

Effect of SMS Text Language on the Writing Skills of Students of College of Education Billiri, Gombe State

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of SMS text language on the writing skills of students of College of Education Billiri, Gombe state. The study had four objectives and asked four questions. The survey research design was used on a population of 320 (NCE I, II & III) students from which 120 were sampled using a systematic. The SMS Effect Questionnaire (SMSEQ) with a reliability index of 0.81 was used to collect data which was analyzed qualitatively using content approach for phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax respectively. The results established students use of abbreviation and deletion of vowels leading to damaging phonology. In addition, lexical deviation, omission of vital vowel sounds, inclusion of numbers and acronyms which has effect on the morphology of words was used. More so, students use syntax wrongly evidence by short form of words representing phrases and sentences which was deemed unacceptable among future teachers. It was recommended that the Department of English should sensitize students on the effects of SMS language and the use of standardized language in written and spoken communications. Also, students' Clubs should emphasize acceptable English standards using, fliers, hand bills, Alumni Associations and other media that are attractive to students on campus.

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INTRODUCTION

English language is the official language of communication and instruction for all subjects from basic to tertiary levels in Nigeria. The knowledge of English language at all levels of education helps in understanding other subjects taught at school except for French, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa language which are also taught subjects. English language is a very complex system of rules whereby meaning and sound structures are mixed for communication purpose. English language follows general principles known as rules of grammar which guides combination of words that converts complex meaning according to the order of such words. According to Awoyemi (2013), it is a complex part of human psychology,

a phenomenon which is orderly, meaningful and creative. The creative nature of the English language is seen in the fact that even though it is standardized, it is very flexible. It can have variations and can be subject to a complex dynamism (Balogun, 2013). The variation may occur in its use to suit formal and informal occasions such as observed in the short message service (SMS).

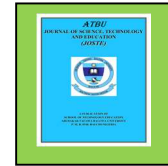
The advent of SMS has created a new linguistic form by deviating from the established ones and also reshaping the conventional communicative practices (Albasheer & Alfaki, 2016; Osman & Omer, 2020; Sadiq et al., 2022; Mensah et al, 2023). The SMS being a popular medium of communication among young

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generation, the language of SMS has evolved and reinvented its unique stylistic features, which violate the rules of Standard English. According to Li and Cummins (2019), texting has become enormously popular as an important means of written communication among school-aged and college students worldwide, many of whom come from different first language (L1) backgrounds.

Javed and Mahmood (2016) asserted that texting is one of the most recent forms that people use to communicate which has generated its own style of language including abbreviations and graphics. It differs from other forms of written communication to a great extent. This language has developed a unique variety of English, which separates it from the daily written language. This language is very familiar among mobile users, internet users, chatters and bloggers, who are in most cases the teenage students. These activities resulted in creation of a new body of "discourse, identity, authorship, and language which affects students in many ways. This kind of effects may become negative especially among student teachers under training at the Colleges of Education (COEs) in Nigeria.

This is because the COEs are saddled with the responsibility of training teachers who will teach young children at the elementary schools. Imaging a scenario where the teachers passed wrong information to learners simply because he/she did not learn well when under training. This may lead to a vicious circle that may not be easily corrected. This presupposes that the place of the student teachers or pre-service teachers is very important in the education of young people. The effect of SMS (if any) must not be allowed to destroy the nation with regard to learning standard English language.

From the forgone, many effects of the SMS texting trend abound on students for which research should be conducted in order to check a possible alienation of the correct form of the English language as required and taught in schools. Especially, in a teacher training College where graduates are expected to pass on knowledge acquired to a younger generation. This study will investigate the effect of SMS text

language on the writing skills of students of College of Education Billiri, Gombe state.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The world has witnessed a continuous change of various medium of communication occasioned by the influx of technological driven communication gadgets used by people. It is a common sight to see people sending messages on their mobile phones and devices. One of such medium is the Short Message Service (SMS) offered by all service providers used extensively and excessively by students and youths. The College of Education (COE) in Nigeria is a teacher training institution where graduate teachers are expected to teach at the basic levels (Low, middle and upper) of the education system. It has been observed that the students of the college are given to the texting or SMS syndrome which is latently leading to a malady of poor spellings, grammar and writing to mention a few. There is a need to study the extent to which the 'texting' or SMS syndrome has gotten into students of the COEs in order to avert a possible vicious circle of poor adherence to the rules of grammar and learning the English language which is the official language through which all school subjects except few L1 Nigerian languages are taught and accessed in. Hence, the study will investigate the effect of SMS text language on the writing skills of students of COE Billiri, Gombe state.

