

IMPLICATIONS OF TEXT MESSAGING ON STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BUEA

Lima Beatrice Kahboh Lebsia Titanji*

Department of English, Faculty of Arts
University of Buea, Cameroon

Lima Beatrice Kahboh Lebsia Titanji, PhD* corresponding author

Majo Michele Patience**

Department of English/French, Faculty of Arts
University of Buea, Cameroon

Nseme Stephen Ndode (Ph.D Student) ***

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Buea-Cameroon.

Key terms: Simple message system (SMS), Text messaging, Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS)

*Beatrice Titanji is a lecturer in the Department of English, University of Buea- Cameroon.

**Ms. Majo Patience is a final year undergraduate student at the University of Buea-Cameroon

***Nseme Stephen Ndode is an instructor / PhD student at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Buea - Cameroon.

ABSTRACT: *This article examines the implications of SMS text messaging on the writing skills of students at the University of Buea. A survey was carried out on students' of level 500 with the aim of finding what they write in their messages and giving the samples and full forms. It identifies the kind of messages that students write and shows how different they are from the formal contracted forms that are known by writers and linguists. An analysis of the presented forms shows that they are very different from the regular contractions that are known in the English language. Students present what is understood by their readers and friends which is different from Standard English forms. Research carried out also shows that contrary to what many people think SMS texting is not all negative. The phenomenon of SMS texting has a positive side to it as many students today write more than ever before. The paper shows that there is much to achieve with its use than otherwise. This new school of thought is spearheaded by David Crystal (2008) and Baron (2008) who see more positive aspects to SMS text messaging than other linguists and some writers.*

KEYWORDS: Simple message system (SMS), Text messaging, Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS)

INTRODUCTION

Developments in technology have seen shifts in mass communication which has given rise to novel technological tools that have become useful for world-wide communication. The cellular phone or

Mobile phones as they are commonly known has become the most important devise of the media and is gaining enormous reputation among the masses around the world and of course at the University of Buea. As more and more people continue to acquire and use the cell phones, it is pertinent to inquire their effect on the communication landscape. The progressively more extensive use of text messaging has led to the probing of the social and academic performance of students (Mphal et al; 2009). (Rafi 2009) found that the observed data demonstrates that SMS (System Management Services) language ignores the orthographic and syntactic regulations of a language with an enormous stress on written sounds. For example:

‘4’ for ‘four and ‘for’

‘8’ for ‘ate and ‘eight’

‘bc’ bcz’ for ‘because’

Short sentences as ‘hw r u?’ for ‘how are you?’

The main focus of this paper is not to bring out the forms used in SMS texting but to examine the effects that the new forms have on students’ formal usage in relation to their writing skills. (Crystal; 2008) says “texters are prone to ignore spellings either intentionally or reflexively.” What is true is that SMS has developed as a 21st century style, full of contractions and out of the ordinary use of language used by an immature generation that does not worry about standards. There is a broadly voiced apprehension that the practice is nurturing a decline in literacy. Thus, the manner in which people converse as well as write has been influenced by text messaging.

Every day more and more students worldwide acquire and use mobile phones to send simple message system (SMS). As the name suggests, SMS is simple and students have devised a myriad ways of sending messages to friends in a complicated coded language which is new to the English writing system. When we consider the complex English spelling system, one could see this as a positive revolution that could help students in communication. However, as long as a form of writing is not standardized, it is never considered formal and this system of communication has led many a student to bring in the new forms into the classroom. The phenomenon has brought in its wake three main schools of thought. While some educators and students think that text messaging is one of the banes of mobile telephony, because of its possible negative impact on writing skills of students; others contend that it is rather enhances their written communication skills and is therefore a blessing rather than a curse. A third group thinks that the argument is neither here nor there-text message has neither positive nor negative impact on student writing. The first school of thought bases its argument on the fact that for the sake of brevity, concision and economy, the SMS throws the essential mechanics of writing such as grammar, syntax, punctuation and capitalization to the wind (Crowder, 2010). The other school of thought spearheaded by the renowned linguist (David Crystal, 2008), thinks otherwise: “text messaging does not really pose a threat as many fear it can. The more students write, the more they improve upon their writing skills. Therefore its increased use rather enhances the literacy of user, especially the youth instead of harming it.” The debate is carried to another level by the third group who doubt that texting really has any effect (positive or negative) on English grammar at all. It is its misuse, especially the unbridled use of abbreviations and non-standard expressions and spellings and their possible negative impact on students’ writing skills that makes SMS negative.

