

Citation: Nawaz, S., Ahmed, R., & Mushtaq, A. (2021). Effects of Short Messaging Services' Language on the Academic Writing Skills of Graduate Learners at University Level. *Global Language Review*, V(II), 110-117. [https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021\(VI-II\).13](https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021(VI-II).13)



Effects of Short Messaging Services' Language on the Academic Writing Skills of Graduate Learners at University Level

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Abstract

Short messaging service (SMS) language, textspeak or text language is used with internet-based communication such as text messaging or e-mail and instant messaging. The current study aims at determining the reasons for short messaging service (SMS) language usage and its effects on the academic writing of the learners. Eighty (40 male and 40 female) learners and ten teachers were purposive a selected as participants of the study. The data were amassed from two public sector universities of the Punjab, Pakistan. Two questionnaires, one for teachers and the other for learners, were administered as research tools for the data collection. The collected data were analyzed through SPSS. The majority of the teachers viewed that the SMS language usage had an undesirable effect on the pedagogic inscriptions of the university learners. Learners opined that the SMS language was an easy and fast mode of writing through they committed errors of punctuation, spelling, and syntax.

Key Words: Academic Writing, SMS (Texting), Textspeak, Standard English, Writing Skills

Introduction

The rise in text messaging among learners has raised the concerns of language teachers that this notion is very detrimental to the academic writing of the learners (Crystal, 2009). Ling (2010) terms SMS language as a life phase and not a cohort phenomenon. Mphahlele and Mashamaite (2005), SMS language stands for the economy of money and time. Baron (2010) claims that learners' writing is influenced by SMS messaging and SMS writing skills and communication. Crystal (2011) suggests that language learners know the power of Short Message Services (SMS) language and its potential to develop creative work. Brown et al. (2018) argue that the internet has changed the style of people. This style is more prevalent in the form of human interaction on

the internet. Cormack et al. (2007) view the change as both the positive and negative pedagogic manifestations.

Standard English is regularly referred to as a standard dialect. Standard English is a variation of the English language (especially print) that is usually used as part of a composition; is associated with instructive frameworks of English-speaking peoples around the world (Chen et al., 2015; Lyddy et al., 2014; Thurlow & Brown, 2003).

Shockingly coded dialect expressions (instant messages) are not really understandable for a penny (Starovoit, 2012; Thurlow & Brown, 2003). A guiding framework that is representative of standard language is direly needed. For example, to

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replace single syllables and words with single letters or numbers, one or more words are combined in one method. All words can also be overlooked (SMS) language ([Goldstuck, 2006](#)). For example, "thank you" is tightened with "tnx" and then abbreviated with "tx" ([Goldstuck, 2006](#)). According to [Thurlow and Brown \(2003\)](#), instant messages can be perceived as non-standard typography or spelling structures. A study in South Africa found that abbreviations, non-standard spellings, and paralinguistic compensations were used as part of instant messages written in English.

Teachers are making deliberations on the effects of information communication contents with more attention and focus ([Geertsema et al., 2011](#)). Language instructors and language planners are much concerned about the usage of truncated, shortened, and abbreviated way of communication that is improperly being sifted into standard academic writing skills. The SMS dialect has likewise been seen in examination scripts ([Weiss, 2009](#)). UK-Based language testing body, in an official report, surfaced that examination scripts were absorbed and occupied with abridged, truncated, and curtailed lexicons (Henry, 2004).

[Owens \(2004\)](#) notes that reading and composing a structure is an important part of the instructional framework, especially for young learners. Spelling and reading have also been shown to have a great connection between spelling and composition ([Geertsema et al., 2011](#)). Discussion and spelling offer fundamental phonological ways, but not simply provisional forms ([Owens, 2004](#)). This is because spelling requires more information to be erased from memory ([Geertsema et al., 2011](#)). Extensive spelling requires a section, and reading requires mixing skills. Spelling and composition are the connecting forms that should form the ideal work ([Owens, 2004](#)).

As noted by [Crystal \(2009\)](#), the ingenuity of messaging is practically ignored. Research shows that messaging does not affect young people's ability to read and write. This further enhances the skill. Recent research (by a group at Coventry University) has found an unusually positive relationship between the use of content dialect in pre-adolescent

youth and the skills required to achieve it in Standard English.

