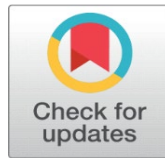


THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CAMEROONIAN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Social media has today emerged as a popular technology that is influencing the different sectors in Cameroon: education, business, government, print media, audiovisual media, etc. This new means of communication has eased the exchange of thoughts and ideas. The internet, as an aspect of new technologies, came along with a deviant form of writing peculiar to the younger generation in general and the Cameroonian youth in particular. This new system of communication gave rise to what is known as computer-mediated communication, which had become widely spread within the educational milieu in Cameroon. Social media has negatively influenced the use of Standard English in Cameroon, especially written texts, giving that aspects of computer-mediated communication have rapidly replaced conversational writing forms. Such development in communication has affected language, which has gradually shifted from its original sound, sign, or symbol and complex sentence structures governed by grammatical rules to the language of text messaging with its simple syntax, incomplete sentence forms, informal structures, and modified ideograms known as emojis (happy faces, sad faces, excitement figures, blushing faces, etc.). This research aimed at analysing the writings of students at the University of Yaounde 1 to show the extent to which the use of social media has affected the written rendition of their essays. To elucidate this, a study was done by analysing the scripts and text messages of the students. The communication accommodation theory was adopted to arrive at the expected results.

Keywords: Social Media, Computer Mediated Communication, Emojis, Grammatical Rules, New Technologies, Texting

1. INTRODUCTION

Proysen (2009) writes that language has developed immensely from its origin to the 21st century. At the dawn of the 20th century, a new language was introduced to the world; that of text messaging and electronic communication. The language is characterised by its simple syntax, incomplete sentences, informal structure, and orthographic conventions, which are different from those of Standard English and other world Englishes.

Text messaging does not adhere to conventional written language rules but uses a register known as 'textese' which includes abbreviations and phonetic replacements such as 'ur' for 'your' or word combinations such as 'lemme' for 'let me' or 'livme' for 'leave me' depending on the context of usage. Rebuses like slang

are commonly used because of the essential patterns of mobile phone text messaging etiquette. This has led to the assumption that text message features may appear in users' general writing, ultimately resulting in linguistic deviations. [Thurlow \(2001\)](#) opines that "young people are both 'teen talk' and 'netting' and are often blamed for the negative impact on Standard English or traditional ways of communication." The casual language used in text messaging by language users in general and some English language users in Cameroon, in particular, is a source of impediment for some students in understanding grammatical rules applicable to Standard English. As a result of such misunderstandings, it is the context of usage that helps when interpreting some text messages. The objective of texters is to use the least number of characters, to economize space, time, and money.

The present article aims to show the extent to which text messaging is drastically influencing the quality of the written rendition of Standard English at the levels of grammar, syntax, semantics, orthography, and punctuation of learners in different faculties at the University of Yaounde 1. This deviant usage is not only the result of word contraction in students' sentences but equally the result of the frequent use of non-standard spellings, interference, abbreviations, or alphanumeric, which are common features in texting. This study is based on the premise that the continuous use of text messaging on social media by some users of Standard English in Cameroon is a cause for concern that merits investigation, given its negative influence. The study will equally point out other negative effects of text messaging on the written renditions of students in the use of Standard English, which leads to their poor handling of grammatical rules in the construction of sentences. The present study differs from similar studies conducted by [Dansieh \(2011\)](#) in Ghana at Wa Polytechnic. His research revealed that some Ghanaian students struggle with grammar, lexis, and sentence structure because of the use of social media features. Given the complex linguistic situation in Cameroon, which has two official languages, English and French, Pidgin English, and more than 270 home languages, results obtained in research on language acquisition will be different from those obtained elsewhere.

The theory adopted for the present investigation is Howard Giles' (1971) Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Communication accommodation is a communication theory that emphasizes the adjustments people make while communicating. According to this theory, "people try to emphasize or minimize the social difference between them and those with whom they interact". Howard holds that the factors that lead to the accommodation activity are adjustments through verbal communication or gestures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The writing process of formal teaching is becoming more complicated. [Alibi \(2008\)](#) thinks that:

The writing process of formal teaching and learning in English is becoming confusing because most students nowadays read little or no novels, textbooks, or teachers' notes, which could help shape their writing skills.

He holds that through experience, writers can switch between the written language of text messaging and formal writing, though many students who send and receive messages still find it difficult to switch easily or are unwilling to switch at all from informal to formal language.

