
TXTN: Exploring Learners' and Educators' Perceptions of the Use of Internet Language in an EFL/ESL Context

Christelle Frangieh Fenianos*

Jessica Saba**

Abstract

In recent years, a significant interest in the subject of Internet language has become noticeable as mobile communication has become prevalent and easily accessible by everyone, especially this new generation. In Lebanon, some voiced concerns and complaints about this practice were noticed by some teachers who claimed that texting features have leaked into students' writing. This study investigates both learners' and scholars' views of the use of Textisms in an ESL/EFL (English as a Second Language/ English as a Foreign Language) setting. Through learners' questionnaires and scholars' interviews, this study shows that despite the high exposure to Textisms, this style remains restricted to informal communication as texters proved to be able to code-switch between formal and informal writing styles. From a psychological perspective, this trend triggers no particular belief in texters who remain indifferent about this practice. From a professional point of view, the results indicate that teachers are not favorable of the use of Textisms and believe it affects language, yet this effect is not major and does not threaten the future of the English Language. Language learning is a dynamic and evolving process, thus it is fundamental to know how to properly implement emerging developments to cater for this generation's needs.

Keywords: Textisms, Internet language, Messages, Standard English, Abbreviations

1. Introduction

* Lebanese University – Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences. E-mail address: frangieh.c@gmail.com.

** University of Balamand Dubai – Faculty of Arts and Sciences. E-mail address: saba.jessica@fty.uobd.ac.ae.

Anyone might notice as they walk down the street, sit on a bus or in a lecture hall, or even walk on campus that cell phones are not exclusively used for voice calls anymore; instead, texting is the trend in mobile communication these days (Drouin, 2011). The days of using cell phones for voice calls have long gone. Smart phones are on the rise due to the fact that they allow people to access all kinds of social applications instantly. Smartphone owners can immediately reply to emails, text-chats, Short Message Services (SMSs), and social networking posts like Facebook, Twitter or others. The advent of such electronic technologies offers numerous opportunities for written communication (Varnhagen et al., 2010). While communicating over texting media, users tend to twist the standard form of the language into a non-standard one called Textism (Choudhury et al., 2007).

Leung (2007) defines Texting as the use of abbreviations and other techniques to compose SMS and IM (Instant Messages) by reducing the time and sometimes the cost of text messaging. This new language has also been described as an amalgam of spoken and written English (Plester & Wood, 2009) and was considered a highly phonological form of spelling.

Not only has this emerging writing style become a novel trend adopted by almost all users, but many educators have also claimed that it has dissipated in academic writing, especially in formal, graded tasks such as exams.

The rapid growth of this linguistic phenomenon of Texting has aroused curiosity, fear, and confusion among people (Crystal, 2008). Many assumptions and postulations about Texting have been set forth by sociologists, psychologists, educators, and journalists in an attempt to understand this writing style. Some of these claims and beliefs supported this new trend while others objected it. According to Crystal (2008), all the negative hype surrounding Texting is wrong; Texting is neither a new phenomenon nor does it harm language.

In Lebanon, the controversial topic of Texting had its share among educators. Some voiced concerns and complaints about this practice were noticed by some educators who claimed that Texting has leaked into students' writing due to its widespread and common use. One cannot ignore such concerns; yet, one cannot also generalize and maintain that Texting is detrimental given this vague lethargy. The question of whether Texting is improving or harming language is a broad, endlessly debatable one that cannot be answered without having studied this new practice beforehand.

Up to these days, Texting is still considered an understudied area in Lebanon regarding the paucity of research about this emerging writing style. Therefore, this paper offers an analysis of the perceptions of Texting in Lebanon, which will pave the way for more research to take place in the future. It will underline students' views of Texting and teachers' beliefs about its effects on students along with recommendations and suggestions shaped by their experience.

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- a. How do students perceive Texting in Lebanon? How are they psychologically and sociologically affected by this trend?
- b. How do professors perceive Texting in Lebanon with respect to their experience?

2. Theoretical Background

Several scholars have investigated the effects of Texting use on individuals' psychological well-being, social interaction, and literacy.

