RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF TEXTISM ON THE ACADEMIC USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Language is a dynamic entity. It changes over a period of time, registering within itself even the subtle changes in culture. With the boom in computer-mediated communication (CMC) and mobile mediated communication (MMC), the pace of these changes has picked up rapidly. Earlier, a change in the use of language would get reflected over a period of decade, reaching all the corners of the world through radio stations, books, newspapers and journals. However, with globalization and internet these changes enter the registry of a language with a simple click. David Crystal (2010) declares that words like *Google*, *blogging, texting*, *SMS*, *iphone, instant message, Facebook*, and *twitter* are products of the internet.

A new feature affecting a change in the use of Standard English Language is the trend of using textism in both writing and communication. Due to the increasing popularity of this new language, many teachers believe that students may get confused between textism and Standard English Language. The present study is an attempt to ascertain the impact of textism on the academic output of University students. The study is based on a general survey to explore whether university students are aware of their use of textism in academic writing. It aims to find out if textism exerts a negative influence on the writing skills of University students.

Keywords: Textism, Standard English Language, computer-mediated communication, mobile mediated communication

Introduction:

Language is a dynamic entity. It changes over a period of time, registering within itself even the subtle changes in culture. With the boom in computer-mediated communication (CMC) and mobile mediated communication (MMC), the pace of these changes has picked up rapidly. Earlier, a change in the use of language would get reflected over a period of decade, reaching all the corners of the world through radio stations, books, newspapers and journals. However, with globalization and internet these changes enter the registry of a language with a simple click. David Crystal (2010) declares that words like *Google*, *blogging, texting*, *SMS*, *iphone, instant message, Facebook*, and *twitter* are products of the internet. Prominent linguists like Robert W. Murray (1996), Jean Aitchison (2003), John Algeo (2002), and David Crystal (2010). Aitchison (2003) consider that all languages perennially register changes in their sounds, syntax, and meaning. These changes are commonly noticed by speakers of such language.

A new feature affecting a change in the use of Standard English Language is the trend of using textism in both writing and communication. Textism is normally referred to as the language that texters (text message senders) use on their electronic devices. In numerous researches, textism has been discussed as "text speak" (Drouin & Davis, 2009), "textish" (Faulkner & Culwin, 2005), "teen-talk" (Thurlow & Brown, 2003), and "textese" (e.g., Drouin & Driver, 2014; Kemp, 2010). Textism has emerged as a new pidgin language that commonly involves the usage of shortened words or phrases, borrowing heavily from native languages. These abbreviations are categorized which include word shortenings, contractions, acronyms, ignoring vowel sounds, initializations, accent stylizations, misspellings, combining letters from two different languages and using numerals within a word to create new contractions

Textism allows the sender to abide to restricted message length given by various mobile service providers. A few researchers like Bernicot, Volckaert-Legrier, Goumi & Bert-Erboul, (2012b) believe that textism causes orthographic changes to words and contextual innovations. According to a few researchers like Bernicot et al.,(2012a); Dansieh, (2011); Plester & Wood, (2009); Rosen et al., (2010) there are two types of textisms: linguistic textisms (logograms) and contextual textisms (pictograms). Textisms, textese and text speak are all different ways in which current literature refers to the phenomenon of writing in shorthand within the confines of a text message or SMS (Crystal, 2008; Plester, Wood and Bell, 2008; Wood, Kemp & Plester, 2013.) Though, originally textism was developed as a way to save space and money (Mose, 2013), it still continues due to the social affordances it offers such as social belonging (Thurlow, 2003), the ability to express oneself (Plester, Wood & Joshi, 2009) and fun from 'playing' with language (Crystal, 2008).

Due to the increasing popularity of this new language, many teachers believe that students may get confused between textism and Standard English Language. In 2003, BBC published a specimen of an essay written by a 13-year-old Scottish schoolgirl. A short extract of it are the following lines:

"My smmr hols wr CWOT. B4, we used 2go2 NY 2C my bro, his GF &th 3:-

kids FTF. ILNY, it's a gr8 plc."

Textism usage has been repeatedly debated within the media (Crystal, 2008) in terms of its effect on reading, spelling and grammatical abilities; this, in turn, has prompted several researchers to look at the effects objectively. Much of the research has been conducted with children and teenagers as this age group appears to text most frequently (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell & Purcell, 2010) and they are still acquiring written language competency. The pioneering scholars in the field of ascertaining the impact of textism were Dr Crispin Thurlow (2003) and Dr Beverly Plester (2008). Since then, there have been several researchers like Dr Nenagh Kemp, Dr Richard Ling, Prof Clare Wood, Dr Larry Rosen and Dr Michelle Drouin that have been examining the impact of texting upon language.

