

SMS Language: A Grace or A Curse? Perceived Effects and Transfer of Texting Features in Moroccan EFL Students' Formal Writing

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ABSTRACT

Writing has always been an important language skill for students to develop throughout their academic career, and students must pay close attention to accuracy, appropriateness, and language standards during the writing process. Students' increasing use of technology in daily life raises the question of whether such standards can be maintained in the modern era. This study investigates students' and teachers' perceptions of the influence of SMS language on the formal writing of second-semester English Department students at Ibn Zohr University, and examines whether features associated with SMS language are present in students' formal written samples. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The sample consisted of 86 students and 15 teachers. Data were collected through questionnaires (student and teacher) and analysis of students' formal written samples, and were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively using SPSS. A majority of students reported transferring SMS-related habits into their formal writing at least occasionally, and a number of SMS-associated features (notably spelling irregularities and reduced use of punctuation) were identified in the writing samples, though not to an overwhelming degree. All fifteen teachers reported perceiving a negative change in students' formal writing since the widespread adoption of mobile texting, and the great majority indicated that they penalise such features when encountered. Because the design is correlational and cross-sectional, these findings are best understood as evidence of a strong, shared perception — among both students and teachers — that SMS language negatively affects formal writing, rather than as proof of a causal relationship. The findings carry a number of implications for Moroccan EFL students and teachers.

Keywords: Writing, SMS language, Adolescents, Language change, Computer-Mediated Communication, English as a Foreign Language.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, Mobile technology has become rampant and abundant across the world more than any other communication technology. It is used by children and adults. The language in use has witnessed a lot of changes due to the emergence of new information and communication channels which play a very vital role in our everyday life. According to Lee (2002), it is “a continuing assault of technology on formal written language use” (para. 1).

Gone are the days when it was commonly known among people to communicate using a traditional and primitive way, namely the pen and paper. However, with the advent of technology, it is totally declined to the computer, the Internet, and these smart devices such as mobile phones. At the present time, the prevailing channels of communication that enable people in general to express their thoughts, ideas, and interact using written language are considered to be short text messages (SMS language) via mobile phones or sometimes via the Internet, Electronic Mail, Instant messages, and Social and video networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter... etc.

Adults, teenagers, and children feel like to communicate with the outside world (friends, relatives...etc.) by way of text messages. This preferable choice does not come in a vacuum; rather it is owing to the rapid pace of writing with this current technology. It is probable that every individual owns a computer or at least a cell phone where he/she can keep in touch with other people. This daunting, scary, and threatening technology seems to be abundant

in our communities, especially among students at schools or universities.

More often than not, people prefer to text using SMS language simply because it is time-saving, effort, and even cost. To illustrate more, in comparison to making calls, it is much cheaper. Communication through SMS as one type of interaction among teenagers is referred to as computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC is divided into two types: first, the synchronous CMC, whereby the communication occurs “in real time”, such as Real Time Chat and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). The second type is asynchronous CMC, whereby communication occurs “in postponed time” such as SMS and e-mails (Crystal 2001). This latter type does not require the participants to be online at the time of speaking so that they can receive and send messages (Hard af Segerstad 2002; Baron et al. 2005; December 2005; Goggin 2004).

Granted that, SMS has been considered the most common, useful, and applicable instrument of communication among people. Yet, the Standard or formal language appears to be under a jeopardised threat (Russell, 2010). The SMS language has become the worry and interest of so many linguists and language purists alike. Therefore, numerous questions have popped in teachers’ minds as they think that being accustomed and addicted to the SMS language can in one way or another affect the students’ performance writing skill.

Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study was to examine how second-semester English Department students at Ibn Zohr University, and their teachers, perceive the relationship between SMS language use and students’ formal written work, and to document which SMS-associated features, if any, are present in that written work. In line with this purpose, the study aimed to explore and explain the features and characteristics of the language used in students’ text messages, and to examine whether the frequency and duration of texting relate to students’ and teachers’ perceptions of — and to the observable presence of SMS-associated features in — their formal writing.

Research Questions

This current study tries to provide answers to the following questions;

- ✓ How do the English Department students of semester 2 at Ibn Zohr University, and their teachers, perceive the impact of SMS language on students’ formal writing?
- ✓ To what extent are features associated with SMS language observable in the formal writings of these students, and how does this compare with students’ and teachers’ self-reported perceptions of that impact?

SMS language and Formal Written Essays

Described as a new field of research that is developing, SMS language has gradually won the ground among linguists, educators, parents...etc and so many issues have been raised and become a subject of a passionate debate. A few essays have been written about the SMS. Notwithstanding, the researcher had access to few studies that tackle the same concern “the impact of SMS language on formal writing.” For a couple of years, people have blamed texting for two separate ills; the corruption of language and the degradation in the spelling of youth writing. Many teachers believe that learners are not anymore able to utilise appropriate language in different contexts. That is to say, their informal language (textism) seems to take place in formal writing papers. According to Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith and Rankin Macgill (as cited in Weiss, 2009), several educators and observers are concerned that the abbreviated language style of SMS language is incongruously filtering into official writing. The use of SMS language has also been observed in examination scripts (Weiss, 2009).

In the same path, the learners in the examination situations are always reminded of the necessity nay obligation to use the Standard English to deliver their thoughts and ideas more intelligible to their examiners and get in return maximal or marginal marks for their efforts. It has been noticed that a lot of sanctions are applied to any instances of informal or ungrammatical use of the Standard English language in examinations. Oluga and Babalola (2013) argued that mistakes in such examination situations are usually penalised by the examiners. Still, because of the frequent and the profound engagement with technologically mediated communication through chatrooms on the internet, SMS messaging and the like- students are often influenced to use

linguistic deviations (ungrammatical forms of language) which are theoretically sanctioned with the reduction of marks.

