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The Implications of Text Messaging on Standard Language and Communication: A Brief Study Based on the Language of SMS and Whatsapp

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Abstract: *The prime objective of this paper is to discuss how the text messaging feature SMS(short message service) and instant messaging applications like WhatsApp are affecting the Standard English language and communication. The paper starts with an introduction to the present day’s high-tech environment and gadgets. It gives a short account of the history of language and communication in human civilization. Especially about the mobile and long distance communication (telecommunication), coming of 2G,3G and 4G technologies and the latest mobile operating systems (Android etc.). Firstly, it explains how the old definitions of Sender, Receiver and Message has changed into Texter, Reader and Text Msg. How it has resulted in the transformation of the communication process on a whole. Secondly, it shows the linguistic implications of texting at all the structural levels of the Standard English language. Starting with examples at (1) Phonetic level (“looking” to “lukin”: omission of the last consonant),*

- (2) *Morphemic level (lexicon-shrinking such as “life” becomes “lyf”, increased usage of blend words like Phablet (Phone and Tablet), Acronyms like “OS” for operating system),*
- (3) *Syntactic level (sentence shortenings like “how are you?” becomes “howz u”),*
- (4) *The above examples also show how texting is adversely affecting the spellings and pronunciation too. Semantic Shift (for instance, to coin old words for new concepts or technology like naming Android versions Kitkat, Jellybean, Lollipop etc.) Lastly, it explains the insufficiency of the text message’s Emoticons in delivering human emotions and feelings. And finally, it concludes that however it is not possible to quit texting altogether, there’s always a way to find a middle path where we could use it efficiently with least interference in the language. And, does texting contribute to the gradual and inevitable process of language change or it affects it negatively.*

Keywords: *SMS, WhatsApp, Standard English Language (SEL), Smart Language(SML), Text, Texting, Text Message.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 LANGUAGE AND TECHNOLOGY

We are fortunate to witness this highly advanced and booming digital era that has turned everything into a “touch”. We can connect to a plethora of knowledge, information and products by a simple touch on our smart phones. In fact, our phones have become so smart these days that their primary function to facilitate distant calling now comes next to the unlimited features like smsing (messaging), chatting, e-shopping, blogging, facebooking and so on. Precisely, technology has become so all-pervasive that it has pervaded our personal and professional lives, interpersonal relations, culture and so our language. In the present paper, we will focus on the communicative function of the language and in particular, the technology based communication i.e. telecommunication. Chronologically, speech came much before than the script. Speech-enabled human communication is as old as the existence of *Homo-sapiens* itself. Symbols however, appeared much later; first in the form of cave-paintings followed by glyphs (pictures representing objects and concepts) and graphemes that gradually developed into the different writing systems of the world. With modern age innovations like printing press and typewriter, “typing” was introduced. Invention of computers and internet-enabled devices has led to the “texting”. Poe(2011) [1] presents the five successive historical media as speech, writing, print, audiovisual media, and the Internet.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. WHY SMART LANGUAGE (SML) HAS EVOLVED?

We are living in a world where life has become synonymous with being techno-savvy. Ultra-modern devices like 2G and 3G-enabled mobile phones and android-driven smart phones

have changed the definition of telecommunication. But even then we do need a natural language to communicate with the others. We can't communicate in Java or C++. As necessity is the mother of invention; a new language was needed to cope with the present era's superfast pace, to deal with the busy schedules and increasing paucity of time. And that's how the Smart Language (SML) came into existence. SML is not a new language altogether but simple and short, informal English which is popular as the SMS and text-language. It has been more than two decades since we are using the short message service provided through GSM mobile handsets based on 2G. WhatsApp though is more recent instant messaging application on our Android phones. There are mainly two standard versions of English installed on our smart phones: English (UK) i.e. British English and English (US) i.e. American English. In this paper, the term Standard English Language (SEL) will stand for British English which is being largely followed by Indian education system and is also the official language of the country along with Hindi.

HOW THE SML HAS CHANGED THE FORM AND WAY OF COMMUNICATION?

The first and most common model of communication was that of Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949) which consisted of three important elements: Sender, Channel and Receiver. The following figure shows their improvised model which was based on the new technological advancements like telephone and radio. Hence, the sender changed into the information source:

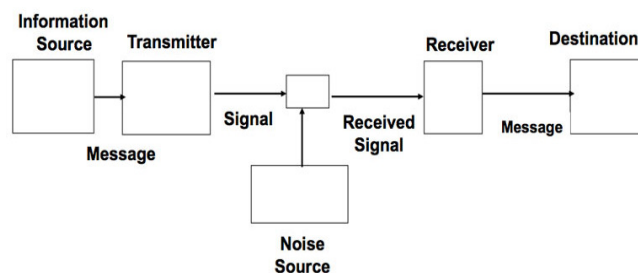


Fig. 1. Model of Communication[2]

Now with the advent of internet and digital devices, the new model of communication is shown below:

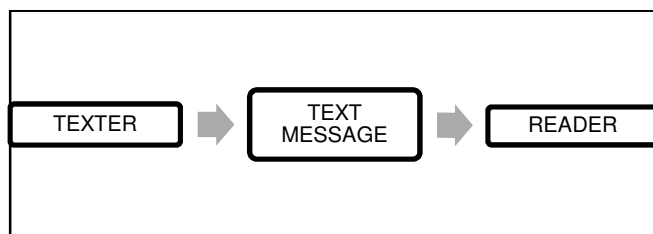


Fig.2. Clearly, the sender now has changed into a “texter”, message has changed into a “text” or “sms” and the receiver has changed into a “reader”.

