

Etec 530 Assignment 2: Teen Texting (Lesson for Anthropology 378)

“Parents fear online chatting ruins children’s language skills”

“Secret of teen talk: The bizarre language of the Texting Generation”

“Are People’s Social Skills Suffering?”

“It’s no laughing matter as cyber-slang rewrites teen literacy”

(US News Media headlines about texting, 2008-2010)

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Learning Objectives

Discover new linguistic forms generated by texting amongst North American teens and young adults

Discuss and understand multiple perspectives on how texting affects young people's language use and literacy

Discuss how texting is represented in the media

Discuss how discourses about texting reflect wider social concerns about youth culture.

Materials

The cellphone you use to text family and friends

If you do not have one, or do not use it to send/receive text messages, your instructor will email you text messages to analyse.

Learning Journal

The learning journal is students' private space to reflect and respond to questions posed about the course content.

Readings

Jones, G. & Schieffelin, B. 2009. "Talking Text and Talking Back: "My BFF Jill" from Boob Tube to YouTube." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14 (4), 1050-1079.

Blackstock, R. (2014, August 10). Students' Bad Spelin Blamed on Txt Spk. *The New Zealand Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11306650

McNabb, C. (2014, August 3). The Truth About Internet Slang: It Goes Way Back. *Salon.com*. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2014/08/03/the_truth_about_internet_slang_it_goes_way_back/

Opening Learning Activity

What kind of language do we use when we text?

- 1) Identify the most recent fifty (50) text messages you have sent and received.
- 2) Read them and list all examples of 'text-language' or non-conventional English used in the text messages. (See next slide for common forms)
- 3) Cut and paste this list onto the appropriate discussion thread by August 15th, 2014. Be sure to include what kind of phone you are using (flip phone or slider with full keyboard, smartphone, smartphone with Swype)
- 4) Include in your post a prediction as to whether the type of device used (flip/slider or smartphone) will impact how much text language is used in the messages. Why do you make this prediction?

Your instructor will collate the class' lists into word clouds that are differentiated by the type of phone, and post these into the discussion thread.

Common forms of text language in English

acronyms (lol; rofl)

removal of vowels and unnecessary characters (mtg)

reduplicated letters (wowwww; OMGGGGG)

reduplicated punctuation (!?!?!?!)

punctuation for dramatic effect (...; !!!!!)

homophones (u; fur sure)

sound play with homophones, using numerals (h8r)

capitalization (PROFESORRRR i'm freaking OUTTTT)

emotive (=P)

colloquialisms

Reflection: is texting the creative, or denigrative use of language?

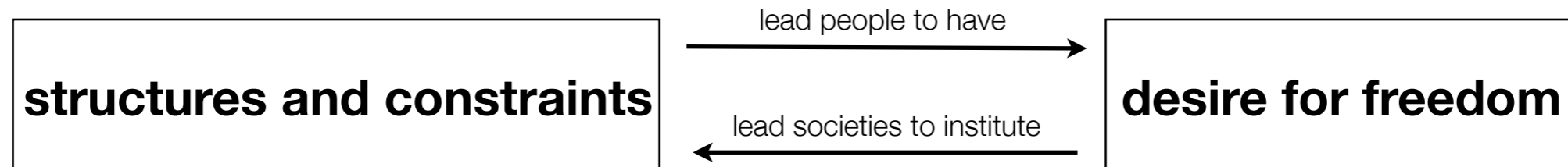
The use of text language amongst young people has become a source of considerable debate in the last several years. Some people feel that the use of text language has or can lead to the decline of English language competency in young people. Others feel it's a creative adaptation of the English language to the cellphone as a new medium for communication.

In a reflection post (~200 words), discuss whether you feel that texting leads to a decline in young people's English language abilities, and why. Do you feel that texting is a cause for concern, or a form of communication that should be accepted, if not appreciated?

Respond to two of your peers' reflections.

Structure and Creativity

Linguistic anthropologists Jones and Schieffelin (2009) argue that text language is creative. They view creativity as emerging from a dialectical tension between:



Examples of structures include grammar, social conventions, degree requirements, rituals and traditions, timetables.

