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AN INVESTIGATION OF SMS LANGUAGE IN WRITTEN ENGLISH COMPOSITIONS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS OF FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ABEOKUTA

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Abstract

The popularity of SMS text abbreviations among students from the secondary school level to tertiary institutions has become increasingly evident in what passes as 'good' English. SMS is a major form of communication in today's day and age that has impacted in various areas especially in that of learning and teaching. The purpose of this study was to determine the non-standard English features in the written English of ESL pre-service teachers. This study also aimed to investigate the non-standard features that could be attributed to ESL pre-service teachers' frequent use of SMS and its implications on teacher education in Nigeria. The study adopted the expost-facto descriptive survey approach. Two research questions and three hypotheses were raised to guide the study. A total of 81 ESL pre-service teachers and 6 lecturers participated in the study. Three instruments, teachers' questionnaire, SMS forwarded by the students' participants and a written composition test were used as the mode of data collection. The results of this study indicated that non-standard English features are present in the written composition of the ESL pre-service teachers. The results also showed a significant relationship between ESL pre-service teachers' frequent use of SMS and their written composition. It was concluded that frequent usage of SMS language plays a great role in influencing ESL pre-service teachers written composition negatively. The implications for pre-service teacher education were discussed and recommendations were made.

Key words: ESL Pre-Service Teachers, Non-Standard English, SMS language, Written Composition.

1.1 Introduction

The English language has come to be part of Nigeria's linguistic family, having since risen in status, from a foreign language (EFL) that it was at its advent, to the present status of a second language (ESL). It is now

in use in virtually all domains and it is taught in schools, from primary to the university level (Owolabi and Bankole 2013). The multi-cultural nature of Nigerian polity on the one hand and the absence of a national unifying indigenous language on the other gave room for the adoption of English language as a medium of intra-

national and international communication (Fakeye 2006). English is the language of integration in Nigeria and the only language that indexes the spirit of togetherness amidst the compounding language complexities of Nigeria. It is equally the most used in correspondences in ministries, industries, and parastatals (Bodunde and Sotiloye 2013). The position of English language in Nigeria educational system cannot be overemphasized because it plays a crucial role. It is the medium of instruction for all school subjects from primary school level to the university level (Fakeye 2011), and it is a compulsory subject which must be passed at all levels of education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy of Education (2004). The poor performance of students in English language at public examination could be traced to some factors which include poor writing skills which could be as a result of the increasing popularity of Text-Messaging and its abbreviations.

Technology plays a very important role in communication today. The mobile phone is one of the most effective, convenient and widely used technological devices in communicating globally. It involves the use of communication system called short message service (SMS) which is relatively cheaper in terms of cost and time. Text messaging is the practice whereby users of mobile and portable devices exchange brief written messages via cellular networks. While the act of sending a text message is termed “texting”, the sender is called ‘texter’. The texter uses fewer and shorter words in communicating rather than long words and time that permeates direct communication over the cell phone. Notwithstanding that SMS has a stream of benefits for users; it has also been found detrimental to the writing proficiency of learners as many now resort to using SMS language in formal English. They mix it with standard English and consequently

commit numerous errors ranging from incorrect spelling to ungrammatical sentence constructions.

Mobile phone usage has now become a very veritable tool of communication in the country among friends and families either far or near, through communication or text. Every family in Nigeria tends to possess at least a mobile phone while in some families; each member has more than one. Andrew Walker, a BBC correspondence in Nigeria, noted in his report of October 10, 2008, on BBC News that, “Nigerians are compulsive text senders”. Text messaging has also become a popular medium for the construction of Christian values, belief systems, and sentiments in Nigeria (Chiluwa 2008; Taiwo 2008). The thriving community of SMS users in the country has also grown into a strong force in fighting exploitation of the masses (Taiwo 2008). In the business sphere, SMS is employed in banking services for notification of payments and withdrawals. Several programmes on the electronic and print-media also solicit SMS from the public for counselling and feedback.

ESL Pre-Service Teachers are students undergoing formal training with the goal of becoming professional English language teachers or providing assistance to students learning English language as second language. (L2). They are otherwise known as student teachers. During the pre-service education programme, the pre-service teacher learns how to formulate lesson plans to teach their class and will be given opportunities to develop skills through lesson plans, teaching lessons and classroom management. Pre-service education therefore equips the would-be ESL teachers with knowledge to teach the subject matter effectively.

