

THE IMPACT OF TEXT MESSAGING ON THE ACQUISITION OF STANDARD ENGLISH WRITING IN TANZANIA: A STUDY OF HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN DODOMA MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

Text messages also referred to as “text messaging” or “texting” have become the preferred mode of interpersonal communication among young people at the turn of the 20th Century (It is in the 21st Century that SMS has become popular among young people). This study is aimed at investigating the impact of SMS/text messages on the acquisition of Standard English writing in Tanzania. The general objective of this particular study was to explore the distinctive linguistic features of text messages used by university undergraduate students and their impact on the acquisition of Standard English writing at higher learning institution in Tanzania. In carrying out this study, Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles (1987) was applied and data was collected through questionnaires, telephone survey and documentary review. Data based on questionnaires was analyzed through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Basically the study employed both qualitative approach and quantitative approach. The findings of this study clearly show that text messaging is characterized by both standard and non standard language, though non standard language seems to be the greatest feature of students’ text messages. General effects of text messaging on the acquisition of Standard English writing in particular is seen to be a result of the nature of text messaging which gives rise to more abbreviated language.

Keywords: mobile phone, text messaging, acronym, undergraduate students, code switching, mixing.

INTRODUCTION

This section presents the problem background, research gap, statement of the problem as well as the contribution of the study in literature and policy making.

Problem background

Language has always been a social tool for communication that is naturally used both for framing of thoughts and for conveying messages in social interaction. Language is also used in multifunctional speech events. In Africa for instance; language has been used both in formal context like trade, courts and in the informal context. Apart from face to face communication language was also used in long distance communication with the help of messengers. The benefit of oral communication included spontaneity, speed, affordability and freedom to be accompanied by gestures and other paralinguistic features.

Written language was mainly used for formal communication and its main advantages included ability for documentation and preservation for later retrieval.

Writing became more popularized as more people were enrolled in schools for formal education and it broadened the scope of incorporating the informal use like interpersonal communication, for example letter writing between friends and family. Letter writing was useful in long distance communication. When mobile phone technology emerged, few people particularly those who had good financial status accessed it. Currently, the case seems to be different because it has gone from being rare and expensive equipment to being easily available and affordable to many.

Among other studies on the new media, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) (Adebola, 2011) has thrown some interesting insights into the extent to which CMC has extended and enhanced relationships, apart from the traditional

face-to-face communication. Questions have been raised about the effects of “text messages” on standard literacy. Discussion on text messaging will not be completed if it does not dwell on the new linguistic forms emerging from its users.

Technology plays a very important role in communication today. Mobile phone is one of the most effective, convenient and widely used technological instrument for communication facility known as short message service (SMS) which is relatively cheaper, both in terms of time and money spent during the process of communication (Mampa & Kwema, 2012).

With the advent and use of mobile phone short message service, letter writing became cumbersome and viewed as an expensive medium requiring paper, pen, envelop and postage stamp except for hand delivery letter which excluded the envelop and postage stamp but lacked privacy. Therefore the age of letters to friends, relatives, families, colleagues and others in an informal setting has now far been overtaken by faster, far reaching and confidential text message because of the coverage of short message service.

However, it is through the limitation of mobile phone’s screen size being small, small keypad as well as limited number of characters that can be used per SMS that affect the way a message is written. It is from this scenario therefore, researchers obtained the idea of conducting this study.

Research gap

A great deal of work has been accomplished in different aspects of text messaging and contexts in countries such as USA, UK, India, Kenya, Malaysia and South Africa. There are various noticeable gaps. (Adebola,2011) explained little on how “text messaging” among students has influenced the acquisition of standard language especially on the acquisition of Standard English writing. It is also noticeable that little research has been done on mobile phone and communication, text message and language acquisition, particularly on the acquisition of Standard English writing in Tanzania. It is on this ground that we focused to bridge the gap that exists by investigating the impact that “text messaging” has on the acquisition of Standard English writing at higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Communication technologies seem to have generated new forms of literacy which put the standard of writing among adopters at stake. Mobile phone SMS in particular is something which most university undergraduate students are attracted to and that makes them the heaviest users of “text messaging” (Thurlow, 2003). It is also asserted that text messaging or texting has become the preferred mode of interpersonal communication among the university undergraduate students at the turn of the 20th Century (Thurlow & Poff, 2011)

According to (Ling, 2004), text messaging has several characteristics that make it a useful mode of communication. Text message is a cheaper medium of communication than conventional voice calling (Crystal, 2001) this likely seems to be one of the reasons why it has gained so much popularity among university undergraduate students.

Most text messages are not in form of standard written discourse but users are very effective in describing what they want their readers to perceive. The technological barriers of mobile phone seem to give rise to a new language forms; the language of text message which is characterized with a lot of distinctive linguistic features. There has been a conviction that university undergraduate students spend a lot of time “text messaging” each other and that some of them seem to bring that language of text messages into school work -(Proysen, 2009). He further adds that there is a supposition that “text messaging” is a threat to standard writing.

These suppositions indicate that “text messaging” could lead to writing that displays features which deviate from standard written English. Hence in spite of “text messaging” benefit in enhancing communication, it also seems to have detrimental effects on the acquisition of language.

In this study therefore, text messages were treated in relation to communication and language acquisition. The study focused specifically on the distinctive linguistic features of “text messaging” used by the university undergraduate students and their impact on the acquisition of written English in Tanzania.

The study's contribution in the literature and in policy making

“Texting” as a method of transferring messages that has become an important form of communication. The findings of this study are expected to provide useful information about the real situations of the university undergraduate students on the acquisition of Standard English writing in Tanzania. The study also aimed at assisting the educators in understanding why errors are made in written language. That is by understanding the impact of “text messaging” language on university undergraduate students’ writing, improvements will not only be made possible but also we might be able to find effective ways to improve and enable students to be sensitive towards the appropriate use of language in specific situation.

