

## **Effect of SMS Lingo on Writing Skill: An Investigation**

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**Abstract**

The present study attempts to investigate a fascinating way of using language for sending a text message to a mobile phone and its effects on writing skill. Using a survey method, the study examines how the non-standard contracted forms are used and avoided according to the context. The data has been collected through a questionnaire from 10 UG students of the University of Hyderabad and then analysed to check the hypothesis put forth. The study reveals that the use of a non-standard contracted form may affect the writing skill. However, the appropriate use of the forms of the words enhances the writing skill.

**Keywords:** SMS language, SMS Lingo, Text messaging and writing skill.

### **1. Introduction:**

Language is species specific, so is the writing. It took the humans many centuries, to evolve the finest writing systems which we are privileged to employ today. In recent times, the use of electronic devices for the purpose of writing has added a new chapter in the history of writing in human species. Not long ago, the world has witnessed the use of electronic devices such as Mobiles to send and receive messages. However, the language used in this messages or popularly abbreviated as SMS (Short Message Service) sent through mobiles drastically depart from the conventional language used for the purpose of communication. Thus, this paper endeavours to explore the characteristics of this language and examine its effect on the writing skill of the young undergraduate students in the Indian context.

*SMS Lingo* is a characteristic language which predominantly uses contracted forms for sending text messages or SMS using mobile phones. Due to the revolution in the telecommunication sector, especially the user-friendly interface of the device has resulted in high use of mobiles across the age group. However, the use of this lingo is very widespread, especially among today's youth. The primary objective of SMS lingo seems to make use of the minimum number of characters to

convey an intelligible message. The need for this minimum number of characters seems to have emerged as the telecommunication companies had set an SMS character limit, allowing only certain number of characters per message. The limitation on the use of characters, further leads to the use of innovative but idiosyncratic and sub-standard contracted forms of words in the SMS.

A study carried out by Solomon (2011) reveals that text messaging does not only involve contracted forms but also much more than that such as the use of pictograms and logograms. His observation in this regard is quite fascinating. He states, words are either shortened through the use of initial alphabets to represent the word or by using both, alphabets as well as numbers. The message, “ Bye, take care. I will talk to you later” for instance, could be conveyed or written simply as ‘Bye, tc ttyl’. This instance suggests that the short words such as bye are not contracted and only the initial letters of the words are used to contract the whole sentences such as ‘tc’ for take care and ‘ttyl’ for ‘talk to you later’. In addition to that, it also suggests that the omission of the subject and the tense marker to make the text as short as possible. The following instances show the alphanumeric combination to write the text. For instance, the words such as ‘Great’ is rendered to as ‘gr8’; “To night” as ‘2nit’ “for you”, as 4U; and “before” as b4.

Since nearly unrestricted freedom is taken to convey the message through writing, there emerges the wide concern of the masses who research on linguistics in general and the writing skills in particular. Therefore, the current study endeavours to inquire into the following research questions.

### 1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

The study attempts to answer the following four research questions:

- a) What type of language is used for SMS?
- b) How the language used in the SMS lingo is different from the language used in other conventional written communication?
- c) Why the different type of language is used for SMS?
- d) What is the impact of the SMS chat language on writing skill?

### 1.2 Hypothesis

The study hypothesis that the use of a contracted form of English words for SMS texting affects the writing skill.

## 2. Literature Review

Though the impact of text messaging on language has generated a great deal of debate, not many books have been written on the subject. Solomon (2011) surveys the research done on the texting language. According to him, the first book ever published on texting language is by Hannu Luntiala (2007) followed by a most comprehensive work on the topic by Crystal (2008). In the existing literature, he also observes that the phenomenon has been viewed from three different perspectives. The first perspective believes that text messaging is potentially harmful to the writing

skill of the learners. Researchers like Rosen et al. (2009) as cited in Russell (2010) believes that the regular use of SMS lingo can impact negatively on the everyday language of the learners to exercise it. This perspective is based on the argument that the SMS lingo does not follow the essential mechanism of the writing such as grammar in general and syntax, punctuation, spelling and capitalization in particular in order to bring brevity, concision economy to the SMS.

On the contrary, the other perspective believes that the SMS lingo or the exercise of texting rather enhances the learners writing skill. Crystal (2008) is the major contributor to this perspective. He asserts SMS Lingo is not really a threat as many fear it can. Regardless of the way, the more the learners write, the more they improve their writing skill. Thus, in fact, the increased use of texting rather enhances the literacy among the young learners. O'Connor, (2005) also contributes to this perspective by stating that the more you got students to write, the better is it.