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876, he hardly would have thought where the invention will lead the world to. Before the telephone became available for use, people used long distance electronic communication by means of a telegraph. This showed the need for communication even at long distances between people who could not see one another. Today's mobile communication is wireless, thereby giving communicators a chance to see mobile phones as companions (Ngange and Boateng, 2011). Remarkably, this power of portability gives mobile phones an advantage over stationary technologies like radio and TV sets. Moreover, radio and TV still remain under the stiff control of the ruling elite, thereby encouraging individuals to cling to their mobile devices which they consider personal (Geser, 2004; Ling, & Donner, 2009).

The origin of the mobile phone has tremendous strength to empower individual members of society to engage in communication. This interaction goes beyond physical barriers, since distance is not an issue for users of mobile phones. In fact, it feels close and intimate sharing text messages on the mobile phone, giving one the opportunity to think that their interlocutor is not far off from them (Agre, 2001).

The 21st Century is referred to as an information age largely because the explosive growth in computers has made information a valuable product and communication a useful tool (Tanjong, 2006). Consequently, there is rapid increase in the ownership and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The mobile phone offers students an opportunity to reach out to friends and relatives; both far and near (Haggan, 2007). With such utility value, mobile phones have become a "cannot –do-without" tool for students. Highways, beer parlours, classrooms, bedrooms, and all environments have become favourite for the exchange of text messages between students and their telephone contacts (Ling & Baron, 2007). Some students even text in class (Tindell & Bohlander, 2012). From observation thus, it is difficult to find a student without a telephone in hand at any given point. This is because they are either expecting a reply to a text message they sent to an interlocutor, or they expect someone to send them a text message. Text messages have thus been used by students to create virtual environments, as well as a means to socialize (Campbell & Kwak, 2010). Accordingly, text messaging is a routine activity amongst students (Lin & Tong, 2007).

Text messages also offer students the ability to undertake silent communication (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). A third party does not need to know what any two interlocutors are discussing, except the content is intentionally made known to a third party. Ideas are communicated by text interlocutors without much noise and interference (exception of network breaks). Hence, students will automatically find it more convenient to use text messages, especially if they find themselves in certain environments that may prevent them from making a call (North, Johnston, and Ophoff, 2014). Students thus can find it convenient using SMS, because it is cheap, affordable, and quick in communicating information (Mahmoud, 2013).

The fact that students can also share secrets via texts makes text messaging a hobby for them (Balakrishnan & Raj, 2012). The students thus become more available to friends (through text) as a means to share key issues that make up their daily agenda. In a survey of American undergraduates, (Drouin and Davis 2009) found that 75% of students believed it to be appropriate

to use texts in informal messages to friends, but only 6% believed it to be appropriate in formal written correspondence with an instructor.

To economize space, SMS texts use more abbreviations, shortening of words, dropping of letters, combining letters with symbols or numbers to convey a given message. This has a negative bearing on students' English language skills (Rosen, Lim, Carrier, & Cheever, 2011).

(Bouhnik and Deshen , 2014) are of the opinion that the original intention of creating WhatsApp was 'to replace the existing SMS platform for a system that is free of charge...' (p.217). This argument to date, is debatable. In Cameroon for instance, mobile telephone companies (there are three outstanding ones in the country: MTN, Orange and Nexttel) have devised recent strategies that aim at providing SMS for almost free. An MTN subscriber for instance simply fills in credit for 500FCFA to get unlimited text for one month. This is almost free compared to the previous system where subscribers needed to pay between 30FCFA and 50FCFA for each message sent. Again, for 20 FCFA, MTN subscribers can simply dial a code to get unlimited text for 24 hours. With MTN Freedom code, a subscriber gets unlimited SMS, airtime, internet and free social media browsing (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Google Plus) for up to 30 days. MTN Easy Booster code also offers 100% bonus to calls and SMS to MTN mobile numbers. Subscribers of Orange can dial a code to subscribe to unlimited SMS. This code gives them the option to choose per day, per week or per month subscription. Nexttel users can dial a code to get unlimited calls and SMS every week end at 300 FCFA. They can also get up to 400 percent discount for calls, SMS and internet by subscribing to the ECO-PACK by dialing a code.