Moreover the findings of this study are expected to shed new light and contribute to the already existing literature concerning the mobile phone SMS “technology”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The History and Use of Mobile Phone SMS

The idea of short message service (SMS) began to be discussed as part of the development of the Global System for Mobile Communications network in the mid-1980s, but it wasn't until the early 1990s that mobile phone companies started to develop the commercial possibilities. Text communicated by pagers was replaced by text messages. In 2002 the GSM estimated that 250 billion messages were sent through their networks. The growth in usage has been a natural consequence of the phenomenal growth in penetration of the mobile phone (Crystal,2008). In 2009, the United Nations reported that more than 60% of the world's population had access to mobile phones. Most people used them for person to person communication (Thurlow & Poff,2011)

Hall, Lewis, & Bernhardt, (2015) reported that the use of mobile text messaging has been increasing rapidly in the United States. In 2011 for instance, texting among adult mobile users was higher among Hispanics (83%) and African American (76%) than Whites (70%)

In Africa particularly South Africa, Freudenberg (2009) reports that the use of cell phones has been on the rise for more than a decade with the introduction of cell phone application. Most Africans especially young people are texting each other every day.

In Tanzania, the case seems to be the same. Over a number of years the country has experienced significant growth of mobile phone industry to the extent that the government saw a need to have a telecom regulator refereed as Tanzania Communication Regulatory Authority (TCRA).

This growth has been evidenced by a number of scholars and writers; for instance according to Mutarubukwa, (2010), in the year 2000 and 2001, there was one telephone for every 100 people when the country's teledensity was one per cent. The teledensity was 15, 21 and 32 per cent in 2006, 2007 and 2008, respectively. In 2008, Tanzania had about 13 million mobile customers, which means mobile operators hooked over four million users to their networks. During year 2008 and 2009 the number of fixed line subscribers increased from 123,809 to 172,922. In 2010 there were over 17 million mobile phone users in Tanzania compared to less than 300,000 a decade ago, signifying the phenomenal growth of the telecommunications subsector. In September 2010 the penetration rate was estimated at 48.13% over a population estimate of 42.75 million.

The latest statistics by (TCRA) show that the number of mobile subscribers increased from about 16.2 million to nearly 17.5 million between September and December, 2009 (Mutarubukwa, 2010)

The TCRA had licensed six common mobile phone telecommunication services (cell phone operators) before 2009 namely Vodacom Tanzania Limited, Tanzania Telecommunication Company Limited (TTCL), Zantel, Benson Informatics, Airtel, and the MIC Tanzania Limited (TIGO). Up to the end of 2009 there were seven more mobile operators following the commencement of Sasatel's operations in 2009 (Mutarubukwa, 2010). TCRA has licensed more mobile phone companies with the latest registration of five mobile phone operators such as MyCell, Egotel, Rural Netco, Smile and Excellent Com, bringing to 12 cellular companies- (Mutarubukwa, 2010).

New technology is one factor that has greatly influenced human language. The mobile phone has been the latest way to communicate quickly since the invention of text messaging. The term ‘text message’ or just short message, short mail, person to person message, refers to the brief typed messages sent –using SMS of mobile or cell phone –(Thurlow & Poff,2011) As technology develops a whole new domain of restricted language emerges as people adopt their messages to fit the screen and make use of the new software (Crystal, 2001). Crystal further observes that despite the bending of rules in English the SMS is credited for the creativity of its new words. Crystal, (2008) emphasizes that texting is not different from other innovative forms. Adebola, (2011) argues that the advent of mobile phone and its services has infiltrated into the linguistic continuum of new words, expressions and syntactic structures. Adebola adds further that new inventions bring with them new vocabularies, expressions and attitudes.

Text message seem to provide opportunity for intimate personal contact while at the same time offering the detachment necessary to manage self representation and involvement (Reid and Reid 2004 as cited in Adebola 2011). The important function of communication technology like mobile phone is that it enables people to maintain connections with those from whom they are distanced physically. This function is most obviously achieved through the interpersonal messaging capabilities that the technology supports.

Hearing (2001) as cited in Adebola (2011) noted that language will necessarily be affected by technological variables such as synchronicity, gravity, multimodality as well as other non linguistic variables such as participants’ relationships, expectations and levels of motivation. Hearing adds further that language of SMS may be defined as a synchronous text based.

SMS language is an interpersonal communication between people who know each other; therefore messages may be brief because of shared knowledge. “Texting is relatively cheap and it is personal as it is a direct message from one person to another. It has created a form of linguistic style which has moved away from the literacy notions of fine writing, good style to stylistics. The informal style of text message which is characterized by the use of short forms is gradually becoming a regular feature of learners’ formal written text (Ling, 2004)

The technical restriction or brevity of text messaging has led to the development of short forms in SMS communication (Bodomo & Lee, 2004). The small screen size, small key board and the limited character space bring a challenge to the way text messages are written (Crystal, 2001).

Text messaging” is said to be popular amongst young people. Young people are the largest users of the short message service; they use SMS features mainly to coordinate their social lives (Crystal,2001). Crystal, (2008) acknowledges that text message has spread like wildfire especially among young people who appear to spend most of their time “texting” and are unwilling to write much else.

According to Katamba, (2005) texting is posing a problem that should be addressed urgently. Students need to know the difference between what is appropriate in the written form of the language and what is not. He further added that “text messaging” is characterized by informal use of language and it has its own place not in the official works.

