

2B OR NOT 2B: Future of Texting in the Digital World

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ABSTRACT

In this new world of communication, a Short Message Service language called Texting has engulfed the world like a towering inferno. It is a language created for those who have no time but plenty to communicate. Educationists and media have voiced their growing concern over the infiltration of this language, which is assumed to be a scourge to English language. Texting is all about minimizing, abbreviating, short forms, and symbolic representation of information, which may be faster written than spoken. This new technique is popular with the youngsters who claim it is faster, practical, and fulfilling to emotional needs. Studies have found a positive correlation between texting and literacy. In other words, contrary to what you might think when faced with “creative” usages such as ur for your, 2 for to, and w8 for wait, kids who text may be stronger readers and writers than those who do not. In fact, if we look at studies on texting, a different conclusion emerges: Texting increases literacy and it improves, of all things, spellings. If students have learnt the grammar rules and know the difference between slang and correct English then there is no reason why it should be shunned. An experiment was undertaken to understand one aspect of Texting: “Is it useful in effective note-taking/comprehension”. This simple experiment was conducted in a few classes of engineering students. This paper presents the analyses of this experiment with the interpretation of the inference.

Keywords: *Texting; SMS; Texting and note taking.*

Introduction

The world is poised on the brink of a new era where new modes of communications have swept people off their feet. Today millions of people across the globe are expressing themselves in a million new ways, a million times. What has made this accessibility to one another so easy? It is obvious that individuals do not prefer to send long, typed out messages. Yes, it is this mode of texting that has engulfed the world like a towering inferno.

Texting is not restricted to a particular age gender or to people with commonalities. It is a language created for those who have no time but plenty to communicate. That is how the digital world survives – so much of information exchanged in so little a time. Children right from their elementary level have picked up the art of texting that it might well be replaced by learning alphabets or being taught grammar. This is instant communication.

Keeping abreast with time

Whether we conform or not to this new digital world we are thrown by compulsion into this digital era where in every child is knee deep, and if we wish not to have a communication gap with them we need to wean away our staunch supporting attitude of the Queens English. A conventional grammarian and a die hard supporter of English language may find texting atrocious and abusive but when he is thrown into a pond of texting fishes he has to learn to swim whether he likes it or not.

Keeping aside English language, with all its vulnerabilities, one has to accept this new language code, very alien, erratically obscure, yet may make one not conforming to it seem –illiterate

As Swatzlander (2010) says, “I, like most parents, am a bit conflicted on this new language of texting. Am certainly not a –”digital native”, which describes the generation (my daughter included) that was born in a digital era. I am what I have been described as a “digital immigrant”, eager to embrace technology for my own purposes as well as to communicate with my children.”

The frequency of this digital communication has led to an assault of language as it were .But to remove it totally would be like removing an important organ from the body... Youngsters go into paranoia in its absence because texting has so corroded their individuality that life for them without it becomes vegetative. Media and scholars

have voiced their growing concern over the invasion but nevertheless find it obtrusive and adversely constructive.

Examples of comments on Texting by print media read as follows:

“The changes we see taking place today in the language will be a prelude to the dying use of good English.” (*The Sun Magazine*, April 24, 2001)

“English language is beaten up; civilization is in danger of crumbling.” (*The Observer*, March 7, 2004)

“Texting is penmanship of illiterates.” (*The Sunday Telegraph*)

“Appalled teachers are now presented with essays written not in standard English but in a compressed minimalism language of mobile phone text messaging.” (*The Scotsman*, May 4, 2003).

Why Focus on Texting

Initially, when I was contemplating on this topic, I thought I was the lone teacher in this crusade for the survival of Queen’s English. Soon I realized that this was the plight of hundreds of supporters of standard English all over the world. I was overwhelmed now and decided to take a step further and analyze: WHY ENGLISH? What is the destiny of this language? Should we say that we should let punctuation, grammar, good vocabulary go for a toss and enter a world of abbreviations, short forms, symbols and a forgotten world of punctuations? Words such as chat speak and texting are for the generation N and

perhaps here for stay. Alternatively, like other fads, can we consider it as a passing phase?

If we take the camera back in time a little, say in the 70s, there mushroomed a language called F language. This suddenly took its toll on the high school students. Teenagers got thrills using this self-created language, which was as if coded English meant to share secrets. In this language, every word had an f inserted in the middle of the word. For e.g.- Has she come .She is a bore...would be... Hafs shfe cofme.Sfe ifs a bofre

The same rules could be used with the insertion of the alphabet T or any other, though R, T, S were the popular ones. This phase came lasted for a few years and faded away .Teenagers realized that speaking the original language was less cumbersome rather than exercising their brain so much by placing the extra alphabets in between.

Similarly, some may opine that texting is just a temporary phenomenon that will either fade (unlikely) or develop into a new language used primarily in electronic communication among those who can"decode" the abbreviations. Learning another language does not influence one's ability to use proper English as long as students have learnt the grammar rules and therefore know the difference between slang and correct English. Whether it is regarded as a separate language or not, chat speak can never be considered literate.