Considering the relatively short history of SMS language, its effect on language has brought a great deal of debate. It has bred an immense level of interest and concern among educators and researchers. Most of the works on the effect of such language (SMS language) take the form of articles, newspapers and on the internet. Some of the online articles have addressed the pros and cons of SMS language on various aspects of academic and social life. The researcher could not have access to books that investigate this phenomenon. Yet, some editing books include chapters on this issue were available. The most well-known, credential and welcomed book so far is of David Crystal's book; *Txtng: The Gr8 Db8* (2008). As a general statement, the literature about the SMS language has come up with three different and basic camps of thoughts about the effect of SMS language on the Standard English language. **The first camp** believes that abbreviations and the SMS language are assaulting the written Standard English as students' papers are brimming over with punctuation mistakes, bad grammar and inappropriate abbreviations. **The second camp** firmly believes that this language (SMS language) has a positive effect as the texters feel at ease and relaxing conditions while writing. **The third camp** sees it as a language of its own and has no noticeable effect on the Standard English (Russel, 2012).

With respect to **the first camp** of thought, which is centred on the negative side of SMS language on students' communication skills especially writing skill. The detractors of SMS language argue that technologically mediated communication and its resulting language such as SMS, Netslang, SMS language...etc institute a bona fide curse as they affect negatively students communication writing skills. This camp of thought claims that not only the regular use of technology in a long or a short term impacts the writing reflexes of the user but also exploits the SMS language in formal context. Oluga and Babalola (2013) firmly consider this service (SMS language) an incident that impacts the spelling system of the texters simply because it makes them encounter difficulties to come up with the correct orthography of words. This latter, simply because they are accustomed to spelling incorrectly and using abbreviated forms of words in text messaging.

Not far from the context, a study by Freudenberg (2009) which aimed to investigate the impact of SMS language on the written school work of English first language (L1) and English second language (L2) high school learners. The study was taken place in an English-Afrikaans dual- medium school in the Western Cape, South Africa. The participants involved were 88 learners; 43 from Grade 8 and 45 from Grade 11, 51 were English L1 speakers and 37 Afrikaans L1 speakers. The instrument used to collect data were a questionnaire and a written English task. Concerning questionnaire, they were administered with the goal to determine the frequency and volume of participants' use of SMS language as well as the features of their SMS language. Respectively, the participants' written English samples were oriented to assess specific features of their SMS language. The findings of this study revealed that all the participants used features of SMS language while texting and many confessed using SMS in the written school assignments. Still, their samples did not witness a tremendous number of instances of SMS features (Freudenberg, 2009).

To support the previous views and studies, Odey et al. (2014) conducted a research under the influence of SMS texting on the writing skills of students at a college of the education in Nigeria. The target student skills of students were 50 third year students. The methods used were quantitative and qualitative methods. The data collected was 250 sample SMS texts produced by the students, 50 essay scripts and observation. With respect to the 250 SMS messages, they were the most recent ones students have sent to their friends to the researcher who was in charge of the study. These SMS texts were analysed by determining the SMS language features they displayed. The 50 essay written by students as part of their examination and were content analysed to establish the extent to which the SMS language features observed in the SMS texts occurred in them. The most prevalent and paramount features of the SMS language determined in student essay responses were vowel deletion, graphemes (letter homophones), alphanumeric homophones, punctuation errors, and initialisation (Obey et al. 2014).

With all the possibly negative impacts studies have proven, Crystal (2008) as the first pioneer of the second camp, which holds a bright and positive side of texting, defends his counter argument by providing six principal key points. He claims that, (1)Typically, less than 10 % of the words are abbreviated in text messages, (2) abbreviation has been in use since the English language began to be written down such as exam, vet, cox...etc,

(3) adults use SMS language more than children, (4) students do not make use of abbreviations in their homework or examination habitually, (5) SMS language is not blamed of bad spelling because people have to know how the word is spelt before sending a text message, (6) SMS language improves people's literacy simply because it supplies more opportunities for people to embroil with the language through reading and writing. This is beneficial for school-age children. Based on these views, he strongly believes that SMS language does not negatively affect language literacy. Instead, it serves our language. The strongest and solid standpoint the researcher sees is if it happens that a person wants to text and use abbreviations, he first must be aware of how sounds and letter intermingle. At the end, the use of such language is not but due to the lack of space and time in delivering a message. It accounts for the texters whether or not to make use of text features in their messages.

Evidence in support of the previous camp can be found in Mahmoud's study. Mahmoud (2013) investigated the effect of English SMS language on the development of 40 Foundation Year students' speaking and writing skills at the university in Saudi Arabia. The research question the study tried to answer was "Does the frequent use of the SMS affect students' spoken and written communication skills?" The participants of this study were 40 candidates. These participants were randomly assigned into two groups: 20 in a control group and the other 20 in an experimental group. The former group (control group) was taught using conventional strategies. Whereas the latter group (experimental group) was taught using both strategies and SMS messages as an additional means of communication. The instruments used to collect data were, SMS messages written in Standard English words without short and abbreviated words, an oral test consisting of two tasks, and a written test in which the candidates were to produce a well-organized paragraph about one of the topics related to a foundation module they were being taught. The major findings of this current study were not far from Crystal's view. The study proved that the students, who were accustomed to texting where SMS language features were presented, had their writing and speaking performance considerably improved and gotten better.