2.1 Psycho-Social Level

Walsh, White and Young (2009) conducted a study on young adults aged 16-24 to understand this new generation's motives to text in Australia. The results showed that cell phones are used to boost the sense of belongingness and social identity among this young generation. The participants claimed that the frequent contact with their peers through the use of Textisms promotes the perception of being loved, valued and popular among them. Yet, the participants who did not meet the texting standards stated that they were disliked by others. Therefore, the authors concluded that the texting behavior has been defined as a social norm, and those who text experience a great sense of belongingness, which in turns raises their self-esteem.

In another study, Thompson and Cupples (2008) highlighted people's attitudes towards Internet language. The participants in this study claimed that they cannot live without their mobiles. As a result of this strong interaction, the authors speculated that people who are strongly involved with Internet language experience a considerable degree of anxiety in its absence.

Moreover, Tayebenik and Puteh (2012) investigated students' perceptions of the use of texting and its effect on them by performing their study on students aged 20-23. They found that students text just to follow this recent trend, which is considered a prestigious act among their friends.

Leung (2007) studied the motives of 18 to 25 year-old-students to text and found that text messaging is appealing for individuals who are apprehensive about face-to-face interactions and who are more confident when texting for interpersonal encounters. The authors also stated that people text because it is fashionable and stylish.

2.2 Academic Level

Two explanations have been set forth to support the claim that the use of Texting has negative effects on literacy: *'the Low-Road/High-Road explanation of Transfer of Learning'* (Salomon &

Perkins, 1989) and '*the situated Learning*' (Brown et al., 1989). According to the former explanation, people exposed to Internet language might transfer these abbreviations into their informal writing (low-road) but make conscious decisions for correctly using Standard English when appropriate such as formal writing (high-road) (Salomon & Perkins, 1989). The latter, however, suggests that the use of Texting is transferred to general writing because abbreviations are learnt and not deliberately transferred (Brown et al., 1989). Thus, such transfer explanations can justify why literacy decreased among some texters.

Additionally, two other explanations emerged to further explain the negative effect of Texting on literacy: *the retroactive interference* and *decay theories*. The retroactive interference explanation states that recent information interferes with the acquired notions presented at an earlier time, while the decay explanation suggests that learnt information that is not used over time may be less accessible (Drouin, 2011). The application of those two theories to Texting revealed that constant exposure to Texting makes it hard to remember Standard English spelling, and if Standard English is not being used, it becomes more difficult to remember it with time (Drouin, 2011). Moreover, exposure to a misspelled word through Texting might have a harmful effect on the future spelling of that word (Drouin, 2011). This suggests that orthographical representations in adults are not steady; there might be many rather incorrect representations due to exposure to misspellings; therefore, constant exposure to Texting (interference) might lead to forgetting (decay) of Standard English representations.

Moreover, numerous studies have been conducted worldwide to examine the effect of texting on some specific language skills and the results were also controversial.

Tayebinik & Puteh (2012) examined the effect of Texting on grammar by conducting a study on 40 undergraduate students aged 20-23. The findings showed that students were well aware that Internet language harms their grammar skills, which was noticed in their writing by omitting subjects (e.g. *am reading*), disregarding capitalization (e.g. *i*), ignoring the use of articles (e.g. *internet* instead of *the internet*), and dropping auxiliary verbs such as 'do' in questions (e.g. *I know you?* instead of *Do I know you?*). The authors concluded that the adoption of unstructured sentences in texting has negatively affected grammar and caused confusion.

However, Dansieh (2011) suggested that some schools of thought state that Internet language does not affect grammar. He stated that since Textism can be considered as a language on its own, it does not influence students' ability to use English grammar. According to the author, even though every generation has its own jargon, grammar has not changed. When students acquire the basics of English, they will be able to differentiate between Internet language and correct Standard English and code-switch when needed.