Studies by linguists highlight the debate on whether SMS impacts positively or

negatively on students' written composition. Ream (2005) is of the opinion that a whole generation is being raised without communication skills. She firmly believed that the negative influence of SMS on students' written composition is attributed to the inability of teachers to teach their students good critical thinking skills. This issue became prominent after teachers began to notice a decrease in the writing abilities of their students which is attributed to the increasing popularity of Text-Messaging and its use of abbreviations. The same problem has been observed in Nigeria especially among students of tertiary institutions and has become a concern to English teachers. Lecturers in tertiary institutions are often challenged when students at this level of education have difficulties in writing effectively in English Language and thus unable to clearly convey messages during interviews or normal writing composition.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The need for this study is predicated on the observable nonstandard features of English in the written composition of ESL pre-service teachers that may be connected to their frequent use of SMS, which may likely impact their future students. There is a gradual deterioration in the writing of many of these ESL pre-service teachers in examination and assignment exercises where they make use of abbreviations and wrong spellings associated with SMS language as if they were Standard English. Although studies have been done on the influence of Short Message Service (SMS) on the written composition of ESL students, none has been done on pre-service student teachers in Nigeria. This is the gap the study intends to fill.

1.3 Research questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the non-standard features of English exhibited in the written compositions of ESL pre-service teachers?
2. What are the non-standard features of English used by ESL pre-service teachers that can be attributed to their frequent use of SMS?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were generated for the study:

H₀₁. There is no significant relationship between ESL pre-service teachers' usage of SMS and their English language written composition.

H₀₂. There is no significant relationship between ESL pre-service teachers' frequency of SMS usage and their English language written composition.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of text messaging

Text messaging/SMS is the practice whereby users of mobile phones exchange brief written messages via cellular networks. While the act of sending it is termed "texting", the sender is called a "texter". It is used in place of voice calls in circumstances where it may be impossible. Generally, texting is considered economical. Some people make use of SMS because it is relatively cheap than making calls. There is a bit of controversy as to who actually invented the SMS. In some quarters credit is given to Nei Papworth, a 22-year-old Test Engineer for Sema (now Air Wide Solutions), who is said to have been the first to invent the service in 1992, using a personal computer to text "Merry Christmas" through the Vodafone Network to the phone of one Richard Jarvis. In some other quarters, credit is given to Matti Makkonen, a pioneer in Finish Mobile Communications (Dogbevi 2008).

Considering the relatively short history of mobile telephony in general and SMS text messaging in particular (December 1992 to 2011), it is rather amazing the level of interest it has generated among researchers and authors around the world. Not much literature exists on the subject. In 2007, Finnish author Hannu Luntiala published the first ever book written solely in text message language, about a business executive traveling through Europe and India (Crystal 2008). The following year, David Crystal, a renowned Professor of Linguistics emerged with his book entitled, *Txting: The Gr8 Db8*. This could be said to be the most comprehensive work so far on the SMS text messaging. Various researches on the impact of SMS texting have also been carried out and findings published in journals, newspapers and the internet. These articles, mostly online, address the positive and negative impacts of text messaging on various aspects of social life, including the academic work of students. While a school of thought argues that the service is a curse, because it negatively impacts on student communication skills, particularly writing skills, another led by David Crystal, contends that texting is not harmful to student literacy, rather it enhances it (Crystal 2008).

2.2 Some attested impacts of SMS on written composition

The impact of text messaging has generated a great debate. While researchers like Rosen et al (2009) are of the view that constant use of SMS can impact negatively on the daily language of texters, Linguistic experts like Crystal (2008) refuted it. In his book, *Txting: The Gr8 Db8* (a logogram which stands for 'Texting: The Great Debate'), Crystal refutes the popular view that SMS Language and its profuse use of abbreviations and slang can impact negatively on student language and literacy. His claim was based on six main points:

- i. In a typical text message, less than 10% of the words are abbreviated;
- ii. abbreviations has been in use for decades, and thus is not a new language;
- iii. children and adults alike use text language, the latter being more likely to do so;
- iv. students do not habitually use abbreviations in their homework and examinations;
- v. before people can text, they must first know how to spell, texting can therefore not be a cause of bad spelling; and
- vi. that since texting provides people with the opportunity of engaging with the language through reading and writing, it improves people's literacy.

A third school of thought contends that it has no effect on grammar. It argues that SMS texting should be viewed as another language, and since learning a new language does not affect students' ability to use English grammar, it would be wrong to conclude that text messaging can affect their grammar. It points out that slang words have no effect on English grammar, and even though each generation has its own jargon, English grammar has been changed. All students need to do as is to learn the basics in English class and they will be able to distinguish between "slang, texting Lingo and Correct English" (Russell 2004).

