

GENDER DIFFERENCE IN TEXT MESSAGING IN THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF ONE HUNDRED LEVEL UNDERGRADUATES OF IBRAHIM BABANGIDA UNIVERSITY, LAPAI, NIGER STATE

Amina Gogo Tafida* And C. O. Okudishu²

Department General Studies, School of Science and Technology Education, Federal University of Technology, Minna.*
Department of Arts and Social Science Education, University of Abuja.²

Accepted 13 March ,2016

The study compared the impact of text messaging on the written English of male and female one hundred level undergraduates of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai. Three hundred and twenty students from nine departments organized under three disciplines-Arts, Social Science, and Science- were sampled for the study. The sample consisted of one hundred and seventy five males (175) and one hundred and forty five (145) females. The instrument used for the study was students' essays on the topic, *Corruption in Nigeria and Measures to Curb it*. The essays were content analyzed for occurrence or otherwise of SMS forms. Five classes of SMS forms found in the essays were classified under five classes such as non-conventional spelling, phonological approximation, shortenings, letter-number homophones, and grammatical peculiarities. The result shows a mean of 3.56 and standard deviation of 2.10 for males and mean of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 1.82 for females. The frequency of occurrence of SMS forms was 55.4% for males and 44.6% for females across disciplines. In the light of this, the study recommended that teachers at the various levels of education should discourage the use of short message service forms in formal writing, such as applications, assignment, test, lecture notes, etc. There is the need to teach learners what constitutes correct language. Also, language teachers, curriculum planners, governments at various levels, and parents should emphasize and encourage intensive and extensive reading in learners.

Key words: Global service for mobile communication (GSM), gender, Short message service (SMS), text messaging, text messages, texters, mobile communication

INTRODUCTION

Language is defined as a coding system and a means by which information is transmitted or shared between two or more communicators for purpose of command, instruction and play (Lockerby, 2009). Language is a potent vehicle for transmitting cultures, values, norms and beliefs from generation to generation. It is also a vehicle of social interaction and we need language to function properly in the workplace, social interaction, and indeed, for functional literacy. Ker (2006) asserts that 75% of the language of information and communication technology is English. Hassan (1990) also points out that English has become a basic resource with which our present world is built and organized and, therefore, a fundamental part of our educational process. The National Policy on Education (2004) also gives prominence to English language as medium of instruction right from primary four to other levels of the country's educational system. However, with the advent of GSM in 2001 in Nigeria and with the availability of the text message facility, many people irrespective of age and social status frequently use text messages to communicate with friends, colleagues, siblings, and even parents with some of these messages containing SMS forms. Thurlow (2006) reports how SMS is severally described as slang, a novice language, a digital virus, a new language, technobabble, textese, etc. Sutherland (2002) also describes SMS as "bleak, bald, sad shorthand, drab shrink talk, which masks dyslexic poor spelling and mental laziness." Egya (2009) observes that courtesy of the GSM, the art of letter writing has almost disappeared. According to her, young people write letters only if they have to apply for job positions and that such letters are full of basic errors. She observes that some students, consciously or unconsciously, bring GSM text message forms into their official writings such as examinations and essays.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The most fundamental problem envisaged by this study is that the SMS forms may consciously or unconsciously creep into the formal, academic, written English of the users. In some parts of the world, this phenomenon has been reported as shown in studies by Thurlow (2006); Lee (2002); Sutherland (2002); Humphreys (2007), among others. Also, Crystal (2008) in his study showed that women wrote longer messages than men. The mean number of words per message for women was 6.95, whereas for men it was 5.54. He also opined that women used abbreviations and emoticons more than men. Is this phenomenon reflected in the occurrence of SMS forms in official/ written English?