

Texting: a Monster Corroding English Language

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The promptest, easiest and felicitous means of communication, Texting connotes the sending and receiving of short typed communiqués between mobile phones. With the future scheme of advancement on its vision, the Global Structure for Cellular Communication considered to muse over and negotiate the possibility of brevity as a notion, for the purpose of developing short message service in the mid-80s. However, the process of texting gained momentum as a method of exchange of ideas with the invention of this feature in cellular phones in the late 1990s. Earlier it primarily won popularity among the younger generation but then it gradually paved its way into the world of business, essentially attributable to the fact that it lets one to have a very quick and swift mode of interaction, without having one to address a telephonic conversation. Through text interface, an individual is at ease to divulge significant information, that too with meticulous exactitude, and can reciprocate to the received messages as and when convenient to suit their interest.

The desire to be in contact with our acquaintances and exchange a few words hastily and instantaneously, at any time anywhere - be it at the hour of marching for the lecture, or waiting in queue or dawdling at home – propels the user of smart-phones to employ shortcuts, acronyms, homophones as well as pictograms. One of the most significant traits of SMS language is the omission of ‘non-essential’ letters viewed such from the lens of testers, such as ‘cud’ for ‘could’ and ‘hv’ for ‘have’. This usage of acronyms or abbreviations in place of proper acceptable words has led to the emergence of the sub-standard ‘Text - speak’. This deliberate incorporation of abbreviations for the purpose of communication using short-message service is detrimental to the knack of skilful writing and is boosting high degree of waywardness in grammar. It is probably attributable to this fact that, John Humphrys posits the ideal - those who employ text-language are synonymous to “vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours 800 years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And must be stopped” (Guardian).

Often hailed and criticised as a ‘digital virus’ texting performs the role of and serve as a catalyser to the assimilation of acronyms, which subsequently results in students’ lack of skill to even spell words. This inability then sneaks into written form. The users of this feature from adolescents age group, are so accustomed to such slang variety of techno-language that they unknowingly use these shortcuts even in formal setting such as ‘cuz’ for ‘because’, ‘b/w’ for ‘between’ and so on. Undoubtedly, this practice has hit the skids in the number of brilliant and proficient wordsmiths.

In order to serve clarity and assist in interpretation, English use punctuation marks - the part and parcel of a language, which is usually done away with in text-speak. It hardly pays heed to the deliberate employment of full stops, comma, semi-colon, etc. which divides a sentence and a clause, and are often helpful to draw meaningful inferences. The persistent neglect of these marks during texting, assumes the role of a monster which skilfully corrodes the user’s ability in writing in formal usage.

Another most vital illustration of deviation from Standard English Language is the exercise of ‘singles’ i.e. the delineation of words or their segment in the image of single letters or symbols or numerical, as exemplified in the use of ‘4’ instead of ‘for’ and ‘c’ for ‘see’. This incorporation of singles on behalf of proper and complete words is generally called ‘rebuses’. Similarly, the practice of initial alphabets to represent whole phrases is yet another phenomenon accelerated by texters, as demonstrated in ‘lol’ for ‘laughing out loud’ and ‘omg’ for ‘oh my God’. The development of such trend during texting and then its gradual creeping into formal creative writings infects our Standard Language.

It is the unavoidable truth that texters generate a relatively non-standardized means of communication, prone to oddity and quirky traits. It has evolved series of shortened words coupled with logograms, that is, the use of single letters and numbers to signify whole words, as well as solecistic spellings, like ‘cu2nite’. An apple-pie gelling of this is brought about by omission of spaces, which often makes it challenging to grasp even the simplest of sentences. In this regard, it is appropriate to quote the opinion of S. Shyam Sundar, co-director of Penn State’s Media Effects Research Laboratory, “There is no question that technology is allowing more self-expression, as well as different forms of expression”(Penn State). He further adds, “Cultures built around new technology can also lead to compromises of expression and these restrictions can become the norm.” Another interesting anecdote of Cingel too bears resemblance to the above cited argument. He posits, “I received text messages from my two younger nieces that, for me, were incomprehensible... I had to call them and ask them, ‘what are you trying to tell me?’ ” (Penn State)

English Language is a systematic entity of formalized words, signs and symbols used for the purpose of communication. It is reckoned to be a global lingua franca in the present scenario. It has an organized set of grammatical rules of its own. But, with the progression of texting on such an incessantly fast pace, the norms of this language are more than frequently violated, and this has its undesirable effects on written language. Therefore, it ardently requires efforts not only on the part of teachers and professors but parents and the individual too on their part. The youngsters need to be recalled the importance of language, as well as its an urgent requirement to coax them so that they can chart a thick line of distinction with regard to the use of such text-speak, which should be limited to their leisure time, and not in the least cross the boundaries and enter their creative writings, test-papers and examination answer sheets. The students need to be reminded that ‘there is a time and place for everything’.

