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## Internet Language: An Investigation into the Features of Textisms in an ESL/EFL Context

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, the prevalence of mobile communication has given rise to a new writing style that is an amalgam of oral and written modes. The rapid growth of Textisms arouses curiosity, fear, and perplexity among people. In Lebanon, some educators complain about the propagation of texting and claim that it is becoming harmful for their students. Thus, this study examines the nature of this new trend by describing its linguistic features and comparing it with oral speech through the application of Carter and McCarthy's Model of Spoken Grammar. A detailed analysis of 1,890 messages obtained from 240 university students shows that Textisms are mainly characterized by unconventional spelling through the use of contractions and expressive. Similar to the oral language, texted sentences are weakly structured due to their brevity, and common features entail frequent use of deictic references, ellipsis, discourse markers, and others. Unlike the spoken language, vagueness, swearing and taboo expressions, and sign-offs are rarely used by texters. Finally, punctuation rules are violated by texters and hold major signification in texting.

**Keywords:** Texting, Textisms, Spoken Grammar, Internet Lingo, Abbreviations.

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### 1. Introduction

The phenomenal growth of the mobile phone industry has provided people all over the world with the ability to communicate with anyone, anywhere, and at anytime. Smartphone ownership has been on the rise in recent years, with individuals embracing mobile communication technology at a very young age. With their sophisticated physical designs and advanced technology, cell phones have become integral parts of individuals' daily life. Not only is the use of this portable, palm-sized device restricted to phone calls and SMSs (Short Message Services), but data services have also allowed people to access a wide range of synchronous and asynchronous applications such as SNSs (Social Networking Sites), IM (Instant Messaging), emails, and search engines. Many of these venues increase the chances of constant written-communication between users, thus giving birth to a new digital

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writing style called Textisms. Such advancement in the world of communication has led to a change in language in order to keep up with this digital development.

The rapid growth of texting has aroused curiosity, fear, and confusion among people (Crystal, 2008). In Lebanon, the topic of texting had its share among educators. Some voiced concerns, and complaints about this practice were noticed by some educators who claimed that texting has leaked into students' writing due to its widespread and common use. Definitely, one cannot ignore such concerns; however, one cannot also generalize and maintain that texting is detrimental given this vague lethargy. The question whether texting is harmful or not is a broad- endlessly debatable- one that cannot be straightforwardly answered without having studied and analyzed this new practice beforehand. Thus, the main problem that this study tackles is the rapid widespread of Textisms and the adoption of this informal register by ESL/EFL (English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language) users.

The present research is motivated by the need to explore the linguistic features of Internet lingo that is commonly used by youths in Lebanon. More specifically, as texting is believed to have the elements of both spoken and written discourses, the study seeks to identify the similarities and differences between texted and oral English and highlight the features specific to Textisms. The absence of research that investigates in details the characteristics of Textisms in the Arab world is another incentive to embark on this study.

The novelty of this exploratory research lies in the detailed analysis of the linguistic features characterizing Textisms. It explores word formations, punctuation use, and sentence structure by drawing on existing literature surrounding texting, notably on the works of Androutsopoulos (2000), Bieswanger (2007), Ong'onda, Matu, and Oloo (2011), Plester, Wood and Joshi (2009), Weber (1986), Crystal (2008; 2011), and Carter and McCarthy (2006).

This study mainly contributes to the academic field as it provides educators with an insight into students' use of Textisms and their knowledge of English as a second language, especially with the rise of a public debate about the effect of Internet lingo on literacy. It also benefits users themselves by raising their awareness about the writing style they are adopting and the multiple issues resulting from twisting the standard form of the language.

The research methodology adopted is a descriptive one that aims at closely investigating the characteristics of Textisms. One thousand eight hundred ninety (1,890) text messages were collected from 240 participants using Plester, Wood, and Joshi's (2009) scenario-based elicitation method. The data obtained was then analyzed using WordSmith Tools Lexical Software (version 7).

The main findings of the study reveal that Textisms are mainly characterized by unconventional spelling through the use of contractions and expressives. Similar to the oral language, texted sentences are weakly structured due to their briefness, and common features entailed frequent use of deictic references, ellipsis, discourse markers, and others. Unlike the spoken language, vagueness, swearing and taboo expressions, and sign-offs are rarely detected. Finally, punctuation rules are violated by texters and hold major signification in texting.

The structure of the paper is as follows: section 1 begins with an introduction that clearly identifies the purpose, significance, and contributions of this work; section 2 presents a brief literature review of the topic; section 3 outlines the methodology used to conduct this research; section 4 includes the results and discussions; and section 5 provides concluding remarks and offers implications and recommendations for future research.