A September 2008 article in the US entitled "Texting, Testing Destroys Kids' writing style" summarizes many of the most common complaints about the effect of texting. It states that according to statistics from the National Centre for Education, only 25% of high school seniors are "proficient" writers. The article quotes Ream, a former teacher and author of *K.I.S. – keep it simple, a guide for writing better*

and more effectively, that “we have a whole generation being raised without communication skills”. She firmly believes that because of this lack of communication skills, students do not have the ability to write well. She blames the use of acronyms and shorthand in text messages for students’ inability to spell and ultimately write. Ream also points out that students struggle to convey emotion in their writing because, as he states, in text messages “emotions are always sideways smiley faces”. She also puts blame on teachers for not teaching their students good critical thinking skills.

This debate became prominent after some teachers began to believe they were seeing a decrease in the writing abilities of their students. Many attributed this perceived decline to the increasing popularity of text messaging and its use of abbreviations. Naomi Baron, a Linguistics professor at an American University, who was worried by the rise in its popularity blames texting on the fact that “so much of American Society has become sloppy and laissez-faire about the mechanics of writing” (“should we worry or Lol?”). Teachers report finding “z” for “to”, “gr8”, for “great”, “dat” for “that”, “shud”, for “should”, “luv” for “love”, @ for “at”, “Thnx” for “thanks”, “B4” for “Before”, “CU” for “see you”, “2day” for “today”, “ASAP” for “as soon as possible”, and “LOL” for “Laugh out Loud”.

Ream (2008) also feels text messaging as a means of communication is destroying the way our kids read, think, and write. She contended that it is too easy, too simple, and this type of communication using acronyms and shorthand does not require critical thinking skills or analysis. According to Ream, text messaging is destroying the written word, and she believes students today need to do more writing not in the form of instant messages, but well thought out essays (Shaughnessy, 2008). They need to know how to construct a sentence and an

essay. In addition, the need to know how to use punctuations properly, O’ Connor (2005) reported that the more students use tools like SMS the less they are able to separate formal and informal English. In observations on student writing, Fries (2003) noted that although students seemed to communicate scholarly thoughts, they did not seem to know its “y-o-u”, not “u”.

On the other hand, Mphahlele and Mashamaite (2005) observed the clear influence of the SMS Language on Learners’ Language proficiency especially in English which was realised in the learners’ official written work such as tests, assignments and reports. He said the use of SMS Language affects the Learners’ performance since it does not observe grammatical and syntactic rules of a Standard English Language. It is neither an official nor a standard language. He exemplified this in a test script of a tertiary learner registered for a module in communication and it reads thus: “If we do get the money how “shud it be used?” He further attributed the use of this SMS Language to the frequent occurrence of such in the media. The frequently used SMS word such as “luv” for “love” which appears many times on the television screens especially during “phone-in” and “send your SMS” programmes confuses learners to the extent that they may believe that both spellings are correct. He therefore opined that SMS Language hampers learners’ Language proficiency in particular, grammatical and spelling skills especially in English. He also affirmed that, SMS Language has an influence even on the academics in the sense that they also use it when they write official documents such as circulars and memoranda. He said the academics considered it convenient to use as it saves time, space and it is less expensive to implement. The sad part of it is that learners read those circular and believe that

the language used is acceptable since it is also used by educators

Supporters of texting also argue that it does not only teach elements of writing but provides extra practice to those who struggle with the conventions of writing. As Crystal points out, children who struggle with literacy will not choose to use a technology that requires them to write, enjoy, they can learn to take pleasure in writing formally. Anderson (2008) a composition and literature teacher, explains, "Any writing is good writing, as long as you get your point across". Writing skills improve with time and practice. If students are continually writing in some form, they will eventually develop better skills.

Furthermore, those who favour texting explain that with practice comes the confidence and courage to try new things, which some observers believe they are seeing happen with writing as a result of texting. Teenagers have, for example, created an entirely new language. One that uses abbreviations and symbols instead of words, does not require punctuation, and uses short, in complete phrases throughout the entire conversation. It's a way of speaking that is a language in and of itself. Crystal, among others, sees this "language evolution" as a positive effect of texting; he seems, in fact, fascinated that teenagers, who are so young, are capable of creating such a phenomenon. He describes it as the "Latest manifestation of the human ability". David Warlick teacher and author of books about technology in the classroom would agree with Crystal. He believes students should be given credit for "inventing a new language ideal for communicating in a high-tech world".