An interesting observation made by John Whorter an accomplished linguist caught

my attention. Mc Whorter disagrees with the fact that texting should be linked to written skills. He asserts that more than writing "texting" involves the brute mechanisms of writing, but in its economy, spontaneity and even vulgarity, texting is actually a "new kind of talking."

There is a virtual cult of concession and little interest in capitalization or punctuation. Then it is high time people stop associating it with English language in all its puritan form but accept it as a novel language with its own kind of grammar, combinations and permutations.

Status of texting

If we take a minute and look back a little bit into history, we know that the older generation indulged in written form of communication ie.via letters, which soon was replaced by e-mails. Today the mobile phones have slid into email mode And furthermore texting has replaced all communication. This hierarchy-letters-to email-to phone calls-to texting....can it be called technical growth or is it degeneration of quality communication. Through texting long distance, communication has been reduced to seconds and sent to many at the same time.

Presumably, the main problem with texters is their lethargy to conform to the primary form of communication in the sense lack of proper grammar spellings and word usage. However, what one should not fail to observe is the speed with which the mortar ability as well as the ability to think fast is monitored. In an age of instant curry mix

why not an instant language mix, or instant communication.

On one side many schools and educational institutions ban cell phones in the classrooms and penalize texters. On the other hand academicians resort to sending messages syllabus, explanation, or important information to the students through texting, which means students have to be glued to the mobiles anyway for any lesson plans and institutional updates. According to them texting has become advantageous to many learners because it expands the way students think since they have to edit what they are trying to say in order to fit in a long message in the shortest way possible. If a teacher permits her students to write in whatever way he is comfortable in then he might be surprised at the positive results. It is easy to be accustomed to small abbreviated writing, brief sentences that include complicated words or proper grammar but equally imperative is the perfection in language acquisition.

BBC British broadcaster John Humprey wrote a rant for the "Mail Online" about texting when he cited that texting teens are "vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbors' 800 years ago. They are destroying it, pillaging our punctuation, savaging our sentences, raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped"

Today if the teenagers are advised against the use of texting language then they would discard the idea impatiently as an old

antiquated notion, too conventional and not at all in keeping with the fast paced digital age where instant communication is the need of the hour.

Review of Research

On the other hand over the 25 years research has shown that the 16-year-old learners of America have shown tremendous improvement in writing skills. A study conducted by Cambridge Assessment (a dept of Cambridge university) "students all over the US are testing higher in the writing category and the quality of their writing has greatly increased. Alf Massey declared that "the quality of many features of writing by school leavers (British term for graduates) has improved over the past decade, Contrary to our fears he found that students" are using more complex sentence structures, punctuation and a wider range of vocabulary" Gradually to type faster teenagers began to use short forms like l8r -for later 2-for two, lol for laugh out loud, omg for o my God, u -for you,

There is no doubt that the increased use of abbreviations can be correlated to proliferation of text messaging which may not necessarily have a negative impact. A pidgin language of this kind can display thoughts and emotions in writing without worrying about perfection and in a style suited to oneself. Not conforming to a standard orthography and sending out millions of text messages adds to a great deal of writing. Linguistics Professor David Crystal asserts that texting can actually help rather than hinder literacy among students.

He says "Texting has added a new dimension to language use, but its long term impact is negligible. It is not a disaster." Texters know that they cannot break too many rules. Hence being aware of them and using discreet strategies might make them analytical and mentally alert Furthermore it testify the point that communication in whatever form, keeping close to the texters frame of mind ,emotions and freedom of expression can yield positive results.

Opinions on Texting

At PEW Centre, one teenager commented, "I don't think texting harms our communication skills. It enables us to communicate more. A long time ago before there were phones people were rarely able to communicate with people. Only a few times a day like in the morning and in the night were you able to have any kind of communication through phone. I think we are evolving and learning to communicate in more ways.

It should be accepted as a fact that with a global digital infiltration of new techniques and amazing gadgets, there has to be language to communicate instantly the benefits of the same. Like Mc Wohter said" texting is a miraculous thing. Texting is not writing at all .It is a finger language" Writing is a conscious process and speaking is like a telegraphic process. If you can speak like writing for e.g. the long orations delivered by political leaders, Then there may be a time where we can write as we speak. That is when texting comes into the scene. Texting is loose in structure-a fingered speech. So let us not consider it

as a scourge. We can write the way we talk, with its emergent complexity, we observe a new structure coming up. For e.g. LOL-laughing out loud earlier is today empathetic communication accommodation. A battery of new constructions are developing. Being bilingual, bidialectical is an expansion of a learner's repertoire wherein a learner can indulge in two parallel activities: one is texting for local communication and the other to improve scholastic inputs by learning English as a language.

Experiment Conducted

An experiment was conducted to understand one aspect of Texting: ***Is it useful in effective communication/comprehension?*** A simple experiment was conducted in a few classes of engineering students. To understand this, students were divided into two groups and given different passages .The students of first group were allowed to read and 'text' the matter to the second group who were required to interpret and understand it. A total of 14 questions were asked after the 2 passages were given for texting. This was conducted for sets of groups both having different paragraphs. The questions and the results are enumerated below.