Given the current high-profile debate with regard to the negative and positive effect of SMS language on writing skill, it is quite surprising that the last camp proposes that SMS language has neither positive nor negative influence on students' writing. Russell (2010) argued that SMS language is just an independent and new language where students have to master the basic rules of the Standard English language so that they can make a distinction between grammatical and ungrammatical structure use of the English language. This camp conte that since learning a new language does not influence students' ability to use English grammar correctly. It would be unfair to infer that SMS language can affect grammar. The proof headed to defend this view was the fact that the emersion of various jargons throughout the history of language has never brought up a dynamism to appear in English grammar. Notwithstanding the survival of the jargons, the English language has not witnessed any changes. All what students are to do is to try to have a full mastery of the basics of the English grammar in formal contexts so as to be able to differentiate between Slang, texting lingo and correct Standard English.

In spite of the apparently vast volumes of work on the subject from different parts of the world, the literature seems to be silent on the phenomenon in Morocco where English is the third language of its population. This proposed study seeks to fill this gap by figuring out whether some of the previous proved claims hold true for the English Department students of semester 2 at Ibn Zohr University.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Procedures for Data Collection

The data for the study were collected using two techniques of data collection. The first method was a questionnaire. The addressees of this questionnaire were students and teachers. The questionnaire was made up of open and closed questions. Closed questions were answered by choosing a number from the response categories provided and jotting it down in a small box. Whereas, open questions were asked so as the respondent to answer the question in his/her own words. The choice of open questions was to give the floor to respondents to express their standpoints without being influenced by the response categories provided by a closed question. Furthermore, they allowed the question to be interpreted and answered in different ways. Thus, the respondents had a chance of self-expression and elaboration.

The questionnaire also opted for the two-choice question. That is, questions to prevent respondents from being

asked a string of questions that did not apply to them. This type of questions is always followed by the expression “go to question” (Franklin & Walker, 2003). Plus, semi-closed ended questions were used where a closed-ended question was asked then followed by additional responses in an open-ended question.

The second method adopted was collecting essays of the semester 2 students with the aim to look them up and check whether the SMS language features were presented in the formal essays such as abbreviations, shortening, incomplete sentences...etc. Plus, the presence of capital letters was also looked up which were used mostly in formal writing to stress a certain word or name of a person or thing. In addition to, punctuations whether students tended to overuse them or neglect them at all. The corpus of essays collected was 86 essays.

Data Analysis Procedures

Concerning the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire, all the answers to each question provided in students’ questionnaire were tallied. To present a comprehensive overview of the results, graphs and tables were used. The graphs displayed the frequency of SMS language use and the number of hours devoted to texting per a day. Besides, the main reasons for texting and the features of SMS language that the students confessed to using in their text message. Moreover, these graphs and tables did not only reveal the number of students who believed that texting had an effect but also the number of students who did not see any way that texting could have an effect on their formal written work.

With respect to teachers’ questionnaire, they were tallied and analysed as the data provided was presented in tables. This latter disclosed idea on how long the teacher has been teaching, the characteristics of SMS language that the teachers determined in the formal written work of their students. The measures and strategies the teachers opt for to fight the occurrence of SMS language in students’ formal written work were examined and discussed qualitatively.

The data collected from the formally written samples of the students were analysed for actual features of SMS language. These recorded features in the collected samples were the same as those which the students were asked to identify in their texting when completing the questionnaire. These features included spelling errors, punctuation errors, lack of function words, emoticons and rebus writing. Still, while analysing students’ formal samples a further feature occurred, namely shortening of words. These SMS language features were tallied according to the frequency with which they occurred in the students’ formally written samples.

Results Presentation

The data is presented and analysed. It includes the results and discussion based on the sample (86 students) used for the study. Descriptive statistics were introduced using frequencies and percentages.

Results of the students’ questionnaire

Frequency and volume of using SMS service

Table 1 Frequency and volume of texting (SMS) service

SMS usage		Number of Students	Percentage
Frequency	Daily	77	89.5 %
	A few times week	9	10.5%
	Never	00	00
	Total	86 (100%)	100%
Number of Hours per day	0-1 hours a day	26	30.20 %
	0-2 hours a day	17	19.80%
	0-3 hours a day	18	20.90%
	0-4 hours a day	9	10.50%
	more than 4 hours a day	16	18.60%
Total		86 (100%)	100%

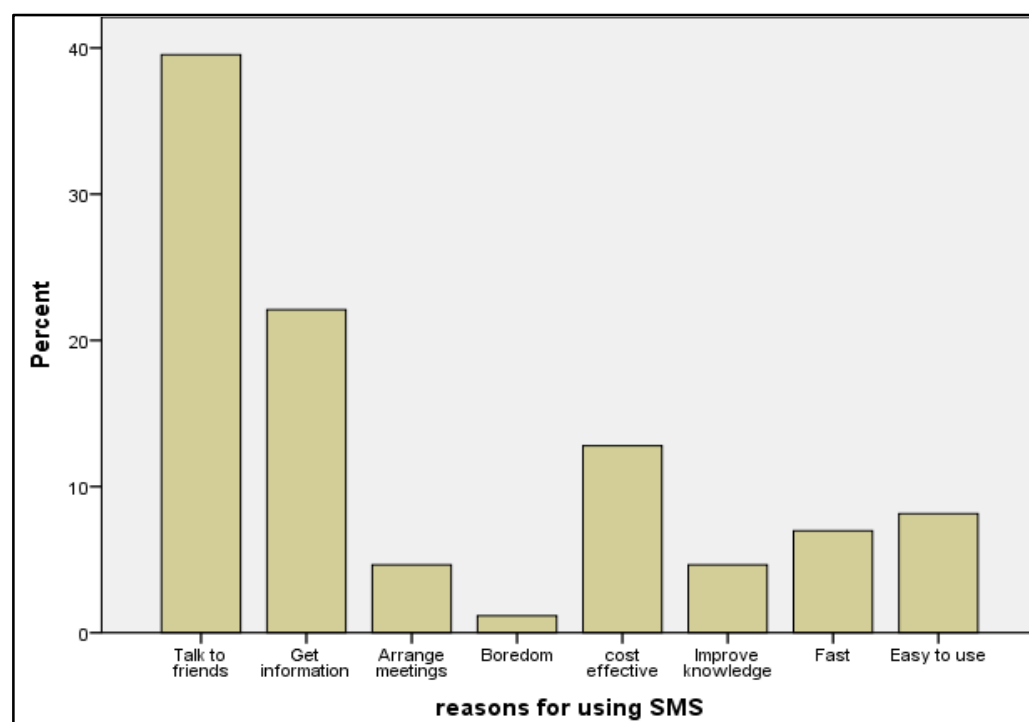
The participants were kindly asked to specify the frequency of using SMS. All the 86 participants reported regular use of SMS for varying amount of time. None of the participants went without using SMS. That is to say, all the participants were therefore in one way or another exposed to the features and characteristics of SMS language whether in the messages they send or those that they receive.

