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TEXT MESSAGING: A LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON

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Abstract

There is a long-standing tradition of applied linguistic and discourse analytical research on the structure, social meaning, epistemology, and functions of media language. Media language has always been the center of attention of linguists, particularly applied linguists and sociolinguists. Although text messaging is a relatively recent phenomenon, a considerable amount of research has described the patterns of written communication through electronic devices. Texting has become an efficient and immediate way to communicate with others, it has also brought many complexities and nuances in language. The impact of correct use of language in text messages, which is increasingly popular among younger generation, particularly among college going students requires investigation. The aim of the current study is to determine the efficiency and correctness of the linguistic features of text messages. Specifically, does text message reflect the linguistic features including message length, use of correct spelling, appropriate expressions, capitalization and using the specific grammatical rules? The language of the text message is asynchronous and virtually mediated discourse. It reflects the unrestricted new communication medium with an incredible speed. The study may be able to provide an understanding of expressions used in the communication process by analyzing the text messages that considered as another form of discourse.

Key Words: Text, Message, Communication, Linguistic Phenomenon

Introduction

Communication may be defined as an act of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another person. The term ‘communication’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘communico’ which means sharing and not just sending the message. Therefore, we may say that communication is a social process, and is one of the countless ways in which human beings interact with each other in society. The communication may be verbal, non-verbal written, and audio-visual. The study of communication thus involves two aspects: a broad comprehension of mechanical means and the underlying

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theories of communication and more importantly, an understanding of how we use these tools in our daily round of informing, influencing, inspiring, communicating and entertaining one another. Communication presupposed a shared symbolic environment, a social relationship among those who participate and interact in the society. So, we may say that communication in its simplest form consists of the transmission of information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another. A communicator sends a message through a channel to an audience seeking some effect. The traditional concept of communication is to express our inner purpose, attitude, feelings and to describe events and objects of the external world to produce sharpness between the speaker and the audience addressed.

Communication and Language Interface

Language is the most sophisticated and versatile means available to human beings for the communication of meanings. We communicate primarily by the use of language, and by the manipulation of words. Sensory communication alone is not enough for human beings to survive. Hence the evolution of symbolic communication called language from non-verbal gestures to the verbal, and then to the written and printed word took place. The arts have grown out of this fundamental desire and need to express on self to reach out to others. The principal task of linguist is to investigate and describe the ways in which words can be combined and manipulated to convey meanings. An obvious use of language is to communicate information about the world, about us and to get things done. Sometimes, by extension, we can use language to refer to hypothetical states of affairs, to imaginary world, and to our own and other people's ideas, wishes and desires, and we know that the world would have to be like that for these statements to be true or false. Many fiction writers and Novelists obviously do this all the time. They invite their target audience to enter an imaginary world and use language to refer to events and so on in this world. This use of language to convey information is often thought of as involving the literal use of language and has been called cognitive or descriptive.

Linguists, particularly those engaged in the textual or social study of language use, might wish to adopt a less abstract view, particularly, if they are concerned with language as the part of communicative process as a whole. Some such linguists consider the relationship between the structure and communicative function of language to be so intimate that the structure itself is to some degree determined by the functions it serves. In this view, form and medium would be seen as closely interrelated. It is not

hard to come up with certain evidence. Language, one might argue, must have some substantial realization, and the relationship between language and the spoken medium is, particularly, intimate for obvious reason. The use of language involves words and sentences and the ways in which they can be brought together to communicate meanings.

David Crystal describes text messaging as a “linguistic phenomenon which has aroused curiosity, suspicion, fear, confusion, antagonism, fascination, excitement and enthusiasm, all at once.” A language is, as Ferdinand de Saussure says, a sign system of which the main function is communication among people. The Cambridge dictionary defines “a language as a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar, or the system of communication used by people in a particular country or type of work”. The main way that we, the humans, communicate with each other is through ‘language’. “Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced sounds”. This definition of Sapir expresses that language is mainly concerned with human beings and constituted a system of sounds produced by them for communication. We have the opportunity to exchange information and thought, vision, belief and perspective via language, also express our feeling if we be happy, sad, and angry by using hundreds of expressions. Media, as a part of communication also need language. The relation between media and language is very strong. These are two different things that cannot be separated; no interpretation can be made if language is not used in media. Language used in media is a specialized kind of sign system. It is a collection of specific words, idioms and sentence structures. Advertisements aim to persuade, challenge, and seize the audience’s attention; thus, demand highly creative language. The well-made advertisements appeal sophisticated language skills.

