COMMUNICATING THROUGH TEXT MESSAGES

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Abstract

This article in a form of descriptive and comparative study aims at throwing light on one of the new areas of communicative language, the usage of text messages as an effective and frequent method in everyday communication worldwide. It elaborates on how the text messaging have evolved since the beginning and explores the main reasons it becomes more and more popular now days. Through a comprehensive but short history of text messaging, contributions and reviews of the scholars, research-driven literature on text messaging, and some cases of the usage of text messaging in everyday life, we highlight the impact its usage has in the way people communicate and understand each-other around the world, trying to give a full picture of where and why it is used mostly, in order to show also the effects of its usage.

Keywords: communication, language, text messages.

1. Introduction

If we look around and try to notice what people around us are doing when sitting in a café waiting for our coffee to arrive, sitting in the stadium waiting for the match to start, or even when in the classrooms in between the breaks, one thing that most of us have in common is a piece of technology in our hands that some use for entertainment, others to reach their loved ones or connect to the outside world, and the rest systematically pushing the little buttons quickly or touching screens as if playing a musical instrument. What they all identify themselves with is the mobile phone that most of us prefer to use in silence in order not to disturb those around or get disturbed. This is the only moment when silence speaks; it communicates messages through the TEXT MESSAGES! When the current President of the United States started his campaign in 2008, he announced his choice of vice-presidential running mate by sending a text message to journalists and Democratic Party senators and supporters. One not-so-restrained New York Times journalist characterized the

event: 'Mr. Obama's use of the newfound medium is the widest use of texting by a presidential candidate in history.' The following morning, again in the USA, a National Public Radio journalist talked about 'the most highly anticipated text message in human history'.(Thurlow & Poff 2011)[13].

This already newsworthy event was evidently being given an added mediatized spin thanks to texting.

2.History of text messaging–contributions on messages and communication
2.1 History

Many companies have claimed to have sent the very first text message, but according to a former employee of NASA, Edward Lantz, the first was sent via one simple 1989 Motorola beeper in 1989 by Raina Fortini from New York City to Melbourne Beach, Florida using upside down numbers that could be read as words and sounds. The first commercial SMS message was sent over the Vodafone GSM network in the United Kingdom on 3 December 1992, from Neil Papworth of Sema Group (using a personal computer) to Richard Jarvis of Vodafone (using an Orbitel 901 handset). The text of the message was "Merry Christmas". The first SMS typed on a GSM phone is claimed to have been sent by Riku Pihkonen, an engineer student at Nokia, in 1993.[14] Initial growth of text messaging was slow, (since it was originally designed for the hearing impaired) with customers in 1995 sending on average only 0.4 messages per GSM customer per month. By the end of 2000, the average number of messages per user reached 35. The first web text messaging portal was invented in Doncaster, Japan by Hung Fui. Beta tested in 1994 and launched in 1996/1997 it offer three sms from mobile phones to email or via a web portal. It also offered the first commercial advertising service, sending 20,000 SMS's per month with servers in China and Australia. SMS was originally designed as part of GSM, but is now available on a wide range of networks, including 3G networks. Today text messaging is the most widely used mobile data service, with 35% of all mobile phone users worldwide or 4.2 Million out of 7.3 Million phone subscribers at end of 2003 being active users of the Short Message Service (SMS). In countries like Finland, Sweden and Norway over 72% of the

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[13] Crispin Thurlow and Michele Poff, as checked in
http://faculty.washington.edu/thurlow/papers/thurlow&poff%282010%29.pdf
[14] http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_year_did_cell_phones_begin_to_send_text_messages

population use SMS. Text messaging was reported to have addictive tendencies by the Global Messaging Survey by Nokia in 2001 and was confirmed to be addictive by the study at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium in 2004. Since then the study at the University of Queensland in Australia has found that text messaging is the most addictive digital service on mobile or internet, and is equivalent in addictiveness to cigarette smoking.[15]