The relationship between structure and desire for freedom is dialectical because neither the structures, nor the desire for freedom, could exist without the other. Instead, they continuously and mutually reinforce each other.

Creative actions challenge the constraining frameworks that structures provide. In your learning journal, brainstorm some creative actions that people take to challenge these structures.

How is texting creative?

For Jones and Schieffelin, (2009) text language is the latest in a long history of people playing informally with language.

They suggest that texting is both **poetic** and **pragmatic**. It is poetic in that new language forms are generated to communicate semantic meaning; UBC students have reported that adding unnecessary letters to a word changes its meaning. As an example, 'hey,' 'hey,' and 'heyyyyy' all have different meanings. The first is a simple greeting to an acquaintance, the second is a more casual, personal greeting for a friend, and the third is a flirty message that one would send to a potential love interest.

Texting is pragmatic in that new language forms develop to respond to the technological constraints that texters face. Language is often abbreviated to fit as much content as possible into a tight character limit. It is also often abbreviated to alleviate the frustrations of clicking a button multiple times to find letters or punctuation.

UBC students report that touchscreen smartphone technologies make them more willing to send text messages with complete, grammatically correct sentences. This is because the screens are easier to type on than previous cell phone models.

Learning Journal

Take a look at the word clouds the class generated, and answer the following questions in your learning journal:

- 1) Was your prediction correct? How did the results presented on the word clouds confirm or challenge what you thought was going to happen?
- 2) Is your own text language either poetic or pragmatic?
- 3) Do you have any examples of new spellings in text language that change a word's meaning (as in 'heyyyyy')?
- 4) Do you see your own text language as a pragmatic response to technological constraints?

Texting and moral panic

Jones and Schieffelin (2009) discuss how a moral panic has developed in North America around children and teenagers' texting.

A **moral panic** is a social response to an event or episode that is perceived to threaten the dominant social order. It is characterized by public concern, fear, and anxiety, which is often represented in mainstream media. With texting, young people are developing coded ways of communicating that their parents' generation find difficult to understand. The ubiquity and hidden nature of text messages also lead many of their parents to be concerned over the content of the messages. In this way, texting as a coded and covert form of communicating reduces parents' ability to monitor their children's behaviour.

These coded ways of communicating are also often deliberately grammatically incorrect. Because texting has become a primary mode of writing for many young people, some in their parents' generation has expressed concern that it has a negative effect on young people's ability to write in grammatically correct English. In this way, there is a fear that the 'deviant,' incorrect, youth-generated language may supplant the dominant, socially accepted language that youth are taught in school.

Learning Journal: Media discourses on text language

Read these two contrasting news articles from August 2014 about text language. One represents the view that texting has negative affects on youth, while the other argues that texting and other forms of internet languages are creative.

Blackstock, R. (2014, August 10). Students' Bad Spelin Blamed on Txt Spk. *The New Zealand Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11306650

McNabb, C. (2014, August 3). The Truth About Internet Slang: It Goes Way Back. *Salon.com*. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2014/08/03/the_truth_about_internet_slang_it_goes_way_back/

In your learning journal, note the various points that the authors raise. Reflect on your earlier discussion post on whether text language is denigrative or creative. Discuss whether the articles here shifted your perspective.

If you wish, you can edit your earlier discussion post. If so, be sure to note "ETA" (edited to add).

Learning Journal: “IDK, My BFF Jill?” (Cingular ad, 2007)

This popular television advertisement from 2007 demonstrates generational conflict around text language.

Watch the advertisement and respond to the following questions in your learning journal:

- 1) Why do you think Beth-Ann (the child)’s speech is captioned?
- 2) Does this ad reflect a reversal of power?
- 3) Do you think this ad is an example of the moral panic around texting, or a critique of it?



Final Reflection Post: Concerns About Texting

Write a post (250 words) that discusses your experience with texting with respect to some of the ideas presented in this lesson. How does your experience support or contest any of these ideas?

- moral panic
- text language as creative: what structures does texting challenge?
- text language as poetic
- text language as threatening young people's command of written English
- text language as exacerbating generational tensions between young and older people

If you want, you can include some of the material from your learning journal into your post.

Respond to two of your peers' posts.