communication? Let us take few more examples: -

- 1) I miss you so much.
- 2) I mis u soooooooooooooo mch.
- 3) Waiting to see you soon.

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- 4) Wtng 2 c u soooooooooooooooooooooon.
- 5) This is for your information that your report had several errors.
- 6) diz iz FYI dat ur rprt d svrl errosrrrrssss

Sentence 2 uses ‘**Repetition**’ as expression effect booster which lacked in sentence 1. Similarly, sentence 4 uses ‘Repetition’ to add more effect to what has been said earlier in sentence 3. Sentence 6 seems to be more emphasized and aims at making the writer of the report realize that he/she has committed a blunder, not minor mistakes; it uses ‘**Transposition**’ to make the effect more severe.

Written communication lacks in expressions as compared to spoken communication which has the great support of paralinguistic features, but the kind of language we are discussing is capable (although up to some extent) of adding expressions even to the written forms. This could be done with the help of few comparison operators as mentioned above. The nature of communication through internet allows people to include a better form of written language (as far as expression is concerned). The trouble is that on-line conversations are really a cross between a letter and a phone call. The potential for misunderstandings, without the tone and expression of a voice, or signals given out by body language, are considerable.

Perhaps, to overcome this, the language we are talking about is equipped with ‘**emoticons**’ – **emotions** + **icons** OR ‘**Smileys**’ that represent human facial expressions. Perhaps the Europeans tend to call them Emoticons and the Americans, Smileys. As a result of this, a shorthand version of expressing moods has emerged on the *Net* and together with certain behavioral rules form *netiquette*. Originally, the shorthand for moods uses standard (QWERTY) keyboard symbols and they are known as ‘Emoticons’ OR ‘Smileys’. In recent years as computing and network power has increased these have become pictures, although we still think the originals have a certain charm:

:-) Smiling ;( original form using QWERTY keyboard)

 Smiling; (new forms)

:-D

Laughing



Laughing (new forms)

## Debate So Far

Now, we have a great debate on the impact of this kind of language on us, and also on the inclination we have developed towards it in terms of its usage. Researchers and linguists are of various opinions when it comes to getting an understanding of analyzing the impact of SMS language on students' writing skills. Whorter says, "*People have always spoken differently from how they write, and texting is actually talking with your fingers*".

Thus, there is a reasonable number of people who strongly believe that *SMSing* or *texting* can do no harm to the well-established English Language. They not only whole-heartedly welcome *textspeak* which is widely popular amongst the youth but also negate its detrimental effect on their writing skills or deformation of language as they believe that this form of language is not lately originated but the abbreviated forms of words were used around five decades before the invention of real *textspeak*.

Many critics are of the opinion that although you may be a greenhorn in the discourse of SMS language, you are prevalently alleged as a maestro of crumpled words and therefore your friends won't stop messaging you in every shortest possible form. It seems to be a paradox that the structure of a language, which took decades to evolve is ruined in just one go. The lessons that a child is taught are overlooked, spelling tests are gradually losing importance as more compressed forms of language are in vogue. And the easiest way to become a lexicographer or a linguist of this kind is to observe people who were always bad with spellings. For those who want to master this art, the key is to wash away their English learning and take up the tricks of badly squashing words into their Lilliputian best.

John Sutherland of University College London condemns *textspeak* which he strongly believes is, "*bleak, bald, sad shorthand. Drab shrinktalk ... Linguistically it's all pig's ear ... it*

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*masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness. Texting is penmanship for illiterates."* (Crystal) Educators all over the world reflect their detestation for *textspeak* as they firmly believe that promotion of such form of orthography certainly will result in paralyzing the kids' thinking ability. The author of *KISS- Keep it Short and Simple* expresses her concern about the whole generation being brought up as non-thinkers:

Text messaging is destroying the written word. The students aren't writing letters, they're typing into their cell phones one line at a time. Feelings aren't communicated with words when you're texting; emotions are sideways smiley faces. Kids are typing shorthand jargon that isn't even a complete thought. (Ream, 2005)