2.3 Non-Standard Features of English Originating from Text Messaging

This section of the study probes into the non-standard features of English originating from text messaging. This is to evaluate the

extent to which these features have impacted the written composition of texters. There are a number of features of text of non-standard English associated with text messaging as identified by Thurlow et al (2004) namely; the use of abbreviations and acronyms (lol for laugh it loud), minimal use of punctuation and capitalisation, deliberate spelling errors, the use of emoticons or smiley, the use of capitalisation for emphasis, and multiple use of punctuation and rebus writing. Crystal (2008) also identified the following most noticeable features of non-standard English in students' written work; the use of single numerals and symbols to represent words or parts of words as with 'b' for "be" and '2' for "to", which he refers to as rebuses traceable back to Centuries. Similarly, Crystal identified the use of initial letters for whole words such as, n for "no", gf for "girlfriend", cmb for "call me back" etc.

Having identified these features, David Crystal posits that despite the doom-laden prophecies, text messaging has not been the disaster for language as many feared, he argues that people have initialising common phrases for ages because words like IOU is known from 1618 and that there is no difference between a modern kid's "lol" and earlier generation's "swalk" meaning; "sealed with a living kiss". However, not all of these non standard features could be attributed to the influence of SMS language; specifically, some of the spelling errors could be unrelated to SMS language as they have been noticed in the

3.0 Materials and Method

A descriptive/survey research design of the ex-post-facto type was chosen to investigate the non-standard features of English exhibited in the written compositions of ESL pre-service teachers and determine the part of the non-standard features that can be attributed to their frequent use of SMS. The target population

for this study was college students (male and female) in Federal College of Education aspiring to be ESL teachers (herein referred to as respondents A) and their lecturers (respondents B).

3.1 Sampling Technique

A total of 81 ESL pre-service teachers irrespective of their gender were randomly selected among the 162 second-year students using a multi-stage sampling technique. Six lecturers of the department were also part of the study. The second-year students were chosen based on suitability and availability. The third-year students were busy preparing for their final examinations and the fresh-year students were not considered because of their inexperience and possibility of much instances of SMS language in their written compositions.

3.2 Sampling Instruments

Three instruments were used for the study. The first instrument was a 40-min essay test which required the students to write an Essay in not less than 350 words to their Uncle living abroad telling him the latest development they find interesting on their campus. The test contained an instruction that the students may not write their names but must include their gender. The second instruments were text messages sent to the researcher by the participants. The participants were asked to forward their most recent text messages from their “sent items” in their mobile phones to the researcher. They were being assured that their text messages will be treated with confidentiality and for research purpose only. The last instrument was a one-page questionnaire containing both open and close-ended questions that requires the lecturers to specify their years of experience in the teaching profession, give their opinion on whether they had noticed any changes in the written composition of their learners since the increased use of cell phone and

SMS technology, and to identify features of non-standard language that could be found in their learners’ written work. The last two questions required them to state whether they believe that SMS have effect on the written language of their learners or not, and the final question asked them to specify the methods employed to combat the presence of SMS speak features in the learner’s written work.

3.3 Data collection

The researcher sought permission from the Head of the selected department, to administer the 40-min test on the second-year students (pre-service teacher). The test was later assessed and analysed by the researcher for features of SMS language which include: spelling errors, abbreviations and acronyms, rebus writing, lack of punctuation, and lack of function words. The forwarded text messages which were the second part of the instruments used were studied using content analysis and the third instrument which was a questionnaire was administered on the lecturers.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process of this study included two stages. The first stage included a descriptive analysis to describe the distribution of the data. The second stage included hypothesis testing with ANOVA using SPSS. Effects were considered significant at an alpha level of 0.05.

4.0 Results and Discussion

All the 81 ESL pre-service teachers (respondents A) answered the questions, 49.4% being male and the remaining 50.6% female.

4.1 Influence of Short Message Service (SMS) on the Written Composition of ESL Pre-service Teachers

About 67% of respondents B noticed lack of function words in their learners’ written composition. All the respondents (100%) observed lack of punctuations, over punctuations and abbreviations and

acronyms whereas no rebus writing was reported (Table 1). Majority of respondents B were experienced in teaching English language as observed in their responses to the questionnaire. Fifty percent of the lecturers have been teaching English language between 6 to 10 years, 33.3% have been teaching English language between 11 to 15 years, while the remaining 16.7% have 21 years and above experience.