(Abbie, Nenagh, Frances, and Rauno 2015) found that university students recognize the different requirements of different recipients and modalities when considering text use and that students are able to avoid text use in exams despite media reports to the contrary. Short messages (SMS) can be of great importance to English language teaching in particular and to languages in general. It can be destructive if not controlled and left to accept make up words, choppy lingo, sloppy spelling and grammatical errors to get a quick and short message across (Starovoit, 2012). On the other hand, it can be a very good tool to boost language skills and sub skills if controlled and written in proper English especially that it comprises the main corpus of people's communication.

(Jacob, 2011) calls for caution when examining the influence of text on 'writing'. To him, SMS style of writing improves students' note-taking competence as well as comprehension. However, (Dansieh, 2011) opines that SMS text messaging function could heighten the tendency among students to adopt non-standard uses and contracted forms of English words in their classwork, examinations and research reports especially in an academic environment where English is the main language of instruction. Baron (2009) points out that language is "rule-governed behavior" and if the language community follows the rules, others will recognize when errors in writing are made (p. 44).

In their 2016 book entitled "[The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World](#)", Adam Gazzaley and Larry Rosen explain that human brains are limited in their ability to pay attention. We don't really multitask but rather switch rapidly between tasks. Students can thus be said to "switch" at some point to consciousness when they are faced with a formal situation that require

them to produce results. This could be, in part, the argument of scholars who argue that text messaging has no influence on students' writing and speaking skills. Linguists who support the use of SMS like (Baron, 2008) contend that

“the use of texting manifests creativity in the use of letters, punctuation and numbers and that it increases phonetic awareness in children. ... different people have their own unique texting styles depending on the messages and the person who receives the message. Some are relational and some informational which require a change in register. (Coupland, 2000) notes that, “...the concerns about the impact of SMS language appear exaggerated. Its graphic uniqueness is not a new phenomenon and its use is not limited to the young. There is evidence that it helps rather than hinder literacy, and only a small part of it uses a distinct orthography. A trillion text messages seem a lot but ... in comparison to multi-trillion instances of standard orthography in everyday life ...negligible proportion of the language in usage.”

It will however be ignorant to agree with Coupland that we do not care about the impact of SMS language on the Standard English language. We should care about the language in order not to be lost when writing in a formal situation.

(Crystal, 2008) mentions that

“texting has added a new dimension to language use, but its long term impact is negligible.”

He further says it is not a disaster and it will not harm the standards of the language. Crystal thinks that only about ten per cent of words are abbreviated and that texting as a 21st century phenomenon has its distinct graphic style, full of abbreviations and deviant spellings and uses of language used by youths who do not care about standards, causing a decline in literacy and harming language as a whole are wrong, or at least debatable.

Inasmuch as these thoughts and views have been put forward by linguists, field experience shows that when wrong forms are used constantly, the tendency is to write those forms every time and everywhere a writing exercise is called for. Note-taking could be done using short forms but students have shifted the constant use of the short forms into the examination halls for which they are penalized.

The main focus of this paper is not just to bring out the forms used in SMS texting but to examine the effects that the used forms have on students' formal usage in relation to their writing skills. (Crystal 2008) says that “texters are prone to ignore spellings either intentionally or reflexively.” What is true is that SMS has developed as a 21st century style, full of contractions and out of the ordinary use of language used by an immature generation that does not worry about standards. There is a broadly voiced apprehension that the practice is nurturing a decline in literacy. Thus, the manner in which people converse as well as write has been influenced by text messaging.