The web semantics proposed by [Crystal \(2009\)](#) recommends that we learn more about the instructive point of view, the qualities of the SMS dialect, and its imaginary possibilities. Mobile phones have the potential to be expressed separately from the main open capabilities. The world saw messaging verse competitions and content books as new evolving species exploring the potential consequences of wordplay within the 160-character limit. Why can't we use it to increase learners' ability in a standard dialect? As the web and messages are gradually used as part of teaching and instruction, [Crystal \(2009\)](#) offers methods of using informative content in the classroom to encourage learning about the dialect.

Theoretical Framework

George Grebner's theory of mass communication plays a key role in his work on the influence of the media using a framework. The central claim of this theory is that constant exposure to media content has small but measurable effects on the perception of members of the audience, and the more a person is exposed to a media message, the more he starts believing in the content ([Gerbner et al., 1986](#)). Here, the effect of SMS is measured by usage.

Aims and Objectives

The main goal is to find out the effects of texting/short message service (SMS) use on learners' academic writing skills. This study also finds out if learners' academic writing skills are affected by SMS language. Thus, the hypothesis is that the greater the habit of using SMS, the more negatively it affects the learners' academic writing skills. This study envisioned recognizing the perspectives of university learners regarding the possible influence of short service messaging on their speculative writing. The objectives of the study were: to help determine the reasons for SMS language used by the learners enrolled in the universities of Punjab, explore the effects of short messaging service language on academic writing of graduate learners and compare the level of short messaging services

usage in male and female learners academic writing skills.

Research Methodology

The study is quantitative in its nature. Two questionnaires were employed to collect information from university teachers and learners. Purposive sampling was employed to select the individuals for an aspired purpose. Learners and teachers were included in the study from two public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan (IUB and GSCWU Bahawalpur). The questionnaire for learners' participants was divided into three factors which were formulated in accordance with the objectives of the research study. A separate questionnaire for teachers was used to seek their opinions about the usage of SMS language in their

academic writing tasks. Questionnaires were delivered in person, and information was collected from the target population. These self-prepared questionnaires were completed by participants without the assistance and participation of researchers (Bless et al., 2000). The collected data were spread in the SPSS data sheet and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Results pertaining to factors like reason of SMS language use, learners' consciousness of SMS language use, effects of SMS language on academic writing skills, and the teachers' views on the effects of SMS language on academic writing of learners are presented below:

Table 1. Students Perspectives on “Reasons for SMS Language Use”

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	SMS language is easy to use.	3.71	1.62
3	Text language is appropriate.	3.68	1.28
5	I send messages to my friends in my free time.	3.63	1.51
9	Learners write simple English in text messaging.	3.58	1.23
12	I can compose my message rapidly.	3.51	1.04
13	I enjoy text language while in chat.	2.93	1.49
11	My communication purpose is achieved.	2.63	1.18
	Average	3.38	1.335

Table 1 shows that the frequency for the first five items is comparatively high like the SMS language is easy to use ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.62$), the text language is appropriate ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.28$), the learners send messages to their friends in free time ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.51$), compose their messages rapidly ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.23$) and can compose their messages fast ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.04$), 60% of learners' reasons for using SMS language reportedly agreed. The two items on

these reasons belong to the average use, they enjoy the text language during the conversation ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.49$), and their communication purpose was achieved ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.18$). A holistic view of the results indicates the reason for the use of SMS language ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.204$). Hence, it is evident that most learners use the language of SMS as easy, simple, and pleasant to compose a message quickly and to achieve an interactive goal.

Table 2. Students Perspectives on “Consciousness of SMS Language Use”

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
2	I use abbreviations in text messaging.	3.89	1.23
4	I often use it for SMS in my daily life.	3.71	1.18
6	I use the short spelling of words while writing SMS.	3.69	1.36
7	I am aware of SMS text messaging.	3.68	1.24
8	I receive and send text messages in routines.	3.65	1.23

10	I don't care about grammar errors.	3.59	1.29
14	I don't find text language as appropriate communication.	3.10	1.29
17	I enjoy text language.	3.49	1.52
18	I consciously accept the lexicon of the text language.	3.43	1.38
19	I am habitual of text language.	3.42	1.36
	Average	3.56	1.301