Objectives of the Study

The study is designed to achieve the following specific objectives, to determine:

1. the effect of SMS text language on students' phonology.
2. the effect of SMS text language on students' morphology.
3. the effect of SMS text language on students' semantics.
4. the effect of SMS text language on students' syntax.

Research Questions

The study answered the following questions:



1. what is the effect of SMS text language on students' phonology?
2. what is the effect of SMS text language on students' morphology?
3. what is the effect of SMS text language on students' semantics?
4. what is the effect of SMS text language on students' syntax?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Texting and the Short Message Service (SMS)

Texting is the act of sending shorting messages with mobile phones or other text-enable devices. It can also be said to be the act of composing and sending electronic, typically consisting of alphabetic and numerical characters usually between two or more people having similar devices or text-enabled devices. Another name for the 'texting' is the Short Message Service (SMS). Tomita (2009) defined the technology of SMS as a communications protocol used to deliver short text messages, up to 160 characters, via Global Systems for Mobile Communication (GSM) enabled mobile phones. Texting involves both verbal and non-verbal communication. The verbal form refers to texting words which may be exact, short or abbreviations (conventional and non-conventional). On the other hand, the non-verbal form includes the use of emoji's, response time punctuations and other pictorial representations. SMS or texting has brought about a breakthrough in communication in the world today with most mobile users taking to it.

Texting has found usage in all disciplines including education where report of explosive use has been trending since most schools are made up of young people whose livelihood is on the fast lane so to speak. Many articles have been conducted on the SMS/texting which looked at its advantages and disadvantages. For instance, Janin-Starr (2014) and Ali et al (2019) reported that some researchers found texting to interfere with formal writing, while other studies demonstrated just the opposite in schoolwork.

Empirical Studies

Literature has shown that texting or SMS impact students negatively in their spellings,

vocabulary development and writing skill proficiencies (Albasheer & Alfaki, 2016; Javed & Mahmood, 2016; Ali et al., 2019; Hafitz et al., 2019; Osman & Omer, 2020; Sadiq et al., 2022; Mensah et al, 2023). These studies reported that the SMS used among students impacts negatively on their formal writings evidences by wrong spelling, poor vocabulary, wrong punctuations, grammar and writing skills. However, the SMS skill has also been observed to help students in note taking during lectures (Mohammed, 2024).

Other studies such as Alufohai (2017), Al-Salman and Saeed (2017), Li and Cummins (2019) and Shal et al (2022) reported that even though students use the SMS widely, their formal writings are not affected. Hence, SMS texting is in itself not harmful. However, caution must be exercised in encouraging students in its use particularly in ensuring that the basic rules of grammar, punctuations, concord and others are strictly followed in formal writings. This suggests that the students were able to switch between formal and informal writings without being affected by their use of SMS texting.

An in-depth study by Albasheer and Alfaki (2016:28) delved into the effect of SMS on English language aspects and communication. Their focus was on the content analysis of syntax, semantics, morphology, phonology, spelling and punctuation, and communication. The result was astonishing and includes:

1. On the basis of syntax, there is no fixed word order like in ordinary English syntactic structure. Therefore, grammatical rules may not be adhered to.
2. In morphology, the internal structure of word, there is complete damage of words by many processes such as blending and use of acronym.
3. In semantics, there is complete volition of punctuation, the use of symbols, signs, pictures and digits and this sometimes leads to confusion.
4. With regard to phonology, there is an omission of vowel letters which affects pronunciation in addition, there is an omission of final vowel letter

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5. The use of abbreviations leads to ambiguity in perceived meaning of words. Also, they are linguistically incorrect, but communicatively acceptable.
6. People miss-spell words and textism, which may have a negative effect on the correct spelling of English word linguistically.
7. The style of writing text messaging is informal; however, it spreads in the formal situations in universities, schools, and companies.
8. Text messaging leads to displacement of authentic, standard and direct communication.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the survey research design and descriptive design (including content analysis, discourse analysis, conversational analysis, and text analysis). The population of comprised of all students of the College of Education Billiri was 320. The sample for the study was determined using the Research Advisors (2006) which gives all students equal chance of being picked to participate in the study (Julia & Saul, 2023). Consequently, 120 students were sampled using a systematic approach from each of the three levels (NCE I, II & III) from each of the four schools (Arts, Sciences, languages,

ECCE/PED). To achieve this, their matriculation number was used. The Dean of each school was consulted to facilitate and get the students to give their consent to participate in the study. Data was collected using a five (5) sectioned questionnaire tagged: SMS Effect Questionnaire (SMSEQ).