## 2. Literature review

Texting refers to the use of abbreviations and other techniques to compose SMS and IM by reducing the time and sometimes the cost of text messaging (Leung, 2007). This emerging language has also been described as the product of the hybridization between spoken and written English (Plester & Wood, 2009) and was considered a highly phonological form of spelling. The abbreviated form of English includes different types of contractions, such as initialisms (e.g. lol for laughing out loud), omissions (e.g. tomo for tomorrow); letter homophones (e.g. c for see; b for be); number homophones (e.g. 2 for two/to/too; 2day for today), expressives such as emoticons (e.g. ☺ to show

happiness) and logograms (x for hug), not to forget the violation of the capitalization and punctuation rules (Thurlow & Brown, 2003; Carrington, 2005; Varnhagen et al. 2010; Plester, Wood & Joshi, 2009).

The new language system of texting has been variously labeled as Netwrite (Paterson, 2010), NetSpeak (Humphrys, 2007), Textish (Faulkner & Culwin, 2005); Textese, phone shorthand (Sutherland, 2002), Txt (Shortis, 2007), Texting (Crystal, 2008), and TextSpeak (Crystal, 2003; Drouin & Davis, 2009).

Several researchers investigated the characteristics of Textisms in multiple contexts.

Hard af Segerstad (2002) analyzed the abbreviations and grammatical ellipses in 1,152 text messages by collecting data through questionnaires from anonymous Swedish participants, and from four other informants (two males and two females) aged 12-25 through diaries of sent and received messages. Hard af Segerstad (2002) concludes that the unconventional use of punctuation marks entailed the omission or excessive use of punctuation. Moreover, in addition to many typos found in the collected corpus, texters spelled many words in a way reminiscent of how they sound in the spoken language. Consonant writing and abbreviations, grammatical reductions, and graphical symbols were also other characteristics of Textisms used to save time, effort, and space, and convey paralinguistic cues.

In another study, Thurlow and Brown (2003) investigated the linguistic forms and communicative functions of 554 teenagers' actual text messages in the UK. In terms of linguistic features, the authors found that the participants used shortenings, clippings, contractions, initialisms and acronyms, letter/number homophones, and accent stylizations. The findings showed that abbreviations, typographic symbols, and a few letter/number homophones were seldom used by texters. However, phonological approximations and apostrophes were more frequent.

Grinter and Eldridge (2001) studied 477 text messages of 10 British teenagers through log forms of sent and received messages. The authors identified four main categories of short forms namely standard abbreviations, ad-hoc abbreviations, dropping a single letter, and phonetic spellings. Shortenings were mainly restricted to simple, everyday words such as school, internet, tomorrow, homework, instead of complex acronyms.

Another study performed by Ong'onda, Matu, and Oloo (2011) explored the syntactic characteristics of 160 text messages from 40 university students in Kenya. Data analysis revealed that texters playfully manipulate and modify the language. Syntactic variations were reflected in the use of omissions (pronouns, auxiliary verbs, objects, articles, to infinitive), grammatical disagreements (in terms of number, tense, person, gender), contractions, and improper word order.

Additionally, Heidari and Alibabae (2013) explored the role of gender in linguistic and discoursal features of 100 Iranian participants aged 20-25. The analysis of 400 text messages showed that females' messages were more formal and complex, and they included more punctuation and logographic emotions. However, men's texts were simple, truncated and had more initializations. The study also revealed that alphanumeric features were equally used by both genders, and their use was restricted to some popular expressions or the days of the week.

Elvis (2009) analyzed 300 text messages from 72 Cameroonian and Nigerian participants using the theories of written and spoken discourse communication. The findings showed that texters from both countries employ several texting processes of word reduction, phonetic respellings, shortenings, letter/number homophones, omission of punctuation marks, and accent stylizations.

The main gap in the literature surrounding the topic of the linguistic features of texting is the absence of research that analyzes in details the characteristics of Textisms in the Arab world. Moreover, most of the previous studies focus on spelling and word formation without including a detailed comparison between texting and the oral discourse. Hence, the present study aims at exploring the aspects of Textisms as employed by ESL/EFL texters and presents a comparison between text messages and spoken grammar.

### **3. Study method**

#### **3.1 Context and participants**

For ethical reasons, and in consideration of the participants' privacy, personal documents such as students' real messages were not requested. Instead, the participants were asked to write messages in response to sixteen real-life scenarios via their mobile phones to simulate the texting behavior. This

scenario-based elicitation method was previously used by Plester, Wood, and Joshi (2009). For this study, the scenarios were sent to 240 participants through links, each containing eight scenarios. 1,920 messages were obtained and filtered through the method of text-reduction, where irrelevant, empty, and redundant messages were removed (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Corbin & Holt, 2004). Only 1,890 messages were analyzed. Data was carefully examined manually and electronically through WordSmith Tools Lexical Analysis software<sup>2</sup> (version 7).