3. LINGUISTIC AND NON-LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF SML

3.1. AT PHONETIC LEVEL

Several interesting linguistic deviations from the SEL can be easily seen at the sound level. Few examples are as follows:

Addition of a vowel in the middle and last of a word like {please} changes into {puhleez}, {so} > {sooo} etc.

Deletion of a vowel in the word-beginning like {am} changes into {m}, {OK} > {k}; in the middle like {don't} > {dnt}, {not} > {nt}; at the end like {like} > {lyk}, {love} > {luv}. Sometimes, deletion of a vowel in a word takes place at two places simultaneously. For example, deletion of the first and last vowel of the word like {are} > {r} (deletion of 'a' and 'e'); deletion of first and mid-vowel like {you} > {u}.

Addition of consonants doesn't take place in the beginning of a word however it does take place in the middle and at the end of it. Like, addition of /h/ in {please} > {puhleez}.

Many a time, the addition of a consonant in the mid-place both changes and replaces the previously present consonant or it changes the preceding sound such that it becomes a double consonant. Like in the phrase [how's that] > [howzatt] (/s/ > /z/, deletion of /th/, addition of another /t/ in the end, making it a double consonant /tt/) and [what's up] > [wassup] (deletion of /h/, deletion of /t/ and addition of /s/ in its place, again making it a double consonant).

Deletion of consonants usually takes place in the middle and last of a word. Like, {what} > {wat}, {that} > {dat}, {there} > {dere} etc. One feature is very evident here that mostly it's the letter /h/ which is being deleted if it's a mid-consonant. Examples of deletion of the last consonant are {going} > {goin}, {moving} > {movin}, {call} > {cal}, {thanks} > {thanx} (here, not only the last two consonants are deleted but also replaced by a similar consonantal sound).

Sometimes deletion of both the vowel and the consonant takes place in a word. Like {should} > {shud}, {would} > {wud}, {could} > {cud}, {will} > {ll} or {I} (as in I'll or I'I for 'I will'), {and} > {n} and so on.

Sometimes the words are replaced by a single numeral like {for} > {4}, {to} > {2}, etc. because of their homophonic (similar sounding) quality.

3.2 AT MORPHEMIC LEVEL

Lexicon- shrinking is very common among SML. For example, {life} > {lyf}, {very} > {vry}, {thank you} > {thanku}, {goodnight} > {gudnite} etc. Use of abbreviated forms and acronyms is too very frequent. Like, use of {app} for 'application', {fab} for 'fabulous', {grt} or {gr8} for 'great'; {LOL} for 'laughing out loud', {ASAP} for 'as

soon as possible', {Gen X} for 'next generation' etc. Blends are also common. For example, technical ones like netiquette (net+etiquette), phablet (phone+tablet), emoticon (emotion+icon) etc. and informal ones like gonna (going to), dunno (don't know), {come on} > {cmon}, {see you} > {cu} etc. Neologism (creating new words) is a popular process in SML. Like to "google" means to "search". Not only this, but the new derivational forms are too being invented like from 'google' forms like googling, googles etc. A lot of 'alphanumeric' terms are also being created like {tomorrow} > {2morrow}, {later} > {l8r}, {everyone} > {every1}, {before} > {b4} etc.

3.3 AT SYNTACTIC LEVEL

Sentences are also being reduced. Like [How are you?] is [howz u], [I am doing good] is [m doin gud], [Why are you not taking my calls?] is [Y rnt u takin mi calz] etc. Capitalization and punctuation too are missing.

3.4 AT SEMANTIC LEVEL

Since many terms are old but now their meanings have become new so sometimes there's confusion in understanding their actual reference. For example, the statement "Where's my Apple?" the word "apple" could mean a fruit or an i-phone. All the android versions have been named on the desserts like Cupcake, Jellybean, KitKat and Lollipop. Also due to the self-made shortened words, it becomes really difficult to differentiate between their actual meanings. Like, whether the short forms 'red' or 'rd' is used for the colour 'red' or 'read' (past tense of the verb 'read').

3.5 USE OF NON-LINGUISTIC FEATURE LIKE EMOTICONS

Emoticons are a nice and unique way of conveying our emotions through text but they seem insufficient many times. For example, one can find emoticons expressing happiness, sorrow, anger etc. but not the feelings of enthusiasm, sickness, dullness etc. or of confused, tensed or busy state of mind and such.

4. RELATED WORK

Various academicians and linguists have expressed their fears and doubts for SML whereas some of them have shown their approval and likeness for the same.

Crystal(2010) [3] gives an account of how a British broadcaster John Humphrys (in 2007) termed texters as 'vandals' who are destroying our language in an article headed 'I h8 txt msg: How texting is wrecking our language'. He however defends texting and says that it has added a new dimension to language use. US linguists Ling and Baron(2007) [4] quotes that "Linguistic analyses of texting have appeared for several languages...Among the stylistic features noted are abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, misspellings, and omission of vowels, subject pronouns, and punctuation." The study carried out by Hemmer(2009) [5] concludes that text messaging does displace face-to-face communication but it is not caused by text messaging only but all new technology.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Language (speech) change is inevitable. Though it's a slow process which takes place over a long time-span but it can't be stopped. It could be regulated however through the process of Standardization. SEL has also come a long way surpassing the Old, Middle and Early Modern stages. SML is indeed not a threat to SEL. One must know that both SEL and SML are used in entirely different domains: Formal and Informal respectively. The best way to avoid the conflict between the two is to keep their territories separate and not let them mingle with each other.

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