Section A is on demographic of participants while Sections B, C, D and E are for content analysis of words, their short forms and image representation which were classified under phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax respectively as used by Albasheer and Alfaki (2016) in their study. SMSEQ was administered among the selected students by researchers who also engaged the students in some discussion on their responses. All sessions were carried out when student are free to participate so that they are not distracted from attending their lectures. Data collected was subjected to content analysis (Albasheer & Alfaki, 2016).

RESULTS

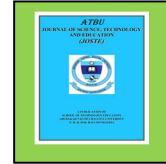
The participants were well guided on their response but care was taken not to interfere with the responses. To elicit better response, the discussion with some of the students was noted.

Research Question One: what is the effect of SMS text language on students' phonology?

Table 1: Effect of SMS on Phonology

S/N	Word	Textism	Category	Process	Aspect
1	You	U	Pronoun	Shouting/spoken feature	Phonology
2	Love	Luv	Noun	Abbreviation sound feature	Phonology
3	Between	Btw	Adjective	Sound abbreviation	Phonology
4	The	D	Article	Spoken feature	Phonology
5	These	Dis	Demonstrative	Sound feature	Phonology

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6	Have	Hv	Verb	Abbreviation sound feature	Phonology
7	Nigeria	9ja	Noun	Sound, number, abbreviation	Phonology
8	See	C	Verb	Capitalization of stress sound	Phonology
9	Because	Bcus b/c cuz Bcoz coz	Adverb	Capitalization of stress sound	Phonology
10	Thank you	Tnk u	Verb phrase	Abbreviation, capitalization of stress sound	Phonology

From Table 1, the examples given by the students which classify as phonology includes: 'you' 'u' consonant (y) and (u) are deleted and the use of spoken feature. In 'love' 'luv' there is substitution feature, also in the word 'between' 'btw' there is deletion of four letters 'e,e,e,n'. Again in the word 'the' 'd' there is deletion of 't,h,e,' and 'd' is used instead of sound feature, likewise 'these' 'dis', 't,h,e,s,e' are deleted and 'dis' used instead of sound feature. In the word 'have' 'hv' letter 'a' and 'e' are deleted and abbreviation 'hv' as spoken feature. Another is 'Nigeria' '9ja' there is deletion of the letters n,i,r,l, using number '9' instead of 'Ni', 'j' instead of 'e,r,l' as spoken feature.

Also in the word 'see' 'c' there is deletion of 's,e,e' using the letter 'c' as spoken feature. In the word 'because' there are five ways of writing in textism 'bc' the two syllable are abbreviated by two letters, in 'bcuz', there is deletion of 'e,a,s,e' and use of 'z' instead of its sound feature. While in

'coz' there is deletion of the first syllable 'be' and deletion of 'a,u,s,e' and use of 'z' instead of its sound feature. While in 'cuz' there is deletion in the first syllable 'be' and 'e,a,s' in the second syllable, and use of the letter 'z' as its sound feature. Then in 'bcoz' there is deletion of 'e,a,u,s,e' and use of 'o,z' instead of its sound feature. Finally, in the phrasal verb 'thank you' 'tnk u' there is deletion of 'h,a' in 'thank' and 'y,u' in 'your' using 'tnk u' as spoken feature.

From the foregone, it is evident that students' use of abbreviation, shortening and deletion of vowels leads to damage of phoneme. This may make students concentrate more on spoken language used in texting, damaging their pronunciation of some words and thus affect their phonology.

Research Question Two: What is the effect of SMS text language on students' morphology?

Table 2: Effects of SMS on Morphology

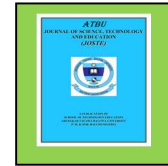
S/N	Word	Textism	Category	Process	Aspect
1.	Good to go	G2G	Verb phrase	Lexical deviation	Morphology
2.	Boyfriend	BF	Noun phrase	Clipping	Morphology
3.	In real life	IRL	Prepositional phrase	Clipping	Morphology
4.	Bye for now	B4N	Verb phrase	Lexical deviation	Morphology
5.	Will you come	WUC	Question	Acronym	Morphology
6.	That is good	Dats gud	Adjectival phrase	Idiosyncratic clipping	Morphology
7.	Have a nice day	Hv a 9ce dai	Verb phrase	Idiosyncratic clipping	Morphology