In order to investigate the effect of the profuse use of Textisms on spelling and pronunciation, Aziz et al. (2013) performed a study on undergraduate students aged 19-25. The findings indicated that the participants' misspelled words were not only the result of using Textisms, but they are mainly due to their laziness, carelessness, or lack of knowledge. This shows that the effect of Texting is exaggerated, and in order for students to abbreviate words, they should know their correct standard spellings already (Aziz et al., 2013).

Similarly, Powell and Dixon (2011) examined the effect of exposure to Internet language on spelling. The study was performed on 94 British university students with a mean age of 24.4 years old whose spelling ability was assessed by pre- and post-tests i.e. before and after being exposed to three forms of the words: the correct spelling (tonight), the phonological misspelling (tonite), and Texting (2nite). The spelling scores decreased from pre- to post-tests after being exposed to misspellings, but they increased after being exposed to correct spelling and Internet language. The authors concluded that exposure to Texting has a positive impact on young adults' spelling as they can practice writing English words more.

In another study, Kim (2011) explored the effect of Internet language on vocabulary by performing a study on university students aged between 19 and 25 years old by creating a control and an experimental group. The findings proved that assisted mobile use in class through Texting helps learners extend their vocabulary knowledge due to the characteristics of mobile phones which are immediacy and portability. Such features motivate students and keep them engaged and interested.

Crystal (2008) also added that some educators complained about their students' use of Texting in their academic writing. The author did not deny such observations but wanted to investigate the reasons behind this dissipation of Texting. He defended Texting saying that such instances were sporadic and probably the result of inattention or rush rather than the inability to spell, punctuate, or abide by the language rules. Crystal did not ignore the fact that some students might be weak in writing, but this observation is not new as such students have long existed even before the rise of Texting.

Last but not least, Javed and Mahmood (2016) summarized the positive effects of Texting on students' literacy. Their findings revealed that:

1. The use of abbreviated words in messages remains restricted in spite of its fast dissipation;
2. Texting occurrences in academic writing is still limited to some instances; each medium has its own language style;
3. Students who text habitually are not losing their interest in formal English;
4. Students spend a great amount of their time with formal English writing activities compared to Texting;

5. It is impossible to use an abbreviated form of a word without having any knowledge about the full word;
6. Many trends come and go; same is going to happen to the use of text language;
7. English is a universal language that demands expansion over time, so the addition of new words and phrases into the Oxford English Dictionary shows the progress of this language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research is based on a ‘Constructivist/ Interpretivist’ paradigm which tends to rely on the participants’ perceptions of a particular situation (Creswell, 2003), given the fact that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p.12). In this thesis, opinions of instructors and students are both fundamental in building up the reality about Texting in Lebanon. The study is an exploratory one that aims at tackling a new issue on which little research has been done (Brown, 2006). Moreover, a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative data analysis is used in this study.

3.2 Participants and Context

The participants of this study are 400 students (52% males and 48% females) aged 19–25 from two different universities in Lebanon and 21 college and university English teachers. The number of interviewed teachers was tentative at first; it was then determined when there was no additional information obtained. The reason for picking university students among other age groups is that, at this level, students are knowledgeable of the English language and are assumed to have already acquired its basic rules.

3.3 Instruments and Data Collection

In order to interpret students’ opinions, all the participants had to fill out a questionnaire made up of 19 close-ended questions about their texting behavior. Web-based questionnaires using *Google Drive*- an online surveying platform- were thoroughly designed to measure Texting in the Lebanese context and were then processed through SPSS (The Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The first step consisted of scanning the entire database to remove any redundant, unintelligible, or irrelevant information and therefore employ a process of text reduction in order to make the obtained data more manageable (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Corbin & Holt, 2004). Potential items were then categorized by coding and labeling the database. The next step entailed reporting

and interpreting the obtained results (descriptive analysis) and crossing different variables through ‘Chi-square test’ (statistical analysis) to explore any emerging relation between those variables.

In the aim of obtaining a clearer insight into teachers’ perceptions, semi-structured interview were carried out with 21 English language teachers. Two types of interviews were used for this research: face-to-face and online interviews. Online interviews were conducted through synchronous technologies including video calls and IM applications that resemble face-to-face interactions with continuous exchange of information (Salmons, 2010).