Every day more students worldwide acquire and use mobile phones and its massive use causes them to immerse more in text messaging; simple message system (SMS). As the name suggests, SMS is simple and students have devised a myriad ways of sending messages to friends in complicated coded languages which are new to the English writing system. When we consider the complex English spelling system, one could see this as a positive revolution that could help students in communication. However, as long as a form of writing is not standardized, it is never

considered formal and this system of communication has led many a student to bring in the new forms into the classroom situations which have only caused them to lose marks where the standard forms are expected. The phenomenon has brought in its wake three main schools of thought. While some educators and students think that text messaging is one of the banes of mobile telephony, because of its possible negative impact on writing skills of students; others contend that it is rather enhances their written communication skills and is therefore a blessing rather than a curse. A third group thinks that the argument is neither here nor there-text message has neither positive nor negative impact on student writing. The first school of thought bases its argument on the fact that for the sake of brevity, concision and economy, the SMS throws the essential mechanics of writing such as grammar, syntax, punctuation and capitalization to the wind (Crowder, 2010). The other school of thought spearheaded by the renowned linguist David (Crystal, 2008), thinks otherwise:

“text messaging does not really pose a threat as many fear it can. The more students write,

the more they improve upon their writing skills. Therefore its increased use rather enhances the literacy of users, especially the youth instead of harming it.”

The debate is carried to another level by the third group who doubt that texting really has any effect (positive or negative) on English grammar at all. It is its misuse, especially the unbridled use of abbreviations and non-standard expressions and spellings and their possible negative impact on students’ writing skills that makes SMS negative.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a sample population of fifty students in level 500 in the department of English/French at the University of Buea. Out of (50) fifty questionnaires given out, (46) forty-six were retrieved and respondents approved the fact that they use all types of short-cut forms to communicate with their friends, family etc. Students were further asked to indicate the type of short forms that they use in texting. The various short forms used by students were presented and for the interest of this paper, they were identified and grouped to show that though abbreviated, the SMS texts have meaning for the users. The results collected were presented as tables under findings categorized under the following headings: grammar, abbreviations, punctuations and ambiguities. Inasmuch as some linguists condemn the use of these short forms, this article finds some of them good enough to be incorporated into the language to ease writing and make it faster and acceptable as standard. English being a liberal language, it is hoped that this will be seen as a contribution to the academic world in the new era of SMS texting.

FINDINGS**1) GRAMMATICAL SHORT FORMS USED IN TEXTING****Table 1**

S/N	SMS TEXT	FULL FORM/STANDARD
1.	*btn/ bn/ bwn	Between
2.	*gdmnx/ gmx	Good morning
3.	*btw dem/ bndem, btn	Between them
4.	*by, bai	Bye, buy
5.	may ur dz b gud /me ur dz b gud	May your days be good
6.	plz 2moro /tmoro	Please tomorrow
7.	*im anoi wt u/ am anoi wt u	I'm annoyed with you
8.	tru/ tr	Through, true
9.	cmx nau/ Kamx n	Coming now
10.	*enof	enough
11.	xpln	Explain
12.	*phone	Fone
13.	shld	Should
14.	wld	Would
15.	diff	difficult
16.	*wit	with
17.	*actn	action
18.	*auctn	auction
19.	*situatn	Situation
20.	crwd	crowd
21.	rait	Write
22.	grp	group
23.	flw	Follow
24.	hafa	How far
25.	tday	today

One area that has seen a lot of wrong usage in SMS texting has been grammar. Several words have been distorted to the detriment of young learners who take the spellings for real and automatically transfer them on to their classroom formal work. The words that are starred on the **Table 1** 'Grammar' above may be some of such words that students use so regularly that they are penalized for as errors in their tests and examinations. The text form of 'with' which is 'wit' gives a different meaning to the word and also a different context to someone who has knowledge of grammar since both words are correct English words. The use of 'wit' for 'with' is very rampant in Cameroon Pidgin English and the deletion of the 'th' so common that allowing this usage may only further impede correct usage of the English language at the University of Buea.

Learners have a problem with the past tense in regular classroom situations thus there are expressions like "I'm annoyed with you" written as "am anoi wit u" or better still "anoid". These forms as can be seen have problems with the personal pronoun 'I' and the past tense of the verb

‘annoy’ which is not conjugated. The continuous use of these forms only goes a long way to hamper the correct standard forms of the language.

