



The impact of Technology (BBM and WhatsApp Applications) on English Linguistics in Kuwait

Ashraf Atta M. S. Salem

PhD in TEFL, Institute of Educational Studies & Researches, Cairo University, Egypt
Mahboula, Block 1, Street 131, Building 24, behind Alhashel Complex, State of Kuwait
E-mail: sirashrafams@hotmail.com

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Abstract

This paper sheds light on the impact of the widespread of improvements happened in the fields of communication technology on English language use. This impact is described on the basis of interviews conducted with participants. The sample of the study consists of (211) participants. The sample is divided into two age levels groups; the first group is the intermediate school students (118 participants their ages range from 11 to 15 years old) and the second is the secondary school students (93 participants their ages range from 16 to 18 years old). Data are discussed in relation to other studies. Also, the researcher has discussed the implication of the findings of the study.

Keywords: Technology -BBM – WhatsApp Applications- Linguistics- Kuwait

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

From my own experience as an English language teacher in the state of Kuwait, I noticed the overuse of text messaging shortcuts in the students' pieces of writing. Once students are asked to write about certain topic, they use the same language they use in typing instant and text messages to their close friend. This is not accepted as it is a deviation from the Standard English language used in teaching and learning institutions. Sweeny (2011) focused on the positive role using of instant and text messaging technologies play. It is argued that instant and text messaging plays a prominent role in socializing, sharing information and structure communication. On the other hand, Rankin (2010) argues that using instant and text messaging shortcuts has an adverse impact on developmental students' spelling and grammar skills.

The study tries hard to investigate the actual use of instant and text messaging shortcuts on in the writing tasks of intermediate and secondary stage students and its impact on English language use.

1.2 Importance of the Study

The researcher hope the study to be a step further towards the assessment of the actual use of instant and text messaging shortcuts in writing tasks at schools. In addition, it aims at investigating the positive as well as negative effect of using instant and text messaging on English linguistics in Kuwait. Also, the study is hoped to trigger further studies dealing with the impact of new technologies on English language in general and specifically on English writing skills.

1.3 Questions of the Study

The study tries to answer the following question:

“To what extent is the instant and text messaging adversely affect the use of English language (in terms of vocabulary, spelling and grammar) in Kuwait?”

1.4 Theoretical Background & Related Literature

New Technologies affect greatly English language use. New technology plays a very important role in the process of communication in today's world. Internet chatrooms and cellphones are the most effective, convenient and widely used technological instruments for communication globally. One of the most accessible tools of communication in today's world is the cellphone text messages (SMS). Mphahlele and Mashamaite (2005, 161) argue that SMS is relatively cheaper both in term of money and economic in term of time spent during the process of communication. In spite of the fact that new technology facilitate the process of communication. Internet communication applications including chatroom and email exchanging on the one hand and the text messaging on the other hand play a positive role in making communication easy and fast. Yet, there are negative effects derived from using these tools. According to Mphahlele and Mashamite (2005), there are detrimental effects on the language proficiency of English language learners. Learners of English using new communication technology especially text messaging commit numerous errors ranging from incorrect spelling to ungrammatical sentence structure.

1.4.1 Technology and English Linguistics:

Nowadays, handwriting is substituted by email exchange. Instead, typewriting machine and keyboards are spreading widely everywhere in order to write documents. Once we deal with the effect of new technologies, we should pay a due attention to its affordances and affectivities. With regard to the affordances of new technologies, computers afford larger display screens and comprehensive keyboards which allow its users to type longer messages in addition to communication. On the contrary, new technology has its constraints or negative effects.

In reality using instant and text messaging includes using certain non-standard abbreviations, reduced endings and verb omission which are ungrammatical. SMS users always type texts according to the way they pronounce them. For example, a person writes “shud “instead of “should”. This is because they write the same way they pronounce words. Table (1) shows the full words and its abbreviations in text messaging language.

Table 1. Full words and its abbreviations in text messaging language.