The table above shows the average score and standard deviation of students' perspectives on "Consciousness of learners using the SMS language ."The results indicate high utilization for the first six items. The learners use abbreviations in text messaging ($M = 3.89, SD = 1.23$), often use a mobile phone in routines for short message services (SMS) ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.18$), use short spelling of words when writing SMS ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.36$), the learners were aware of SMS text messages ($M = 3.68, SD = 1.24$), receive and send text messages in routines ($M = 3.65, SD = 1.23$) and do not pay more attention to

grammar ($M = 3.59, SD = 1.29$). The next four expressions belong to the categories of medium frequency usage, the text language was not appropriate ($M = 3.10, SD = 1.29$), the learners enjoy the text language ($M = 3.49, SD = 1.52$), consciously accept the lexicon of the text language ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.38$) and learners use text language ($M = 3.42, SD = 1.36$). It was found that learners know the use of SMS language to a high level. Learners are familiar with the language of the text; it is inappropriate grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, but often use it as a habit.

Table 3. Students Perspectives on "The Effects of SMS Language Use on Academic Writing"

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
15	SMS language deviates from linguistic norms.	3.81	1.36
20	I feel difficulties in academic writing.	3.78	1.62
21	My writings are influenced by the language of SMS.	3.67	1.22
22	The SMS language corrupted my grammar.	3.62	1.28
23	I make spelling mistakes in academic writing.	3.66	1.22
24	I become confused about spellings.	3.65	1.51
25	While writing academically, I am confused about grammar.	3.64	1.36
26	My ability was influenced by the SMS language.	3.63	1.25
27	SMS has a negative effect on learners' language.	3.41	1.23
28	I use short words when writing an exam paper.	3.16	1.23
29	I often forget to spell the words on the paper correctly.	3.09	1.29
30	Learners do not write proper sentences in text messaging.	2.93	1.18
31	SMS has a negative effect on the English language at times.	2.93	1.04
	Average	3.38	1.244

The average and standard deviation in the table above showed high-frequency use for the first eight items. SMS language goes beyond linguistic norms ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.36$), the learners feel difficulty on writing academic discourse ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.62$), writing is under the influence of SMS language ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.22$), SMS language grammar is damaged ($M = 3.62, SD = 1.28$), the learners make spelling mistakes in academic writing ($M = 3.66, SD = 1.22$),

they are confused on spelling ($M = 3.65, SD = 1.51$), grammatical confusion when writing academic ($M = 3.64, SD = 1.36$) and SMS language influenced their knowledge ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.25$). The next five items fall into the categories of medium frequency use; SMS has a negative effect on learners' language ($M = 3.41, SD = 1.23$), the learners use short words when writing exam papers ($M = 3.16, SD = 1.23$), often forget to write the words on the page correctly ($M = 3.09, SD$

= 1.29), do not write correct sentences in text messaging ($M= 2.93, SD= 1.18$) and SMS sometimes has a negative effect on English language ($M= 2.93, SD = 1.04$), 65% of learners are agreed. Results revealed that the negative effects of SMS language on

the academic writing. Text language has a negative effect on the grammar, vocabulary and spelling of learners who are accustomed to using the SMS language.

Table 4. Teachers Perspective on “The effects of SMS Language Use on Student’s Academic Writing”

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I do not pay attention to spelling in academic writing	4.00	1.10
2	I do not pay attention to punctuation in academic writing.	3.04	1.05
3	I use the abbreviation in academic writing.	3.78	1.21
4	I use a letter as a literal sound of a word.	3.78	1.08
5	I use non-traditional spelling in my academic writing skills.	3.85	1.06
6	I use G. Clipping as a get-goin.	4.22	.93
7	I use extra punctuation for joy or sadness.	3.37	1.21
8	I use deleting the last letters like aft-after.	3.70	1.03
9	I break the grammar rule in academic writing.	4.11	.97
10	I do not use correct sentences in academic language.	3.48	1.34
	Average	3.82	1.098

The frequencies and percentages on the reasons for using the SMS language are given in the table above. The mean and standard deviation showed high use for all statements. The learners do not pay attention to spelling in academic writing ($M= 4.00, SD= 1.10$), do not pay attention to punctuation marks in academic writing ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.05$), use abbreviations in academic writing ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.21$), use a letter or number as the letter sound of a word ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.08$), use non-traditional spelling in academic writing ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.06$),

use the letter G. clipping as the cut continues ($M = 4.22, SD= .93$), use the deletion of the last letters such as aft-after ($M = 3.70, SD = 1.03$), break grammatical rules in academic writing ($M = 4.11, SD) = .97$), and do not use correct sentences in academic writing ($M = 3.48, SD = 1.34$), 85% of teachers satisfied or agreed. Teachers’ perspectives on “SMS language has a negative effect on learners’ academic writing” suggest that the learners use numbers as unconventional spelling, G. cuts, extra punctuation marks, extra letters, and sounds.