As the table above shows, the majority of the participants (77) that is 89.5% make use of SMS on a daily basis for up to one hour. The participants who reported that they use SMS for fewtimes a week were in the minority; 9 of the 86, which is 10.5%.

Moreover, it reveals that the majority of the participants make use of SMS service on a daily basis up to one hour. The informants who reported that they make use of SMS for more than four hours were numbered 7 out of 86 participants. This minor figure could be thought as these informants were akin and attached to their phones and might have a more established social life than others.

Students' reasons for using SMS service

Figure 1 Reasons for using SMS for all participants.



The data in figure 1 below implies the reasons behind using SMS. Most of the participants reported that talking to their friends was their first and main impulse for SMSing. The need to obtain information was ranked the second most recorded reason (by 46 participants) which in most instances involved obtaining information about homework assignments. Besides, the information that was sought among the students was ranging from sporting activities to making arrangements, such as planning social and weekend activities. Keeping in contact with friends and family were also frequently recorded as reasons for using SMS. Moreover, a significant figure of participants (27 of the total 86) claimed that they make use of SMS due to its cost effective; it is much cheaper than a phone call.

It is highly obvious that the participants of this study indicated that chatting and keeping in touch with their friends was the primary reason for using SMS. Adolescent social behaviour is characterised by “increasing interest in, and involvement with, the peer group” (Louw & Edward, 1997, p.518). For, friendships and friend groups were of high importance to them; they feel like to be connected to what is going on around them, they want to know where their friends are, what they are doing, and they want as well to be involved in social events. The behaviour of SMSing is a sure way to accomplish this desperate need for constant contact owing to its cost effective and disposal across all the age groups. These recorded reasons definitely demonstrate the frequency of SMS use

among the participants of this study.

Features of SMS language reportedly used in SMS messages

Table 2 Self-reported features of SMS language used in SMSes of the participants

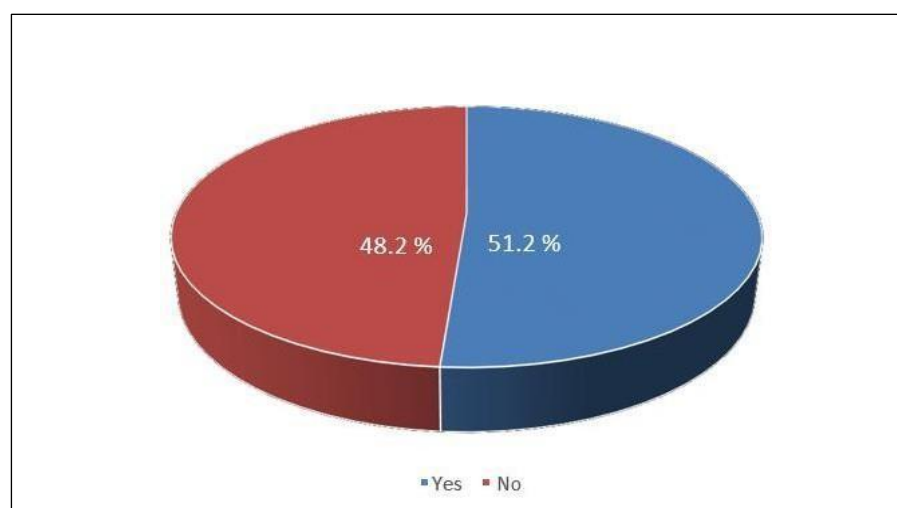
SMS features	Yes		No		Sometimes	
	Freq	Pct	Freq	Pct	Freq	Pct
Spelling Mistakes	20	23.2%	55	64.0%	11	12.8%
Punctuations	21	24.4%	52	60.5%	13	15.1%
Overusing punctuations	44	51.2%	28	32.6%	14	16.3%
Functional Words	31	36.0%	39	45.3%	16	18.6%
Smileys/ Emoticons	60	69.8%	4	4.7%	22	25.6%
Substitute letters or numbers	46	53.5%	17	19.8%	23	26.7%

In this regard, the participants were given a list of features of SMS language and kindly asked to refer to which features they make use of when SMSing. As it is noticeable in Table 2, smileys and emoticons were found to be the most used features in SMSes as 60 out of the 86 participants reported using this feature. It is no wonder that these emoticons are mostly and frequently used because teenagers are thought to be more expressive and feel like to convey emotions and facial features while texting. Emoticons and smileys are considered a convenient way to express feelings, emotions and tone that are absent in text-based communication. These emoticons take up less space in an SMS than a description of one's emotions would. To illustrate more, if it happens that one was to express an emotion like happiness, it would take up more time and space to type the whole phrase I am so thrilled than the emoticon 😊 which takes less time and space.