Homophones like “buy, by and bye” are texted in same manner. The words already give

2) ABBREVIATIONS

Table 2

S/N	SMS TEXT	FULL STANDARD FORMS
1.	lv u, lv yu	Love you
2.	b/cs, bc	Because
3.	2u, t u	To you
4.	8 et	Ate, eight
5.	rtrn	Return
6.	hs	House/his
7.	schl/sch/skul	School
8.	dat/dt	That
9.	frm	From
10.	nd/n	And
11	tmoro/2morro	Tomorrow
12.	fgiv/4giv	Forgive
13.	hr	Here/hear/hour
14.	gov't	Government
15.	Bro	Brother
16.	dn't	Don't
17.	monx	Morning
18.	s'up	What's up
19.	Info	Information
20.	y'af	You have
21.	cls	Class
22.	uwc	You're welcome
23.	y'all	You all
24.	sth	Something
25.	prblm	problem

It should be noted that although **Table 2** is on abbreviations, the contractions do not contain abbreviations like apostrophes that are common in the English language. This shows how SMS texting functions. What is important in the message is the meaning and not the form.

3) AMBIGUITIES

S/N	SMS TEXT	FULL STANDARD FORMS
1.	cls	Class/clause
2.	fyn	Fine/find
3.	hr	Hear/here/hour
4.	dunno	Do you know/ I don't know
5.	shw	Show/shower
6.	m/I'm	I'm/am
7.	dat/dt	That/dart
8.	n joy	Enjoy/and joy
9.	blv	Believe/beloved
10.	wr	Where/wear/were
11.	grt/gr8t	Great/grate
12.	tym	Time/thyme
13.	wat	What/wart
14.	lv	Live/leave/love
15.	hs	His/house
16.	ld	Lead/load
17.	lk	Look/lock lack
18.	bk	Book/because/bucket
19.	ppl	People/pupil
20.	yr	Your/year
21.	rait	Write/right/rite
22.	cld	Could,cold
23.	dr	Dear/doctor
24.	frm	Form/former
25.	den/thn	Den/then

Table 3 contains words that have ambiguities that can be recognized as homophones i.e. words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings. These occur in the table above and more as the SMS text is the same for “here, hear and hour”. Ambiguities occur when an interlocutor does not understand the context in use and may take the one to mean quite the other. Such SMS texting will therefore require knowledge of the subject under discussion and as (Baron 2000) states “...as a 21st century phenomenon, texting is distinct in style” and may have just a negligible to the multi-trillion instances of standard orthography in everyday life. Its unique style may therefore be just a necessary evil in this era.

PUNCTUATION

Most SMS textings are done in a rush; consequently, there is no time to verify errors Punctuations almost don't appear in SMS texting. Sometimes an 'x' is used to indicate the 'ing' form for the continuous tense as in 'good morning' and a stroke – used above a letter for 'tion' or 'sion' as in action, auction, and situation. Generally, punctuations do not matter in texting as observed in the data collected so far. The intention of the interlocutor is only to pass on the information at hand to

the listener. There is no thought for correctness in punctuation, capitalization, subject-verb agreement anywhere. Did you get my message?

It is assumed that the frequent use of telephone text messaging distracts students. This distraction is presumed to have negative repercussions in university students' writing and speaking skills (Russell, 2010). Writing deficiencies result from spill-over effects tapped from text messages and moved into formal language settings. Such unintended consequences need urgent attention, considering the power and influence the English Language has in the business, scientific and educational world. Students are required to have a proper mastery of English Language skills; accounting for why, for instance, the University of Buea introduced two compulsory English Language courses (ENG 101 and ENG 102) that are prerequisites for graduation. With the influence of technology and the use of text messages (SMS), there is a worry that the informal nature of text communication, the use of Pidgin English forms and excessive use of abbreviations will continue to negatively impact students' proper use of grammar, spellings and punctuations. (Baron 2008) and (Crystal 2008) both see the phenomenon in another perspective and think that SMS texting constitutes a negligible proportion of the language in use and is thus harmless. (Crystal 2008) says that only 10% of words are abbreviated in SMS texting and is thus not a disaster that will harm the standards of English. Research for this paper also showed that many of the short forms used in SMS texting are recognizable meaning that texting can be used for communication. A lot of ground is also covered during texting through faster writing as compared to long hand or formal writing situations.