Both the questionnaires and interviews were coded into themes.

4. Results

4.1 Students’ Perceptions

The habit of texting and quotidian use of cell phone. The obtained data showed that 82% of the participants use their mobiles very frequently. The results also revealed cell phones are perceived as texting devices (79%) rather than calling devices (21%). In terms of the services accessed most through cell phones, the results indicated that 76% of the participants access IM applications, 18% use the social networking applications, 5% use the internet browser, and only 1% check their emails. Last but not least, the findings revealed that 53% of the participants use Standard English when texting others, while 43% use Textisms. Only 4% opt for Arabic and do not use English at all.

Writing style. The reasons for adopting a specific writing style when texting varied among the respondents, where 54% of the participants use Standard English for the sake of clarity and to get their messages across in an understandable way, 32% believe it is more formal, 11% claim to be knowledgeable about the language, and 4% do not know how to use Textisms. As for the use of Textisms, 63% of the participants use such style because it is faster and it saves time, 20% unconsciously use Texting, 12% want to follow this trend, and 5% just want to hide their poor spelling.

Target audience. The findings proved that 56%, of the participants text their family members and close friends, 26% text almost everyone without restrictions, 18% just text their friends, and 1% claim to use texting channels with their professors.

Perceptions about Texting use. When asked about their beliefs upon using Textisms, 45% of the participants claimed to be indifferent about using it, 45% chose up to date, while only 10% chose valued, loved, and popular. Furthermore, upon receiving messages with Textisms, 43% of the

participants claimed that they would be annoyed because they have to decode the words, 33% of them remain indifferent, and 12% felt up to date. On another note, when asked about how others perceive their use of SE rather than Texting, 44% of the respondents stated that they are probably perceived as formal and serious, 32% think they are not into technology and texting, 15% think they could be thought of as old-fashioned, and only 10% claim that others might consider them as knowledgeable of the Standard English.

Phone dependency. The study results demonstrated that 70% of the participants agreed that they can spend a couple of days without their mobiles, while 30% of them cannot. When opening up about their perceptions, 53% of the participants claimed that leaving their phones would make them become lost, anxious, curious, and out of reach, while 36% stated that they become more relaxed.

Emoticon use. The use of emoticons by the participants can be described as moderately high (68%), mainly to visualize their state and attitude (60%), break the ice with others (17%), soften harsh comments (13%), and be friendly and funny (10%). In general, 87% of emoticon use was associated with positive reactions while 13% was related to negative ones.

Texting and formal communication. Another area that this research has focused on is communication. The findings revealed that 68% of the respondents believed it is inappropriate to employ Texting in formal writing, while 32% think it is acceptable to do so. Moreover, 67% of the respondents use oral communication channels like phone calls or face to face interactions, while 33% use written communication channels like emails and IMs. Based on their previous answers, the respondents had to justify the choice they made by picking the answer that best expresses their thoughts. Among those who prefer oral channels with professors, 60% prefer oral interaction with their teachers because of the non-verbal messages they get such as voice tone and intonation, facial expressions and gestures, while 40% prefer oral communication simply because it is fast and they can get a direct reply. As for the ones who resort to written communication channels, 59% state that written channels are fast and easy. The remaining 41% claim that written mediums help them express themselves more because they are shy, which goes in line with Leung's (2007) finding that texting appeals to shy people. The participants were also asked to choose the electronic written-medium they use most upon communicating with their teachers using written channels. The findings showed that 65% of the participants use e-mails, 32% use IM applications like Whatsapp, and 3% use SMS, with 91% of the respondents opting for SE while only 9% use Texting.