WORDS IN FULL	ABBREVIATIONS OF SMS LANGUAGE
As Far as I remember	AFAIR
Love	LUV
Thanks	THNX
Today	2day
Before	B4
Have a nice day	HAND
See you	CU
So what’s your problem?	SWYP
At	@
Tear in my eyes	TIME
Sealed with a Kiss	SWAK
Keep it simple ,Stupid	KISS
Such a Laugh	SAL
At the moment	ATM
Parents are watching	PAW
Random act of Kindness	RAK
Please reply	PR
Second	SEC
You are on your own	YOYO
As soon as possible	ASAP
Hugs and Kisses	HAK

(Mphalele and Mshamaite, 2005)

Therefore, using text messaging language makes teachers perplexed because people will look at the word “HAND” as a part of the body whereas text massagers mean “have a nice day”.

Mphahlele and Mashamite (2005, p166) envisaged that SMS language affect language proficiency of learners. Cellphone language affects two aspects of language proficiency which are represented in two types of skills; the skills of expressing oneself eloquently through writing as well as the skills of using words in context in an appropriate way.

Faulkner & Cluwin (2004 as cited in Geertsema, Hyman and Van Deventer, 2011) view that text messaging is a by-product of the cellphone industry. According to Goldstuck (2004 cited in Geertsema, Hyman and van Deventer , 2001) argues that text messaging – as well as instant messaging (IM) – represent a direct function of online rooms which have been expanded to cellphones in order to make them able to use applications that can be downloaded to the handset. He added that using text messaging helps developing a new, dynamic English slang. Goldstuck (2004) concurs that SMS has altered language with the passage of time. He provided various examples such as “thank you” which was condensed to “tnx “and then later shortened to “tx”.

Thurlow (2003 as cited Geertsema, Hyman and Van Deventer, 2011) envisages that text messages may be perceived as non-standard typographic or orthographic forms; these forms can be divided in to various types:

- G_ Clippings (excluding the end –g letter), for example: “Goin” (going).
- Shortenings (delectation of end letters, excluding the final letter) for example: “After” (Aft)

- Contractions (deletion of middle letters) for example: Nxt (Next).
- Acronyms and initialisms (formed from initial letters of various words), for example: "LOL" (laugh out loud)
- Number homophones, for example: "b4" (Before)
- Letter homophones, for example: "U" (you)
- Non-conventional spellings, for example: "Nite" (night)

According to Sutherland (2002, p.5) young people, especially teenagers, have been labeled "generation text", "generation grunt" and the "Net generation", while descriptions such as "bleak, bald, sad shorthand" have been attributed to text messaging or SMS. Blair (2004) suggested that an over-dependency on technology has culminated in young generation with deficient communication skills which leads Thurlow (2006, p.11) to say that it causes a "dumping down" of language and a "lowering of standards".

Taglimonte and Denis (2008) envisage that people use standard language in text messaging for much time. Sometimes, they use non-standard language in a creative way to serve communication purposes and in order to reflect skilled command of language. Examples of textism and netspeak of instant and text messaging is the non-conventional spelling (fone-phone) and shortenings (goin/going). This may be justified because texts are limited to 160 characters and writing a text requires using complex multiple keystrokes on the different phones. Therefore, it leads to using abbreviations such "mon" instead of "Monday" clippings "goin" instead of "going" and accent stylizations "gonna" instead of "going to" as well as using abbreviated forms like "cos", "luv", "wot", and "ya".

Plester, Wood & Bell (2008) and Thurlow & Brown (2003) listed the most common abbreviated forms in texting; "cuL8r" instead of using "what you up to" and "BCNU" instead of "be seeing you". It is worth nothing that days and months are commonly abbreviated. Crystal (2008) argues that contractions are words with omitted middle letters usually vowels because consonants provide greater information than vowels. Examples of omitting vowels are "text-txt", "will - wil", "have - hav" and "homework - hmwrk". It is so crucial to cite Biesawanger (23008) definition of acronyms which means pronouncing letter by letter in writing. According to Thelwall (2009), accent stylization such as "wanna" instead of "want to" and "gonna" instead of "going to" is often employed as humorous alternatives.

1.5 Experimental Design

The researcher used the qualitative design. This design is the most suitable as it concentrates on descriptions and explanations of various phenomena in the study. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument or the tool for designing, collecting and analyzing data. Qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative research, generally doesn't translate aspects of phenomena into numbers to be analyzed mathematically. Instead, it analyzes the phenomena through the lenses the researcher brings to bear on the data.