Moreover, the above table shows that all the participants (86) reported that they make use of SMS language features as they save for them more space to convey their messages. The feature that was mostly and commonly used was spelling mistakes, reported by 55 out of 86 participants. They reported that they pay no attention to spelling mistakes. This is due to the fact that SMSes have a very limited space numbers for characters. Therefore, texters would deliberately misspell a word provided that the incorrect spelling renders a shorter, but still comprehensible, version of the correctly spelt word. Further analysis of the data collected will be revealed whether these regularly used features can, as a consequence, also be found in the samples of their formal written work that the participants have produced.

Students' perception concerning the presence of SMS features in their formal writings

Figure 2 Students' opinion concerning the influence of texting on their formal writing



The overwhelming majority of the participants (44 of the total 86) do not have a strong belief that SMSing affects the language used in their formal written work. That figure of the participants who strongly believe that SMSing has an effect on their formal written work were asked to provide specific and concrete examples. The participants confessed that they barely strive with the correct spelling, make use of abbreviations, acronyms, and shortened words. In the following section, the results of the participants' written work will be highlighted and discussed indicating that these features and possibly other features did, in fact, took place in their formally written English of the participants.

Results of the students' formal written samples Figure 3

Features of SMS language identified in the formal written work

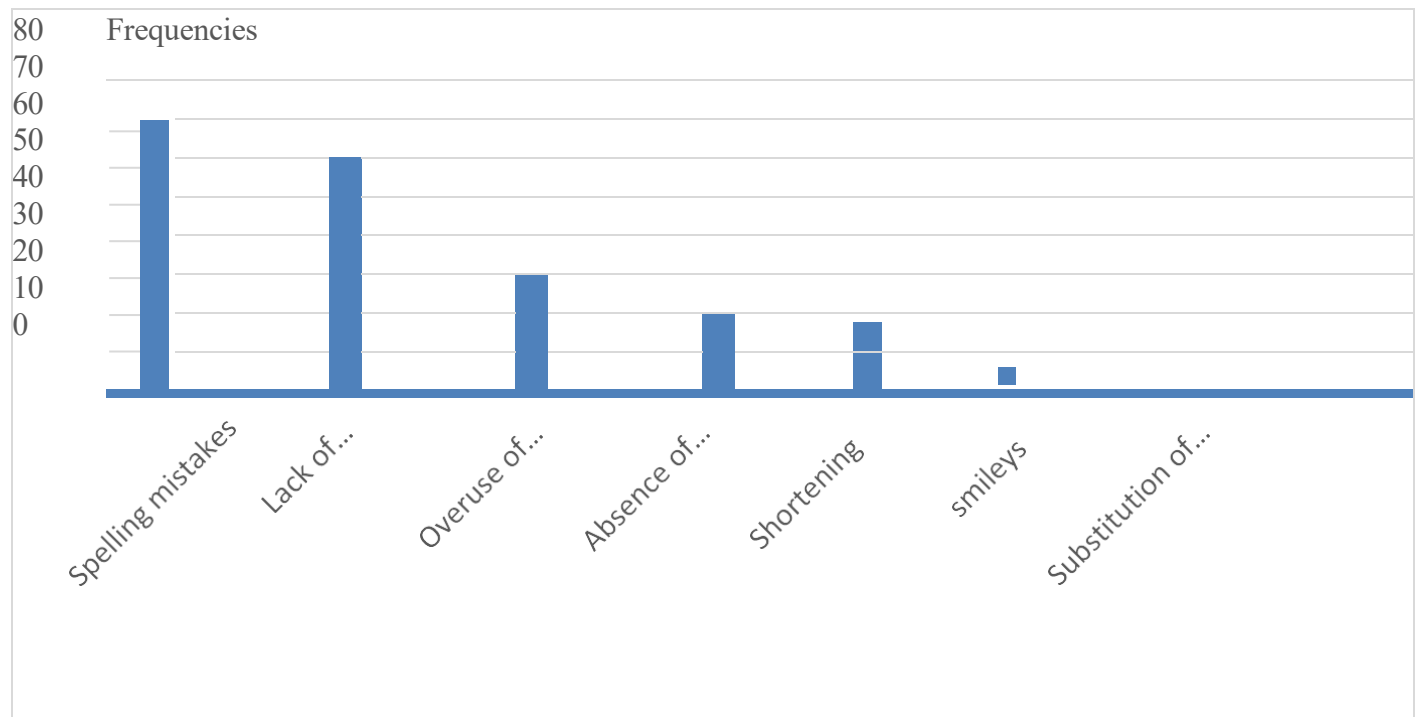


Figure 3 shows the non-standard features of English language that were identified in written work samples of the participants and the number of samples in which each of these features was identified. The samples of formal written work assignments were analysed for the previously identified features of SMS language. Still, while analysing the samples, a significance presence of an extra feature of SMS language that was not previously specified in their questionnaire. Figure 8 therefore, includes an additional feature, namely, and shortening of words.

The most widespread feature of non-standard English found in the samples of formal written work provided was spelling mistakes. Almost the participants 86 provided many instances of spelling mistakes, such as, chocked instead of shocked, I was looked instead of I looked, MY FIRST DAY AT instead of My first day at, withe instead of with, good lock for instead of good luck to, and begening instead of beginning and so forth. The second common and prevalent feature of SMS language in the samples of formal written work provided is the absence of punctuation with 73 of the 86 samples including for example, the absence of comma after the expressions used to start a paragraph as in, To begin with....., For me....., To start with and To sum up.....and so on. Plus, no question marks after a question. For example, what can I do instead of what can I do?, how did you do that instead of how did you do that?, and how can I understand instead of how can I understand?