2.2. Theoretical contribution and reviews on text messaging

For a technology that only really went 'live' in the mid-1990s, it took scholars a while to attend to texting. Since the early 2000s, however, research from a range of disciplines and a number of countries has been growing. While much of this work falls beyond the immediate interests of language scholars, it does reveal the increasing importance and application of texting in both scholarly and public contexts. This research also demonstrates how much scholarly writing focuses on the transactional and often commercial uses of texting rather than the relational function which, as we will suggest, sits at the heart of most everyday texting. Representing a veritable 'shopping list', texting research spans a wide range of disciplines and topics. From medicine, studies include the use of texting for patient reminders (e.g. Downer, et al. 2006; Leong, et al. 2006) and for aftercare treatment (e.g. Robinson, et al. 2006; Weitzel, et al. 2007). In academics, studies include texting as library support (Herman 2007; Hill, Hill and Sherman 2007), as a research methodology (Bosnjak, et al. 2008; Cheung 2008; Steeh, Buskirk and Callegaro 2007), as a pedagogical tool (Dürscheid 2002a; Naismith 2007), as a recruitment strategy (Maher 2007), and as a means for reducing school truancy (Allison 2004). Research in environmental development has examined how texting assists Bangladeshi villagers to locate clean water sources (Opar 2006). Further on, texting research extends to business and commercial uses (e.g., Bamba and Barnes 2007; Hsu, Wang and Wen 2006; Mahatanankoon 2007), political campaigning (Prete 2007) and media broadcasting (Enli 2007). Closer to human communication research, psychologists have looked at compulsive texting (Rutland, Sheets and Young 2007) and so-called cyberbullying (e.g. Raskauskas and Stoltz 2007; Smith, et al. 2008). What is apparent from this research is how often the purely

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[15] http://opinionrepublic.wordpress.com/2008/09/15/is-txt-ing-replacing-the-english-language/

informational uses of texting are often privileged. A lot of other research does address the role of texting as a social-communicative resource in people's daily lives. Lists like this illustrate nicely the ways in which texting is typically embedded in people's daily lives. In terms of language and communication in particular, scholarly interest has been a little slower still to establish itself, and texting continues to be a relatively under-examined area of research (compared, say, with other modes of CMC). This too has been changing, however, and a growing body of properly sociolinguistic and discourse analytic research attends to texting in English and other national languages.

3. Text Messages and language usage
3.1. Texting as a distinctive genre?

In her well-known paper on the language of email, Baron (1998) grappled with the idea that email might herald a new linguistic genre; her conclusion was ultimately that email language instead represented a creolizing blend of written and spoken discourse[16]. Like email, and indeed most new media discourse, text-messages have much the same hybrid quality about them – both in terms of the speech-writing blend and in terms of their mixing of old and new linguistic varieties. As Rössler and Höflich (2002)[17] put it, texting is 'email on the move'. In its transience and immediacy, however, texting is as much like instant messaging as it is like email – and, for that matter, speech. In keeping with Herring's (2001) proposals, therefore, we are more inclined to view texting in its own terms; whatever formal similarities it may bear to other CMC genres or modes, the linguistic and communicative practices of text-messages emerge from a particular combination of technological affordances, contextual variables and interactional priorities.

Example message

Safe Hi babe! Angie + Lucy had words last nite-stood / there arguing 4 ages, loads of people outside cobarna.Bit/ obvious they……werent gonna fight tho cos they were / there 4 so long! I was a bit pissed (woh!) Good nite tho! Spk / 2u lata xx Beckyxx

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[16]http://faculty.washington.edu/thurlow/papers/thurlow&poff%282010%29.pdf
[17] http://141.105.33.55/~lomov/library/bigdvd/dvd58/Harper%20R.,%20Palen%20L.,%20Taylor%20A.%20-%20The%20Inside%20Text.%20Social,%20Cultural%20and%20Design%20Perspectives%20on%20SMS%282005%29%28331%29.pdf