English being a liberal language, it is thought that this will serve as a contribution to the academic world in the 21st century. The text form of 'with' which is 'wit' gives a different meaning to the word and also a different context to someone who has knowledge of grammar since both words are correct English usage. The use of 'wit' for 'with' is very rampant in Cameroon English and the deletion of the 'th' so common that allowing this usage may only further impede correct usage of the English language at the University of Buea and elsewhere. The use of the interdental "th" is a problem to many users in Cameroon which should impede its usage in standard English and many users write 'wit' because that is the way they pronounce it and many of such abound in both speech and writing.

Learners have a problem with the past tense in regular classroom situations thus there are expressions like "I'm annoyed with you" written as "am anoi wit u" or better still "anoid". These forms as can be seen have problems with the personal pronoun 'I' and the past tense of the verb 'annoy' which is not conjugated. The continuous use of these forms only goes a long way to hamper the correct standard forms of the language. Homophones like "buy, by and bye" are texted in same manner. The words already cause spelling difficulties with learners which texting has come to complicate. These words cause ambiguities in situations where the context is not clear. We see advertisements like "Bye, By Me" which should otherwise read "Buy Me" on billboards.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to (Ling 2010), young adults 19 to 21 years of age have reached the peak of using text messaging in their life phases. (Craig 2003) argues that young people who use instant messaging

– and therefore enter into a practice of using slang and phonetic replacements - subconsciously increase their knowledge of metalinguistics - the skill of understanding language and culture – thus experiencing “tangible increases in overall literacy” (p. 125). This shows that it is not all a waste of time but texting actually causes learners to improve in the culture of the language since no language is learned without the culture of the people who speak it.

From the examination of SMS and the input of other schools of thought, we realize that SMS has come with its own lexicon which is somehow different from the English language contracted forms that we know. The use of SMS in communication has greatly eased communication in the last ten years. The use of SMS cannot only be seen as a negative force in the academic world. With constant use of short forms, students can take down classroom notes faster. However, students should be attentive when it comes to examinations. No examiner or employer will excuse a candidate who uses short forms in an examination situation because that will only be tantamount to lack of knowledge on the field of study. It was also observed that whereas the general cry is that SMS has ruined students’ work, the contrary is true. Although students may not speak English most of the time, they are constrained to use letters of the English alphabet to write text messages. Therefore, unlike seeing SMS as an evil, educationists should see what good thing has come out of it and remind students of the need to discriminate between formal and informal situations. Grammar rules are flaunted because SMS texts are mostly written in haste; therefore teachers should consider the aspects of grammar as crucial for classroom emphases. The use of punctuation marks requires further manipulations on the phone which hinders many users which is why many SMS users are young people.

Another aspect of SMS usage in society which can be mentioned in this paper is its anti-social nature. Many people who text messages block out from others in society. It is regular to travel around the western world today and not able to carry a conversation with anyone as they are all buried into their phones chatting with people all over the world. In Cameroon today, the same trend is coming up in homes and social gatherings where people get silent and concentrate on sending or receiving messages through SMS. SMS texting can therefore be seen as a double-edged sword; helping in one way and spoiling on the other.

This paper set out to examine the implications of SMS text messaging on the language skills of students at the University of Buea. Having examined the various schools of thought and seen some of the ways in which students use short forms and the impact they have on their formal writings, it can be concluded that SMS text messaging has come to stay. As every innovation, it has its good and bad sides and the user has to be able to distinguish when it is appropriate to use short forms and standard forms and even when to use it in society.

It was also brought out that though one school of thought thinks it is so bad, another school sees it as a way of getting students to write more which was already failing in many a classroom. Craig’s 2003 argument that young people who use instant messaging subconsciously increase their knowledge of metalinguistics – (the skill of understanding language and culture) is thus founded meaning that texting should actually be encouraged in young people i.e. students – who experience “tangible increases in overall literacy” – and therefore enter into a practice of using slang and phonetic replacements when necessary and which may be part of the culture of those who speak

the language. The SMS text messaging could just be seen as a necessary evil of the 21st century which could redeem the dying writing skill in our students worldwide.