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study investigated the occurrence or otherwise of text message short forms, also known as SMS forms, in the written communication of one hundred level undergraduates of Ibrahim Babagida Badamasi University, Lapai. Specifically, the study is to compare the occurrence of the SMS forms in the written English language of male and female one hundred level undergraduates.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Is there a difference in the frequency of occurrence of SMS forms in the written English of female and male one hundred level undergraduates?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference in the frequency of occurrence of SMS forms in the written English of male and female one hundred level undergraduates.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is expected that the study will help to provide a clear picture on the controversy surrounding the impact of SMS on users' written English language. This is because studies have reported diverse results on the impact of SMS or text messaging on users of English as second language. Hence, it is hoped that the study would awaken the consciousness of teachers of English as second language and encourage them to pay more attention to the writings of students in order to eliminate cases of SMS forms or other substandard expressions. This would also help language teachers to design relevant instructional materials for language learners. In addition, the study would hopefully provide an avenue for instructional innovation for English language teachers. The study would provide the teachers with the opportunity to explore the use of text messages to as a language teaching device and help in effective language teaching by ensuring communicative and personalized learning by students. Textbook writers would also benefit from this study as it will alert them to the changes sweeping through the English language due to the influence of media technologies. This would enable them to produce interesting materials that would motivate and inculcate in the learners the love for reading and writing using the standard forms of English.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Wood (2001) opines that women and men communicate differently. In fact, it is sometimes stated that they communicate so differently as if they are from different planets. Although at times differences in women's and men's communication styles seem to be constant and overwhelming, they are really quite minor. For example, Torppa (2002) observes that both women and men can be nurturing, aggressive, task-focused, or sentimental; what is important is that women and men sometimes perceive the same messages to have different meanings. Lakoff (1975) argues that women's language represents an overall conventional politeness. Her theories on women's language suggest that they use a language style that reflects diffidence, shyness, and lower self-confidence, indicating a lack of commitment or strong opinion. This assumption is consistent with the findings of Al-katib&Sabbah (2008) and Colley & Todd (2002), among others, who note gender differences in which females and males were found to display different patterns of language use. Colley and Todd comment on gender differences in the Japanese sample, with women using graphical accents more than their male counterpart. Al-Katib and Sabbah (2008) in their study demonstrated that the sex of the writer has a role to play in the process. According to them, the female has a stronger tendency than the male to use switches, and male, by contrast, has a greater tendency to use Arabic totally than English totally or mixed elements. In terms of general difference in texting, research has been done in a number of countries. For example, in Norway, Ling (2005) reports that female texters and young adults text more frequently with more than 40% of young women texting daily. The women were also said to send a greater number of longer and more syntactically complex messages, with 82% containing complex sentence structures compared with 15% of boys. In Norway, girls also used abbreviations and innovative spellings (Ling, 2002). Kasesniemi (2003) shows similar results in his study of Finland texters. According to him, Finland