Text messaging encourages the use of abbreviations and non-conforming forms of grammatical rules, and as such, the practice tends to harm students' written

communication skills. [Dansieh \(2011\)](#) sees this claim as true. He ascertains the variable impact of the language of SMS on the writing skills of students at Wa Polytechnic in Ghana. The results of his research reveal that students struggle with grammar, lexis, and sentence structure. [Winzker et al. \(2009\)](#) supported this view in their research on the impact of the use of SMS speak features on the written works of English first- and second-language users.

Their findings revealed that students make use of SMS features like spelling errors, the absence of punctuation markers, the non-use of function words, and the excessive use of abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, and rebus in formal writing. The questionnaires administered to the students in the study showed that these learners are avid users of the SMS-speak features. All those who took part in the study acknowledged the use of SMS speak features in their SMSs, and more than 40% reported that they use SMS speak in their written schoolwork. Despite this, features of SMS speak frequently occurred in the written work of the students, which indicates that the students can assess when it is and when it is not appropriate to use a certain variety of language. That said, several SMS-speak features were indeed present in the samples, which shows that SMS-speak features had some impact on the written work of the students.

Moreover, Camile Arundie [Tabé \(2023\)](#), in a study on language and identity in Cameroon social media, writes that there is a frequency of positionality and identity on Cameroon social media. She opines that words and expressions from languages other than the English language are used by texters in communication. Texters use a mixture of words and expressions from French, home languages, Pidgin English, and computer-mediated communication features such as emojis (smiling faces, blushing faces, sad faces, etc.).

3. THE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is global in nature, it is outstanding and popular worldwide, and as such, it has attracted the attention of many researchers. It is "websites and computer programmes that allow users to communicate and share information on the internet, using a computer or a mobile phone". Although different generations have embraced the challenges brought about by social media, the younger generations are the most fanatic users of applications such as Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook, Skype, LinkedIn, and DUO. Research on online social networks has revealed that these applications are greatly impacting the lives of most Cameroonian youths as well as their English language proficiency. Social media applications have provided a platform where the younger generations can create groups and pages based on common disciplines, build connections, and have various topics of discussion.

The field of computer-mediated communication deals with how human behaviours are maintained or altered by the exchange of information through machines. [Wood and Smith \(2005\)](#) describe the rapidly changing nature of communication technologies as the "process by which people create exchange and perceive information using networking telecommunication systems that facilitate the encoding, transmission, and decoding of messages." Both authors write that Computer-mediated communication can equally be referred to as the encoding and decoding of linguistic and other symbolic systems between the sender and the receiver for information processing in multiple formats through the medium of the computer and other technologies like phones and tablets, and media networks like the Internet, email, chat systems, text messaging, YouTube, Skype, etc.

4. CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE VIEWS OF COMMUNICATION

The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) adopted for this study looks at interpersonal relationships and links it with the larger social context of intergroup communication. The theory developed by Howard Giles (1979) from speech adjustment theory demonstrates the value of psychological concepts to understand the dynamics of speech. He writes that language users accommodate their communication activities to get approval and to set a positive image vis-à-vis interactants. The environment in which language users are interacting equally affects their communication behaviours. CAT can be explained by two accommodation processes: the convergence and divergence processes.

According to Giles (1979), convergence is a process whereby an encoder tends to adapt the decoder's communication characteristics to reduce social distance; this includes the use of pronunciation, pause and utterance length, vocal intensity, non-verbal behaviours, and the intimacy of self-disclosure. People with similar beliefs, personalities, and behaviours tend to be more attracted to each other and, as such, desire to achieve a certain social distance. The desire to create social interaction leads to convergence. When a user tries to converge or shift his or her language to assimilate another, it can result in a more favourable appraisal. As such, convergence is perceived as positive and can enhance both the conversation and the attraction of both the speaker and the listener. Convergence reflects an individual's desire for social approval from his interlocutor.

Divergence, on the other hand, is a linguistic strategy to accentuate the linguistic differences between the speaker and the interlocutor. Emphasis is at the level of social differences and the nonverbal differences between interlocutors. Both differences depend on the characteristics of the interlocutors. Users accommodate their communication while interacting with those who have higher standards and other characteristics that they believe are better than theirs. CAT is influenced by social psychology and guided by four major components: the socio-historical context, the communicator's accommodative orientation, the immediate situation, and evaluation, and future intentions. These components are essential to communication accommodations and affect the course and outcome of intercultural conversations. In the communication process, there are similarities and differences in the speech and behaviours of users. The characteristics that language users exhibit is based on their experiences and cultural backgrounds.