4.2 Teachers' Perceptions

Texting in a formal setting. The majority of the teachers agreed that Textism occurs infrequently in formal settings. Some of the answers were: “*seldom*”, “*infrequently*”, “*very very few instances*”, “*once in a while*”, “*rarely*”, “*not often*” etc. A few instructors, however, stated that they witnessed Textism very frequently in their students’ writing: “*all the time*”, “*always*”, “*all over the semester period*”, whereas only one instructor did not spot Textism in students’ writing saying “*No, it (Textism) doesn’t happen (in class)*” as students know the repercussion. The participants also reported their reaction upon spotting Textism. Most of the instructors stated that deduct grades, while the rest provide oral or written feedback and do not consider Texting a language mistake. All the teachers also seem to accept students’ use of Texting in their emails and do not give it much attention. Below are some of the answers provided by teachers regarding their reaction to Texting in class:

- [...] they have to be taught the hard way by deducting grades so that they won’t repeat the mistakes again!
- I deduct grades. They should write using proper grammatically correct sentences
- I deal with it in a funny way. I believe that you should not reprimand students if you want to achieve academic learning.
- I call their attention to it and ask them to be careful. Most of the time they do not even see it or realize it. They do it unconsciously.

Moreover, upon being asked about the reason behind students’ use of Texting in formal writing, all the instructors agreed that Texting affects formal writing for three reasons. First, the daily use and exposure to Textism through various easily accessible platforms urges students to unconsciously use shorthand writing. Second, students use Textisms in order to save time. Third, Texting is used to hide poor spelling and incorrect grammar mistakes.

However, opinions were split regarding whether such reasons vary from one student to another or not. Some teachers stated that reasons vary based on the students’ level of proficiency and their degree of exposure to Texting, while others believed that there is no difference among all students.

The examples below show some of the answers to this question:

- Technology age.. students rarely read.. reasons vary yes, between those who are addicted to the internet and those who are not.
- Laziness or rush.. I guess those are two reasons.. and probably some students might unconsciously use them as they get into this habit of texting.

- Since students are using texted messages on a daily basis, I think habit is the main reason why texting is affecting their writing. There might be other reasons as well, like laziness or the inability to spell a word correctly.

Regarding language acquisition, most of the teachers related the degree of interference to the students themselves: their proficiency level as well as their vulnerability and exposure to Texting, while others were a little more explicit in their answers where they either agreed or disagreed with the statement. Some of the answers are illustrated below:

- It depends if the students have poor spelling and weak sentence structure..yeah they get affected.
- Maybe if they use the texted words very very frequently the mistakes become fossilized and they will forget them eventually.. Lack of practice of the right word leads to forgetting the right spelling.
- Of course, because they are used to Texting whenever they are communicating with friends or whatever.. so it kind of affects their writing whenever they are doing something formal.
- Well, you are putting this as if it is a big threat.. no I do not think their use of Textism is that dangerous.. it is a trend and an easy way of expression.. It cannot interfere in any well acquired notions.

Effect of Texting. Upon being asked about the effect of Texting on SE, most of the teachers were negative saying that it harms its grammar, spelling, vocabulary and other areas, while some teachers were more positive about it since it enables people to express themselves.

- Texting affects students writing skills negatively as it impacts their spelling as well as their vocabulary usage.
- No! On the contrary.. I think Texting is a way to run away from rules!!!

Texting and the future of language. Asking the instructors about the future of English was inevitable. The majority of the teachers recognized the change but did not consider it a threat, yet only three instructors saw that Texting, in terms of language change, is harmful and hazardous, stating that the whole corpus of language will be affected in the future as shorthand writing will substitute SE. Below are some examples of teachers' thoughts:

- Yes, it causes threat..and I believe in the future a new language will emerge... the language of Texting.
- I think that language has always been fluid and will continue to change to adapt to new times. I do not think it is necessarily a threat, but an adaptation to the changing world.

Texting and academic writing. Instructors were asked about the integration of Texting in the classroom setting. The results proved that most of the teachers accept the use of Texting in classes

with moderation and only in non-graded tasks as SE should be used in formal, graded writing, while the rest completely disagree with the idea of integrating any form of Textisms in their classes.

- Yes, definitely. I already do that, but it is reserved for communication and students questions, not for lesson explanation.. also in notes and brainstorming.
- [...] when they take notes.. also when they are doing any listening activity.
- No never.. it must not be allowed [...] Not even [in note taking]; it becomes habitual..it is informal and incorrect.