The third perspective doubts the either positive or negative effect of texting on the writing skill. Many researchers in the field like Solomon (2011) posits that it's not the text messaging which is bad in itself but its misuse such as the inconsistent, idiosyncratic and non-standard use of abbreviations, expressions and spellings is.

According to Russel (2010) as cited in Solomon (2011) SMS lingo should be recognised as a different language. He argues that, learning of a new language usually does not affect students' ability to use the grammar of another language, it would be inappropriate to consider the view that the text messaging can affect learners' grammar. However, there seems to be a problem with this view of Russel as it contradicts with the fact that the language learnt first causes the linguistic interferes while learning another language.

## **2.1 Methodology**

The data was collected through a questionnaire from 10 UG students of the University of Hyderabad and then analyzed to check the hypothesis put forth.

## **2.2 Limitations of the Study**

The questionnaire prepared to check the hypothesis put forth was consisted of ten questions and the data was collected only from ten students which have helped the study to be focused but limited the scope of the study.

### 3. Data for Discussion

The numbers appear on the right side shows the number of students (out of 10) ticked the particular option.

1. Which language do you use for texting?	
a) Formal	1
b) Informal (the short forms)	2
c) Both	7

2. Why do you use the formal or informal (the short forms) language for texting?	
a) For saving time and space	8
b) To hide spelling mistakes	1
c) Some other reasons?	1

3. Have you ever felt that the short forms help us in hiding our spelling mistakes?	
a. Yes Always	0
b. Yes at times	4
c. Not at all	6

4. If so? In which words?	
a. Long words	2
b. Newly introduced words	1
c. Difficult words	4
d. No answer	3

5. Can you provide a few of such words?	
5a. procrastination, Czechoslovakia, tomorrow, important	
5b. Palazzo, Squabble	
5c. continuous, disheartening, program, conspicuous, programmer, professor, encyclopedia (3 students did not provide any example)	

6. Have you ever felt that the use of short forms affects your correct spellings?	
a. Yes	3
b. No	2

c. At times	5
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7. If so? In which words?	
a. Privilege, tomorrow(4students), Professor, Programmer, Fellow, people, balloon Saturday, necessary	

8. Have you ever used the formal language deliberately in texting?	
a) Yes	6
b) No	1
c) At times	3

9. If yes/no? Why? Did it help you in anyway?

10. How will you write the message? *Hi, shall we meet tomorrow for discussion in Shopping Complex?*

#### 4. Results

Proving the fact that the characteristic language, *SMS lingo* is used extensively in texting by the youngsters; the study also brings out the following interesting facts:

1) The *SMS lingo*, as well as formal language, is employed by most of the subjects according to the context.

2, 3, 4 & 5) The main motivation for the use of *SMS lingo* is *to save space and time*, though it is also at times employed *to hide possible spelling mistake* in long (*procrastination, Czechoslovakia, tomorrow, important*) difficult (*continuous, disheartening, program, conspicuous, programmer, professor, encyclopedia*) and newly introduced words such as *Palazzo* and *Squabble*.

6 & 7) Most of the students felt that the use of short forms affects their correct spellings in words such as *Privilege, tomorrow(4students), Professor, Programmer, Fellow, people, balloon, Saturday, and necessary*.

8 & 9) The texting is *context-bound*, the *formal language was deliberately used with the elderly people and teachers to show respect and maintain the right attitude*. The formal language was also used *to keep the conversation very realistic and natural*. It was at times used because it felt more *proper* and help *to strengthen the knowledge of sentence formation and practice the usage of certain tricky words*.

10) The SMS lingo is used among/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 turn and slows down the process of communication.

The following things were observed when the subjects were asked to write the message: *Hi, shall we meet tomorrow for discussion in Shopping Complex?*

- a. Vowels are deleted: *fr* for 'for'
- b. Only Consonants are used: *tmrw* for 'tomorrow'
- c. A complete word is replaced by a letter: *v* for 'we'
- d. Use of numerals instead of words: *4* for 'for'
- e. Punctuations are avoided: no full stop.
- f. Unnecessary punctuations are used: *!!!*

## 5. Conclusion

Though the use of *SMS lingo* has been quite useful to save time and space and for other various reasons, the continuous use of nonstandard contracted form of English words affects the writing skill. The study also brings out the fact that if formal language is used for the SMS texting, the texting can be used as an effective tool for improving written communication skill.

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