The study dwells on how University of Buea students use text messages and the impact such use has on their proper language abilities. The Uses and Gratifications theory proposed by Katz and (Blumler 1974) is relevant. Uses and Gratification propounded by Katz and Blumler seek to explain the uses and functions of the media to individuals, groups and society at large. In developing the theory Katz and Blumler seek to find out the gratification users will derive when they use a particular medium. Fifty two years after the theory was developed, it still finds “relevance” in contemporary use. This relevance is experienced mostly in how members of society use technology, and how, in turn, technology influences those individual members of society, institutions, and the culture of society as a whole on a macro level.

Since the world is driven by technology, people from all facets of life increasingly depend on technology to help them make daily decisions, and also improve on their daily living. The same scenario is seen with the use of text messages by University of Buea students as a means to enable them meet up with the agenda of their immediate community (find out what others are doing, know where others are, and know the daily agenda of others). It is difficult to see a University of Buea student on campus for instance without a mobile phone in hand, ready to be manipulated.

The writing skill was already getting out of hand (diminishing) and many students no longer found interest in writing as seen in the low letter-writing skills today. These thoughts and examinations on the SMS text messaging naturally led us to make the following recommendations. Students should be taught grammar rules as they pertain to the writing skill. Once the students know the rules and regulations of grammar properly, it becomes easier to discriminate between what is formal and informal. Students should be encouraged to write stories on their phones since all modern phones have the QWERTY/AZERTY installed in them. This will make them use grammar and other structures daily since they carry the mobile phone everywhere. In order to further make use of SMS texting in the advantage of the learners, assignments and other pertinent classwork should be given for writing on the mobile phone.

REFERENCES

- Abbie G., Nenagh K., Frances, H. M., & Rauno, P. (2015). Undergraduates' attitudes to text messaging language use and intrusions of textisms into formal writing. *New Media & Society*, Vol. 17(5) 792–809.
- Agre, P. E. (2001). Changing places: Contexts of awareness in computing. *Human-Computer Interaction*, 16 (2-3). <http://dlist.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/hci.html>
- Balakrishnan, V., & Raj, R. G. (2012). Exploring the relationship between urbanized Malaysian youth and their mobile phones: A quantitative approach. *Telematics and Informatics*, 29 (3), 263–272.
- Baron, N.S. (2009). *Talk about Texting: Attitudes towards Mobile Phones*. American University, Washington DC, USA.

- Battestini, A., Setlur, V., & Sohn, T. (2010). A large scale study of text-messaging use. Conference: Proceedings of the 12th Conference on Human-Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services, Mobile HCI 2010, Lisbon, Portugal, September 7-10.
- Belrose, J.S. (2002). Reginald Aubrey Fessenden and the birth of wireless telephony. *IEEE Antennas and Propagation Magazine*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 38-47
- Bouhnik, D. & Deshen, M. (2014). WhatsApp goes to school: Mobile instant messaging between teachers and students. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, 13, 217-231.
- Campbell, S.W. & Kwak, N. (2010). Mobile communication and civic life: Linking patterns of use to civic and political engagement. *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 536-555.
- Chen, B., Seilhamer, R., Bennet, L. & Bauer, S. (2015). Students' mobile learning practices in higher education: A multi-year research study. *EDUCAUSE Review Online*.
- Coe, L. (2003). The Telegraph: A history of Morse's invention and its predecessors in the United States. USA, McFarland & Company, Inc.
- Craig, D. (2003). Instant messaging: The language of youth literacy. The Booth Prize Essays. <http://boothprize.stanford.edu/0203/PWR-Boothe-Craig.pdf>
- Crystal, D. (2008). *Txtng: The gr8 db8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dansieh, S.A. (2011). SMS texting and its potential impacts on students' written communication skills. *International Journal of English Linguistics* Vol. 1, No. 2; September .
- Drouin, M. & Davis, C. (2009). R u txtng? Is the use of text speak hurting your literacy? *Journal of Literacy Research* 41: 46–67.
- Edwards, G. J. & Reid, A. (2009). How can mobile text messaging communication support and enhance a first year undergraduate learning environment?, *ALT – Journal of Research Learning Technology*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 201–218.
- Gayomali, C. (2012). The text message turns 20: A brief history of SMS. *The Week* magazine, December 3.
- Gazzaley, A. & Rosen, L. D. (2016). *The distracted mind: Ancient brains living in a high-tech world*. MIT Press.
- Geser, H. (2004). Towards a sociological theory of the mobile phone. In: *Sociology in Switzerland: Sociology of the mobile phone*. Online Publications, Zuerich.
- Haggan, M. (2007). Text messaging in Kuwait. Is the medium the message? *Multilingua*, 26, (4): 427-449.
- Heeks, R. (2008). ICT4D 2.0: The next phase of applying ICT for international development. *Computer*, 41 (6), 26–33. <http://www.ransbiz.com/2015/12/callsms-nad-other-promotions-in.html>
- Jacob, O. (2011) Effect of training in the use of mobile phone short message service on note-taking and comprehension of students in Kogi State, Nigeria. *Educational Research*, 2(7) pp. 1258-1264.
- Katz, E. & Blumler, J.G. (Eds.). (1974). *The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratifications research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Katz, E., & Aakhus, M.A. (Eds.). (2002). *Perpetual contact: Mobile communication, private talk, public performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lenhart, A. (2010). Teens and mobile phones (Pew Internet & American Life study). Available at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Teens-and-Mobile-Phones.aspx>
- Leung, L. (2007). Unwillingness-to-communicate and college students motives in SMS mobile messaging. *Telematics & Informatics* 24 (2): 115-129. <10.1016/j.tele.2006.01.002