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

8.	Thank you	Tnk u	Verb phrase	clipping	Morphology
9.	You are welcome	U a w/cm	Noun phrase	clipping	Morphology
10.	Love one another	Luv 1 anoda	Verb phrase	Lexical deviation	Morphology

The aspect of morphology is presented in Table 2. It was observed that the first verb phrase 'Good to go' 'G2G' there is lexical deviation, the first letter of the word 'good' 'G' is written and the number '2' is used instead of 'to', also the letter of the verb 'Go' 'G' is used, all are written in capital letters. In the noun 'boyfriend' 'BF' there is abbreviation of the first letter for each word, and it is written in capital letters. Also in the prepositional phrase 'in real life' 'IRL', there is abbreviation of the first letter, written in capital letter. While in 'Bye for now' 'B4N' there is abbreviation in the first letter 'B' and of the last word 'N' with the number '4' in between them 'B4N'. In 'will you come' 'WUC' all the words are abbreviated, there is capitalization using 'W' instead of 'will', 'U' for 'you' and 'C' for 'come'. Whereas in the adjectival phrase 'that is good' 'dats gud' there is idiosyncratic clipping. In the verb phrase 'have a nice day' 'hv a 9ce dai' there

is idiosyncratic clipping and the use of numbers '9ce' for 'nice'. Again, in the verb phrase 'thank you' 'tnk u' there is clipping and in textism abbreviation is used. 'You are welcome' is a noun phrase, capitalisation is used in the word 'you' 'U' and abbreviation for the word 'are' 'a' and 'welcome' 'w/cm' there is omission of the first and last vowel sounds 'welcome' 'w/cm'. Also, in the verb phrase 'love one another' 'luv 1 anoda' has lexical deviation, numbers and acronym. The lexical deviation, abbreviations used, omission of vital vowel sounds, inclusion of numbers and use of acronyms have effect on the morphology of words used by the students.

Research Question Three: What is the effect of SMS text language on students' semantics?

Table 3: Effects of SMS on Semantics

S/N	Word	Textism	Category	Process	Aspect
1.	Banana		Noun	Symbol	Semantics
2.	Star		Noun	Symbol	Semantics
3.	Cry		Verb	Using facial expression	Semantics
4.	I love you	I ❤️ u	Noun clause	Letter, symbol, letter	Semantics
5.	Book		Noun	Symbol	Semantics
6.	Good		Adjective	Symbol	Semantics
7.	I like you	I 👍 u	Noun clause	Letter, symbol, letter	Semantics
8.	One minute		Noun clause	Symbol	Semantics
9.	Wrong	X	Noun	Symbol	Semantics
10.	Two	2	number	Number	Semantics

In Table 3, the analysis was on semantics of SMS words and symbols by students. The word 'banana' the symbol is used and there is relevance between the word and its symbol. In 'star' as a noun a symbol is used which is related in the 'cry' which is a verb, a facial expression related to the symbol is used. In the noun phrase 'I love you' it is replaced with the use of a letter for the vowel 'i', symbol and another

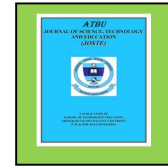
vowel 'u'. For the word 'book' which is a noun a symbol which is related with the word is used. In the adjective 'good' there is the use of a symbol. Again, in the noun clause 'I like you' the letter 'I' is used then symbol and a vowel 'u' serves as an expression. In 'in one minute' a noun phrase a symbol is used which has no relevance. Also, in 'wrong' a noun a letter serves as a symbol. In the word 'two' a number is used. There is the use of

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emotion and facial symbols, sound features, use of picture and different shapes. All these are effects of SMS on semantics.

Research Question Four: What is the effect of SMS text language on students' syntax?

Table 4: Effects of SMS on Syntax

S/N	English Form	Textism	Category	Process	Aspect
1.	Before you wake up	B4 u wak up	Prepositional phrase	Abbreviation	Syntax
2.	Please call me	Pls cal m or PCM	Phrasal verb	Abbreviation	Syntax
3.	You are welcome	U a wlc	Sentence	Abbreviation	Syntax
4.	Are you okay	A u ok	Question	Abbreviation	Syntax
5.	Sing for me	Sing 4 me	Phrasal verb	Abbreviation	Syntax
6.	Happy birthday to you	HBD 2 u	Sentence	Abbreviation	Syntax
7.	See you later	C u later	Phrasal verb	Abbreviation	Syntax
8.	By the way	BTW	Prepositional phrase	Abbreviation	Syntax
9.	How are you doing	How a u doing	Question	Abbreviation	Syntax
10.	I love you	I luv u	Sentence	Abbreviation	Syntax