All respondents B acknowledged that they have noticed changes in the written composition of their learners since the increased use of cell phone and SMS technology, and the use of SMS has had an effect on the written composition of their learners. Table 2 shows that 66.7% of respondents B do take explicit measures to combat SMS language in their learners' written composition, while 33.3% do not take explicit measures to control SMS language in their learners' written composition. Features of SMS language that were identified in the participants' written composition with the exemption of rebus writing and emoticons are presented in Table 3. This might be due to their exposure to texting which is been reproduced in their written composition.

Written composition

All the 81 respondents A had spelling/grammatical and punctuation errors in their written composition. Thirty-nine of them (48.1%) had left function words while 40 (about 41%) used abbreviations and acronyms (Fig. 1).

Forwarded SMS

The forwarded SMS had many features of non-standard English as described in Table 4.

Table 1 Respondent's view on the areas where they noticed change in their learners' written Composition.

Variable	Measurement	Frequency	Percentage
Spelling			
	Yes	6	100
Lack of punctuations	No	-	-
	Yes	6	100
Over punctuations	No	-	-
	Yes	4	66.7
Lack of function words	No	2	33.3
	Yes	6	100
Abbreviations and acronyms	No	-	-
	Yes	-	-
Rebus writing	No	6	100

Table 2 Respondents' opinion on whether or not, they take explicit measures to combat SMS language in their learners' written composition.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	4	66.7	66.7	66.7
Valid	No	2	33.3	33.3	100
	L	6	100	100	

Table 3 Features of SMS language found in some of the learners written composition

Category	Features
Spelling Errors	Tenor, whoud, sophisticated, exited, christmas, recieve, condusive, presstly, campous, lectural, commissionnal, furthermor, expectially, issues, luxurious, reconstruction, ofices, colledge, beuty, schoolar, beuid, analys, lattest, coppled with, surpris, eresis, writtting, honoring, lapeses, Ahmed force etc.
Use of abbreviations and acronyms	Ur, ok, fo, ict, am, i.e, sug, u've, u , bro, ATM, JAMB, ACPC, OGTV, i'v etc
Grammatical Errors	With the to sense of humility, if that be the true, my purpose for writing to you, God have been doing well, classrooms has, prospective students realize their hopes, building is erecting on the land, there is also a venues, I taught they are doing fine, extend my greetings to your wife, calivery greeting in the name of the lord that how is every thing, hope all is fine and also how is the family o, I was been offered admission, which enables each department etc
Omission of functional words	The/an
Lack/wrong use of punctuations	Commas, full stops, question marks, apostrophe etc
Inappropriate use of tenses	Government have renovate, I also known etc
No capitalization	nigeria, united, jesus, mummy, alfa, omega, federal etc