In addition, the researcher used the descriptive research design in order to review the related studies that relate with the current study to know the similarities and differences. The descriptive research design was used also to write down the theoretical background of the study.

2. Method

2.1 Area Description

Kuwait is a Middle East country found at the northwest point of the Persian Gulf, between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, with a total area of 17, 820 sq. km. Kuwait got its independence in 1961 from Great Britain. Kuwait has a total population of 2, 646, 314 as per July estimates, of which close to 50% (1,291,354) of the population are non-Kuwaitis. Kuwaiti's 98% of the population live in urban centers. The progress attained in the country's education system has been attributed to oil (Mohammad, 2008). The geography and the demography of Kuwait, and globalization and internationalization make English an important language in Kuwait. Although the official language of Kuwait is Arabic, however English is widely spoken in Kuwait. Signs of modernization are evident in the country's urban centers. Particularly, shopping centers, cafes, restaurants, and foreign community signal the extent of civilization in Kuwait. These features are, in part, evidence for the increasing importance and relevance of English in Kuwait as a second language. This importance has had its own implications on the education system, especially the English curriculum.

2.2 Participants Characteristics

The researcher has randomly selected (211) participants. The sample of the study consists of (211) participants. The sample is divided into two age levels groups; the first group is the intermediate school students (118 participants their ages range from 11 to 15 years old) and the second is the secondary school students (93 participants their ages range from 16 to 18 years old). Participants are accustomed to use instant and text messaging for a long time.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

The sample of the study was randomly selected from the same socio-economical background. The researcher selected a homogeneous group (age, academic achievement and socio-economic level). The distribution of the sample is shown in table (2).

Table 2. The Sample Distribution

Age level	Total	Percentage
Intermediate School Students	118	55.9%
Sixth Grade	48	22.7%
Seventh Grade	24	11.3%
Eighth Grade	23	10.9%
Ninth Grade	23	10.9%
Secondary School Students	93	44%
Tenth Grade	32	15.1%
Eleventh Grade	31	14.6%
Twelfth Grade	30	14.2%

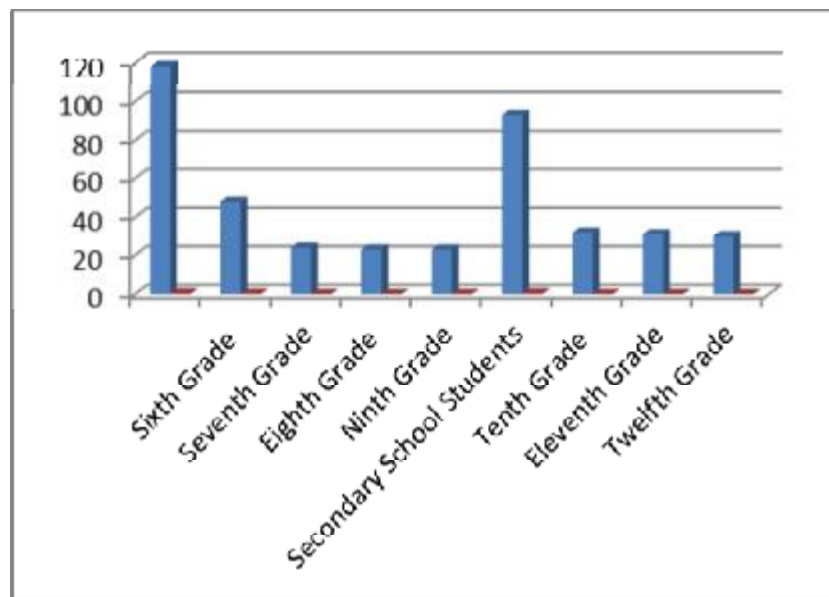


Figure 1. Distribution of Sample

2.3.1 Sample Size, and Power

Total sample of the study was (211) participants, all of them are Kuwaiti citizens. Those participants enjoy a high socio-economic level due to the welfare the government provides. This makes each citizen able to buy the latest versions of communication technology both software and hardware. From their early childhood they are exposed to the up-to-date technology. This makes them proficient in using the most advanced technology in their daily life. Compared with their partners in other countries, they are proficient in using, sometimes developing, up-to-date innovations in the field of communication.