Moreover, the majority of the teachers believe that they should not employ Texting in their writing while only three teachers admitted using it on the board because of time constraints. The examples below show some of the different perceptions for this question:

- If a mother is a smoker, it will be more difficult to explain to her kids why they should not smoke, right? I don't use it then.
- I don't use Textism at all in my class, because as a language teacher I have the obligation to teach my students correct language. I even make sure everything I write on the board is spelt correctly because students photograph the board instead of taking notes.
- Indeed..Yes, spontaneously I use Textism from time to time but of course with limits.

Emoticon Use. The last theme aimed at exploring teachers' opinions about their students' use of emoticons. All the teachers agreed that emoticons have become a non-verbal form of language used to express their attitudes when words fail to do so. Most of the teachers seem to accept emoticons from their students when used moderately and in the correct setting. Two teachers said that they never received emoticons from students but would react positively upon receiving them, while only one teacher objected its use. The selected answers below summarize the instructors' perceptions about the use of emoticons and their reactions:

- I am okay with emoticons... even though they are informal.. I am friendly with students, so if they send me Whatsapp message it is ok..Yet, I always explain to them that they should never use them in formal situations like emails or essays.
- I have never received any from my students.. I think that they understand that emoticons are not appropriate.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate both students' and instructors' perceptions of Texting use in Lebanon. The findings showed that the participants are highly exposed to their smart phones, which expose them in turn to Textisms, notably Instant Messaging (IM) applications. The traditional perception of cell phones as calling devices has changed and so have the services. All

companies today are facilitating the usage of electronic written channels by lowering their cost and creating numerous economic bundles for their clients (e.g. Whatsapp bundle). Yet, despite such massive exposure, SE remains the most adopted writing style by students as English is a third language in Lebanon right after Arabic and French, and the participants' repertoire of English is still probably limited.

RQ 1: How do students perceive Texting in Lebanon? How are they psychologically and sociologically affected by this trend?

Texting is being used simply because it is faster, while SE is used because it is clear and understandable. Despite its clarity, SE might be considered time consuming for texters who are always in a rush. Additionally, Texting is used in informal situations, mainly with relatives and close friends rather than new acquaintances and professors, due to its easiness and the high degree of familiarity that prevails in this circle. This proves that the act of Texting is only associated with close people where the entire communication is based on the frequent and fast exchange of messages. The study also showed that texters believe that they are perceived as strict and serious if they do not use the new technological writing style. Such finding correlates with Tayebnik and Puteh's (2012) and Leung's (2007) statements that those who do not meet the texting standards are disliked by others.

Looking at the beliefs associated with Texting, this study shows that in Lebanon, unlike other countries, people do not seem to give much attention to Textisms. Many youngsters in Lebanon are rather indifferent about the act of sending and receiving Textism. Likewise, many respondents felt up to date, which goes in line with Tayebnik and Puteh's (2012) and Leung's (2007) findings that using Texting is a fashionable or up-to-date act among friends. However, the low percentage of participants who reported being loved, valued or popular upon using Textisms contradicts Walsh, White, and Young's (2009) hypothesis where the majority of texters reported being loved, valued and popular. This is probably due to the nature of texters. Lebanese texters in this study, being non-native speakers of English, are indifferent about using abbreviated English words as they tend to blend three languages together instead of solely texting in English. Not only do texters have perceptions about their own texting behavior, but they also consider others' views too. This shows that the students seem to focus on the content of their message rather than the form. However, and despite such prevailing indifference, texters believe themselves to be up to date when using Texting as this trend is recent and Lebanese people always get excited about any new trend, yet they get annoyed upon receiving unclear messages full of Textism, especially SE users, and directly seek clarification. This is probably due to the fact that the Lebanese people are known to be hot-

tempered. Texters' belief that they are perceived consider them strict and serious if they do not use Texting seems to correlate with Tayebenik and Puteh's (2012) and Leung's (2007) hypothesis that senders who do not meet the texting standards are disliked by others.