boys preferred to send one- sentence text messages while girls preferred longer and more complex sentences. He adds that in Finland, teenage girls are heavy texters, often placing greater emphasis on providing emotional exchanges, contemplating reasons behind interpersonal incidents, and discussing new incidents. Finland boys, on the other hand, place emphasis on speed and their messages tend to be brief, informative, practical, often single word or question-answer texts in a single sentence, and are about facts of events. These findings were consistent with those of Ling and Baron (2007) that 60% of female university students' text messages contained more than one sentence. They found that text messages in the US averaged only 7.7 words each, making them closer in length to those in Norway, which averaged 6.95 words per message for girls and even fewer at 5.54 words per message for boys. Ling (2005) adds that girls use capitalization and punctuation more prescriptively, are more adroit at innovating new forms, prefer to coordinate events in the immediate future, and are likely to use texting for managing emotionally "loaded" communication. At the broader social level, however, Ling (2000) found that women write longer text messages than men. In spite of the fact that men were the early adopters of mobile phones, it is among the women that the great motor of SMS lives. According to Ling, women, and in particular young women, seem to have a broader register when using SMS. They use them for immediate practical coordination of issues and also for the more emotional side of mobile communication. In addition, their messages are longer, have more complex structures, and retain more of the traditional conventions associated with other written forms than men. In yet another study, Ling (2005b) collected 417 messages through a telephone survey from 1000 Norwegian participants between the ages of 13 and 67. The analysis shows that girls aged from 13-34 years old write longer messages than boys (30 and 20 letters, respectively). Between 35 and 54 years of age, there is no difference in the word length as both men and women sent messages containing 20 letters. For participants of 55 to 67 years of age, the number of letters increased to 25 for women and decreased to only 10 for men. In Deumert and Masinyana (2008) South African study, 312 messages from 22 participants who are bilingual speakers of isiXhosa and English whose ages ranged from 18–27 were collected. The 312 messages are written either in one or the other language, or in a mixture of both. The average length of the messages is 22.6 words, with girls writing an average of 23 words, and boys 19 words. Igarashi, Tajai & Yoshida (2005) discovered that first-year undergraduate Japanese females use their text messaging more actively than males in social networks. They report that the content of females' text messaging is different from those of males. Female teens send more text messages, send longer text messages, and get involved in more text messaging discussions than males do. In South Africa, female participants write longer messages than male participants (Deumert&Masinyana, 2008).Balakrishnan and Batat (2010) investigated the effect of age and gender on SMS usage among Malaysian and French youths. The participants are 50 Malay and 32 French who ranged in age from 15 to 25 years. An interview was administered to elicit the participants' use of emoticons and abbreviations. The findings show that female youths from the two cultures are more active in using SMS, emoticons and abbreviations than their male counterpart. Rafi (2003) investigated lexical, morphological and syntactical choices of male and female SMS users. The result of the study showed that the SMS messages written by females were significantly more likely to have complex capitalization. Females also use punctuation more than males. SMS messages indicate that both males and females opt for non-standard or admixture of languages, which has given birth to a new and creative variety. This seems to be challenging the stereotype that females tend to opt for standard varieties; whereas, males regress towards non-standard choice of these varieties in a speech community Rafi (2008) explains the variations among males and females in texting messages when he found that 38% males and 62% females prefer SMS for communication respectively. Also, in line with the findings of Ling (2002) and Kasesniemi (2003), among others, Rafi reports on female's use of lexically dense words in SMS messages. According to Rafi, females are more skillful in writing complex messages and have developed a unitary system of intelligible communication in the form of SMS language, which is leaving a backwash effects on standard language and media language in Pakistan. His findings showed that more than 74% of messages by males were simple one- sentence or one–clause messages whereas 51.61% of messages sent by females consisted of many clauses.Ling (2006) also concludes in his study that although men are early adopters of mobile phone technology, it is among the females that the great motor of SMS lives. Settles (1985), Treichler and Kramarae (1983) and Rosenthal (1985) also conclude that females write longer messages and have a more complex structure than messages written by males.Yousaf and Ahmed (2013) in a study on the effect of SMS habits on writing skills of the university students of Pakistan and how the medium of communication is affecting the writing skills of the university students show that a significant majority (54%) of the students have problems in their written examinations and especially in writing English. The study also finds a considerable difference in the comparative study of the data gathered from male and female students as the female students (62%) feel the problem of writing more as compared to male students(38%). As SMS is a hybrid of written and spoken discourse, females are able to use this innate form of SMS, so they ' write' as though they are speaking. This study proves that females write longer messages than males, suggesting that they are comfortable to interact virtually as if they are in a real life interaction. In general, males are more concise in expressing their thoughts in SMS texts. However, writing too simple and brief SMS messages may sometimes lead to incomplete understanding of the message. In addition, writing too long SMS messages may lead to confusion as the intended message from the sender is lost.Baron (2004) reported some significant gender differences in relation to contracted forms and emoticons .Baron mentioned that male texters use more contracted forms than their female counterparts, and that females employ more emoticons than males. The same results were found in Finland where girls tend to send longer and more complex sentences (containing more than one clause) than male teens (Kasesniemi and Rautiainen, 2002). Similarly, Norwegian teenage girls sent far more complex and longer messages