Part 1: Interpretation of the Experiment.

1. The students were able to understand the text and reproduce it to texting form with clarity of 73%.
2. The students receiving this 'text' could interpret it better and reproduce with improvement in all (100%) the cases.

3. The final text was reproduced with matching clarity of 86% to the original even though the text forwarded contained 73% matches.

4. This shows that the students were good

at reference to context to recreate the original.

5. Overall there was an increase in the understanding of the original text to forwarded text i.e. nearly 20% improvement.

Results: Interpretation of the passage

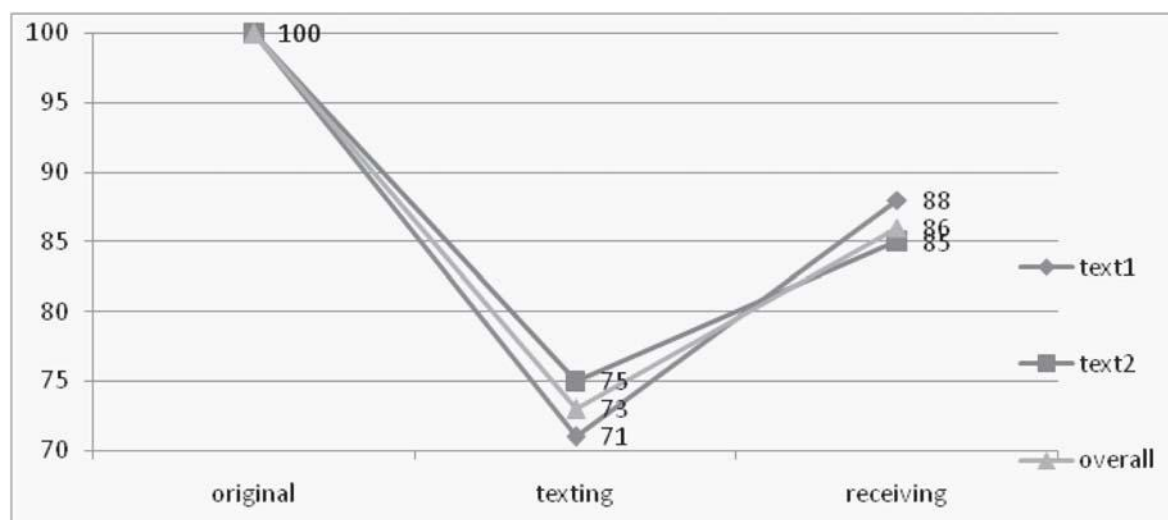


Figure 1: % conversion for text transmission vs. reproduction

Part 2: Student feedback

1. In the survey 70% of the students have started using the cell phone less than 2 years back.
2. Texting is very popular with them as nearly 53% are using texting since 2 years and all 100% were currently using this feature.
3. Texting is not very popular with family members. Only 20% were doing regularly and 80% sometimes.
4. It is very popular amongst the fellow students. A majority of 73% always

5. used between themselves and the balance 27% sometimes.
5. With others nearly 93% never used or used sometimes. Only 7% used regularly.
6. A big majority of students found texting (87%) and receiving (87%) as a very easy and convenient mode of communication.
7. More than 80 % of the students felt that there may be a need to standardized texting words / language.
8. 60% of the students were of the view

that texting could be used as an alternate language.

9. Nearly 70% students felt that texting helped them in improving their communication skills.
10. A majority i.e. 77% felt that texting was exciting to use in communication.
11. Apart from texting 90% were of the view that emotions and character usage in communication was very useful and meaningful to communicate.
12. Most of the students (67%) felt that it should not be taught as a subject in English but they could develop it on their own.
13. Students could not comprehend that this could be the language of the future. Only 33% thought that this could go on to be the language of the future.

Inference from the experiment conducted

It can be seen that

- a. All students used texting in some form to communicate.
- b. They were very familiar and at ease with texting especially with their fellow students.
- c. There was improvement in the text reproduced in 100% of the students.
- d. It was easy convenient and time saving.
- e. They were apprehensive about standardizing the 'texting Language'.
- f. They were not sure about how this could

be integrated with English language.

Conclusion

It is time we realized the strength of Texting in English communication. Let the fraternity repose its confidence in this global language and see that justice is done to the kind of teaching in the school itself. A tribute should be paid to the English teachers who have contributed to the divine digi world by giving a firm grounding to the language. Learning a language is like swimming, which can never be forgotten once one masters it. It can be welcomed with all its modulations and permutations with open arms. Hence academicians should find no reason to feel threatened and fear its decline. It is only when the edifice of a structure is not strong enough that we fear its decline. The British are contemplating of bringing out a dictionary of texting words for their elders who have grown up in the pre-digital era. This would help in understanding the language.

In conclusion we can stray away from these notions of decline of English to take texting as a motivating factor to the betterment of teaching. It is a contribution to the future world of digital monopoly where the digi language may be the perfect mode of communication. The digi invasion can be consumed and the teachers begin to enjoy the power of weakness.

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