Furthermore, and compared to other countries, students seem to be less dependent on their cell phones and can manage without them for a couple of days despite the negative consequences. This means that texters do become relaxed upon leaving their phones from constant notifications and messages, but their devices remain the only tool to keep in touch with the outer world. Such findings correlate with Thompson and Cupples's (2008) hypothesis stating that texters cannot live without their mobiles, and those who are strongly involved in the texting behavior experience a considerable degree of anxiety in its absence.

The research also focused on emoticons which are very often used in IM applications to simply express positive attitudes. Due to the lack of face to face communication, texters opt for such graphics to clarify their messages by strengthening their thoughts with electronic non-verbal cues even with professors.

Regarding formal interactions, we can clearly notice that oral communication is considered the best way to connect with people through face to face interaction as it reduces any misunderstanding and exposes people to various non-verbal cues that clarify the direct exchange between people. Even when using electronic-written mediums, a formal channel of communication like the e-mail will be used with SE as the adopted writing style. The study also shows that students make a conscious shift between Texting and SE; for instance, in academic writing, students know they could be penalized for the use of Texting, or could risk making their assignments less understandable and hardly decipherable. Such results correlate with Drouin and Davis's (2009) findings that the majority of the students believed that shortened language in formal communication is inappropriate.

RQ 2: How do professors perceive Texting in Lebanon with respect to their experience?

Moving on to a more professional point of view, teachers believe that Texting is definitely affecting language; yet, this effect is not major and threatening as claimed by many linguists and educator around the world, at least not in Lebanon. The English language is not static but dynamic and subject to any development. Texting definitely affects language and changes some parts of it, but the idea of this informal style becoming the future of English is just propaganda.

Despite its emergence, the use of Textism is still not very prominent in the academic setting. Its use is still sporadic, and it is based on occasional instances of texted words. When Texting appears in academic writing, teachers mainly take action by penalizing students and deducting points upon spotting abbreviations, thus showing that Textism is considered as any other major language

mistake. Besides, teachers think that Textism is implemented in formal writing unconsciously and out of habit as students are constantly exposed to shorthand writing and platforms that encourage such writing style. This, however, contradicts with what the students claimed previously, where only 20% said that they unconsciously use Texting, but correlates with the Situated-learning theory mentioned earlier. Students resort to Texting because it is easier and faster as they might be short on time when writing. Teachers also noted that the degree of interference of Texting in students' writing seems to be affected by their proficiency level and degree of exposure. The more students are exposed to Textism and the lower their proficiency level is, the higher the occurrences of shortened writing are.

Instructors these days seem to be less concerned and more open to change which correlates with Crystal's (2008) statement that this writing style adds a new dimension to the language, yet the long-term effects of such practice are negligible. They support the organized and structured implementation of Texting to help and assist language learning noting that its random use could be detrimental to language. Texting could be acceptable in emails, note-taking tasks, non-graded assignments, or brainstorming but not in formal and graded writings. Students should be able to make a conscious shift between the two writing styles and use them appropriately. Teachers also consider themselves as role models for their students, which is why they tend to avoid abbreviations in their own in-class writings except for some correction symbols.

As for emoticons, instructors consider them as a way to visualize their reactions and attitudes and add a friendly tone to the conversation by breaking the ice with funny emojis. They seem to accept them from students if used respectfully within the limits and in electronic mediums only.

6. Research Suggestions

Many limitations of this present research warrant consideration. First, this study was restricted in the number and level of participants. A wider and more diverse population could have led to more conclusions. This can be achieved in the future by performing a longitudinal study with a larger number of participants from different institutions and covering more areas in Lebanon. Moreover, future studies could also collect data from students' written examinations to investigate real instances of Texting in academic writing. Finally, many teachers suggested incorporating Texting in the academic setting; thus, looking for ways to incorporate this writing style academically might be useful to approach this new generation and increase their productivity.