Table 5. Male and Female Students opinions on “SMS language on Academic Writing”

SMS Language on Academic Writing	M	SD	t	df	p
Male	3.68	.634	-4.271	798	.000
Female	3.86	.535			

Results show that mean values of female respondents ($M=3.86, SD=0.535$) are higher than the mean values of male respondents ($M=3.68; SD=0.634$). So, females have a higher level of SMS language use in

academic writing than males. The table also indicates a significant difference in male and female participants’ academic writing ($\alpha=0.05, t=-4.271, p=0.000$).

Table 6. Effects of Short Messaging Services’ Language on the Academic Writing Skills of Learners

Predictor	R	R Square	β	F	Sig.
SMS Language	.707	.499	1.499	507.509	.000

Dependent Variable: Academic Writing

Results confirmed that SMS language has significant and positive effects on academic writing as $\beta=1.499$, $F=507.509$, $p=.000$. R-square value also explained that SMS language accounts for 49.9% of the variance in academic writing.

Discussion

[Thurlow and Brown \(2003\)](#) closely linked their study to the views of [Crystal \(2009\)](#) and came up with the opinion that the majority of text messaging language is used with spelling variants ([Thurlow & Brown, 2003](#)). The researchers' estimates are lower than those used in the survey studies reviewed in the background of the study ([Thurlow & Brown, 2003](#)). The ellipited capital letters were the most common non-standard spelling, reaching the percentage of 22% of such spellings as cited in a study of [Thurlow and Brown \(2003\)](#). [De Jonge and Kemp \(2012\)](#) counted 19% of non-standard spellings. [Plester et al. \(2009\)](#) were of the view that most of the non-standard spellings and short text were not a new phenome. The capitalization issue was resulted in the most common non-standard spelling counting 22% as cited in the study of [Thurlow and Brown \(2003\)](#). [De Jonge and Kemp \(2012\)](#) also found non-standard spelling issues to 19% among the learners' academic writing. [Wood et al. \(2009\)](#) viewed those non-standard spellings and start text as not a novice phenomenon. Although this non-standard usage is taken as a generalization, the academic qualification has yet to create different and varied results ([Rosen et al., 2010](#)). The laboratory based experimental studies also indicated the usage of short messaging in the pedagogic texts. The studies conducted by [De Jonge and Kemp \(2012\)](#) support the above-stated views and claims. The present study also looked at the effects of SMS language or messaging on academic writing in the formation of weak sentences from non-traditional writing, truncated vocabulary items, extra punctuation marks, and extra letters by university graduates.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the above-mentioned results and discussions, the study is rounded off that university teachers are in favor of the negative effects of text messages on the academic writing of graduate learners as it influenced spelling, grammatical structure, and punctuation. Most learners use short messaging service (SMS) languages because they are easy to use, simple to taste, and the message is compiled quickly and reaches the goal. Learners become aware of text language skills; grammar, vocabulary, and spelling are inconsistent, but they are often used because it has become a habit. University learners feel that the use of the SMS language has a negative effect on them, as the text language has a negative effect on the grammar, vocabulary, and spelling of learners who are accustomed to using the SMS language. They are confused when writing in the exam. Teachers are of the opinion that the language of text has a negative effect on the academic writing of learners. Learners learn non-traditional spelling, G. Clipping, additional punctuation, sounds used as letters and numbers, grammatically incorrect sentences, and vocabulary from the language of SMS. Learners who use the language of SMS are aware of its use and its negative effects on academic writing but make it a habit to use it in everyday life. The current study contributes to the betterment of standard academic writing as it raises awareness of the negative effects of text messages among teachers and university learners at the university level. This will open the door for researchers to explore other aspects related to it and to conduct additional research to develop strategies to maintain a standard language among learners at the university level. It is recommended that future researchers should conduct research to investigate the positive effects of SMS language. Additional research may be carried out to determine the specific problems faced by Second Language Learners and to fix these problems appropriately.

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