To evaluate a conversation there is need to understand one's perception of the other's speech and behaviour. Through evaluation, people decide to accommodate and fit in with their social status, and belonging is determined by language and behaviours. While communicating, people tend to accept the behaviours of others. Norms guide the accommodation process, which varies in degree of appropriateness. Such norms define the behaviours of people who are expected to act accordingly.

There are basic principles of the CAT applicable to the present article. The theory is influenced by the features of immediate situations and the socio-historical context in which the interactant is involved. Interactants use specific strategies, either convergence or divergence, to express their attitudes toward each other and their respective social groups. This is done to show a balance between the need for social inclusiveness on the one hand and differentiation on the other.

The Accommodation Theory applies to various communication processes. In the new media, it can be used among youths and teenagers for effective communication. It enables them to adapt while communicating with their peers. It is feasible to apply CAT to new media-related settings, though research in this field is still at its early stages in Cameroon. There are possible accommodation tendencies for many people when faced with the cyber language used through messaging technology. A clear-cut example can occur if two interlocutors both use smiley-face emotions when texting. Convergence is present at two levels: the message matches the same type of emotional display (smiling), and the message equally matches the same type of representation used to convey the message (an emotion).

Alibi (2008) holds that if one uses a smiley-face emoticon and the respondent uses the phrase "I'm smiling", though there is convergence at the emotional display level (smiling), there is equally divergence in the representation of the display because the message is presented in words rather than in textism. Convergence can equally occur in a situation where the respondent replies with the phrase "am smilx". In a formal setting, both users can likely be tempted to use the same phrase with its text message features; "am smilx" instead of "I'm smiling". The use of the informal phrase by both speakers is a convergence with a negative effect on their Standard English language usage.

5. TEXT MESSAGES BY STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE 1

The phenomenon of text messages by students in Cameroon is similar to that of students in many other African countries. To evaluate the extent to which elements of text messaging are present in the writings of students at the University of Yaounde 1, a questionnaire was administered to twenty students chosen at random on campus and from different faculties to collect the required data for this study. Both sexes were taken into consideration; ten boys and ten girls. Twenty open-ended and close-ended questions were prepared, related to the various ways in which young Cameroonians interact with their peers using written communication. The students were asked to say how text messaging affects their written English language proficiency. The concise and simple nature of the questions as well as the relevance of the subject eased the respondents' responses and response rate. The response rate was 100%. All copies of the questionnaire administered were retrieved and analysed. Fifty examination scripts collected from the different faculties were equally selected and analysed. Another questionnaire was designed and administered to seven lecturers on campus. The response rate was equally high at 100%. The questionnaire was measured based on agreement ranging from strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. This was aimed at investigating the lecturers' attitudes toward the use of text messaging and how they think it affects their students' written rendition of the English language.

In reviewing the examination scripts, it was discovered that students tend to reproduce in their scripts text message features such as abbreviations, word shortening, acronyms, non-standard spelling forms, and improper punctuation markers. From the scripts, there were instances of word shortening and word reduction, word combination, non-standard spellings, acronyms, and abbreviations, and alphanumeric, as shown below.

Word reduction and shortening

Instance	Word in full
Bro	Brother
Ha	How!
Pic	Picture
Bcoz	Because
Sis	Sister
Dox	Doing
Wlcm	Welcome

Word combination

Instance	Word in full
Lemme	Let me
Wanna	Want to
Kinda	Kind of
Whatsup	What is up?
Livme	Leave me
Ateu	I tell you
Givme	Give me

In texting, students tend to combine words to create new words with similar pronunciations to the known words.

Non-standard spellings

Instance	Word in full
Ticha	Teacher
Huz	House
Ye	Yes
Skul	School
Dat	That
Wify	Wife
Ryt	Right
Ya	Your/you are
Nite	Night

Texters create a word shortening technique to invent non-existing words that are homophonic with grammatical words. The oral rendition of the new word is similar to that of the known word.

Acronyms and abbreviations

Instance	Meaning
LOL	Laugh out loud/lots of love.

ASAP	As soon as possible
OMG	Oh my God!
TtYL	Talk to you later.
TK	Take care

Acronyms and abbreviations are recurrent in the essays of students. According to the students, they use these techniques in texting because the realizations take less space and less time to write.

Alphanumeric

Instance	Meaning
2morrow	Tomorrow
2day	Today
2dy	Today
4u	For you
Lter	Later

Alphanumeric words are formed by combining letters and figures to create non-existing and non-standard words.

