

Is texting really hurting our literary skills: How to overcome its effects.

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Abstract: *While evaluating final examination answer sheets, I come to know that students are overshadowed with the concept of writing in the way of texting. Their overuse of Android phones having so many social networking sites has made their language even rotten. They subconsciously write Gr8 instead of Great. The idea of presenting this paper struck into my mind because we basically learn and use English as second Language. English did not come to us naturally. So, we have to use correct English with proper use of Grammar, spellings, construction and syntax. The present paper will throw light on the after effects of texting and give some suggestions to overcome them. Those who learn English as second language have to be cautious about their Grammar, Pronunciation and construction. But this pseudo-modernism of language is really making an ugly look of language. We can say that using unconventional grammar when texting is not a consistent sign of poor grammatical abilities, although there may be links between some aspects of grammatical skill and grammatical violations in text messages. Spellings have become so degradable that language has lost its beauty. This paper is an attempt to bring this problem into notice and to find its solution. As we the teachers have to promote technology based literacy along with its bad consequences.*

Keywords: *Grammar, Pronunciation, Construction, Language, Writing, Communication, Literacy*

I. Introduction

“Diz iz ma lyf n I liv it by ma rulezz.” A simple sentence that could have been written as “**This is my life and I live it by my rules.**” has been converted into the former. Log on to Facebook, or Twitter, or Hi5, and you’ll find thousands of young kids writing their thoughts in a language that is supported by no dictionary and has no grammar, yet it is a culture of its own. It is enough to bring a tear to the “GrammarNazis”, and a heart stroke to the English language professor. But, such is the state of affairs of the language written by today’s generation. What started as a simple remoulding of a few words to write concisely followed on to become a trend of being perceived as “cool”, has ultimately become a huge problem for the linguistic in all of us. When the youth writes like that, you feel the urge to tell them about the glorious history and culture of English language that they are killing under the pretence of sounding modern and extraordinary.

II. Origin of the “SMS lingo”

Understanding the history of such IM languages is important as it uncovers the nature and reason of writing our thoughts in such precise style, not caring enough for the phonemes. So, in the 90s, when the phone was not a basic commodity and a rather, luxury, Short Messaging Service, SMS, as it is commonly known as was introduced. In those times, SMS could be a maximum of 80 characters, which later extended to 160 characters per message. This was due to the technological aspect of data being carried on the telephone lines. So, naturally, to fit in the entire meaningful conversation, people started removing a few articles and then some adjectives, and then some adverbs, and now, the entire language is a myth. So, from what started as a convenience, has turned itself into a menace where it is hard for the youth to even write the correct spelling of simple words because they don’t express themselves with the correct spelling at all. We all come across hundreds of professional e-mails written in such pathetic language that standard 4th students can do a better job of writing them. At that time, we teachers feel need of changing this texting into a formal language conversation because it is making students language shaky and not on the standards and heights we wish.

III. Why is it hurting?

It is not just the emotional aspect of the beautiful language that we all speak and write and communicate with, but, the simple knowledge that people are learning the correct form of language and yet, this lingo is lucrative to them. Possibly, this glitters beyond the gold of good grammar, and probably, a good English construct (whether a paragraph, or an essay, or even a blog post) is not as overwhelming to read as a sentence written in a way that burns my head to comprehend the meaning. It is hurting the youth more than it looks at the outset, as people have taken it beyond social networks and beyond virtual existence. It is a part of our reality and identity now. This makes one think that in the next 25-30 years, when the language will be looking for its

shining bright stars to produce some literary brilliance, we'll be reading news headlines and research papers and journals in an alien language best known to just the writer.