2.3.2 Research Design

The interviews were conducted orally yet they were written in order to have both a hardcopy (the written transcript) and a soft copy (the audio form). Each interview consists of 50 items with the first fifteen items are designed for clarifying the personal data. The whole interview describes a complete profile of the participants.

3. Results & Discussion

Interviews conducted with participants were analyzed carefully in order to answer the study question: "To what extent is the instant and text messaging adversely affect the use of English language in Kuwait?". Analyzing data obtained from responses of the participants' shows that instant and text messaging have an adverse, rather damaging, effect of English language in terms of vocabulary, spelling and grammar.

In Kuwait, using smart phones with various applications it provide that includes "BBM" or Blackberry text messages and iPhone text message applications like "WhatsApp" have detrimental effects on English language use. Kuwaiti teenagers especially and young people in general use certain codes of abbreviations or shortcuts to express their ideas to the extent that spoils English grammar as well as spelling. Table (3) reveals the most common abbreviations used in BBM and WhatsApp exchanges and its full form equivalents.

Table 3. Full words and its equivalent abbreviations in BBM language.

WORDS IN FULL	ABBREVIATIONS OR BBM LANGUAGE
Thank you	Ty
I love you	I L u
Welcome	W l c
No need	Nn
No problem	Np
Now	Nw
Back	Bk

Also, there is a list of numbers as they represent certain Arabic letters which don't have counterparts in English. Table (4) shows numbers and its equivalent full forms.

Table 4. Numbers and its equivalent meanings

Number	Meaning
1	There is nothing
2	Hamza "La2" means "no"
3	"Ein" in Arabic "Ali =3li"
'3	"Ghein" Arabic letter "3 allia"
4	"Thaa" as "thameen" = "precious"
5	"Ghee" as Ghair" = "Good"
6	"Taa" as in "6arab" = music
'6	"Zaa" as in "zاهر" = apparent
7	"Haa" as in "ba7ebak = I love you"
8	"9af" as in "8al" = said
9	"saad" "sadek" = tell truth
'9	"Dad" as in "dai9" narrow

Communication through instant and text messages emails and other forms of new technologies have adverse effects on using English language (in terms of vocabulary use, grammar and spelling). This communication is referred to as Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) which is divided into two main types, namely, the synchronous CMC where the communication takes place through "in real time" such as Real Time Chat (RTC) and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). The second type is asynchronous CMC in which communication occurs "in postponed time" such as SMS and emails (Crystal, 2001 as cited in Alkhatib and Subbah, 2008). Using these technologies affect greatly English language through the overuse of abbreviation, clippings, acronyms and other abbreviated forms which is ungrammatical and incorrect. This leads to the oversimplicity and establishing incorrect habits when using English whether as a first or a foreign Language.

This study coincides with the study of Ranklin (2010) that revealed the adverse impact of text messaging language shortcuts on developmental students' spelling and grammar skills. The current study reveal the adverse impact of both instant and text messaging on English language use in term of vocabulary, spelling and grammar.

4. Conclusions & Implications

In spite of facilitating communication processes among people, instant and text messaging have a negative impact on the formal writing skills in the mainstream schools. Students use instant and text messaging shortcuts in the formal writing task although using these shortcuts distort the Standard English that is the official form of teaching and learning.

Using these shortcuts in the classroom affects badly the way students use language; its vocabulary, spelling and grammar. It is also concluded that using these shortcuts make students forget the complete forms of English language. To sum up, using these wrong shortcuts is fossilized and cannot be repaired through remedial practice.

According to the results of the study, using instant and text messaging has an adverse impact on English language learning inside the classroom. Yet, if linguists find a way to standardize the use of these shortcuts, it will be of great help for Non-native speakers of English. This is because certain languages like Arabic have not got the same sound system of English. The use of these shortcuts may compensate the lack of certain sounds. In addition, it will be a great asset to English language teaching and learning in the classroom as students are highly motivated to use these shortcuts (almost all of them ask me to allow using these shortcuts in writing tasks inside the classroom and they get cross when they are obliged not to do so).

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