In analyzing the collected data, we deduced six main stylistic categories from the students' write-ups. 39 non-standard words were retrieved from the 50 examination scripts selected at random. Of the 36 non-standard words, 10 were word-shortening or word reduction, 7 were word combinations, 11 were non-standard spellings, 5 were acronyms and abbreviations, and 5 were alphanumeric, as presented in [Table 1](#) below.

Table 1

Table 1 Stylistic Categories of Text Features Per Frequency		
Stylistic properties	Examples of instances	Frequency
Word shortening	Bro, ha, pic, bc, sis, dox, wlcmm, ur, u, thru.	10
Word combination	Lemme, wanna, kinda, whatsup, livme, ateu, givme.	7
Non-standard spelling	Ticha, huz, ye, skul, dat, wify, ryt, ya, nite, lv, luv.	11
Acronyms	Lol, ASAP, OMG, Ttyl, tk.	7
Alphanumeric	2morrow, 2day, 2dy, 4u,	4
Total		39

If we take a look at [Table 1](#), we realise that non-standard spelling is the feature that is mostly present in the essays of students (11 cases). Word shortening comes in second (10 cases), word combinations and acronyms are next (7 cases each), and alphanumeric (4 cases).

In analysing the questionnaire administered to the twenty students in the study, we realised that features of text messaging are more common in their messages than in their former writings. This is understood because texters are more conscious in former writing than in informer writing. In identifying the different features used in their text messages, we discovered that all 36 features found in the scripts analysed were equally mentioned in responses to the questionnaire. [Table 2](#), [Table 3](#), [Table 4](#), [Table 5](#) and [Table 6](#) present a combination of all the features found in the scripts and analysed questionnaire.

Table 2

Table 2 Word Reduction and Shortening		
Instance	Word	Frequency
Ya/ur	Your	63
Dox	Doing	63
De/e	The	39
Ok	Okay	26
Gdnite	Goodnight	21
Pple	People	11
Wlcm	Welcome	11
Dis	This	16
Huz	House	05
Pls/plz	Please	11
Wer	Where/were	21
Sis	Sister	53
Bro	Brother	53
Thx	Thanks	26
Don/dn	Don't	05
Pic	Picture	21
Hw/ha	How?	11
bcoz	Because	53
Total	509	

Certain words are frequently reduced or shortened by students during social media communication with their peers. As shown in Table 2 above. 509 such cases were used at different frequencies: ya/ur (your) 63 cases, dox (doing) 63 cases, sis (sister) 53 cases, bro (brother) 53 cases, bcoz (because) 53 cases, de (the) 39 cases, ok (okay) 26 cases, thx (thanks) 26 cases, gnite (goodnight) 21 cases, wer (were/where) 21 cases, pic (picture) 21 cases, dis (this) 16 cases, pple (people) 7 cases, wlcm (welcome) 7 cases, pls/plz (please) 7 cases, hw/ha (how) 7 cases, huz (house) 5 cases, don/dn (don't) 5 cases.

Table 3

Table 3 Word Combinations		
Instance	Word	Frequency
Lemme	Let me	200
Wanna	Want to	200
Kinda	Kind of	125
Whatsup	What is up?	188
Gotta	Got to	125
Donno	Don't know	125
Livmi	Leave me	100
Ateu	I tell you	188
Total		1,251

Regarding word combination, an analysis of both the scripts and questionnaire showed the regular presence of 1,251 cases of such words used at different frequencies: lemme (let me) 200 cases, wanna (want to) 200 cases, whatsup (what is up?) 188 cases, ateu (I tell you) 188 cases, kinda (kind of) 125 cases, gotta (got to) 125 cases, donno (don't know) 125 cases, and livmi (leave me) 100 cases.

The use of word combination is mainly for space and time, given that phrases are shortened to single words with similar phonological rendition.

Table 4

Table 4 Non-standard Spellings		
Instance	Word	Frequency
Lv/luv	Love	100

Yeah	Yes	108
Wel	Well	38
Yu	You	77
Yde	Yaoundé	46
Wify	Wife	46
Wat	What	108
Ryt	Right	46
Geh	Girl	31
Dat	That	77
Huz	House	08
Skul	School	77
Dor	Door	08
Total	13 words	770

770 cases of non-standard spellings were noted in both analyses of scripts and the questionnaire: ye (yes) 108 cases, wat (what?) 108 cases, lv/luv (love) 100 cases, yu (you) 77 cases, dat (that) 77 cases, skul (school) 77 cases, yde (Yaounde) 46 cases, wify (wife) 46 cases, ryt/rite (right) 46 cases, wel (well) 38 cases, geh (girl) 31 cases, dor (door) 8 cases.

