Texting: Tampering with the Writing Style of Iranian

Shahla Simin and Simin Kazemi

English Department, University of Isfahan.

ABSTRACT

Text messaging or texting is the process of sending short messages usually 160 characters from a mobile phone. The first text message was sent during 1989 but the arrival of the text message in the public domain was in 1992. This technology has brought a new style of writing called text messaging -or txtng- which is generally defined as shortening of the words. Not only all languages with Roman alphabet (like English) can use txtng, but also non-Roman-alphabetic languages like Persian have some form of texting language. For English, the general rule of texting is omitting the vowels but since Persian does not follow this rule, the process is rather different. The texting style in Persian is more like misspelling of words. Although texting in English is treated as misspelling as well, according to recent studies by researchers at Coventry University and the University of Toronto, English texting improves literacy. This paper aims to find the effects of texting on writing and literacy of Iranian. To this end, 60 Persian speakers -adults and teenagers- were asked to participate. After the analysis of their writings, we found that text messaging has a direct negative impact on the writing dictation and style of the writer.

Introduction

Text messaging or texting is mostly defined as the process of sending short messages usually 160 characters from a mobile phone. The first text message was sent in 1992 saying "Marry Christmas" from Neil Papworth's computer to Richard Javis's mobile phone.(*Anti Essays*. Retrieved July 24, 2012) Butthe new texting is defined as the use in mobile phones and on the net- inchat rooms and weblogs. The first Weblog/blog was the first website, http://info.cern.ch/, the site built by Tim Berners-Lee at CERN. From this page, Berners-Lee pointed to all the new sites as they came online. (Gurdev Singh, S.M. Shahid; 10-4-2006).

The history of texting in Iran is rather different. The mobile technology, in general, was first introduced to Iranians in 1976-78 but on that time the equipments were not widely available so the first mobile number was sold in 1995. With the coming of mobile phones the sms sending was not introduced. The technology of short message sending was first used in Iran in early 2003.

In 2001 the first Persian blog was published by Salman Jariri, using manual coding. Then, Instructions on "How to make a blog in Persian" using Blogger's free service was published by Hossein Derakhshan, in response to readers' requests. A year later, PersianBlog.ir, the first free blog service in Persian, was launched by Ata KhalighiSigaroudi. (wikipedia; 2012)

On mobile phones the aim of txtng is because of the limited number of characters users can send but on the net, where there is no limitation the reason is different. As the users state they mostly do texting on their weblogs to produce friendliness. When texting was first used, with omitting the vowels, scholars mostly disagreed and warned about the negative effects it might bring about. After a while when the current went on they didn't try to stand against it, instead tried to move along the current. They did so both by studying on the positive effects it might have and trying to helping the texting language become part of the formal language; as an example, in 2011 LOL (laugh out loud) was added to the Oxford Dictionary.(*Anti Essays*. Retrieved July 24, 2012)

Despite the growing concerns surrounding text speak, few studies have examined the extent to which students use, understand, or are proficient in text speak vocabulary. As such, there is no empirical evidence to show that the text speak vocabulary has become commonplace within the communication environments of teenagers or college students. Although Baron (2004), Taglia-monte and Denis (2008), and Thurlow (2003) all found evidence of text speak vocabulary within students' interactive discourse and performed comprehensive studies regarding text speak usage, they did not examine students' understanding of or proficiency in text speak. Instead, they conducted naturalistic type studies including linguistic analysis of discourse in IM (instant messaging) forums and text messages, which allowed them to assess the linguistic structures evident within these CMC(computer mediated communication) environments. However, they did not make any assessments of students' overall familiarity with the text speak vocabulary. Moreover, little research has been done on the effects of the use of text speak on literacy. In the few studies that have been done (e.g., Plester, Wood, & Bell, 2008), researchers examined text speak and literacy in younger populations of students and found no linksbetween text speak proficiency and lower standardized literacy scores. In addition, some recent studies by researchers at Coventry University and the University of Toronto, shows texting improvesliteracy. They found that those who were better at understanding and creating English text abbreviations did better on literacy tests. (Children's use of mobile phone text messaging and its impact on literacy development in primary school; ClareWood, Emma Jackson, Beverly Plester& Lucy Wilde Coventry University; 2009).

Thus, this study was designed to explore both the usage of the text speak vocabulary among Iranian college students and the relationship between the use of text speak and literacy.

Tele:
E-mail addresses: shahlasimin@yahoo.com

Method

Participants

Participants were 60 Persian weblog writers (30males and 30females)randomly chosenfrom different regions in Iran. Their age range was 18-25. In order not to threaten their privacy -as most weblog writers write with pen names and want to be anonymous- additional information were not collected.