On the other hand, people supporting the use of shorthand jargons advocate the thought that though the medium of communication is now technology and the usage is comparatively much more extensive than those days but words in their abbreviated and truncated forms were in use since ages. Says Crystal:

In texts we find such forms as msg ("message") and xlnt ("excellent"). Almost any word can be abbreviated in this way - though there is no consistency between texters. But this isn't new either. Eric Partridge published his Dictionary of Abbreviations in 1942. It contained dozens of SMS-looking examples, such as agn "again", mth "month", and gd "good" - 50 years before texting was born. . (Crystal, 2b or not 2b?, 2008)

Crystal being a staunch adherent of this transformation of English Language in the information age believes that this revolution in written expression contributes to spreading literacy amongst people and is as inconsequential as the ripples on the surface of sea. In his article *2b or nt 2b* he says:

A trillion text messages might seem a lot, but when we set these alongside the multi-trillion instances of standard orthography in everyday life, they



appear as no more than a few ripples on the surface of the sea of language. Texting has added a new dimension to language use, but its long-term impact is negligible. It is not a disaster. (Crystal, 2b or not 2b?, 2008)

Crystal in his article advocates the point of text messages being a means of spreading literacy among the young learners. He in fact says that it is the unique form of the language that includes pictograms, logograms, *initialism*, omitted letters, nonstandard spellings, shortenings and genuine novelties that undoubtedly make texting distinctive but none of the above six forms used in text messages are linguistically novel. He is of the opinion that *texting* skills also need ‘*considerable literacy awareness*’ in order to feed their communicative need because they also understand the importance of being intelligible while communicating.

Children could not be good at texting if they had not already developed considerable literacy awareness. Before you can write and play with abbreviated forms, you need to have a sense of how the sounds of your language relate to the letters. You need to know that there are such things as alternative spellings. If you are aware that your texting behaviour is different, you must have already intuited that there is such a thing as a standard. If you are using such abbreviations as lol and brb ("be right back"), you must have developed sensitivity to the communicative needs of your textees. (Crystal, 2b or not 2b?, 2008)

While talking about the reasons of the various forms of the English language prevalent in *texting* he mentions in his book “*Txtng the Gr8 DB8*” about the technological limitations that played pivotal role to endorse truncation, initialization and other deformations of orthography. It is because of the limitations of the numeric keypad which denotes 3-4 alphabetical letters on a single key that one faces while typing the complex words which yield into multiple key pressing which is not only time consuming but also not feasible enough to serve the purpose of Short Message Service. But if we look carefully this technological limitation is challenged much recently with the advent of QWERTY keypad almost in all mobile phone devices of the recent times. He also does not deny that it’s only technological limitation or an urge to save on time

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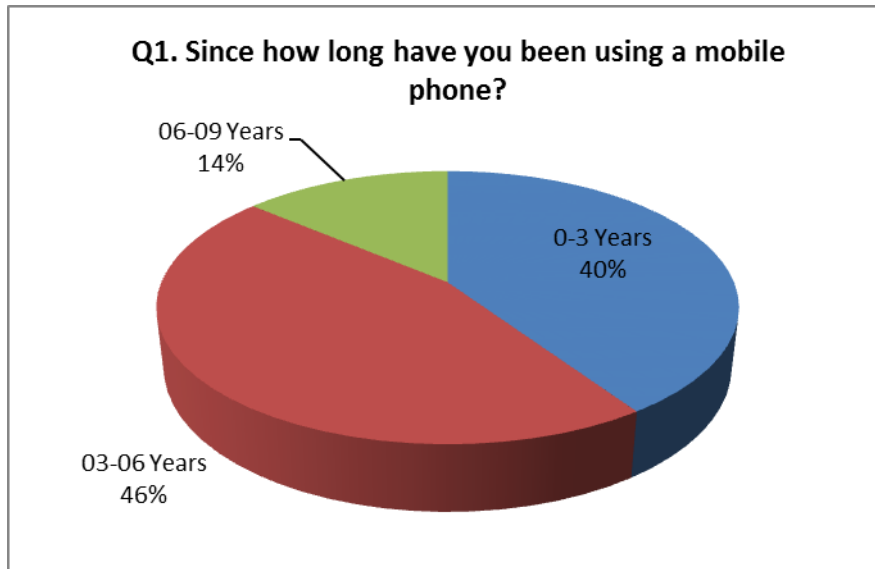
energy and money that has forced people to prefer the shorthand form of orthography but also fun and playfulness of the teenagers with the language that distinct them from their previous generations.