Language, writing and students:

Texting or Cyber slang is a term used to describe shortcuts, alternative words, or even symbols used to convey thoughts in an electronic document. Because so many digital media limit the number of characters an author can use at a time, students are becoming more creative to get the most out of their limited space. Common cyber-slang terms that have made their way into popular speech include BFF (best friends forever), LOL (laugh out loud) and WTF (what the ____). Writing is a skill developed through continuous efforts and careful attention to the subject and language in which one is writing. If someone writes with giving attention to Grammar, structure and innovative ideas of communication, naturally he/she will improve in the knowledge of language. How can we forget Bacon, "**writing maketh an exactman.**" But here the question arise in our mind is, Texting is making our language sloppy and lazy as we have forgotten real way of writing properly and spelling words correctly. As a teacher of undergraduate students, I have seen and noticed many times that they write in their abbreviations as they do in SMS, WhatsApp or other social networking apps and sites. Sometimes it looks very funny and absurd when we talk and discuss some grave issues as we are explaining some beautiful poems by Victorian poet and we, teachers, find our answers in modern texting form. This irritates us and naturally it will curtail our morale as a teacher. It is really true that students use this texting language in their class notes, group studies and while taking notes but when it comes to taking examinations, they skip to their formal language writing. But it is also true that they sometimes jump to this slang while writing their examinations. This actually is the matter of habit. The way of writing texts remain so much present in their subconscious mind that they write unconsciously in this weird language of texting.

IV. Methodology and its outcome: Student's opinion on the topic:

This topic needs some research from students too. I explored different students with different campus, studying in altogether different courses. First, I made a written questionnaire to understand about texting's impact on students. I first Pearl Academy, New Delhi, and met students doing degree course in fashion and textile designing who fill it and opine orally;

- Our spellings have become so shaky that we sometimes feel like kids going to primary classes. Spelling errors are real in an awful state and we feel presence of auto correct all the time. This situation become worst when it comes to examination or documentation is black and white. We feel out of focus and subconsciously search our Phones or Laptops.
- Because we all are reading writing, learning and using English as second language so we feel a great mess with the use of Grammar and also we instantly use our MT when we don't find any word or expression that's the worst part. This all is because of our mixed use of language while texting not because we lack in second language i.e. English.
- Another problem is mixing or blending of singular and plural as well as we makes each word a verb as and when required.
- A student confess that we have become so much habitual of typing that we neither use pen or pencil in class room instead we use typing or click screen shots. When it comes to written documentation, we don't make justice, not because we have no idea, but we nearly have not practiced writing.
- A student opines that Abbreviations we use in texting so much entered in our mind that we write them here and there. This sometimes changed the meaning completely.

Similarly, my interaction and survey with students of Delhi University, B.A. (Hons.) English literature is also a mixed bag of feelings and result. The very first students says, "Haters gonna hate, lovers gonna love. Those who want to will make the extra effort to do even in the most arduous circumstances others won't even take notice".

Other says, "Texting may or may not affect literacy. Lethargy is, by and large, responsible for "abbreviations but with the emergence of 'smart phones', penning down is expected to not take a toll on either their cognition or otherwise physical strength. Ultimately, it all comes down to you".

An activist of the group says, "I don't think Texting is affecting literacy in any way. It is just a recreational activity. An informed individual would set his/her priorities straight and not let them get addicted to it. Though, we youngsters, find it difficult to resist our temptations of using slangs. And there are many other major factors that contribute other than texting".

My own interaction with them observes that students cannot leave this texting at all. It's an integral part of their writing but with continuous pruning from teachers they will understand when not to use this unconventional language. They admit that it is affecting spellings, grammar and formal writings. To them texting is recreational too as it give boost to their tired brain at the time of leisure and above all speed up the conversation. They can't leave it but they want to learn differentiation of usage.

V. Texting: A fad or a trend, killing communication:

Texting can be called a fad or fashion which actually is taking the beauty of language and killing communication completely. We know that English is an evolving language and after so many years of use texting has become its integral part. After nearly 20 years of continuous and successful use of texting language we find paradox results. While texting is convenient and effective, it is degrading communication skills. There was a time when letter writing is considered as a mode of writing which really increase language understanding and make one more accomplished in Target Language. But use of texting has made communication easier, faster and time saving on one hand but it is killing our skills of communications. The reason is below:-

- **Little or no room for personal interaction:** - The worst part of texting is, that it minimise the chances of eye to eye or one to one contact. As a result our emotions and crux of the conversation remain unnoticed. Imagine a personal emotion or some smileys!!! They can't express the same feelings. These are major obstacles in the texting of youngsters.
- **Texting reduces the one to one conversation** which brings dryness and lack of emotions in conversation. Body language and its impact in conversation remain absent.
- **Texting minimises the role of Grammar and spellings.** Last year, I made a spelling see competition and realised that even undergraduates are lacking in some simple spellings that too because of slangs they use for texting.
- **Texting erased socializing and dialogue between man to man.** We have been brought up learning all the time that Man is a social animal but that social ambience is totally finished by the advent of texting, devices and social Networking sites.
- **Texting and use of abbreviations sometimes make the meaning change.** I was just googling some facts and a long list of text messages found where even dignitaries fail to understand the content of text message and it was totally misunderstood.