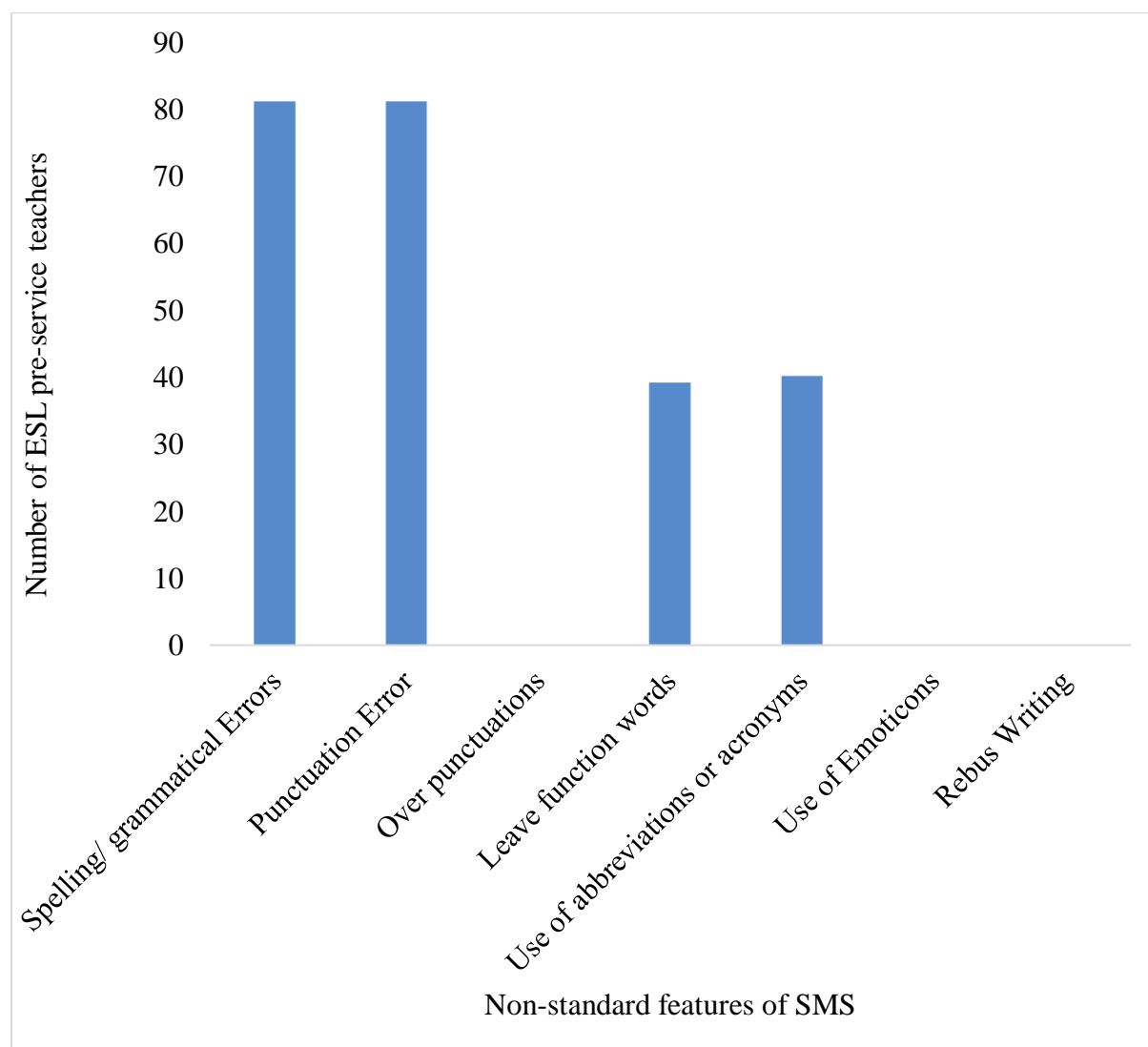


Figure 1 Frequency of occurrence of non standard features of language in the ESL pre-service teachers' written composition.

Table 4 Characteristics of SMS forwarded by the Students' participants.

Charasteristics	Features
Grammatical error	Mistakes in arranging sentences in patterns or structures.
Misspelled words	Spellings errors e.g. "evry" for "every", "dissatisfactn" for "dissatisfaction", "apy" for "happy"etc.

Capitalization

Improper use of capitalization e.g.

Punctuation errors

Inappropriate use of punctuations e.g.

use of abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations such “nd”/ “n” for and, “4” for “for”, “u” for “you”, “ur” for “your”, “luv” for “love”, “cos” for because etc.

Rebus writing

Use of rebuses such as: “2” for “to”, “4” for “for”, “l8er” for “later”, “2morrow” for “tomorrow” etc.

4.2 Testing of Hypotheses

There was a strong statistically significant association between ESL pre-service teachers’ usage of SMS and their English language written composition ($p < 0.05$). Also a significant relationship between ESL pre-service teachers’ frequency of SMS usage and their English language written composition was observed ($p < 0.05$).

5.0 Discussion

Communication is an integral part of man and technology has gone a long way enhancing communication. Thus, text-messaging cannot be underestimated in this contemporary world. This study showed that there are features of nonstandard language in the written composition of the ESL pre-service teachers. The most common features used are punctuation error, grammatical error, and use of abbreviations and acronyms.

This result was similar to findings by Weimers (2008). As the ESL pre-service teachers did not make use of rebus and emoticons in their written composition and that of Thurlow et al (2004) who identified the following features of non standard English which results from text messaging; the use of abbreviations and acronyms (lol for laugh it loud), minimal use of punctuation and capitalisation, deliberate spelling errors, the use of emoticons or smiley, the use of capitalisation for

emphasis, and multiple use of punctuation and rebus writing. Spelling errors found in the ESL pre-service teachers written composition include Tenor, whoud, sophisticated, exited, christmas, recieve, condusive, presstly, campous, lectural, commissional, furthermor, expectially, issues, luxurious, reconstruction, ofices, colledge, beuty, schoolar, beuid etc.