Theoretical Framework of this study

This study was guided by the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) originally developed as Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973) with central argument that people often modify their speech characteristics in order to achieve various goals.

The theory has two main premises: One is that, communicators are motivated to adjust their speech styles with respect to one another as means of expressing values, attitude and intentions. Second, how we respond to another depends on how we interpret and perceive the individuals speech. There are key assumptions or strategies that are described by this theory. These are convergence and divergence.

Convergence is the process whereby individuals shift their speech styles to become more like that of those whom they are interacting so as to reduce social differences. That is when people converge; it shows a desire for social acceptance, integration, identification and or effective communication with another. There is a tendency of two people to become alike in their language speech, pronunciations, utterances lengths and intimacy of their self-disclosure.

On the other hand, in divergence speakers dissociate with or show disapproval of other by making their speech diverge from that of the other. It is a way one can make his or her speech different from the others and actually uses behaviors opposite to the others.

The assumption is that people bring their background and fields of experience into their interactions through their speech. The theory is concerned with the link between language, context and identity. It is centered on both intergroup and interpersonal factors that lead to accommodation as well as the ways in which context concerns affect communication behavior. Moreover, there are factors that affect accommodation or communicative interaction. These include place where speech occurs, the topic of conversation, kind of interlocutors and personality and perceptual elements.

The above conditions and strategies work effectively, in explaining how SMS users converge their writing with that of their interlocutors and diverge their writing to the dissimilar groups. The theory attempts to explain both the motivations and constraints acting upon speech shifts and in human interactions. As far as this study is concerned this theory helps best to explain the motivations and constraints that SMS users encounter when texting.

Research Questions

The study aimed at answering the following questions:

What are the distinctive linguistic features of text messages used by university undergraduate students in Tanzania?

What attitudes do university undergraduate students and lecturers have on the use of mobile phone text messaging in relation to the acquisition of Standard English writing?

What is the impact of text messaging on the acquisition of Standard English writing at higher learning Institutions in Tanzania?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted only at two higher learning institutions located in Dodoma Municipality in Dodoma Region. Dodoma is a region located in the central part of Tanzania. It has been Tanzania’s capital city since 1970’s and is the host of the United Republic’s Parliament.

The population for this study comprised of the lecturers and the university undergraduate students. Lecturers were involved in this study based on their interest on language acquisition so as to provide valuable information required for this study. The university undergraduate students involved in this study represented other university students in Tanzania and it was deemed that their text messaging styles and language will be a true representation of other university undergraduate students in Tanzania.

The study used a sample size of 80 respondents within the higher learning institutions; this included 16 lecturers (eight lecturers from each higher learning institution), and 64 university undergraduate students (32 students from each university) as demonstrated in Table 1. Gender was also considered.

Table 1: Composition of Sample

CATEGORY	SUBTOTAL (University “A” & University “B”)	TOTAL
Lecturers	8 Lectures (from University A) + 8Lecturers (from University B).	16
University undergraduate students	32 + 32 (16male students + 16female students from each university)	64
TOTAL		80

Since this study focused on higher learning institutions which offer degree programs, judgmental sampling technique was used to select higher learning institutions that have the mentioned criteria. From this point of view only two higher learning institutions out of five higher learning institution in Dodoma Municipality were involved in this study. St John’s University of Tanzania and the University of Dodoma were chosen by the researchers as a case study and a representative sample of other universities in Tanzania. The researchers chose these two Universities out of others due to their convenience in reaching them and secondly the University of Dodoma is the largest university in Tanzania population wise while Saint John’s University is the only private university in Dodoma Municipality.

The choice of the lecturers was judgmentally based on their interest in language teaching and language acquisition. The researcher judgmentally selected sixteen lecturers, eight lecturers from each university based on the mentioned criteria. Lecturers were expected to have significant information for this study, since they were mainly those teaching either Linguistics or English language as an academic subject.

Moreover students were selected through stratified sampling and simple random sampling. First, students were located into different strata equivalent to their degree programs through stratified sampling. That is, there were four different strata for each university and each stratum comprised of ten university undergraduate students making a total of forty university undergraduate students per university. This therefore brought a total of eighty university undergraduate students; from there the researcher randomly selected eight undergraduate students from each stratum while considering gender equality. Therefore this resulted to have a number of thirty two students from each university and brought a total of sixty four representative samples of university undergraduate students for the study.

In this study data were collected through questionnaires, observation method, documentary review and telephone survey. In order to validate these instruments, the pilot study was conducted at one of the higher learning institution in Dodoma Municipality with a sample comprising of two respondents; one being a lecturer and the other one being the student. The pilot study aimed at checking if the participants would be able to answer the questions easily, if the format would be easily followed, if the flow of information was logical and if the instrument would be completed in a reasonable amount of time. Through this process the items with unclear meaning to the respondents were identified and adjusted accordingly.

The data analysis for this study included both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative method was used in the analysis of the questionnaire responses, documentary review and telephone survey especially for data that were in numerical and data that needed to be quantified and worked out in percentage.

In this study researchers transcribed, read and re-read the university undergraduate students' written work, university undergraduate students' text messages and questionnaire responses from both the lecturers and the university undergraduate students so as to identify the ideas of similar patterns and put them in the coherent categories called variables. Data based on questionnaires were analyzed through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) in terms of descriptive statistics. Microsoft word was used for data from documentary review and telephone survey. Tables and charts were used to present the findings.