Many instances of incorrect use or rather lack of punctuation were found (in 29 of the participants' formal written work), particularly, the use of exclamation marks as in you are welcome!!!. The lack of apostrophes as in don't, doesn't, wasn't and it's not, and I'm. The upcoming example serves as an example where a student missed an apostrophe: the teacher didnt let me.

Other examples of lack of punctuation were committed such as question marks, full stops and commas; as where is the administration instead of where is the administration? One of the students wrote a whole paragraph with only one comma. Apart from being omitted, commas were also frequently used incorrectly, as in the following example: I see something like that, and see many people, I read it and smile the truth is.to attending classes...There were very few instances of emoticons or smileys found in the samples of formal written work provided. Two unique participants made use of emoticons; drawing a smiley face. One of them drew the figure): at the middle of the paragraph and the other drew ^^ at the end of the formal written work wishing me a good luck in my project. Plus, there was an important figure of instances of shortening of words, although this feature was used merely by quite participants (4 of the 88 participants). For example, one participant attempted to write good luk instead of good luck. Prof instead of professor and another attempted to write cause I was so hppy instead of because I was so happy.

Results of the teachers' questionnaire

Teachers' experience in teaching Table 3

Teachers teaching modules and volume of experience

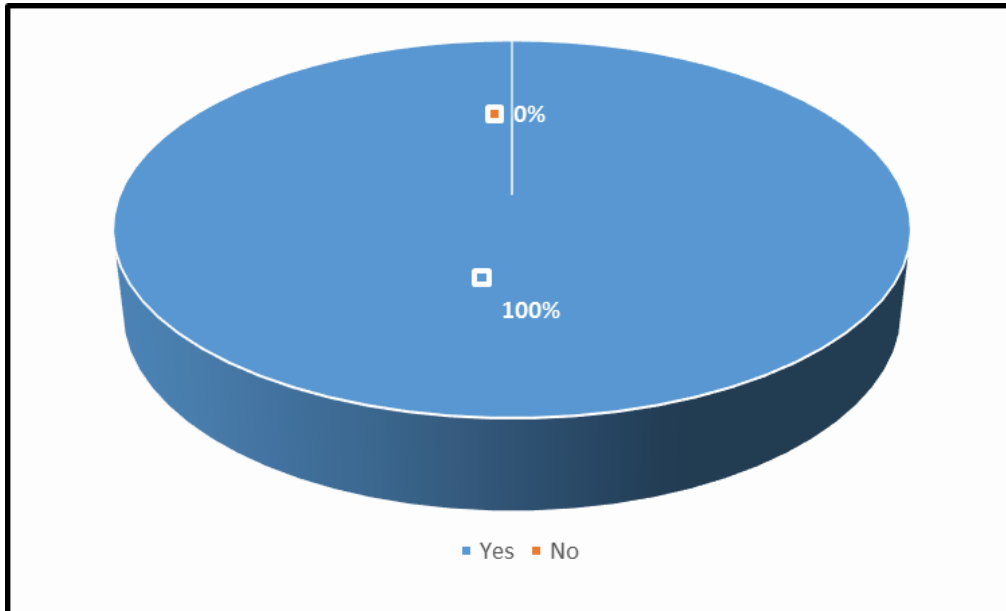
Teachers	Teaching Modules	Years of experience
1	Composition	10
2	Grammar	12
3	Culture studies	15
4	Reading in Culture	06
5	Reading comprehension and precis	14
6	Business communication	16
7	Extensive reading	13
8	USA and UK culture	10
9	Composition	11
10	Culture studies	08
11	Reading in Culture	10
12	Reading comprehension and precis	10
13	Extensive reading	4
14	Study skills	11
15	Composition	11

The table below provides a general insight into the responses of the teachers who were numbered 15 teachers. They completed the questionnaire administered and they were for the teachers of the students who took part in this study. It gives information about the number of years of teaching experience along with the subject that each teacher is in charge of for teaching.

It is quite evident from the table that almost these teachers have a career that spans more than a decade. That is, they have been teaching since the initial stages of the so-called Technological Revolution and from the period of cellphone technology.

Teachers' opinions about students' formal writing change Figure 4

Teachers' opinion about the change of students' formal writing



The Graph below demonstrates that a significant figure of teachers namely 15 which represents 100 % reported that they have witnessed paramount changes in the formal written work of the students since the popularity use of cell phones. That is to say, the SMS language and its peculiar features are gradually paving its way into student's formal and academic writing. This confirms the concerns that were raised before by educators with respect to the use of SMS language which is unconsciously straining into formal writings.

Features of SMS language noticed by teachers in students' formal writing Figure 5

Reported features of SMS language found by teachers in their students 'formal writings