7. Conclusion

Technology is taking over almost every single aspect of humans' life; its presence is inevitable yet mandatory. This is the 21st century: the age of speed and progress where mobile communication has radically changed all concepts and notions. Language is no exception; it has also been affected by mobile technology thus giving rise to a new electronic writing style called Texting. Some people like Texting, some despise it, while others simply feel perplexed by this new trend, especially in the educational sector. The students we teach today are constant followers of technology. Instructors of the English language should aim at teaching the proper language and achieving their predefined objectives while keeping up with students' progress. There is no need to fear this emerging writing style or consider it a taboo in class; it can be implemented academically if monitored properly by the instructors. Such opportunities prove that language learning is a dynamic and evolving process that enables students to acquire in the optimal ways. However, keeping up with technology and staying up to date does not have to be done at the expense of proper language learning. After all, learners should be taught correct English, and they should be well aware that Texting is only a means to an end- it is a way of expression that should bolster language learning and not ruin it. No matter what, students will keep on Texting. Texting is the prevailing trend nowadays, but other developments might emerge with time and affect language in other ways. Nothing is guaranteed with technology, but everything could be amended to serve language learning and cater for this generation's needs.

References

- Auerbach, C. E. & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. New York: New York University Press.
- Aziz, S., Shamim, M., Aziz, M. F., Avais, P. (2013). The impact of Texting/SMS language on academic writing of students- What do we need to panic about? *Elixir*, 55, 12884- 12890.
- Brown, R. B. (2006). *Doing your dissertation in business and management: The reality of research and writing*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Brown, J.S., Collins, A., & Duguid, D. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, 18(1), 32-42.
- Choudhury, M., Saraf, R., Jain, V., Mukherjee, A., Sarkar, S. & Basu. A. (2007). Investigation and modeling of the structure of Texting language. *IJDAR*, 10, 157–174. doi: 10.1007/s10032-007-0054-0
- Corbin, J., & Holt, N. D. (2004). *Grounded theory*. In C. Lewin (Ed.), *Research methods in the social sciences* (pp. 49-55). London: Sage Publication.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *Txtng: The gr8 db8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dansieh, S. A. (2011). SMS Texting and its potential impacts on students' written communication skills. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 1(2), 222-229. doi: 10.5539/ijel.v1n2p222
- Drouin, M. (2011). College students' text messaging, use of textese and literacy skills. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 27(1), 65-67. doi: 10.1111/j.13652729.2010.00399.x
- Javed, S. & Mahmood, M. (2016). Language change in texting: Situation analysis of graduate students. *Journal of Literature, Languages, and Linguistics*, 26, 78-94.
- Kim, H. S. (2011). Effects of SMS text messaging on vocabulary learning. *Multimedia-Assisted Language Learning*, 14(2), 159-180.
- Leung, L. (2007). Unwillingness-to-communicate and college students' motives in SMS mobile messaging. *Telematics and Informatics*, 24, 115-129. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2006.01.002
- Mertens, D. M. (2005). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Plester, B., & Wood, C. (2009). Exploring relationships between traditional and new media literacies: British preteen texters at school. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, 1108-1129. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01483.x

-
- Powell, D., & Dixon, M. (2011). Does SMS text messaging help or harm adults' knowledge of standard spelling? *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 27, 58-66. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2729.2010.00403.x
 - Salmons, J. E. (2010). *Online interviews in real time*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
 - Salomon, G., & Perkins, D. N. (1989). Rocky roads to transfer: Rethinking mechanisms of a neglected phenomenon. *Educational Psychologist*, 24, 113-142.
 - Tayebnik, M. & Puteh, M. (2012). Txt msg n English language literacy. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 66, 97-105. doi: 0.1016/j.sbspro.2012.11.251
 - Thompson, L. & Cupples, J. (2008). Seen and not heard? Text messaging and digital sociality. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9(1), 95-108. doi: 10.1080/14649360701789634
 - Varnhagen, C. K., McFall G. P., Pugh, N., Routledge, L., Sumida-MacDonald, H. & Kwong, T. E. (2010). lol: new language and spelling in instant messaging. *Read Writ*, 23, 719–733. doi: 10.1007/s11145-009-9181-y
 - Walsh, S. P., White, K. M. & Young, R. M. (2009). The phone connection: A qualitative exploration of how belongingness and social identification relate to mobile phone use amongst Australian youth. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 19(3), 225-240.