Language has certain syntactical rules which imply the fact that every sentence type has a peculiar structure of its own. An interrogative sentence, for instance, might include a wh-question and a predicate and so on. An imperative sentence is more or less is either in the form of command or a request. However, the users of text-speak rarely take note of such norms, and this system leads to ambiguity in deciphering the meaning of such sentences, and creates chaos. Often the recipient of text messages is not in the position to comprehend whether the texter is enquiring something or giving orders. This leads to confusion and chaos. The same dilemma with regard to syntax is then exhibited in formal usage.

Yet another crucial aspect of texting that has become the cause of concern with regard to its consequences on language is the facility of pictograms, which has robbed off creative thinking skills from students. The teens are short of the competence when it comes to unravelling or describing the abstract things – their emotions and feelings. This lack of adeptness chiefly has its roots in the aspiration of *tete-a-tete* via text messages, which are characterised by briefness, conciseness and ‘to the point’ feature. In a strenuous effort to secure terseness and precision, these deprive the users in building their flair of innovative thinking and eventually, teens find it difficult to reflect on their sentiments using impressive vocabulary. Jacquie Ream, a former teacher and author of *Keep It Short and Simple* befittingly points out on this attribute of messaging in the modern world using mobile phones, “emotions are always sideways smiley faces”. She further states, “There’s a whole generation that can’t come up with new ideas – and even if they did have a breakthrough thought or opinion of their own, they couldn’t share it with us” (USA Today).

In knee-jerk reaction to the arguments such as “bleak, bald, sad shorthand,...it [Texting] masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness” (Guardian), some envisage that texting, a hi-lingo, gingers up motivation among teens to write and in this way it enhances their writing skills and

that too by bringing into play novelty on their part. John McWhorter, an associate professor of English at Columbia University refutes the arguments against texting and states that it is “far from being scourge.” Inevitably such critics manifest a preference for this ‘slanguage’ for they reckon it to be constructive for teens and spark their confidence as they are constantly practising written form under the curtain of texting, without even getting acknowledged to it.

Advocates of texting argue that the constraints of space in this form of communication are nothing but ‘blessing in disguise’ as it lets teenagers derive expertise on epigrammatic formulations due to such limitation on expressing their ideas. In this way, it stimulates the aptitude to epitomize and articulate one’s thoughts in a fewest possible words, granting economy of expression. In addition to this, it is believed that texting helps the texters to put an edge on their diplomatic skills, for it gives the user of such service adequate time to weave their threads of thoughts into sentences. A composition and literature teacher, Derek Anderson, gives credence to the view that “Any writing is good, as long as you get your point across” (Walsh). In spite of these arguments in support of texting, one can neither ignore nor refute the bitter truth that it is playing havoc and degrading the level of Standard English Language. It poses adverse impact on teenagers’ command of the language in written form. The youth is, without an iota of doubt, the future of this world wide acceptable language and it is certainly their onus to preserve it. If their hold of English is dwindling, then one can expect the English language is deteriorating as a consequence of cryptic ‘textese’, which is creeping into our everyday use of language, beyond the smart-phones.

It might appear that I have embraced a conventional view, but to me this slanguage doesn’t look in the least like a revolution at all. Rather, I perceive a drastic fall off in aptitude for proper language, seeding out of a culture of digital scholars, who are full- fledged in an epoch of spell checks and acronyms.

Though experts harbinger the notion that compared to last two decades, youngsters write more in the present day, all credits to texting and social media. A close look will let one fathom out that such compositions are in the form of text - speak and that is leading to awful custom. This consequently surfaces students’ inefficiency in grappling systematic norms of language.

Apparently, communication has escalated its arena and has grown more global in span and more electronic in style. By the time these techno-savvy children, the users of texting cross the threshold of school and dive into the deep sea of workforce, this wreckage in the spoken word will become greater. This is primarily because the colloquial language is not into use and is kept at bay in communiqué in written formats, be it in reports, emails and even in the most informal viewed ‘text’.

The incorporation of this ‘slanguage’ in children’s essay might seem comical at present. However, nobody could be expected to find it funny or hilarious once you enter the mainstream. Therefore, foundations must be built-in with utmost caution and diligence. Parents and Educators should essentially egg on the children and assist them decipher the occasion for formal language from the informal one. Teens themselves need to improve, sharpen and whet their English skills.

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