This study predominantly employed both qualitative and quantitative research approach. Lunenburg & Irby, (2008) assert that qualitative research approach is more appropriate to use if the researcher wants to attain profound understanding of the research topic. Some aspects of quantitative research approach were used to complement the qualitative research approach because some data were collected in the form of numbers especially those which were obtained through questionnaire, telephone survey and documentary review. In addition, some data were quantified and worked out in terms of percentage and to present the findings tables, charts and graphs were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Distinctive linguistic features of text messages

One of the most important objectives of this study was to find out the types and distinctive linguistic features of text messages as used by the university undergraduate students. In understanding the type of messages and distinctive linguistic features that are included by the university undergraduate students when 'text messaging', this study has found that the paralinguistic communication such as gestures, facial expression, and body language for determining meaning in the context is lost when communicating through text rather in speech.

Although text messages are reported to be characterized by both standard and non standard orthography, so far it was found that, text messages are fully characterized by the informal or non standard spelling the fact that they are not largely understood by everyone rather it is the creative language from the creativity of a group of SMS users sharing a similar background, whom in this study are referred to as university undergraduate students. These students seem to employ their creativity to form their own way of communicating by which it has led to different tendencies of shortening words.

Abbreviation is the most common feature of 'text messaging' that has brought different number of features and a different number of writing styles, that university undergraduate students employ when 'texting'. The need for brevity in

the text messaging is seen to have resulted, not just from the limitation of characters and space, but also from the need for saving time, space, and exploring creativity on using language, quickening the response and keeping identity.

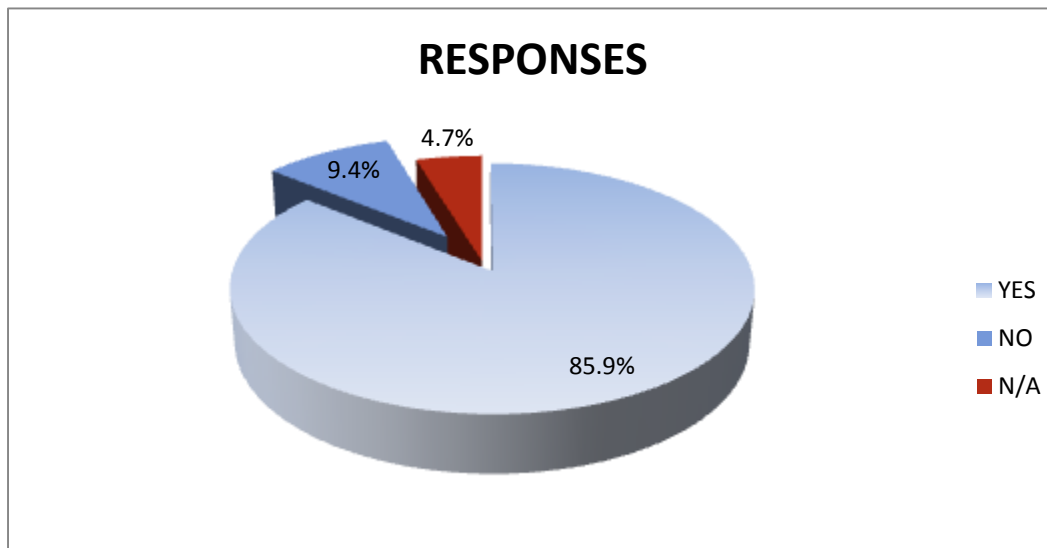
In this study it was observed that there are several strategies involved by the university undergraduate students to shorten words when ‘texting’. The findings show that the shortening of words results from different strategies of abbreviations which can be categorized into separate semantic categories. These include: acronyms and the use of initials, contractions, use of letter and number homophones or alphanumerical combination, capitalization or use of upper and lower case letter, use of punctuation marks, G- clipping and other clipping, accent stylization, use of phonetic sounds and onomatopoeic as well as duplication. Code switching and code mixing were also found and this adds to another feature of ‘text messaging’.

Technically, an acronym is a word that is formed by combining some parts, usually the first letters of some other terms or series of words. The term is also used to refer to *INITIALISMS*, which are combinations of letters representing a longer phrase. An acronym can be pronounced as if it is a word rather than just a series of individual letters or pronounced as series of individual letters. ‘Text messaging’ has spawned a rich set of acronyms for different phrases.

In this study acronyms are found to be used by the university undergraduate students when sending message for the purpose of shortening words and accommodating them to fit the space number of characters in the mobile phone. The use of acronyms allows one who is sending a message to write in a condensed or limited space. This study shows that the use of acronyms is so rapidly increasing among the university undergraduate students. Acronym seems to be a complex language since it is commonly understood by the groups sharing similar culture or background.

The use of acronyms in ‘text messages’ involves the omission of some part of a word while leaving only initial letters of word or phrase. The process is sometimes referred to as reduction of long phrases or initialism. In this study students were asked, ‘Do you use acronyms and initials when texting?’ Their responses where: out of sixty four university undergraduate students 55 students, equivalent to 85.9% responded to have been using acronyms and initials when ‘texting’ while only 6 (9.4%) responded not to have been using this feature when ‘texting’. These responses are as summarized in *Figure 1* below.

Figure 1: Students’ responses on the use of acronyms and initials when ‘texting’.