Examples of grammatical errors from the ESL pre-service teachers written composition are “With the to sense of humility”, “if that be the true”, “my purpose for writing to you”, “God have been doing well”, “classrooms has”, “prospective students realize their hopes”, “building is erecting on the land”, “there is also a venues”, “I taught they are doing fine”, “extend my greetings to your wife”, “calivery greeting in the name of the lord that how is everything”, “hope all is fine and also how is the family o”, “I was been offered admission, which enables each department”” etc. Furthermore abbreviations and acronyms found in their written composition include Ur, ok, fo, ict, am,i.e, sug, u’ve, u , bro, ATM,JAMB, ACPC, OGTV, i’v etc.

There is a significant relationship between ESL pre-service teachers’ usage of SMS and their English language written composition. In other words, elements of SMS language were found in their written composition. The findings of this study

support the submission of Jacquie (2008) who feels that text messaging as a means of communication is destroying the way our kids read, think, and Mphalele et al (2005) who said the use of SMS Language affects the Learners' performance since it does not observe grammatical and syntactic rules of a Standard English Language. Likewise, there was a significant relationship between ESL pre-service teachers' frequency of SMS usage and their English language written composition contends with Crystal (2009) who concludes that texting actually helps people to "sharpen their diplomatic skills because it allows more time to formulate their thoughts and express them carefully".

Therefore, the findings of this study affirmed that the use SMS Language affects the Learners' written performance since almost all the features of SMS language are found in their written compositions. 5.1 Implications for teacher education in Nigeria. As many students worldwide acquire and use mobile phones, there is tendency of been taken over by the unlimited rules of SMS text messages. This is because short messaging habit is like every other habit, which could become difficult to 'unlearn,' when someone is submerged with it. Many educators have expressed concerns that learners' writing skills stand the risk of being affected by text message writing method. This argument has awakened three main schools of thought which can be described as: the SMS School of negativist, positivist, and neutralist. While some teachers, parents and students stand to think that text messaging plays some negative influence on students' writing skills; others from 'the positivist school,' argued that it enhances writers' communication skills by giving them speed and accuracy with an enhanced ability to 'write more with less'. The third school (the neutralists), consider SMS texting to be neither 'a blessing' nor 'a curse'. The use of

text messaging service for communication among youths, students in secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria has almost become a general habit. The reasons are crystal clear; it is quick, it does not adhere to the rules of English grammar, it is relatively cheap, more convenient, allows creativity, used in creating new and re-enforcing old. This practice among the teeming population is one that has generated and still generating a big deal of debate as some educators consider the SMS messaging style as harmful to students' writing and grammar. This view is supported by Holloway (2011: 10-11) who succinctly expressed discontent with the use of SMS abbreviations by noting that: ".....writers and language experts have come out against the use of SMS abbreviations. British journalist and broadcaster, John Humphreys has said that texting is "wrecking our language" and has called its users "vandals". Linguistic traditionalists worry that texting will reduce users' ability to write correct English sentences and will harm their spelling and vocabulary. Because SMS originated from the need to send, very short messages, it discourages complex vocabulary and prevents the creation of longer, more sophisticated phrases". On the contrary, Tomita (2009) was of the opinion that most students that engage in SMS text messaging are still able to differentiate between the standard and the non-standard form of writing. He argued that text-messaging tools enhance a workable means of teaching students 21st century skills to enable them communicate efficiently and work as a team. They argued that text messaging is not just writing anything, but logically constructed tense in alphanumeric writing style. They noted that before students send out text messages, they do some editing in order to format the messages into a limited but precise number of words (Dansih, 2011). Educators from this 'school of thought'

contend that text messaging has no effect on English grammar. In their view, text messaging could be considered as another language. Since learning a new language or slangy words does not necessarily affect a student's ability to use English grammar, text messaging as another language cannot either. They argued that each generation has its own jargon and yet, the English grammar has not changed. Therefore, all that students need to do is learn the basics in English class what the distinctions between slang, texting lingo and Standard English are (Russell, 2010; Dansieh, 2011). It can be said that the use of SMS texting is in itself not harmful. However, its addictive effects could have serious implication on learning among students. This is because its addictive tendency overwhelm learners; and thereby making them so used to it that they may no longer realise the need for Standard English expressions even in strictly formal writings. Although, its inherent benefits cannot be disputed in the enhancement of communication among a wide range of persons. However, caution must be exercised in encouraging students in its use particularly in ensuring that the basic \ grammatical rules, concord, mechanics, and others are strictly adhered to in formal writings.