Communication Process

Let us examine how our daily activities involve communication. We may talk to a person, write a letter, interview, watch a film or slide, prepare a write-up or a pamphlet, organize an exhibition, carry out a demonstration, participate in radio, T.V. programmes – we are engaging in communication process. The main goal of communication is to sharing of ideas among persons by using verbal, visual and written symbols. There are several elements in the communication process. To generate communication, we need five basic elements: source, message, channel, receivers and

effects of message. Who says what, with what purpose, to whom, in what situation, by what means with what effect

WHO → WHOM → CHANNELS → MESSAGE → EFFECT

In today's world, texting has been the main source of communication for most people. People no longer just pick up the phone and call someone but rather click a few letters and quickly send their direct message. Texting has been an integral part of the adolescent's life since phones became ubiquitous in the early 2000s. As an easy method of communication between two or more people that can be picked up and left off whenever it's convenient for the user, there is no surprise at its explosion of popularity. However, what has texting done to affect the way we not only communicate with each other, but also how we understand English grammar as a whole? While texting has been able to improve communication by allowing people to communicate at their own time, being able to create group chats, and to also send pictures; texting has also had dramatic negative effects on the way we use language. Especially with the millennial generation, texting entails a lot of short hand form of communication. For example, instead of saying "talk to you later!", people often now just say "ttyl". This is just one example of many where texting has actually impacted the way we communicate with others.

Impact of Text Messaging

A big impact of texting is that the quality of communication is much more surface level. Texting, often times, is filled with one-line responses and thus prohibits the deeper creation of friendship that other forms of communication can create. On top of that, abbreviated styles of texting like "txt" and "ttyl" makes conversation much less intimate between the two people. This makes it harder to create meaningful conversations with other people and further promotes a more distant style of communicating. Jacquie Ream, a former teacher and author of *Kiss: Keep It Short and Simple*, a guide for becoming a more effective writer, says: "We have a whole generation being raised without communication skills." She believes these poor communication skills coupled with the overuse of acronyms and abbreviations such as "LOL" or "SMH" are the reason so many high school students are not at a proficient reading and writing level.

A variety of form and style is used in media texts; in most cases the text uses different codes, visual, audio and written that fit together in certain way to create a particular meaning. Social media has brought a lot of new words and idioms that never

existed before. There is a use of casual language when posting on the social media platforms such as Facebook, abbreviated forms of language are also being used while texting, it has also given rise to the use of emoticons such as ;-)) and acronyms such as LOL 'laughing out loud' which has recently celebrated its 25th birthday. According to the OFT CITED DATA from digital communication startup Swyft Media, the world's approximately two billion smartphone users send out six billion of the symbols each day. Mobile and smart phones are recognized as technologies with multiple implications for future shifts in language use. Media has provided the opportunity to switch between chatting by typing and also speaking video conferencing is also possible using software. It has produced a new kind of technologically mediated conversation, new ways of speaking and writing through which social life and cultural identities are constructed. There are a number of complex and subtle ways in which media have become an integral part of our day to day lives. Media play a key role in how we understand the world around us.

Jeffrey Kluger, author of the CNN article, we never talk any more: The problem with text messaging says: "Habitual texters may not only cheat their existing relationships, they can also limit their ability to form future ones since they don't get to practice the art of interpreting nonverbal visual cues." Meaning texting is not only perhaps hurting the relationships we have with our close friends and relatives now, but also making us poorer communicators such that it will be harder for us to make more relationships in the future.