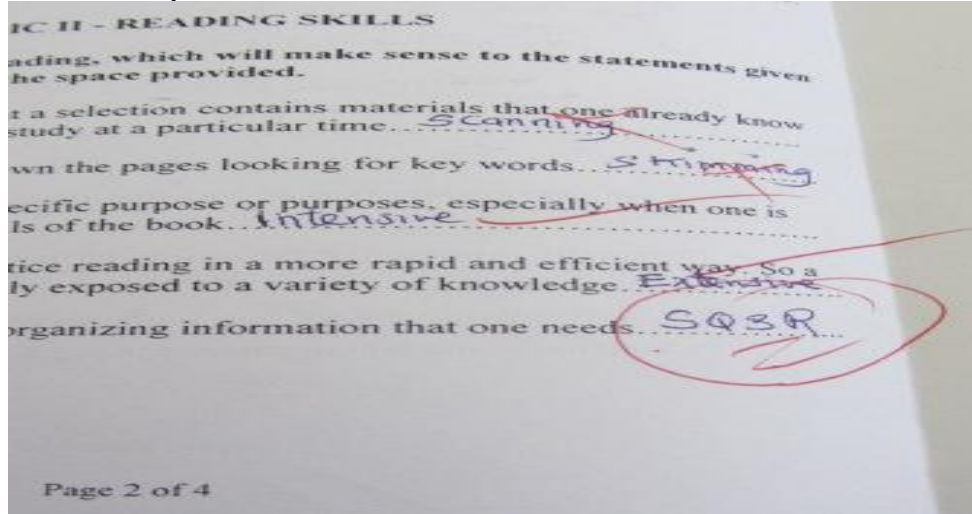
Source: Field Data (February, 2016).

Likewise Table 2 provides a summary of acronyms that were found on the sample of one hundred and twenty eight text messages collected from the university undergraduate students, whereby twelve acronyms were found repeatedly in the eighty three messages.

Table 2: Acronyms and initials found on Students written work

<i>Acronyms</i>	<i>Definition</i>
SQ3R, SQRRR, SQRR, SQR, SQ	S=survey, Q= question, R=read, R=review, R=recite.
UDOM UDo	University of Dodoma.
SJUT Sjut Sj	St. John University of Tanzania.
Ue / ue	University Examination.
SR	Seminar room

Figure 2: Sample of the acronyms found on student's written work.



Source: Field Data (February 2016).

Furthermore, the finding was supported by the lecturers who have also reported to have witnessed the use of the acronyms on the students' written work particularly in tests and essay work.

Table 3: Sample of acronyms found on text messages collected from students.

<i>Acronyms</i>	<i>Definitions</i>
ASAP	As soon as possible
Fb	Face book
DPMD	Don't put me down
NP	No problem
Fw	Forward or For what
Sjut	St John's University of Tanzania
TIA	Thanks in advance
Ue	University exam.
Ty	Thank you.
OMG	Oh My God!
FYI	For your information

Evidences presented on Table 3 and Figure 2 reveals that, university undergraduate students shorten words especially by reducing long phrases by picking only initials of words while leaving the other part of a word. The initials of a word or phrase are then combined to read as a word or series of letters of alphabet. From this analysis it is obvious that Standard English writing is invaded by the use of acronyms that are non- standard forms of writing especially in a formal context

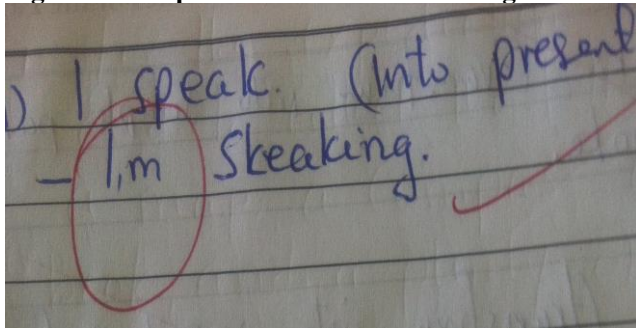
and they can be understood among the groups with the same culture, background and therefore it cannot be said to be universally understood. It is for this reason that the use of acronyms is seen to be non- standard writing style.

Contraction is another way used by the university undergraduate students to condense the language by serving the middle of a word or phrase. Technically, contraction is a word or phrase that has been shortened by dropping one or more letters. In this study the researcher found that contraction is another style used by university undergraduate students when sending messages to each other. The university undergraduate students in this case, are reported to use contractions so as first, to overcome limitations of space and of characters on the mobile phone, second to ensure brevity of their message, and lastly to quicken the response.

Table 4: A sample of Contracted forms found on students’ written assignments

Contracted words	Definitions
Am I’m	I am
Don’t Don	Do not
We’r We’re	Where, were We are
Its It’s Tis	Belonging to it It is
Adj’ve	Adjective
Ad’vb	Adverb
You’r Your Yu’r	You are Possessive

Figure 3: Sample of students’ written assignments with contracted words.



SsSource: Field Data (February, 2016)

Table 5: A sample of contracted words found on students’ text messages

<i>Contracted Words</i>	<i>Definitions and Translation</i>
‘t was	It was
P’z	Please
B’by	Baby
Cu’ldn’t’ve	Could not have
W’l	Will
D’nin	Dinning
A’sbuh	Asubuhi (Morning)
T’nx	Tanks
C’ster	Sister

The uses of letters of alphabet and numerals that sound like a word were also observed to be one among the features of text messages in this study. Letter and number homophones are sometimes referred to as alphanumerical combination when both are used together in place of an independent word. The tendencies of using alphanumerical combination for communication seem to be popular among the university undergraduate students. Students seem to combine numbers and letters as a way to communicate with each other so as to save time in composing a message.

Figure 4 provides a list of some of text messages taken as a sample out of 128 text messages collected from the students' mobile phones that were found with the use of letter and number homophones.

Figure 4: Sample of Text messages with alphanumerical combination as used by the university undergraduate students.