than their male counterparts. Ling (2005) pointed out that Norwegian teen males and females use text messages differently. He added that females tend to send more “grooming” messages, compared with males. Ling (2005) also reported that teenage girls tend to text more, write longer texts, employ more sophisticated syntax, use less abbreviations, salute and close more, and use more punctuation than males do. However, males use more text messages for mid-future planning activities, whereas females use them for immediate future planning activities. He concluded that males are less smart and less sophisticated users of text messaging. Are these differences reflected in the occurrence of text message forms in formal writing of students? The present study investigated the impact of text message forms on the written English of male and female one hundred level undergraduates of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai.

METHODOLOGY

The research was a survey content analysis of students’ essays to establish the occurrence or otherwise of short message service (SMS) forms of the global system for mobile communications technology (GSM) in students’ essays. Students’ essays were analyzed, instances of the SMS forms were identified and the frequency of occurrence compared between male and female students across three disciplines - Science, Social Science, and Arts. These disciplines were represented by Chemistry, Physics, Biology departments for Science; Sociology, Political Science, Business Management for Social science; and English Language, History, Counseling Psychology for Arts. The population of the study comprised two thousand and eight (2008) one hundred level undergraduates of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, who registered for the 2012-2013 academic session. The University was chosen because it is one of the universities that offers courses in arts, science and social sciences from which samples could comfortably be drawn in line with the purpose and hypotheses of the study. One hundred level undergraduate students were chosen for the study because studies (Nurullah, 2009; Taiwo, 2008; Haste, 2005; Thurlow, 2003; and Ling, 2002) have shown that the use of text message forms is more prevalent among youths, particularly university students at the lower level. Accordingly, all the faculties and departments in the University formed the population of the study. The sample size of 320 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) table of random sampling numbers. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select subjects from the three strata using the following formula: total number in the stratum multiplied by the sample (320) and divided by the entire population. This gave a sample of three hundred and twenty students (320) from the three strata. The instrument for the study was the students’ essays and the inventory of words or expressions in short message service (SMS) forms developed from students’ essays called ‘Inventory of Nigeria Text Message Forms’, tagged “INTEMEF”. The INTEMEF served as a coding guide during analysis of the essays. The classification is as follows:

- Non-conventional spellings.
- Phonological approximation
- Shortenings
- Letter/ number homophones
- Grammatical peculiarities

The INTEMEF was given to two English language experts to validate where some of the forms not relevant to the study and those repeated were removed from the list. Also, in order to ensure reliability of the instrument, the students’ scripts were given to raters who are experts in English language to rate so as to ensure inter-rater reliability. The scripts were subjected to several ratings by different experts. This method was used to determine the consistency of the coders in coding the instrument in the same way over a period of time. In analyzing the essays, the identified SMS forms were scored based on the categorization of the SMS forms in this study. A frequency count of each SMS form was taken and recorded under each category. The same process was repeated by two other raters after two weeks. The results of the two analyses were used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The data were analyzed using means, standard deviation (SD), and analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Is there any difference in the frequency of occurrence of SMS forms in the written English language of female and male undergraduates?

Table1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Occurrence SMS Forms across Disciplines by Gender.

Gender	N	Mean(x)	S.D	%
Female	145	3.45	1.82	44.6
Male	175	3.56	2.10	55.4

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the occurrence of SMS forms among male and female one

hundred level undergraduates. The table shows that the male had the higher mean of 3.56 and standard deviation of 2.10 while the female had the lower mean of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 1.82. The frequency of occurrence of SMS forms among male and female subjects across disciplines was higher for males with 55.4% as against females with 44.6%.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of SMS among Male and Female Subjects by Class

SMS Classes	N	MEAN	S.D	%
Non-Conventional Spellings	320	12.53	3.36	14.3
Phonetic Approximation	320	18.02	6.41	20.6
Shortenings	320	16.64	5.07	19.0
Letter-Number Homophones	320	11.09	4.42	12.6
Grammatical Peculiarities	320	29.41	13.52	33.5

Table 2 presents the occurrence of SMS forms by male and female undergraduates according to class. It shows that grammatical peculiarities had the highest mean of 29.41 and standard deviation of 13.52 while letter-number homophones had the lowest mean of 11.09 and standard deviation of 4.42.

Table 3: Summary of ANOVA Results of Occurrence of SMS Forms in the Written English of Undergraduates by Gender

Source Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	P-value
Between Groups	21.5102	1	21.5102	0.2202Ns	0.06
Within Groups	31207.9778	319	19.5294		
Total	31229.488	320			

Ns=not significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that $F(1,319) = 0.2202$ at $p = 0.06$ which is not significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_{05} was retained. This implies that there is no significant difference in the occurrence of SMS forms in students' written English based on gender.