The present study is an attempt to ascertain the impact of textism on the academic output of University students. The study is based on a general survey to explore whether university students are aware of their use of textism in academic writing. It aims to find out if textism exerts a negative influence on the writing skills of University students.

Hypothesis:

The study hypothesis that the use of textism negatively impacts the academic use of the English language by University students

Objectives:

The present study aims to achieve some objectives that can be summarized in the following research questions:

1. What is the ratio of the use of textism by University students?

2. What are the reasons for the preference of textism by University students?

3. What is the impact of textism on academic use of the English language by University students?

Research Methodology:

A sample of 137 students from different streams of the university was chosen to find out the impact of textism on the academic use of the English language by University students. The data was collected through a questionnaire filled by 137 students of the Punjab Agricultural and then analyzed to check the hypothesis put forth. In the questionnaire of 36 items, the alternative responses were fixed and close-ended. The responses of the close-ended questions are simple to administer and easy to analyze. The statements in the questionnaire of the study were the five-point scale. The sequencing of the questions/statements was achieved by taking KAP (Knowledge, Attitude and Practice) as a formula for the sequence.

Results and Discussion:

Demographic Profile

The sample consisted of university students from the age group of 17 onwards. 23.4% of the sample belonged to the age group of 17-20 years; 40.1% of the sample belonged to the age group of 20-23 years; 22.6% of the sample belonged to the age group of 20-25 years and 13.9% of the sample belonged to the age group of above 25 years. 68.6% of the respondents were female and 31.4% of the respondents were male. 70.8% respondents considered English as their second language; while 5.8% respondents considered English as their first language and 23.4% respondents considered English as their third language. 28.5% respondents belonged to the stream of agriculture; 28.5% respondents belonged to the stream of Community Science; 23.4% of the respondents belonged to the stream of Basic Sciences and 19% respondents belonged to the other streams. Out of the entire sample, 79.8% respondents were pursuing graduation and 20.29% respondents were pursuing post-graduation.

Pre-test Stage

A set of questions related to the subject were asked from the respondents to ascertain their grasp of the English language. When asked about to rate their understanding of English Language, 53.4% respondents rated themselves a level below the expert category; 24.8% respondents considered themselves mediocre; 19% considered themselves an expert; 2.2% considered themselves just a level above bad category and 0.7% considered themselves bad. The respondents were asked to rate their vocabulary skills. 53.3% considered their vocabulary skills mediocre. 32.1% considered their vocabulary skills a level below expert; 8.8% considered their vocabulary skills a level above bad; 4.4% considered their vocabulary skills expert and 1.5% considered their vocabulary skills bad. When asked about their latest score in an English language examination, 46.7% respondents chose the option of above 80%; 35.8% respondents chose above 70%; 8.8% respondents chose above 60%; 7.3% respondents chose above 90% and 1.5% respondents chose above 50%.

Testing Stage:

In the first section, to find out the frequency of use of textism in everyday life and to determine the reasons behind it, a set of questions were put to the respondents. When asked if they think textism is different from Standard English Language, 75.2 respondents agreed, 9.5% respondents disagreed and 15.3% respondents were unsure. For the question how many times do you use an abbreviation in your chats/emails, 41.6% respondents chose five times; 31.4% respondents chose ten times; 20.4% respondents chose more than 15 times, and; 6.6% respondents chose 15 times. When asked why do you prefer textism to Standard English Language, 64.2% respondents cited it to be an easier option; 64.2% respondents said it saves time and space; none of the respondents chose the option of hides my lack of knowledge of the English Language, and; 16.8% respondents considered all the three reasons valid. When asked how often do you use textism in your daily conversation, 37.2% respondents mentioned sometimes; 20.4% respondents mentioned often; 19.7% respondents mentioned occasionally, and; 13.1% respondents mentioned never. To the question, how much do you like the use of SMS language, 40.9% respondents mentioned it as a likable concept; 22.6% respondents prefer it; 19.7% respondents sometimes resort to it; 12.4% respondents love using it and 4.4% respondents hate the use of it. When the respondents were asked about their choice of language while giving an examination, 78.1% respondents chose Standard English language; 21.9% chose SMS language. To the question if Standard

English Language should adapt itself to SMS language, 59.1% disagreed, 24.1% agreed and 16.8% were unsure. The respondents were asked if they feel fast-paced technology has forced them to use textism in daily life. To this, 59.9% agreed; 27% disagreed; and 13.1 % were unsure. When asked if they feel compelled to use textism in everyday life, 48.2% respondents agreed; 31.4% disagreed and 20.4% were unsure.