1. **9c 9t** &cwt dreams my budy! 2. **W8** for s'times w'l kol yu. 3. **2MAINI** langu lipo kwako. 4. Bcoz **b4** dat tym. 5. Nipo **g8t**. 6. Okey ma friend. C u **l8r**. 7. He came **2c** me **2dei**. 8. **Gud9t**. 9. Im proud **2c** ur msg. 10. wl c u **b4** dic dei ends!!! 11. Its ol rait c u **2moro** monin. 12. Oya mbona kama u hv **4gtn**. 13. Never have I seen t **b4**. 14. I appreciate it **4frm** ma heart. 15. **2b** onest I **4got** tht! 16. Nipo cls c me **l8r**. 17. twas a **g8** lecturer **2dy** u micd. 18. Nina **5va** rfk, just drop by stwza attend s'mina.

Source: Field Data (February, 2016).

On the other hand the letters of the alphabet found to be used alone as an independent word are such as: y (for why), p (problem), c (see), b (be), bn (been), cct(sister), z (is), u (you), k (okey), yf (wife), ua (your / you are), m (me), czn (for Swahili word 'sidhani' meaning I don't think so), cm (for Swahili word 'simu' meaning pone), bb, zt (is it), r (are) cn (for swahili word 'sina' I don't have or for English word can), as demonstrated on Figure 10.

Figure 5: Sample of Letters used alone in text messages

1. I wl **b** de a.
2. **Y r u** sad ma fr'nd
3. I'l **c** kama ntawez kuatend de lectr.
4. May **b** am gon **b** de perkt **yf** 4 him.
5. Av **bn** xo bored **2dy**.

Source: Field Data (February, 2016).

The strategy used within this form of communication is to shorten the word by replacing it with the alphabet that sounds alike. Also researchers closely observed the way numbers or letters are used to shorten words in 'text messaging'.

Figure 6: Sample of text messages with the use of numbers.

1. I kea a lot **4** u just incase u don b'lv m.
2. Y on eth. **2** me dat sound ridiculous.
3. **9c 9t** cwt.
4. Am travln plz mwambie anna **2** make a **4tcopy 4** me wl pay ha bak.
5. May God empower u in the coming ue..let His glory enlighten and give u enough memories **2remember** the exact answers in u rue...Wishin u all the best.
6. Y ar u cryin! **2** B Qte **4** Sht tym It Mke U Cry?I'm xory. Gnyt
7. I **2** mic u madly gf.
8. **2** marry im is abomination my dear cn't even drim lol! Am goin **2** d h'spital.
9. G9t

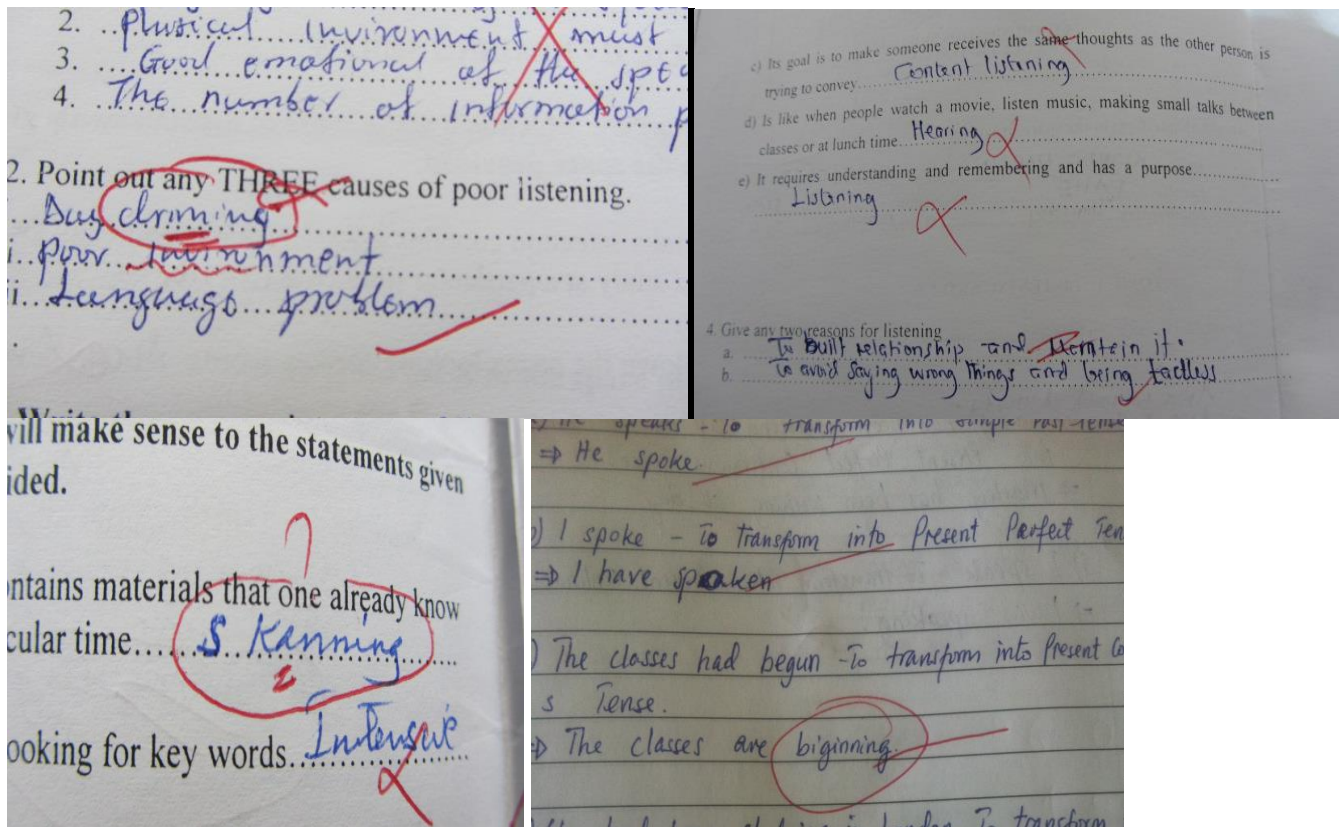
Source: Field Data (February, 2016).