Issues in Texting:

A big issue with texting is how difficult it is to interpret language through people's texts. By spoken forms of communication and face-to-face, people's emotions, hand-gestures, and ways they speak tell a lot about what a person is trying to say. This makes it much more clear for the other person to understand what the other person is saying and they establish a better relationship between the two people. However, with texting, it is much harder to decipher this. With this kind of communication, you can't really understand exactly what the other person is trying to say. There is a lot of open interpretation which often times is not understood correctly. Yes, there has been the creation of emojis to better add emotion and "life" to texting. However, this is not the same as face-to-face interaction and the human engagement that is still lacking with direct messaging. Emojis are frequently utilized to depict the emotion of the message's composer. However, the use of such emojis has greatly impacted our use of language. Users no

longer need to thoughtfully combine words and punctuation to portray their feelings; for example, they can simply add an emoji of laughter to indicate their joy. The impact on society of this phenomenon is far-reaching. Individuals of modern society have become so adept at communicating with a restriction on words and characters, that they are losing the ability to converse. The practice of formulating sentences to accurately depict one's emotions and thoughts helped individuals develop skills vital for human interaction and communication.

Text messaging are informal means of communication in which mistakes do not matter. Messages are generally formed by the communicative situations of the sender and receiver who may indeed use their basic writing skills for different situations. Texting further promotes using improper grammar and poorer writing skills. By texting, it is easier for people to take the easy way out by spelling things wrong to make words shorter like "cuz" instead of "because" or to incorrectly format sentences that wouldn't be acceptable in an actual paper. For example, texts are often run-on sentences with no sort of punctuation or distinction between thoughts. This ends up creating a dramatic effect on people since texting is such a huge part of people's days. Since everyone texts very often, their continued use of improper grammar or use of a language can translate into their day to day. People can be so habituated with using these "shortcuts" in texting that it severely impacts one's knowledge on correct grammar. For example, I know with many of my friends, they often spell words incorrectly or in a shorter way because through texting it makes it easier and faster for them to get their point across. However, due to this, often times they end up forgetting the actual spelling of certain words since they are no longer used to writing it like that. Overall, these smaller aspects about texting end up having much bigger consequences in the real world. The continual usage of improper grammar and spelling can impact how people communicate with each other. It makes them lose their ability on how to convey their thought cohesively and effectively.

The art of language may be at risk. There are clearly many benefits to writing shorthand for text messages, but the impact on grammar is not one of them. In today's society, new acronyms are regularly being added to the dictionary, vowels are often excluded from words, and the use of fragments instead of sentences is becoming commonplace. While some may argue that such a transition increases the efficiency of communication, it also sacrifices grammar, which provides additional meaning to the content of our messages. For example, the improper use of a punctuation mark

can critically alter a message. Despite this longstanding dependence on grammar in our daily communication, a new communication medium has emerged in the last decade, which has generated unprecedented flexibility in our use of grammar, almost to the point of making communication unintelligible to non-texting audiences. Texting has definitely affected the state of grammar to a great extent. Texting has become so ubiquitous; almost everyone texts regularly as the main method of communication. We as humans are a product of our environment, circumstances and those we interact with regularly. The ability to speak and write with proper grammar allows for clear and precise communication, but a lack of proper grammar will indicate poor comprehension, and it unfortunately diminishes the speaker's credibility. Texting has become such a norm in society today following the growth of technology over the past few decades and has become a part of everyday life for most people. Generally, people keep up with their friends on some sort of messaging app, whether it is texting, Facebook Messenger, or other social media apps. As I write this, I receive many messages and I see a pointed difference in how I write this versus how I respond to those text messages. While texting, I make conscious efforts to shorten my messages either through shortening of words or improper grammar. For example, I will use 'cuz' instead of because, 'u,' instead of you, or 'idk,' instead of I don't know. This continual misspelling of words has led me to sometimes confuse my texting language with my 'proper' language.