This phenomenon is so common that it is difficult to differentiate between a student who knows the correct spelling of a word but intentionally decides to use the non-standard version and one who does not know the correct spelling of the word.

Table 5

Table 5 Acronyms and Abbreviations		
Instance	Word	Frequency
LOL	Lots of love/laugh out loud	329
ASAP	As soon as possible	257
TK	Take care	200
OMG	Oh, My God!	286
I no	I know	143
Idno	I don't know	143
Ttyl	Talk to you later	71
Total	07 words	1429

Table 10 reveals that students tend to condense the language by shortening phrases. This is done by shortening long phrases and part-spelling certain words. The initials are combined and read as single words. 1429 cases of such phrases and words were revealed during our analysis: LOL (lots of love/laugh out loud) 329 cases, OMG (oh, my God!) 286 cases, ASAP (as soon as possible) 257 cases, TK (take care) 200 cases, I no (I know) 143 cases, Idno (I don't know) 143 cases and Ttyl (Talk to you later) 71 cases.

Table 6

Table 6 Alphanumeric		
Instance	Word	Frequency
4u	For you	625
2day	Today	625
2morrow	Tomorrow	500
2nite	Tonight	500
Total		2250

There are equally few instances where alphanumeric figures are combined with non-existing words to create other words that are understood only in context. 2250 such cases were seen during our analysis. The figures chosen to have similar phonological renditions as the parts of the words they replace: 4U (for you): 625

cases; 2day (today): 625 cases; 2morrow (tomorrow): 500 cases; and 2nite (tonight): 500 cases.

Different reasons were given by respondents when asked why students use text messages. Based on the data collected, most of the students believed that text messaging was faster and less expensive for them than direct calls. Texting allows the communicator to type whatever he or she wants to send in a few seconds, and the receiver gets the information instantly. Some students wrongly think that texting positively affects them, given that it helps build their writing skills and vocabulary. They equally think it helps them develop their computer skills and mastery of the keyboard on their phones. Others think that text messaging has helped improve their typing skills. To others, texting is fun and interesting and occupies them during their idle moments.

Other respondents disclosed that texting affects their spelling ability because most of the time they use non-standard spelling forms when they are texting. Some blame their poor performance in examinations on their excessive use of text messaging, which influences their written rendition. One of the respondents had this to say: "Text messaging affects my English language skills a lot because there are moments, I go off track; sometimes I even forget I am writing a formal work."

As regards the attitude of lecturers towards the use of text messaging, the questionnaire administered to them was measured based on the options of strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. The lecturers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that text messaging helps them send assignments to students. They were equally asked if text messaging negatively or positively affects students' writing. Three of the lecturers agreed that text messaging helps in the transmission of messages from the school administration to students, while two of them strongly agreed that text messaging is necessary. Three of them agreed that text messaging helps send assignments to students, while two strongly agreed with the assertion. Asked if texting during classes helps to incorporate technology into teaching, two of the lecturers agreed that it is helpful, two strongly disagreed, and three others disagreed. When asked if the use of text messaging was appropriate in the classroom, the answer was similar to that of the previous question. Two agreed it was, two strongly agreed, and three disagreed. Asked whether students can differentiate and switch between formal and informal usage, all seven lecturers were unanimous in saying that students' scripts are fuelled with aspects of the social media features discussed above.

The English language of Cameroonian youths is highly influenced by the internet in general and by social media in particular. Texters make use of aspects such as initialisation, in which initial letters of words are used to represent whole words or sentences. Initialisation constitutes one of the methods of shortening text messaging as seen in the following examples.

Initialisation: Cld u pls giv me d moni ASAP?

Standard English: Could you please give me the money as soon as possible?

Initialization: I study mre dan u, so I ot 2 hav to hire mks.

Standard English: I study more than you, so I ought to have higher marks.

Initialization: Gd morx 2 every 1 in d hauz. Pls, submit ur assigmts dis wkend.

Standard English: Good morning to everyone in the house. Please turn in your assignments this weekend.

Initialization can pose serious problems of understanding given that some words are misspelled, and others do not exist in the English language. Another linguistic aspect used by texters is letter homophones. This refers to letters that take

the place of whole words giving the similarities in pronunciation. [Wanji \(2017\)](#) sees such letters as 'replacements'. They are written representations of the sounds of certain words. For instance: 'u' for 'you'; 'ur' for 'your'; 'en' for 'and'; 'de' for 'the'; 'dis' for 'this'.