The use of spellings that sound the same as a word is another feature that seems to be popular in ‘text messaging’. Writing a word as it is pronounced or heard is another distinctive linguistic feature of ‘text messages’ that university undergraduate students have become much interested with.

The following is a summary for sample of words that were phonetically typed by students in their messages: *gem, ov, ol, nyu, yia, troboz, bebi, janey, pliz, inaf, thout, woz, sef, kul, diya / dya, thanx yu, sem, gudaftanun, bin, olwayz, av, misd, om, owkey, saiz, bize, lavd, welkam, wat, lito, hedek, rait, gud, sory, dei, neva, hat, nat, senti,*

In line with the above, further observation carried on the sample of sixty four written works collected from the university undergraduate students has proven that, there were words typically written in their assignments as pronounced. Some of such words were as: ‘*driming*’ for dreaming, ‘*invironment*’ for environment, ‘*mentein*’ for maintain, ‘*skaning*’ for scanning, ‘*-tyme / taim*’ for time, and ‘*impakt*’ for impact. This is further demonstrated on Figure 19.

Figure 7: Sample of students’ written works with words written as pronounced.



Source: Field Data (February, 2016).

This study has found that code switching and code mixing in particular are heavily used when ‘texting’ and therefore add to another distinctive linguistic feature of text message used by the university undergraduate students. This study has proven that university undergraduate students code switch and code mix a lot in the chat room especially when ‘text messaging’.

Figure 8: Sample of Text messages with code switched sentences.

1. *Tutameet om ninahedek kinoma cn't w8t more.*
2. *Poa c*. nitawork on dat.*
3. *N2MAINIA> Utuniform km kn changes*
4. *Oky gud ideal, gudnite coz nipo na frndzi tunadiscuss hapa*
5. *Question is nitajiprotect vipi?km hal ndo hiyo. LOL*

Figure 9: Sample of Text messages with Code mixed sentences.

1. *Ooow loooo 4 me pole, but udon av a test ryt?*
2. *Y suxaaa looo? 'Meongeza 1 commandmentx ov God... eatin ice creamwill take u to heeell!*

Source: Field Data (February, 2016).

A close and clear observation done on these text messages has discovered that, none of the collected messages were mixed or switched with any of the vernacular languages despite the fact that, these students are from a multilingual society of Tanzania. It was proved that the common languages used by these university undergraduate students when texting include only English language and Kiswahili as seen in Figure 8 and 9.

Accent and slang stylization is another distinctive linguistic feature that happens to be employed by students when 'texting'. An observation made on the text messages collected from the university undergraduate students shows clearly that, there are words that some students often prefer to write them as pronounced to some certain accent and slangs.

Table 6: Sample of the Accentualised Words found on students' text messages.

1. *'da'* for the
2. *'de'* for the
3. *'ma'* for my
4. *'ze'* for the
5. *'ya'* for you
6. *'yo'* for your
7. *'bradaa'* for brother.
8. *'wit'* for with.

This study has also discovered that students ways of writing when 'texting' is growing day by day. In addition to the abbreviation of words, there are basic symbols that are also used when 'texting'. They are said to be the combinations of characters that are designed to show an emotional or facial expressions, gestures and other conventional body language normally placed after the final punctuation mark in a sentence. Students seem to develop new ways of abbreviating words by combining a letter with a symbol. That is to say a symbol can be used alone or incorporated with a letter. For example in an observation made on the text messages collected from the students' mobile phone has found out that, a symbol like '*' is used to stand for a word "star", '@' for a word "each", '&' for "and". A very interesting observation was done to see how these smiles are used, only to find out that '&' is always used alone in place of a word 'and' while '@' is used both as an independent word 'each' or attached to another word as '@one' to mean 'each one' while on the other hand '*' is used for an independent word 'star' not only that but also for a phonetic sound 'sta' for 'sister'. This is evidently seen used with a letter 'c' which is a homophone letter standing for 'Csta' to mean 'sister' as in this tendency then 'texters' have opted to use a letter 'C' plus a smiley '*' to form 'C*' for sister.

Lecturers and Students attitudes on the use of mobile phone text messaging in relation to the acquisition of Standard English writing

In finding out the attitudes that both lecturers and university undergraduate students have on the use of text messaging in relation to the acquisition of standard English writing, it was discovered that, despite the advantages of text messaging, it is also true that it has a negative relationship to the acquisition of standard English writing. It seems true also to both lecturers and students that text messaging affects students writing proficiency for the fact that there is no any grammatical rule that guide students when texting.