VI. Texting and Classroom study:

We, teachers and parents all know clearly now texting is impacting our social and education system in a way that could not be imagined. I made a group of 20 students of my college who are really good not only in studies but gizmo savvy too. We made a group on WhatsApp as well as Edmodo to discuss daily chapters which I was actually teaching in class. In 5 to 7 days I started feeling change not only in their behaviour but in the way they write and express themselves. First, they started not giving answers in classroom or maybe they were hesitant of speaking. May be they find it easier to fit in front of some PC and write their answers. Similarly what they write in their answer is full of slangs such as:-

- Thx 4 reading
- Comnt b-lw
- SWYP (so what is your problem)
- TTYL (talk to you later)

All this made me irritated and then I took help of JB Priestley's essay "On habits" and explain them that habits really sometimes become crutches. So, no need to remain engrossed in them. They realise their mistake and try to write in language they are expected. . Although there are examples of students using 'textisms' in their work, children often make other mistakes in their writings too. As Crystal suggests, these mistakes are not a result of the use of text messaging, they are "evidence of carelessness or lack of thought rather than a systematic inability to spell and punctuate" (Crystal 2008:153). In that case to say text messaging is affecting literacy is quite true in present circumstances, although from 1950 to 1990, we and our teachers had never used textisms in academic work. There are many examples of text messaging affecting literacy, but there are also many linguists (for instance) who believe text messaging is actually a good thing. When we talk about Asian countries, where English is read, write and used as Second Language, I think it sometimes give bad effects. Students do not have exposure in their families to correct them. In that case this habit of using textism becomes a headache. It is important to note, however, that these studies focus on teens and young adults who have already developed written language skills. As the younger generation grows up with cell phone and texting, it will be critical to determine the impact of texting on literacy when children are learning texting in tandem with more formal academic language (Plaster, Wood, & Joshi, 2009). It will also be important for teachers to provide learning opportunities to help students develop digital literacies (Ortlieb, 2012). More research is needed to determine whether texting has educational benefits, and to frame the conversation about texting in terms of evidence and data. However, the available research does seem to suggest that, at the very least, texting is not harming youths' writing skills and, in some cases, may actually have educational benefits.

VII. Teacher's role in improving texting language

The main purpose of choosing this topic is to inform all fellow teachers that texting is really affecting literacy. When I was doing a survey in the schools/ colleges of my town, some astonishing facts come to my knowledge. Grammar is the weakest point while learning second language. These students whose native/MT is not English are really weak in Grammar. This use of texting is making Grammar weaker in future. Students are really not bothered about the bad impact of texting. It is causing some troubles in the path teaching fluent English speaking, reading and writing. While collecting data for this topic, some interesting facts come in my knowledge. In the year 2005 we have only 35% students using cell phones with SMS service, where as in 2015, with the advent of Android phones and many social Networking sites and Apps, this ratio increased to 85%. In undergraduate level every 92 student use Android phone out of 100. Parents say that they can't say their ward not to use texting, as its integral part of their life. If they don't use it, their friends call them outdated.

VIII. Grammatical Development and Texting:

This is quite true that grammatical violations are really used in text messaging. We researched and collected data in three groups: Secondary school students, Under graduate students and Post graduate students. They were asked to perform a test containing written and spoken English where exercises were set for the use of Grammar and some spelling exercises. Secondary school students deviate rules of Grammar but really good in spellings. But the worst result is my target Group of undergraduate students who did both mistakes; spellings and grammatical. Post graduate students are smarter who managed to do better.