Punctuation errors equally characterize the written rendition of young Cameroonians. Research has shown that there are four main punctuation markers that texters mostly use in their text messages: full stop; comma; question mark; exclamation mark. The use of punctuation markers in text messaging is quite complex. Some texters do not use commas, while others use them in place of a full stop. The use of the full stop is not very important given that the end of a line signifies the end of an utterance. Most sentences are fragments. Another punctuation marker ignored by texters is the apostrophe marker.

Dats how u are (That's how you are.)

To maximize time and space, some texters do not inter-space words. Sometimes a text is written in block form with upper-case letter initials acting as the boundary. This has a significant impact on users.

HBD2U. (Happy birthday to you)

Text messaging in Cameroon is characterized by the construction of sentences without subjects. Personal pronouns are often omitted.

I hav 2 finish dis work b4 midnite. (I have to finish this work before midnight).

Do u wan us 2 do de assigmt 2day (Do you want us to do the assignment today?)

The mixing of codes equally characterizes the written rendition of the Cameroonian youth on social media. Most of the time, texters mix French and English within a single sentence structure.

There are instances of French, English, and Pidgin English mixtures.

On go see la nga d'heir (let's go and see the girl of yesterday).

Liv me, I wan tek my pikin' 4 hospital (sorry, I'm taking my child to the hospital).

The creation or invention of 'strange' words and the use of non-standard words by texters are detrimental to Standard English. Such usage negatively affects the language of texters. Some of the invented words include:

Friendzone: a person ignored by the one they like or love.

Hashtag: used to highlight the word being emphasized.

Talkshit: a meaningless/useless sentence

Squad: a group of friends with the same interests

It has been observed that text messaging has become the norm for many students, and as such, this article has investigated the effects of text messaging on students' academic productions. After a careful and critical analysis of the collected data, the findings revealed that, though text massaging has some advantages, it also has lots of disadvantages. Both students and lecturers are aware of the impact of text messaging on students' writing, which greatly affects their use of grammatical rules. On the other hand, and as [Crystal \(2008\)](#) believes, text messaging helps students develop the ability to write while limiting space and time. Though positive, this harms the content of students' writing as ideas are presented in numbers and abbreviations, which violate Standard English rules.

Text messaging is not always comprehensible and understood by everyone because clarifications and an understanding of a governing language rule system are needed in the understanding of communication exchange.

6. CONCLUSION

It is worth noting that the frequent and profound engagement by Cameroonians in technologically mediated communication through chat rooms on the Internet, text messaging, and the like has greatly influenced them, as they develop the tendency to make use of linguistic deviations (ungrammatical language forms and structures). Research carried out by Odey et al. (2014) on fifty final-year students in Nigeria with a total of 250 SMS messages proved that there were five dominant features of SMS in the students' scripts. These are vowel deletion, graphemes, alphanumeric homophony, punctuation 'errors', and initialization.

Texters get used to abbreviations and, as such, find it difficult to get the correct orthography of certain words. Babalola and Oluga (2013) criticize text messaging and present it as a phenomenon that affects the spelling system of texters, making spelling somehow difficult for them as they get used to incorrect spelling forms and abbreviated forms of words in text messaging. Research has shown that email discourse, or text messaging, is neither oral nor literal but a new genre in its own right. Text messaging possesses qualities of both spoken and written language.

Though research has proven that text messaging may be helpful in the development of students' abilities, Okafor (2010) has a contrary view. He opines that it is unfortunate that the ideas in text messaging and other social communication applications are not always properly presented. For instance, the use of signs and symbols in the SMS affects the development of content, organisation, mechanical accuracy, and expression components of the user's essay writing.

We observed during the present survey that some students and other educated persons at the University of Yaounde 1 tend to have difficulties with the spelling and syntax of the English language due to ignorance, carelessness, and laziness, fashionable in the use of social media. This is a result of text messaging features of brevity, minimal space, time, and cost, which attract the attention of most users. Among the proponents of the negative effects of text messaging is Carrington (2005), who earlier viewed text messaging as a useful tool of communication among youths and adults, especially students, though this has led to addiction. Carrington refers to students as 'addicts' whom the much use of text messaging has made unable to shift from the phenomenon in social context to Standard English, and as a result of this, formal language, especially written language, may be under threat.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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