Removed from its original technical context (i.e., transferring it from the small screen of the mobile phone), the extract above is somehow clearly a text message. How is this? Does this not imply a particular 'language of texting'? Yes and no. While so much research focuses on the linguistic (and orthographic) form of texting (see our review above), the defining feature of text messages is ultimately their sociable function. Text-messages are thus communicative events (i.e.13 genres) only superficially recognizable from their look; their real significance (in both semantic and social terms) lies primarily in their discursive content and communicative intent. SMS language or Textese (also known as txtese, chatspeak, txt, txtspk, txtk, txto, texting language, or txt talk) is a term for the abbreviations and slang most commonly used due to the necessary brevity of mobile phone text messaging, in particular the widespread SMS (short message standard) communication protocol. SMS language is also common on the Internet, including in e-mail and instant messaging. It can be likened to a rebus, which uses pictures and single letters or numbers to represent whole words (e.g. "i <3 u" which uses the pictogram of a heart for love, and the letter u replaces you). For words which have no common abbreviation, users most commonly remove the vowels from a word, and the reader is required to interpret a string of consonants by re-adding the vowels (e.g. dictionary becomes dctnry and keyboard becomes kybrd). The reader must interpret the abbreviated words depending on the context in which it is used, as there are many examples of words or phrases which use the same abbreviations (e.g., lol could mean laugh out loud or lots of love, and cryn could mean crayon or cryin(g)). So if someone says ttyl, lol they probably mean talk to you later, lots of love not talk to you later, laugh out loud, and if someone says omg, lol they probably mean oh my god, laugh out loud not oh my god, lots of love. SMS language does not always obey or follow standard grammar, and additionally the words used are not usually found in standard dictionaries or recognized by language academies. The small phone keypad caused a number of adaptations of spelling, as in the phrase "txt msg". To avoid the even more limited message lengths allowed when using Cyrillic or Greek letters, speakers of languages written in those alphabets often use the Latin alphabet for their own language.

3.2. Cases on Albanian and English language usage in text messaging

In Albanian language, most of the words are used in their short, abbreviated form or digital number used instead such as > < ? « ! @ # $ % ^ & * ( ) + - / to express feelings, emotional states, greetings, etc.Among others the followings combinations of number and abbreviations can be met in Albania while communicating via text messaging:

3.2.1. Albanian language

1- kalofshi mire   KLM

2- faleminderit   FLM

3- naten e mire   NTM

4- neqoftese   NQS

5- mirmengjes   MRGJ

6- edhe   &

7- barazim   =

8- ne rregull   NRG

9- mirupafshim   MRP

3.2.2. English language

The followings are some more examples in English language to show how words, digits, expressions all become single letters, signs in the text messaging:

Letters and digits replacing words

Single letter can replace words	Single digits can replace words	A single letter or digit can replace a syllable
be becomes b	words	ate becomes 8, so:
because becomes cuz	ate becomes 8	great becomes gr8
see becomes c	for becomes 4	mate becomes m8
the becomes da, de or d	to or too becomes 2	wait becomes w8
okay becomes k	won or one becomes 1	later becomes l8r or l8a
okay cool becomes kk		skate becomes sk8
are becomes r		skater becomes sk8r
you becomes u		tomorrow becomes 2mro
with becomes wit, w/, simply w		for or fore becomes 4, so:

without becomes w/o		before becomes (combining both of the above) b4
why becomes y		therefore becomes thr4
oh becomes o		once becomes 1ce
see you becomes cya		and becomes &, nd

Common abbreviations

Word or Phrase	Abbreviations
As far as I know	afaik
Age/Sex/Location	a/s/l or asl
As soon as possible	ASAP
At the moment	atm
Be right back	brb
By the way	btw
For your Information	FYI
Got to go	g2g or gtg
Great	gr8
I don't know	idk
I love you	ily or i<3u or 143
In my humble/honest opinion	imho
In my opinion	imo
Just kidding or Joking	jk
Laughing out loud	lol
Later	l8r
Of course	ofc[8]
Oh my god/gosh	Omg
Rolling on the floor laughing	Rofl
Shut the fuck up	Stfu
Take care	Tc
Talk to you later	tty l8r or ttyl or t2yl