Procedure

All the 60 weblogs were analyses in order to find the common texting words considering misspellings. In the analysis, 14 words of the top of the list were chosen for the research. All of the words were words taught at school and also used in daily writings. There were some words among chosen ones which have homonyms in Persian language-so the misspelling would convey a different meaning.In the questionnaire, these 14 words in addition to 2 questions regarding the participants' opinion about texting result were found. Participants should have answered 14 tests about the correct spelling of the words, and finally have their opinion about the idea of texting in general and why they text.Then a weblog was made and the questionnaire was put in. After that all of the participants were asked –commented in their weblogs- to come to the research's weblog and answer the following questions.Unfortunately, among the 60 weblogs analyzed only 5 of them accepted to fill out the questionnaire and cooperate.

Results

After the whole database was collected within amonth, the results showed that 20% of the answers were wrongly chosen.It Worths considering that even one of the participant who was himself a writer could not answer all of the questions correctly. The questions regarding the misspelling of the words with homonyms and "Tanvin" ْ ٍ َ are the most wrongly answered ones.

Figure 1: The answers to questions
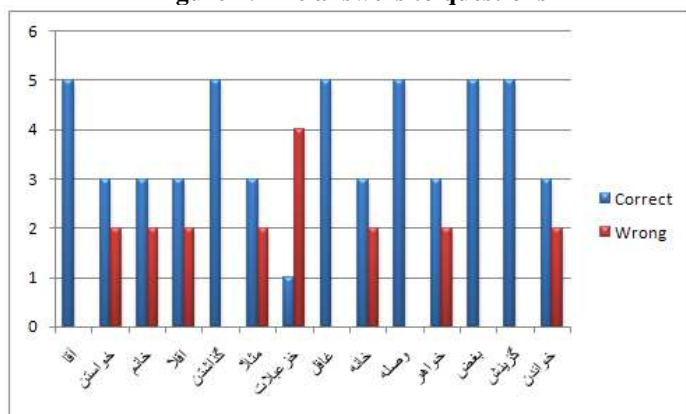
According to the 2 last questions asked about participants' opinion about texting, they considered some misspellings destructive but were eager to change the formal spelling of some words. Most of them agreed on not using ْ ٍ َ which are called "Tanvin" in Persian; they preferred to use the spoken word instead of the written, for example "مثلن"instead of "مثلاً". They are did not like to use the unread "و" in some Persian words like "خواهر". The general goal behind their usage of other texting words was to produce friendliness in their weblogs and attract new readers.

Conclusion

Overall the results of the study show that despite the positive effects of texting on English writing of natives, texting has a negative influence on Persian writing system. As most of the Persian words are written due to their pronunciation, and the fact that weblogs are places mainly for writing diaries and personal thoughts, the misspelling of words happens. Gradually this misspelling becomes part of the vocabulary of the speaker and changes its place with the correct spelling. This might be the reason of wrongly chosen answers to the misspellings. According to the participant-users of the misspellings- they mostly have problems with the Arabic-rooted words like اقلاً or مثلاً. They think these words should be replaced with اقلن and مثلن respectively, which can be resulted from the spoken-written system of Persian.

The Case of Persian language is in contrast to David Crystal's opinion, textspeak bears resemblance to Standard English, and they can both be considered written languages (Crystal, 2006). This research fuels the concern of the dramatic change in Persian writing system. In English the two languages –texting and formal English-can live along separately but the effects of Persian texting are obvious in the writing system. To avoid or at least reduce this negative effects in weblogs, weblog servers can provide a Persian spellchecker in order to help writers choose the correct spelling.

References

Baron, N. (2004). See you online: Gender issues in college student use of instant messaging. Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 23, 397–423.

Children's use of mobile phone text messaging and its impact on literacy development in primary school; ClareWood, Emma Jackson, Beverly Plester& Lucy Wilde Coventry University; 2009

Crystal, D. (2006). Language and the Internet (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UniversityPress.

Gurdev Singh, S.M. Shahid (2006).Blogs as Tools for Online Information Sharing. Library Philosophy and Practice Vol. 9, No. 1.

History On Texting. *Anti Essays*. Retrieved January 20, 2013, from the World Wide Web: http://www.antiessays.com/free-essays/190306.html

Plester, B., Wood, C., & Bell, V. (2008). Txt msg n school literacy: Does texting and knowledge of text abbreviations adversely affect children's literacy attainment? Literacy, 42.

Tagliamonte, S. A., & Denis, D. (2008). Linguistic ruin? LOL! Instant messaging and teen language. American Speech, 83, 3–34.

Thurlow, C. (2003). Generation Txt? The sociolinguistics of young people's text-messaging. Discourse Analysis Online, 1(1). Retrieved June 23, 2007, from http://extra.shu.ac.uk/daol/articles/v1/n1/a3/thurlow2002003-t.html