No entity in the whole cosmos is free from allegations of having few elements of vice in it, apart from the virtues we attribute to it. Same applies to language also. No doubt, we remarkably get benefitted, as we find ourselves more expressive even with the written form. But, we also need to ponder over one fact: words have gigantic power and making them dwarf just for the sake of ease in use is worth or not. The question is: do we still need the kind of language we use in our day to day life? Are we supposed to do that at the cost of the painstaking effort that our language experts have been taking for years due to which a sophisticated language has evolved?

### **Data Analyses**

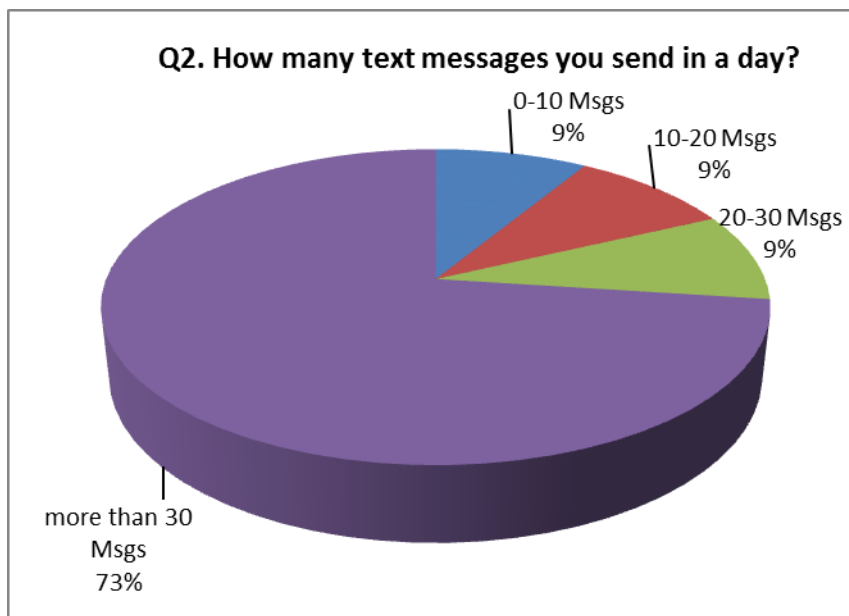
- The Diagnostic Test comprised of the following four questions:-
  - How long have you been using a mobile phone? (Figure 2)
  - How many text messages (including Instant Messages/Real Time Messages) do you send in a day? (Figure 3)
  - Which language do you prefer to text? (Figure 4)
  - Do you prefer SMS lingo for sending messages? (Figure 5)

Figure 2 shows the rapid increase in the usage of mobile phones during the past few years. The percentage of students using mobile phones for the last 3-6 years is 46%, and 40% of the students have been using mobile phone in between 0-3 years. Only 14% of students have been using mobile phones for the duration between 6-9 years.