In the second section, a set of questions were posed to ascertain the impact of textism on academic use of the English language. When asked how often do you accidentally uses textism in formal writing, 40.1% mentioned never, 25.5% mentioned occasionally; 22.6% mentioned sometimes; 7.3% mentioned often and 4.4% mentioned always. The respondents were asked if they have to constantly check themselves regarding the use of SMS language I formal writing. To this, 54% respondents mentioned sometimes; 30.7% mentioned never; and 15.3% mentioned always. When asked if they check their grammar while drafting a SMS/email, 54% respondents agreed; 32.1% mentioned sometimes; and 13.9% disagreed. The respondents were asked if use code-mixing or ode-switching while drafting a SMS/Email. To this, 40.1% disagreed; 35.8% agreed and 24.1% were unsure. When asked if SMS language helps in improving your English language skills, 40.1% were unsure; 39.4% disagreed; and 20.4% agreed. The respondents were questioned if textism negatively affects their vocabulary. To this, 44.5% agreed; 27.7% disagreed and 27.7% were unsure. To the question if auto-correction services provided by some SMS applications have restricted your vocabulary index, 41.6% respondents agreed; 27.7% disagreed and 30.7% were unsure. When asked if you prefer an auto-correction service while drafting a formal E-mail, 59.9% respondents mentioned sometimes; and 42.2% mentioned always. The respondents were asked if they feel their knowledge of the English grammar is affected by the use of SMS language. To this, 43.1% agreed; 30.7% disagreed and 26.3% were unsure. To the question if you feel the need for an auto-correction device during an examination, 46% respondents felt the need sometimes; 40.1% respondents felt the need never and 13.9% respondents felt the need always. When questioned if you feel unsure about the use of vocabulary while attempting a paper or drafting a letter, 70.8% respondents replied sometimes; 16.8% respondents replied never; and 12.4% respondents replied always. When posed a question if you feel unsure about the use of the English grammar or syntax while drafting a formal letter or paper, 67.9% respondents replied sometimes; 22.6% respondents replied never; and 9.5% respondents replied always. The respondents were asked if you feel SMS language negatively affects your use of the Standard English language. To this, 38% agreed; 36.5% were unsure and 25.5% disagreed. The respondents were asked if you feel confused about the spellings while drafting a formal paper. To this, 65.7% replied sometimes; 27.7% replied never and 6.6% replied always. To the question, if you feel your level of use of the Standard English Language has dropped because of SMS language, 36.5% disagreed; 32.8% agreed and 30.7% were unsure. The respondents were finally questioned if you think mobile-mediated language use has negatively affected the use of the Standard English language. To this, 50.4% agreed; 14.6% disagreed and 35% were unsure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that while Computer mediated language has altered the structure and syntax of the English language to some extent; it has also provided a new platform for the younger generations to express themselves explicitly, yet succinctly. The present paper had been an attempt to ascertain the impact of Textism on the Academic use of the English Language by University Students. Based on the survey conducted and the subsequent data analyzed, it has been found that more than 50% of the respondents agreed with the fact that use of Mobile mediated language has negatively affected the use of the Standard English grammar. The analysis of data has revealed four main reasons for engaging in textism. Firstly, University students believed that textism was an easier way to convey a message without indulging in punctuation and syntax. Secondly, they also believed that abbreviated words caused their communication to be faster and saved much time and space. Hence, the quantity of messages could also be increased. Also, they used shortened words to make both typing and reading messages easy and simple. Thirdly, textism allows them to hide their lack of knowledge of English language. Lastly, textism is a "cool" trend by itself and its use has become a mandatory quality for all youngsters.

From these readings it can be discerned that though CMC is affecting the language skills of the University students, its impact is marginally evident on the academic use of language. The students are conscious of the impact of textism on their English Language usage. They are still able to differentiate the Standard English

language from CMC and are able to somewhat avoid the latter's use in their academic profile. However, hybridity due to the use of CMC along with Standard English language is evident in their spelling, vocabulary and communication skills. The abbreviations that are evident in CMC are more reflective in oral communication. The written communication is somewhat less affected by this trend. This hybridity in the use of language is certainly causing confusion in the academic use of language by University students.

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