FINDINGS

There was no significant difference in the occurrence of SMS forms in the written English of one hundred level undergraduates by gender. This concurs with the findings of Rafi (2010), Shafie, Osman & Darus (2010), Balakrishnan & Bata (2010), and Ling (2005) who found no difference in the use of abbreviations, emoticons, onomatopoeic and word length and other SMS classes between males and females. This finding, however, deviates from studies by Baron (2004), Kasesniemi and Rautianen (2002), Colley and Todd (2002), Ling (2002), Kasesniemi (2003), Ling (2005), Rafi (2007), Al-Katib and Sabbah (2008), Taiwo (2008), Ling and Baron (2007), and Crystal, (2008) whose results showed gender difference in composing text messages. The study also showed that even though there was difference in the frequency of occurrence of SMS forms across disciplines based on gender, with males having a higher mean of SMS occurrence than females, the difference was not significant.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings are very crucial for all English as second language teachers. This could serve as a strong factor in enhancing students' use of English language as well as for preparing the teachers for the challenges of language teaching necessitated by the influence of technology. It is therefore expected that this study would go a long way in addressing the controversy surrounding the impact of technology, particularly the short message service forms on written language in particular, and language learning in general.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers at the various levels of education should discourage the use of short message service forms in formal writings such as applications, assignment, test, lecture notes, etc. There is need to teach learners what constitutes correct language.
2. Teachers should emphasize to students the concept of audience analysis. Students need to understand the importance of using the appropriate language in the appropriate setting and should know that who one is writing to affects the way in which one writes.
3. Teachers of English language should intensify the teaching of summarizing skills as the main reason for using the SMS forms is to shorten information in view of the small screen space of mobile phones.

4. Language teachers, curriculum planners, governments at various levels, and parents should emphasize and encourage intensive and extensive reading by learners.

REFERENCES

- Al-Katib, M.A. & Sabbah, E.H. (2008). Language choice in mobile text messages among Jordanian University students. *Sky Journal of Linguistics*, 21, 37- 65. Retrieved from, <http://www.linguistics.ci/julkaisut/>.
- Balakrishnan, V. & Batat, W. (2010). *Text messaging culture among youths: Comparing Malaysian and French youths*. : A challenge for consumer citizens. Retrieved March 30, 2011 from, www.educationforsustainabledevelopment.org
- Colly, A and Todd, Z. (2002). Gender-linked differences in the style and content of e-mails to friends. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 21(24), 380- 392.
- Crystal, D. (2007). *The fight for English language: How language pundits ate, shot and left*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Deumert, A. & Masinyana, S.O. (2008). Mobile language choices. The use of English and isiXhosa in text messages (SMS): Evidence from a bilingual South African sample. *English World-Wide* 29(2):117-147.
- Egya, S.E (2009). *Crippled idiom. English language in Nigeria in the twenty-first century*. Lead paper presented at the 7th Annual ELTT National Conference on 6th October, 2009, at the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa
- Federal Government of Nigeria (1981). *National policy on education*. Lagos: Federal Government Press.
- Hassan, R. (1990). *Linguistics, language and verbal art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kasesniemi, E. (2003). *Mobile messages: Young people and a new communication culture*. Tampere, Finland: Tampere University Press.
- Krejcie, R.V and Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities *Journal of Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 30, 607-610. Retrieved on 3rd March, 2013, from, sunburst.usd.edu/.
- Lin, A. (2005). Gendered, bilingual communication practices: Mobile text messaging among Hong Kong college students. *Fibre culture Journal*. Retrieved on 3rd August, 2010, from <http://journal.fibrejournal.org/issue6-lin.html>
- Ling, R & Baron, N.S. (2007). Text Messaging and IM: Linguistic Comparison of American College Data. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 26 (3), 291-298.
- Ling, R. (2005). The length of text messages and the use of predictive texting: who uses it and how much do they have to say? Paper presented at the Association of Internet Researchers, Chicago, IL.
- Ling, R. (2004). *The mobile connection .The cell phone's impact on the society*. Amsterdam: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.
- Lockerby, P. (2009). *What is language?* Retrieved on 4th September, 2010, from, <http://www.sciencezo.com/>
- Rafi, M.S. (2007). *SMS text analysis: Language, gender and current practices*. Retrieved on 4 June, 2010, from, <http://www.frace.org/>. Nagal
- Shafie, L. S., Osman N., Darus N. A. (2011). The sociolinguistics of texted English among bilingual college students In Malaysia. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* . 1 (16), 258-264
- Sutherland, J (2002). *Can u txt?* The Guardian 11th November, 2002. Retrieved on October, 2010, from, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>
- Taiwo, R (2008). *The thumb tribe: Creativity and social change through SMS in Nigeria*. Assessed on 28 June, 2010, from, <http://hss.fullerton.edu/linguistics/CLn/wioPDF/>
- Torppa, C.B. (2002). *Gender issues: Communication differences in interpersonal relationships*. Retrieved on 11 March, 2010, from, <http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife>.
- Wood, J. T. (2001). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture (4th ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.