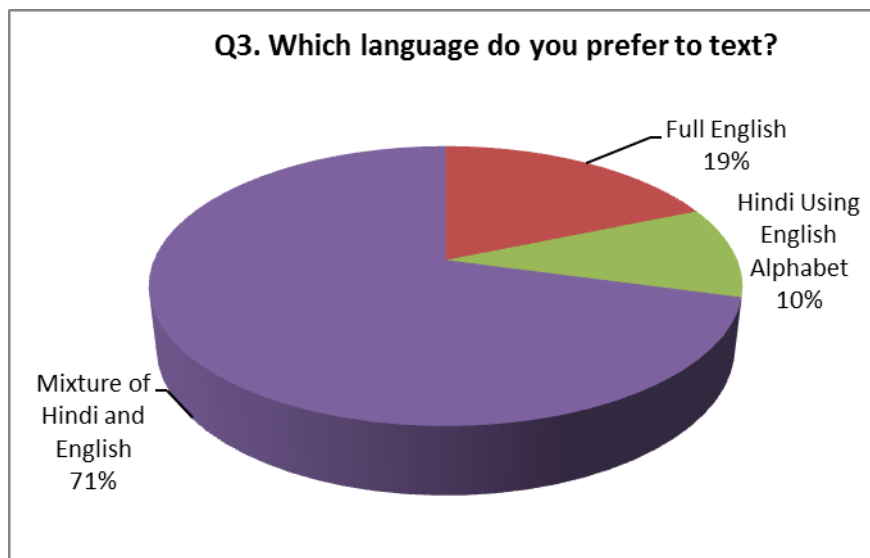
**Figure 2 – Familiarity with using mobile phones**

The second pie chart (Figure 3) indicates an approximate number of messages sent by the *texters* in a day.



**Figure 3 – Frequency of sending text messages**

A significant 73% of students are identified who send more than 30 messages per day. On the other hand the other three categories viz. 0-10 messages per day, 10-20 messages per day and 20-30 messages per day have just 9% of students in each category.

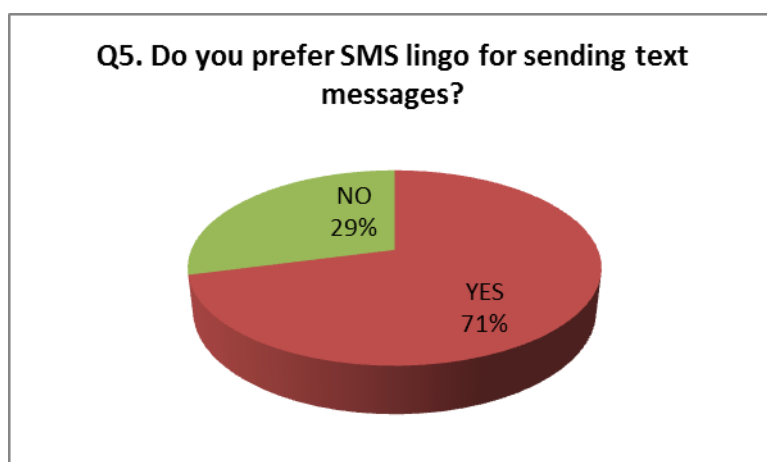


**Figure 4 – Language preference for texting**

Results also show that, though students know the significance and requirement of correct expression in terms of language but they prefer the easy way out. *Textism* not only exhibits their less inclination towards thinking but also the psychology of young generation that consistently makes efforts to discrete themselves from their former generations. When given a choice to use a language for texting, 71% preferred combining Hindi-English for texting, 19% preferred full English and 10% preferred Hindi using English alphabet. **(Figure 4)**

Around the year 2008 which was the time when internet-based text message services (Watsapp, Line, Hangout, We Chat, Nimbuzz, Tango, Facebook Messenger, Chat On) were not much in vogue. With the advent of social networking sites and users' access to instant message services there is a phenomenal growth in the number of *texters*: the significant increase in the number of the *texters* from some millions to zillions is directly proportional to the variability of *Slanguage* developed on daily basis befitting to the expression of the writer according to his/her own preferences and limited knowledge. Initially, the primary purpose of text messaging or **Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 15:4 April 2015  
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Short messaging was to save time, energy & money and to communicate in the shortest possible form where the use of abbreviations & truncations were acceptable up to a limit of 160 characters. But, now the *texters* find it so much an integral part of their communication that 71% of them would prefer texting using SMS lingo only while on the other hand just 29% of them denied to this fact. (Figure 5)