4. Critical views on text messaging

While there are a lot of efforts to try and facilitate communication through text messages as much as possible, interesting to mention here that special website

portals such as transl8it exist to support a community of users to help standardize this text speak by allowing users to submit translations, staking claim with their user handle, or to submit top messages and guess the lingo phrases, still there is another group of people who line themselves up with the so-called critics on text messages. So besides good and positive approach regarding language and its usage in text messaging, there are criticizing voices at the same time. In this way Welsh journalist and television reporter John Humphrys has criticized SMS language as "wrecking our language". The author cites ambiguous examples such as "lol" which may mean "laughing out loud", "lots of love", or "little old lady", depending on the context in which it is used. Humphrys describes emoticons and textese as "irritating" and essentially lazy behaviors, and surmises that "sloppy" habits gained while using textese will result in students' growing ignorance of proper grammar and punctuation. Moreover, the objective of SMS language is to use the least number of characters needed to convey a comprehensible message, also as many telecommunication companies have an SMS character limit, and yet to help those who are not perfect in language usage to communicate with each-other, still many claim that people do not benefit because the characters are reduced, hence, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization are largely ignored. In his book, The Great Debate, David Crystal says: "Texters in all eleven languages use "lol," "u," "brb," and "gr8," all English-based shorthands." American popular culture is also recognized in shorthand[18]. Despite scholarly research to the contrary, the popular notion that text messaging is damaging to the linguistic development of young people and to the English language itself persists. In the same way many think that the use of text messaging has changed the way that people talk and write essays, some believing it to be harmful. An article in The New Yorker explores how text messaging has "Americanized" some of the world's languages with English. The use of diacritical marks is dropped in languages such as French, as well as symbols in Ethiopian language. "From beyond the grave," it seems that America's twentieth century etiquette guru, Emily Post still has lessons regarding people living in the twenty-first century. At the Emily Post Institute website, the topic of texting has spurred several articles, with the "do's and dont's of regarding the new form of communication. One example

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[18] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Text_messaging

from the site is: "Keep your message brief. No one wants to have an entire conversation with you by texting when you could just call him or her instead."

5. Conclusions

We started our discussion by referring to the decision by US President Barack Obama and his campaign organizers to announce his vice-presidential running mate in August 2008 using text messaging. According to an Associated Press report at the time, his campaign aides wanted to attract additional supporters by soliciting their cell phone numbers and email addresses. Undoubtedly, the choice was a strategic and practical one. However, whether intended or not, the medium was also a powerful message in itself. This was a presidential candidate promising to be a man of change and of participatory democracy. So the challenge of introducing new tools and revolutionizing the traditional ways of communication with unconventional types such as texting and messaging could impress people in the positive way. And they got it right! Umberto Eco (200219) notes that we are living in an age where the diminutive, the brief and the simple are highly prized in communication. Clearly, texting embodies this *zeitgeist*. And like many earlier communication technologies, it evokes and/or embodies a range of projected fears and hopes. Indeed, the history of the development of so-called new communication technologies has been marked by periods of excessive hype and hysteria about the kinds of cultural, social and psychological impacts each new technology is likely to have. This is not to deny that few people, professional, academic or layers could have predicted the extraordinary rise in popularity of the cell phone and its sister technology texting. All these remain to be followed and studied further on to see how far and to what extend they will stretch into peoples' lives and the way they communicate. In conclusion we can say that there are still gaps in the academic literature on usage of texting now days, so further efforts for future research on the language of text messaging as well as providing to the best of our knowledge the advantages and disadvantages the usage of text messaging offers to those who use it should be welcomed.

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[19] http://extra.shu.ac.uk/daol/articles/open/2002/003/thurlow2002003-paper.html

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