Table 4 concentrated on syntax analysis of phrases used by students in SMS. For example, 'before you wake up' 'b4 u wak up' there is abbreviation in some of the words 'b,u' and use of number '4'. In 'please call me' 'PCM' or 'pls cal me' there is abbreviation by using the first letter of each word but written in capital letters. In the sentence 'you are welcome' 'u a wlc' there is abbreviation by using the first letter 'u' in capital 'a and wlc' in small letters 'are you okay' 'a u ok' is a question abbreviated by the first letter of each other words. In 'sing for me' a phrasal verb, the second word is used by a number and the last word abbreviated. The sentence 'happy birthday to you' is abbreviated. The first letter of each word is written in capital followed by number, the last word is abbreviated. 'See you later' 'C U later' is a phrasal verb the first two words are abbreviated by capital letters 'C and U' then the last word is written in full. In 'by the way' 'BTW' the first letter of each word is abbreviated and is a prepositional phrase. Again, in 'how are you doing?' is a question whereby the first three words are abbreviated and the last word written in full. 'I love you' 'I luv u' is a sentence that words are abbreviated and written in capital letters. It is undisputable that there is a great effect of SMS on syntax. The messenger is not mindful of the rules of English language due to the use of abbreviation in texting.

DISCUSSION

From Table 1, it is evident that students' use of abbreviation, shortening and deletion of vowels leading to damaging of their phonology. This finding resonates with Albasheer and Alfaki (2016), Sadiq et al (2022) who reported similar trend in their studies. Table 2 revealed that in the course of texting by the students, there was lexical deviation, abbreviations used, omission of vital vowel sounds, inclusion of numbers and use of acronyms which has effect on the morphology of words used. This finding corroborates with the findings of Albasheer and Alfaki (2016), Hfiz et al, (2019) Osman and Omer (2020), and Mensah et al (2023) who reported that the morphology of words is affected but a negative impact is observed in the formal writings of the students.

In Table 3, it was observed that when students send SMS texts, they use emotion and facial symbols, sound features, pictures and different shapes. In addition, some vowels are replaced indiscriminately. These affects the semantics of the original words. This finding aligns with Albasheer and Alfaki (2016), Hafiz et al (2019) and Mohammed (2024) who asserted that the use of emotion and facial symbols, sound features, pictures and different shapes can affect their vocabulary development and semantics. This may also impact their formal writing negatively.

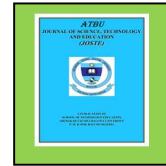
Table 4 presented the content analysis of SMS words with regard to syntax. It shows that

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students use of syntax wrong evidence by their short form of words and abbreviations used to represent phrases and sentences. This finding was articulated by Albasheer and Alfaki (2016), Sadiq et al (2022), Mensal et al (2023) and Mohammed (2024). This leads to errors in spellings, punctuation and impacts formal writings negatively. However, it was observed that it was particularly helping in note taking during lectures.

CONCLUSION

The SMS text messaging has become popular among students since the advent of the mobile phones. While being very helpful in communication and interaction, it has been found to also impact students negatively in most institutions of learning in Nigeria. The findings of this study shows that students in the Colleges of Education use abbreviation, shortening and deletion of vowels leading to damaging of their phonology. In addition, lexical deviation, abbreviations used, omission of vital vowel sounds, inclusion of numbers and use of acronyms which has effect on the morphology of words used was observed.

Moreover, it was observed that when students send SMS texts, they use emotion and facial symbols, sound features, pictures and different shapes. In doing so, some vowels are replaced indiscriminately thus affecting the semantics of the original words. The study also shows that students use syntax wrongly evidence by their use of short form of words and abbreviations used to represent phrases and sentences. The study aligns with others that report a negative impact of the SMS on students' formal writings and examinations as well as in their speaking. This is unacceptable especially among the Colleges of Education students who are expected to teach the younger generations of Nigerians.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

1. Orientation should be given by the Department of English to students in order to

sensitized them on the negative effects of SMS language and the use of standardized language in written and spoken communications especially in the formal form as pre-service teachers.

2. Regular follow-ups should be organized by the Department of English and the College Counselling Unit on the gains and perils of SMS to students and life generally.
3. The College through the various students' Clubs should emphasize the use of correct grammar, language and acceptable standards in English Language using Bill Boards, Fliers, Hand Bills, Alumni Associations, Facebooks, WhatsApp and other media that are attractive to students.

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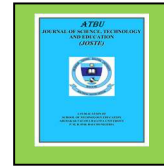
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