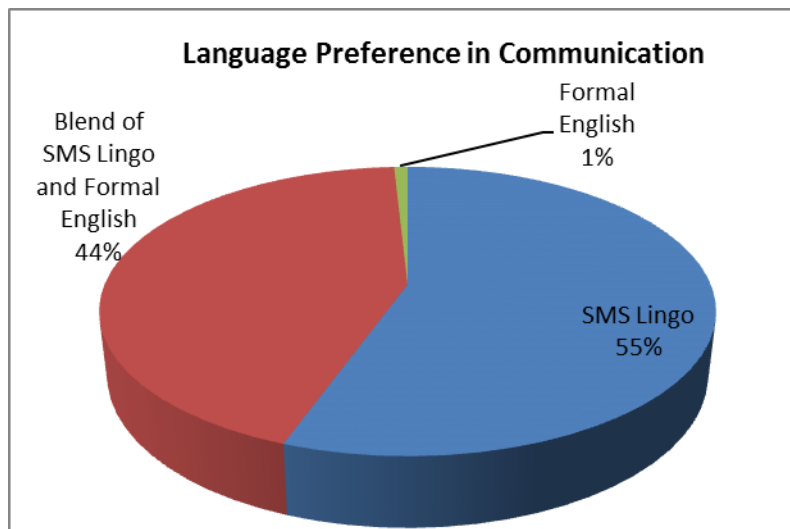
**Figure 5**

The second level of survey was to study the use and preference of SMS lingo and other forms of English and for this a questionnaire which consists of 35 commonly used words, both from formal English & SMS lingo was given to the students. The words given in options were categorized into five major types:-

- Phonetic Substitution – Vowel Deletion
- Numero-Alpha – Combination of numbers & alphabets
- Transliteration – Hinglish
- Textspeak – Most commonly used SMS language
- Formal English

The analysis of the data collected clearly reflects the significant number of students who prefer SMS lingo over formal English. Around 55% of students prefer using SMS language in their

communication where as 44% of them used a blend of SMS lingo & formal English. Only 1% of the students used formal English (Figure 6).



**Figure 6 – Choice of language in communication**

In order to study the impact of the use of SMS lingo on students' written communication, detailed assessment and examination of their answer sheets and written assignment was done. During this examination many incidences of SMS lingo in the written assignments of the students were seen which include incidences of initialization, use of truncations, SMS lingo, *Hinglish*. These assignments also reflect grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors. 17% cases were found where students did not pay any heed to initialization after full stop. 3% of words in truncated form were also observed which included words like **coz**, **pic**, **b/w**, **avg**, **govt**, just to name a few. Two instances of use of Hindi words using English script are also noticed.

## **Conclusion**

Each form of language has its own importance and purpose. We cannot negate the rapid increase in the use of *textspeak* in today's world, which again has a specific purpose to serve. On the other hand, a language, like English, which is called the *Lingua Franca* because of its usage all over the world and adaptability to accept words/phrases/expressions from other languages.

Perhaps, this adaptability is also responsible for its becoming more susceptible to deformity & distortion.

As educators, we may infer that if given a choice to express themselves, subjects prefer SMS language to formal English language which comparatively requires less contemplation, efforts & makes them more contemporary. There were around 2% of subjects who inadvertently (assuming them to be) made use of the SMS language in their written assignments while writing in a flow. Even though the students are taking a written test, SMS lingo tends to seep in, either because they find it more feasible to express themselves, or maybe they do not realize that inadvertently, *textspeak* is reflecting in their communication as a result of using it time and again, though they also understand that *chatspeak* or *textspeak* is not acceptable form of formal communication. But an inevitable truth also stands in front of us which cannot be ignored that the kind of outbreak that is evident within a span of just last five years clearly suggests that the impact is much more than merely the ripples on the surface of the sea.

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