More than just misspelling, texting prompts people to shorten their messages in general. If someone were to send a nicely articulated yet long text, people judge the text, saying things like, "Why is that person writing you an essay over text?" In the texting world, long messages are not acceptable ways to communicate. Instead, texting requires the shortening of messages to get to the gist of something, leaving out nuances or subtleties that could add to that message. In addition, formal language through text is also not considered acceptable. The more shortening or misspelling there are the more casual and acceptable the message is. Many filler words such as, 'like,' or 'um,' are often found in text messages, including in my own. This texting language has grown into such a separate communicative medium that there is an entire Wikipedia page dedicated to it. One of the common changes to regular language brought about by texting is the pervasive use of word and phrase abbreviations. Examples include, 'CU' for "See you", 'NP' for "No problem", 'IDK' for "I don't know". All of these abbreviations take the first letter of each of the words in the phrase. However, some abbreviations can be more complicated

and require a greater level of familiarity with the usage. An example of this less formulaic abbreviation is, ‘XOXO’ for “Hugs and kisses”.

Text is unremarkable, according to Thurlow and Brown (2003: 15) in the sense that most non-standard forms are semantically recoverable and reflect texters’ awareness of the need to be intelligible: consonant writing, for example, recognizes the information load or semantic value carried by consonants while phonological representation is relatively easy to interpret; as well as being reflective of abbreviations used in other informal written texts where speed and time are issues (his example is the fridge door note); or where a certain informal tone is needed (in a magazine, or an advert). They are neither a feature of electronic language in general, nor of texting in particular, but of certain affordances across language mediums. Finally, Thurlow and Brown argue that the impact of text messaging on language is unlikely to be unremarkable: new linguistic practices seldom spring from nowhere, neatly quashing pre-existing forms and conventions. Just as technologies do not replace each other, nor is it really possible to imagine communicative practices breaking completely, or that dramatically, with long-standing patterns of interaction and language use (Thurlow and Brown 2003: 4). But the change of grammar is not as simple as using new abbreviations. For an example of this, we must look no further than perhaps the most commonly used texting abbreviation, “LOL.” This translates directly to “laugh out loud”, but this is not the way it is actually used. The phrase “LOL” is mostly used at the beginning or end of a text to indicate friendliness, and add warmth to a message. It is well understood in the texting community that the expression ‘laugh out loud’ does not translate directly to physical laughter.

While texting has become an efficient and immediate way to communicate with many individuals, it has also removed many complexities and nuances in language. Because messages are so direct, the importance of how things are articulated is not as appreciated anymore. Implied messages or analyzing of text is not a skill people use regularly anymore because of the need for texts to be direct and straightforward. As a result, many people of this generation lack the skills to be as analytical concerning language. When writing formal essays or papers, people of this generation tend to find it harder to use language that is more formal. Basic grammar rules are often overlooked or misused because of the blatant disregard for grammar when texting. For example, the number of people that would say, “She’s a girl that has a white

dress,” vs the correct, “She’s a girl who has a white dress,” shows how small grammar rules like this are being cast aside as a result of people not using them in their daily conversations. Researchers have different views about text messaging. Some scholars agree with the idea that text messaging enhances the communicability among all levels of the users. However, many other scholars disagree with that idea, and they think that using text messaging leads to the incorrect use of the language they are using to communicate. Users use simple abbreviated symbols through language without taking into account to the rules of grammar, syntax, morphology, semantic, punctuation or spelling.

Link with grammar

Yet, some studies have shown that texting does not necessarily affect people’s grammar performance. One article explained that as long as people can differentiate between the two language spheres, the grammar should not be affected. While I can agree with this statement, I still think that analytical skills when relating to language are not as strong as they may have been in the past because of the directness of the messaging culture. However, according to this study, grammar and spelling seem not to be affected greatly or at all by the texting culture.

Despite all these changes, it can be argued that texting represents an evolutionary state of grammar. Texting has brought a world of convenience to our lives with the ability to have a sort of on demand conversation, but this can come at the price of invaluable verbal communication and writing skills if we use it to replace all interaction. Since all languages constantly evolve both in their vocabulary and usage, it stands to reason that grammar can evolve as well. However, this may lead to conflicts with the teaching of grammar as a right platform in the right manner.

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