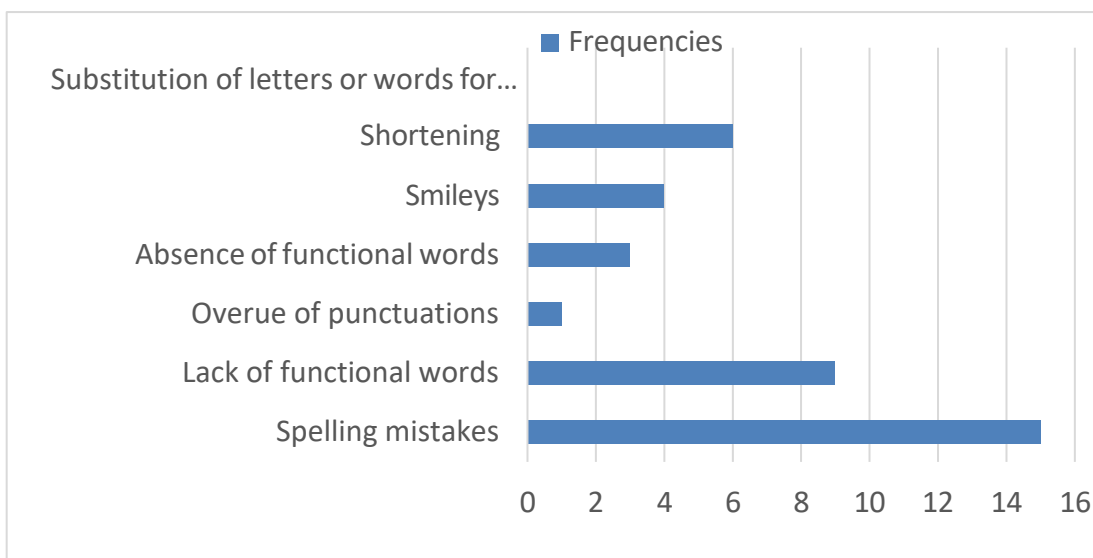


Figure 5 shows which features of SMS language have been observed by the teachers in the formal written work of their students. This correlates with the students' self-reported features of SMS language and with the features of SMS language found in the formal written work of the students: spelling errors were the most prevalent features of SMS language along with the lack of punctuation. According to the teachers, emoticons were notable features of the formal written work of the students even there were low incidences in the formally written work samples provided and analysed for the purpose of this study. During the analysis, none of the participants (teachers) recorded excessive punctuation, as a feature of SMS language, being present in the formally written

work of their students despite this feature occurred in the formally written sample of the students. Thus, it was almost likely an issue prior to the emergence of SMS language.

Teachers' view with regard to the influence of texting Table 4

Teachers' view concerning the effect of SMS on students' formal writing

Volume	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	100 %
No	00	00 %

The Table 4 below reveals teachers' views about the influence of texting on their students' formal writing. All the teachers sampled were of the opinion that texting (SMS Language) and its features have a remarkable influence on student formal writing. That is, students no more provide conventional English where correct grammar and correct spelling is to be respected and obeyed while composing a piece of formal writing. They claimed that texting makes them transfer such language into their writing where shortening, abbreviations, incorrect spellings, smileys....and so on are displayed.

Teachers' explicit measures against the occurrence of SMS language in students' formal writings

The last question in the questionnaire administered to the teachers was to provide explicit measures undertaken to combat the use of SMS language in the formal written work of their students. Having in mind the idea that the participant teachers opine that the use of texting or SMS language influences their students conventional and formal writing, they asserted that they have taken to penalize and torture any student who makes use of SMS language in conventional writing as a measure to discouraging students allowing such to be part and parcel of them. The entire the participant teachers, who enhance the discouragement of such language, use different and several precautionary measures to amputate, at all, student's use of such language style with up to 87.5 % of them penalizing the students as it is considered to be informal and inappropriate in formal contexts while 12,5 % exhort them to relinquish from using it.

The analysis of the formally written samples assured several incidences of SMS language features, as reported by the most participant teachers. However, a paramount figure of the teachers that took part in this study confessed that they were not embroiled with or given any concern to correcting the students writing when they make use of inappropriate language. One of the reasons behind this recklessness on the teachers' part as reported could be that many of these examples such as spelling errors and misuse of punctuation might only be or possibly be perceived to be the result of not being enough exposed to the formally written language in general. Therefore, it is not necessarily owing to the impact of SMS language.

RESULTS DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that SMS language is strongly present in students' everyday communication and is widely perceived, by both students and teachers, as shaping their formal writing. Teachers, without exception, report having noticed a change in students' formal writing since the widespread adoption of mobile texting, and the majority of teachers actively penalise features they associate with SMS language when they appear in formal work. This aligns with an official report from a UK examination board, which similarly found examination scripts containing abbreviated forms (Henry, 2004), suggesting the perception recorded here is not unique to this context.

At the same time, the writing samples themselves show that SMS-associated features, while present, were not overwhelmingly frequent relative to the students' overall exposure to texting: nearly all participants use SMS daily, yet only a minority of samples showed features such as shortening (4 of 86) or emoticon use (2 of 86), while spelling irregularities and reduced punctuation were considerably more common. This pattern — strong perception of impact alongside a more modest and unevenly distributed presence of features — is not a

contradiction once perception and observed frequency are treated as two distinct measures rather than as a single causal claim. It suggests that most students are largely able to distinguish formal from informal registers, while a genuine subset of features (particularly spelling and punctuation) does carry over for at least some students, consistent with Freudenberg (2009), whose participants likewise showed SMS awareness without a large volume of SMS features in school writing.

It is important to note that several of the most frequent irregularities identified — spelling mistakes and inconsistent punctuation — are also common among EFL learners generally, independent of texting habits, and the paper does not claim to isolate SMS use as their sole or primary source. What the data does support is that these irregularities co-occur with heavy, self-reported SMS use, and that both students and teachers interpret this co-occurrence as evidence of a negative influence. Establishing whether SMS use is a cause, a contributing factor, or simply a co-occurring habit alongside other sources of writing difficulty (proficiency level, quality of instruction, feedback frequency) would require the kind of longitudinal or group-comparison design outlined in the Suggestions for Further Research section.

Teachers' near-uniform response — penalising SMS-associated features rather than treating them as a teaching opportunity — is itself a notable finding independent of causality: it indicates an institutional perception strong enough to shape grading practice, even though, as several teachers reported, some of these same irregularities may plausibly reflect insufficient exposure to formally taught rules rather than the influence of texting specifically. This tension between institutional response and the more modest evidence base is, in the researcher's view, itself worth flagging to teacher-training bodies such as MATE (Moroccan Association of Teachers of English).