- Lin, A. M. & Tong, A.H. (2007). Text-messaging cultures of college girls in Hong Kong: SMS as resources for achieving intimacy and gift-exchange with multiple functions. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 21 (2): 303-315.
- Ling, R., & Baron, N. S. (2007). Text messaging and IM: A linguistic comparison of American college data. *Journal of language and social psychology*, 26, 291-298.
- Ling, R. & Donner, J. (2009). *Mobile communication*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Ling, R. (2010). Texting as a life phase medium. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 15, 277 – 292.
- Mahmoud, S. S. (2013). The Effect of using English SMS on KAU Foundation Year students' speaking and writing performance. *American International Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 2 No. 2; March.
- Ngange, K. & Boateng, R. (2011). "The journalist, the mobile phone and facebook", *PC Tech Magazine's Conversations on Technology, Business and Society*, Vol. 2 Issue 1, pp. 36-39, <http://ctbus.wordpress.com/2011/04/29/the-journalist-the-mobile-phone-and-facebook/>.
- North, D., Johnston, k., & Ophoff, J. (2014). The use of mobile phones by South African University students. *Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology*, Volume 11.
- Rosen, L., Chang, J., Erwin, L., Carrier, L.M., & Cheever, N. A. (2010). The relationship between "textisms" and formal and informal writing among young adults. *Communication Research*, 37(3) 420 -440.
- Rosen, L. D., Lim, A. F., Carrier, L. M., & Cheever, N. A. (2011). An examination of the educational impact of text message-induced task switching in the classroom: Educational implications and strategies to enhance learning. *Psicologia Educativa (Spanish Journal of Educational Psychology)*, 17 (2), 163–177.
- Russell, L. (2010). The effects text messaging on English grammar. [Online] Available: http://www.ehow.com/list_5828172_effects-text-messaging-english-rammar.html (April 20, 2010).
- Simons, R. W. (1996). Guglielmo Marconi and early systems of wireless communication. *IEE Review*, January.
- Starovoit, V. (2012) How does text messaging affect the ability to write and speak in English? eHow culture and society languages speak English. Retrieved at: www.ehow.com/about_6501816_text-ability-write-speak-english_.html
- Tanjong, E. (2006). *Africa in international communication*. Limbe, Design House.
- Tindell, D. R. & Bohlander, R.W. (2012). The use and abuse of cell phones and text messaging in the classroom: A survey of college students. London: *College Teaching*, 60, 1-9.
- Verheijen, Lieke (2013) "The effects of text messaging and instant messaging on literacy." *English studies*. Pakistan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will like to acknowledge the contribution of Stephen Nnode, a former undergraduate student of mine who took time to contribute to this work by researching on SMS text messaging as it obtains around the world today. Stephen is now a PhD candidate in the department of Mass Communication at the University of Buea. I also acknowledge the efforts of Majo Michele Patience, another undergraduate student who wrote her long essay on the topic of SMS at the University of Buea.