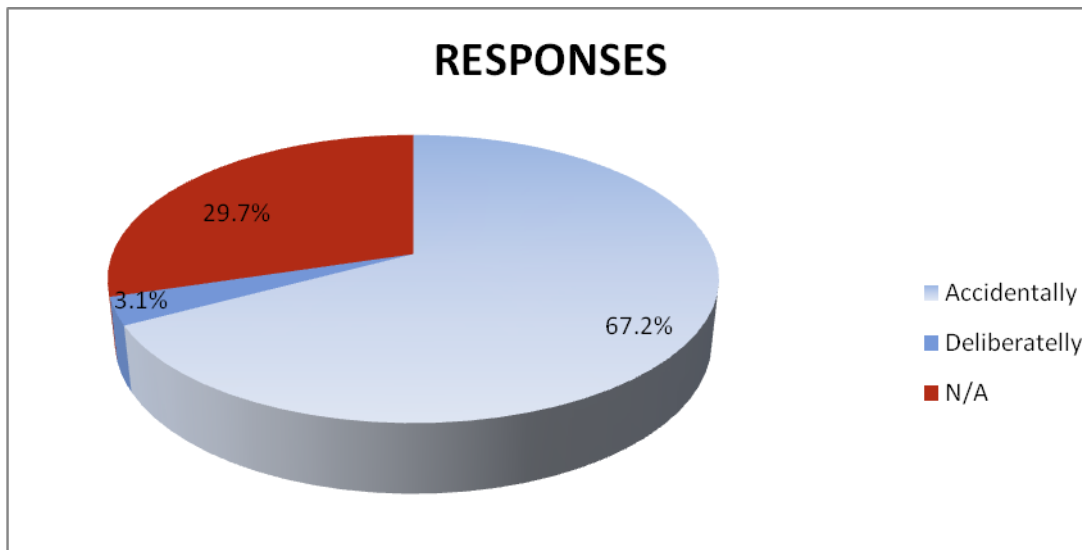
The impact of 'text messaging' in relation to language acquisition.

The findings from this research reveal that university undergraduate students are highly affected by the mobile phone SMS particularly on their writing because of every day practices of sending and receiving messages that has no rule that

guide one to text except for its brevity that needs the user's creativity. This has then let some of the university undergraduate students to form their own way of 'texting,' communicating and accidentally make them include the unacceptable writing on the academic work such as essays and or tests where only standard and formal orthographic writing is expected as far as English language is concerned. Although errors in writing may be caused by different factors, it has evidently been proven in this study that text messaging is one of the greatest factors that lead students into making different errors when writing their academic work.

The study has indeed revealed that students do mix up their academic writing with that of text messaging. This has so far been reported by the university undergraduate students whom in this study were asked 'Have you ever found yourself including text message features when writing in the academic paper?' Their responses clearly proved that most of them do that. 45 responses equivalent to 70.3% responded to Yes, 16 (25%) responded to No while 3 (4.7%) showed a non response. It was when researchers were interested to find how those who responded to 'Yes' find themselves including text message features when writing. Students were again asked 'Do you include text message features deliberately or accidentally when writing?' Most of their responses indicated that they include text message features when writing their academic work accidentally as illustrated in Figure 10 below. Few of the responses showed that there are some students who commit that numerous mistake deliberately with reasons that, they sometimes know a word but find difficult to spell it. This evidence is from the data collected for this study.

Figure 10: Students' responses on including text message features when writing their academic work.



Source: Field Data (February, 2016).

Therefore this study confirms what Mompota and Kwena (2005) report that SMS has been found to have a detrimental effect on the language proficiency of learners as they use it as if it is officially accepted in a standard language. They mix it with the standard language they learn at school, especially the English language and consequently commit numerous errors especially in constructing ungrammatical sentences.

One of the greatest effects of SMS revealed from this study is that it affects the university undergraduate students' writing proficiency since the language of text messaging does not observe both grammatical and syntactical rules of a standard language. Evidence to this was found in students' written work such as test and essay assignments. More evidence can be drawn from the students' questionnaire responses which indicated that students are aware that 'text messaging' is affecting their writing skills.

The study further reveals that the university undergraduate students do write their official work just as they text that is they include some of the distinctive linguistic features and most of them have proved to have done so unknowingly. This indicates that most of the university undergraduate students include the earlier mentioned text messaging features accidentally into their academic work.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of this study, the conclusion that can be drawn in regard to this analysis about ‘text messaging’ is that the study has found out that ‘text messaging’ lives among people especially the university students. The university undergraduate students’ in particular seem to be good users of ‘text messaging’. The creativity on ‘text messaging’ as has been said to be the result of limitation of the character, need for brevity, the small key pad and other individual factors such as keeping secrets, hiding face and so forth have made text messaging to be as part of the culture of the university undergraduate students.

Written language in ‘text messages’ is found to be more compressed and there are no rules that ‘texters’ employ. The most common strategy revealed in this study that university undergraduate students employ to compress the language is through abbreviation. This has led to different semantic categories of ‘text messaging’ features. Language with spellings that are fully shortened with forms that is completely different from the Standard English writing.

Therefore researchers agrees with Katamba, (2005) that there must be rigorous efforts from all stake holders of the education system to stamp out the use of language when ‘texting’ as a form of written language as far as the English study is concerned. Therefore ‘text messaging’ is evidently seen to pose a problem that needs to be known and should be addressed urgently. The university undergraduate students need to know the difference between what is appropriate in academic writing and what is not. They also need to know that the features of text messaging are informal use of language and therefore it has its own place and not in the academic work.

Researchers therefore recommend that, we should find effective ways to improve and enable students acquire sensitivity towards the appropriate use of language in specific situation.

Also, for further studies researchers recommend that since this study covered only two higher learning institutions in Dodoma Municipality, it would enrich this study if similar research may focus on comparative analysis in other higher learning institutions in Tanzania to investigate the same issue for the betterment of students’ acquisition of Standard English writing and other more users’ in linguistic preference. Further research may be conducted to explore other areas of linguistic interest such as syntax and grammar of text messaging, use of punctuations marks, code mixing and code switching.

Moreover, this study can also be repeated in the future studies to find out the same issues at other lower levels of education particularly in Tanzanian secondary schools. This will help to identify more outcomes of the effects of text messaging on the acquisition of Standard English writing since English is a medium of instruction in secondary schools.

List of Abbreviations and Labels

SMS...	-	Short Message Service
SPSS.....	-	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
GSM.....	-	Global System for Communication
TCRA.....	-	Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority
CMC.....	-	Computer Mediated Communication
CAT.....	-	Communication Accommodation Theory

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