Today we cannot imagine walking in any Campus without seeing students glued on their phones doing texting as fast as they can. An Interesting fact is this; they sometimes even don't see their screen but type. In one of the present findings, texting is called the most usable communication mode. In the history of nearly 22 years it has spread like an epidemic all over the world. On the one hand, it has shorten the distances, made students and teachers more accessible to each other but when we talk about abbreviations, which are popular, really a warning bell rings in our minds as alarms. It asks us to guide our students regarding the bad or side effects of texting. Present studies say that an undergraduate students use 100 to 150 times messaging a day. But that does not mean that it always for negative side. We have some interesting facts too that came out while talking and discussing with students coming from other streams too.

- **Texting and reading:** is a good connection. Studies say that students read texts which build habit of reading and understanding as some abbreviations need time and patience to understand.
- **Texting and Phonology:** There is a big connection between two. Students have to use their brain in thinking which words to combine which to put together, that even improve their understanding of pronunciation, voice modulation etc.
- **Texting and Vocabulary:** Students play and learn vocabulary by texting. In classroom, they feel burden when they were asked to learn vocabulary, but that vocabulary is increased unintentionally by using texting.
- **Texting and use of words:** Students use and create words, spellings which ask and promote them to create new words. Every year, dictionaries increase new words and some of them are created by texting only.
- **Texting is creative:** Naturally, students always try to invent new styles, new stand by breaking words and writing them in an innovative way. They build a new creativity among them. They use and create new words.
- **Texting increase Abbreviations:** Abbreviations are a part of language and evolution of language depend on it. OK, the abbreviation started from America and it is known as the most popular abbreviation. We have example of many abbreviations which Oxford Dictionary added from time to time when they became popular.

IX. Suggestions for English Language Teachers:

Texting has become every day task that almost every youngster remain involve in their daily practice. The broken language they use is often accepted and welcome among their friend circle as well as family. But it is observed that it often plays a negative effect on the literary skill of students as they don't differentiate and distinguish when they need to write formally in literary language. I think we need to research more about the use of textism in our daily life as well as classroom study. With long term use of texting, it may be possible that students mistook between their personal conversation and formal writing. Sometimes it is even observed that people use texting language even in formal and official mail which looks annoying. The wise advice as a teacher is, we must ask our students to minimise the use of texting, and use proper grammar and spelling to make the beauty of language alive. There are some activities we can do classes to differentiate the language of texting and formal language.

- **Practice some formal Meeting conversation.** Give your students a situation in which they have to talk formally and ask them to write a paragraph which is grammatically correct and they should use some literary language with correct spellings.
- **Vocabulary Test:** The worst impact of texting is, it make vocabulary rotten. So, we should give our students tasks of learning and writing some unabbreviated and tough spellings.
- **Ask them to write fast:** The practitioners of texting say that it makes the writing speed faster. But we must ask and educate our students about proper way of taking notes as they find texting handy in taking notes. We must give them some brain storming exercises to reduce the effect of texting.

X. Conclusion:

I personally believe that texting is really making written language a pot of broken pieces. Sometimes students use it subconsciously. Texting has become any every day task that normally every youngster engage in on a day to day basis. The use of texting is starting to become more accepted among the younger generation.

There have been suggestions from both media sources and ELT that texting may have a negative effect on the literacy skills of students. Perhaps that biggest problem is that students do not distinguish between times when they need to write formally without using texting, and when they are writing informally and the use of texting is acceptable. With more long term studies and concentration from teachers, it may be possible for students to determine if the use of texting does indeed have negative effects on literacy. It may be possible that they use in their personal correspondences into their formal writing in a workplace environment. Until the time that concrete results are acquired to suggest that texting has deleterious effects, it may be wise to encourage students to lessen their use of texting, and to instead use proper grammar and spelling while they are using texting as a form of conversation and communication among their peer group. The explosion of social media has completely changed the way we communicate with each other. Whether via laptop computers, advanced mobile devices, Wi-Fi or enhanced 3G wireless networks, we are more connected than ever to everyone we know.

While this communications boom has been praised for its educational benefits, a negative side effect is beginning to take hold in our classrooms. Cyber slang is suspected of damaging students' writing acumen. So, we the teachers have to be cautious for the use of texting language and give message of using it with restrictions. There is one thing for sure; texting is not going to go away. We have to explore the opportunities for mobile-assisted literacy and manage the risks and consequences.

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