Taken together, the findings support the conclusion that SMS language is perceived — strongly and consistently, by students and teachers alike — as relevant to formal writing quality, and that a subset of SMS-associated features is observably present in that writing. Whether this relationship is causal, and how large its true effect size is, remains an open question that the present cross-sectional design is not positioned to answer.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how semester-2 English Department students at Ibn Zohr University, and their teachers, perceive the relationship between SMS language and formal writing, and to document the presence of SMS-associated features in students' written work. The students sampled are avid, near-universal users of SMS and related messaging technologies, and the large majority report transferring at least some texting habits into their formal writing on occasion.

Despite this near-universal exposure, the formal written samples collected did not show an overwhelming volume of SMS-associated features, suggesting that most students are able to judge, at least partially, when a given variety of language is or is not appropriate to a formal context. At the same time, a meaningful subset of features — spelling irregularities and reduced punctuation in particular — was identified across a substantial share of the samples, and this observation is echoed independently by the teachers surveyed, all of whom reported perceiving a negative change in students' formal writing coinciding with the rise of mobile texting.

Read together, these two strands of evidence — a modest but real presence of SMS-associated features, and a strong, shared perception of negative impact among both students and teachers — support the conclusion that SMS language is widely perceived as a relevant factor in the quality of Moroccan EFL students' formal writing. Not every irregularity identified can be attributed to SMS use specifically, since spelling and punctuation difficulties are also commonly documented among EFL learners for reasons unrelated to texting (insufficient exposure to formally taught rules, limited feedback, or proficiency level). The correlational, cross-sectional design of this pilot study means these findings should be read as evidence of perception and co-occurrence rather than of causation; the Suggestions for Further Research below outline how a future study could test the causal question directly.

As Thurlow et al. (2004, p. 124) note, "Standard English may be the agreed norm for writing a college essay or

a business letter,” but it is not the norm of everyday spoken language, and technology is only one of several forces shaping how language changes over time. Crystal (2004) likewise observes that concern over the effect of new communication technologies on written standards is a recurring, not a new, phenomenon. What the present findings add to that conversation is a Moroccan EFL data point: both students and their teachers already perceive SMS language as bearing on formal writing quality, which is itself sufficient grounds for pedagogical attention — through explicit register instruction and consistent feedback — regardless of how the underlying causal question is ultimately resolved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of this current study as enumerated above, it is of high importance to make some recommendations of certain measures, which will help in combating the use and occurrence of SMS language in formal written work of students.

It is granted that many teachers of English disregard teaching the writing skill. This peripheral could be because of their ignorance of how teaching writing process works as all they see about it is just a handwriting and filling in words in the blanks of the worksheet. Teachers are to embed adequate and suitable linguistic behaviour and teach the students to make use of Standard form of a language. This latter can be fulfilled through providing students with constant essay writing assignments and making requisite corrections. Sticking to this process, sooner or later they will be able to determine and see the gravity of the use of SMS characteristics in their formal writing. Therefore, they can dishearten the students from using SMS language through steady corrections, feedbacks as the students write essays regularly, and the teacher's mark. The emergence of this modern and update appliance- GSM has come up with its orthography, which is progressively being adopted by Moroccan students into their formal writing. As the future stakeholders of the English language, the current trend, if unchecked, consciously or otherwise, will kill the formal writing and make a sure way for the “new GSM writings” and this would inevitably falsify the Standard language of English usage in Morocco.

The students should be made to know that using SMS language in their formal writing can affect them. To achieve communicative competence in the English language, not only should students see texting messaging as the easier and quicker means of communication but also realise its negative sides on their formal written work. They must grasp the practice of writing formal letters and essays abiding by to grammatical conventions and writing mechanism. They have to be in fully aware of their writing so as to separate informal and formal writing in order not to use SMS language features in their formal writing.

Professional conferences, meetings, and workshops on the language of electronic text messages are so vital in this regard. For, teachers are to attend such occasions as they pave a way for them to be informed and well acknowledged about the update and latest developments in the field and other issues in teaching profession “Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language.” By doing so, teachers can share and exchange ideas, thoughts and experiences with other teachers from different countries on this hot issue of adopting SMS language in students’ formal writing and its solution.

Teachers of English can set for seminars, lectures and conferences such as the organization MATE, which stand for “Moroccan Association of Teachers of English” within the university premises in which issues like this would be tackled and discussed where the students are to attend. Technology and its use is considered to be the prerogative of every individual. Though, for foreign language learners like Moroccans its use may be determined by the user by deeming its effect on language skills. In another word, Students are to still in their minds set that the academic and social lives of foreign language learners (EFL) is completely distinguished from the native speakers; who acquire English as their mother tongue that their language learning practices are not influenced just the way as texting possibly affect second language learners. Thus, a rational approach may be followed to avert academic loss which second language learners may face in academic life.

Since technology has always been there for us, we are to see alternative and good ways to embrace it and work with it to our advantages. History and literature have been shown that resistance is futile and that we can never ever turn back the tide of technology. Plus, If these few recommendations are taken into account, it is not far-

fetches that the SMS language and its negative impact on students' formal writing especially students who are learning English as a foreign language will be diminished or possibly imputed.

Suggestions for Further Research

New technology is by no means an introduction to new forms of communication and language varieties which provide and set a ground for academic study. When new technologies are applied one may feel like to study how the target population innovates with new language styles and the sociolinguistic practices. Studies documenting the use of SMS as one feature of phones and its impact are limited and no studies have been conducted in Morocco. Since the current study is a pilot study, the findings are to be taken as preliminary indications. It is hoped that the pilot study in Morocco will set the floor for future researches by scrutinising the use of communicative technologies such as SMS and its multiple influences on different aspects. For example, studies are to be taken under teachers' attitudes towards students' use of SMS language in their formal writing, the specific problems experienced by second language learners of English as the case in Morocco and the role of educators in approaching these specific issues ... etc

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