6.0 Implications for teacher education in Nigeria

As many students worldwide acquire and use mobile phones, there is tendency of been taken over by the unlimited rules of SMS text messages. This is because short messaging habit is like every other habit, which could become difficult to 'unlearn,' when someone is submerged with it. Many educators have expressed concerns that learners' writing skills stand the risk of being affected by text message writing method. This argument has awakened three main schools of thought which can be

described as: the SMS School of negativist, positivist, and neutralist. While some teachers, parents and students stand to think that text messaging plays some negative influence on students' writing skills; others from 'the positivist school,' argued that it enhances writers' communication skills by giving them speed and accuracy with an enhanced ability to 'write more with less'. The third school (the neutralists), consider SMS texting to be neither 'a blessing' nor 'a curse'.

The use of text messaging service for communication among youths, students in secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria has almost become a general habit. The reasons are crystal clear; it is quick, it does not adhere to the rules of English grammar, it is relatively cheap, more convenient, allows creativity, used in creating new and re-enforcing old. This practice among the teeming population is one that has generated and still generating a big deal of debate as some educators consider the SMS messaging style as harmful to students' writing and grammar. This view is supported by Holloway (2011: 10-11) who succinctly expressed discontent with the use of SMS abbreviations by noting that: ".....writers and language experts have come out against the use of SMS abbreviations. British journalist and broadcaster, John Humphreys has said that texting is "wrecking our language" and has called its users "vandals".

Linguistic traditionalists worry that texting will reduce users' ability to write correct English sentences and will harm their spelling and vocabulary. Because SMS originated from the need to send, very short messages, it discourages complex vocabulary and prevents the creation of longer, more sophisticated phrases". On the contrary, Tomita (2009) was of the opinion that most students that engage in SMS text messaging are still able to differentiate

between the standard and the non-standard form of writing. He argued that text-messaging tools enhance a workable means of teaching students 21st century skills to enable them communicate efficiently and work as a team. They argued that text messaging is not just writing anything, but logically constructed tense in alphanumeric writing style. They noted that before students send out text messages, they do some editing in order to format the messages into a limited but precise number of words (Dansih, 2011). Educators from this 'school of thought' contend that text messaging has no effect on English grammar. In their view, text messaging could be considered as another language. Since learning a new language or slangy words does not necessarily affect a student's ability to use English grammar, text messaging as another language cannot either. They argued that each generation has its own jargon and yet, the English grammar has not changed. Therefore, all that students need to do is learn the basics in English class what the distinctions between slang, texting lingo and Standard English are (Russell, 2010; Dansieh, 2011).

It can be said that, the use of SMS texting is in itself not harmful. However, its addictive effects could have serious implication on learning among students. This is because its addictive tendency overwhelm learners; and thereby, making them so used to it that they may no longer realise the need for Standard English expressions even in strictly formal writings. Although, its inherent benefits cannot be disputed in the enhancement of communication among a wide range of persons. However, caution must be exercised in encouraging students in its use particularly in ensuring that the basic \ grammatical rules, concord, mechanics, and others are strictly adhered to in formal writings.

7.0 Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it could be established that frequent use of SMS language plays a great role in influencing ESL pre-service teachers' written composition negatively and if a pre-active measure is not taken on time, it could lead to bad spellings and inability to use Standard English.

Thus, after the findings of this research work, the researcher hereby gives the following recommendations:

1. There should be sensitisation on proper usage of words in English language written composition.
2. Teachers should endeavour to give Essay questions to students regularly so as to control the menace of SMS in English language written composition.
3. Teachers should be conscious of what they teach because they are to impact the right knowledge.
4. Mass media should equally assist students and the society at large in enlightening their audience on SMS usage and its effects on English language written composition.
5. There should be a reduction of marks for the usage of SMS language in students' written composition.
6. More writing tasks that will drill the students in the act of proper writing should be given often by the teachers.
7. Teachers should advice the students to write all their answers in full sentence.
8. Less objective questions should be given to the students as either tests or assignments.

8.0 Conclusion

The results obtained from this study clearly shows that, over time, students texters will lose their ability to spell or write correctly as a result of time spent on texting. This study showed that overuse of SMS has a negative effect on students' writing. SMS had altered traditional written language. The effect of SMS on standard form of writing include use of wrong spellings, use of acronyms, lack of functional words and lack of punctuation etc. which were abundantly present in the written composition of the ESL pre-service teachers. It is therefore suggested that further research be done on the effect of SMS on the ESL students' personal interaction and spoken communication.

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