## 4. Results

Following a thorough investigation of the collected corpus of text messages, it can be said that text messages are characterized by unconventional grammar. Most of the words are modified and abbreviated by texters in multiple ways.

### 4.1 Spelling

Despite the complex and varied nature of Textisms, shortened words can be grouped into categories and subcategories. In texting, English words are twisted and altered to fit a particular digital context. The patterns of spelling below can be categorized into two general classes: contractions and expressives.

#### 4.1.1 Contractions

Five types of contractions are detected namely initialisms, clippings, phonetic spellings, and colloquial and regiolectal spellings.

Initialisms entail the use of the first letter of a group of words (Crystal, 2008). In the examined corpus, acronyms- the pronunciation of the initials as one word- are only limited to the occurrence of lol (18) with all its variations standing for laugh out loud to express extreme laughter. Occurrences of alphabetisms- the pronunciation of initials letter by letter- are more frequent than the acronym and entail various examples such as pm for post meridiem (97), omg for oh my god (40), am for ante meridiem (20), idk for I don't know (4), dw for don't worry (4).

The second type of contractions is clippings or omissions, which is the deletion of some parts of a word from the initial, medial and end positions (Bieswanger, 2007). Clippings are frequently used by texters. Numerous words are vowel clipped by texters yet remain comprehensible like single or multiple vowel reduction such as gd for good /gʊd/, lv for love /lʌv/, tmrw for tomorrow /tə'mɔrəʊ/, hmwrk for homework /'houmwɜrk/. Consonant clippings are also noticed such as rly for really, wil for will, em for them /ð/, goin for going. Syllables are sometimes omitted from some words too such as cause for because, tomo for tomorrow, prob for problem, fri for Friday.

Moreover, the collected corpus of messages entails frequent use of phonetic spellings or the use of letters or numbers to substitute a sound (Bieswanger, 2007). For instance, the letter 'o' is used to replace many sounds, such as /ɒ/ in because (coz), /o/ or /əʊ/ in though (tho), /o/ or /əʊ/ in tomorrow (tomoro); the letter 'u' is used to replace /ʊ/ in good (gud), /ʌ/ in love (luv), /ɜ/ in girl (gurl). Examples of consonant substitution include 'b' for /bi:/ (be, bcoz), 'c' for /si:/ in see you(cu), 'r' for (are), 's' for /θ/ in thanks (sanks), 'z' for /z/ in please (plz) and /ð/ in this (zis). Numbers are also used for sound substitution such as 2 for /tu:/ in to and too, 4 for /fɔr/ in before or foresee (b4; 4c), 8 for /et/ or /ɛt/ in great (gr8).

The last category of contractions encompasses colloquial and regiolectal contractions or the reduction of words based on colloquial pronunciation or regional varieties (Androutsopoulos, 2000; Weber, 1986; Crystal, 2008). The occurrences of colloquial and regiolectal contractions in the corpus of text messages are infrequent, and some examples include the use of wanna/wana for want to (22), yo for you (8), gonna for going to (7), da/dis for the/this (4).

<sup>2</sup>WordSmith Tools is an integrated suite of programs for looking at how words behave in texts. The WordList tool shows all the words or word-clusters in a text- set out in alphabetical or frequency order. The concordancer, Concord, gives users a chance to see any word or phrase in context and what sort of company it keeps. With KeyWords users can find the key words in a text. <https://lexically.net/downloads/version8/HTML/index.html>

### 4.1.2 Expressives

In the compiled data, expressives are occasionally used by texters. Logograms refer to the use of a character or combination of characters to stand for a whole word without respecting its pronunciation and are limited to some common characters like the use of the symbol @ to replace the preposition at (23). Furthermore, the two letters xo often appear together with x meaning hug and o meaning kiss. xo with all its variations appears 12 times in the collected corpus, at the end of the messages, as a closing remark to express positive feelings of love. Another symbol used by texters is the ampersand & standing for the conjunction and with 9 occurrences. Texters use this symbol to add and join ideas together.

Moreover, emoticons, which refer to the pairing of punctuation marks like the period, colon, semi-colon, apostrophe, hyphen, parentheses together or with numbers and letters to express feelings (Crystal, 2011), are infrequently used. Texters resort to these graphic representations to express their feelings such as the heart <3 (25), the happy face :-) (9), the kissing face :-\* (8), the sad face :-( (6), and the beaming face :-D (2).

## 4.2 Spoken vs. texted English

Texting is believed to be the product of the combination between spoken and written English (Plester & Wood, 2009; Tagg, 2012), and texters tend to employ features of the spoken language to produce speech-like informality. Therefore, it is essential to consider Carter and McCarthy's Model of Spoken Grammar against which the obtained data is measured.

### 4.2.1 Clause combination

After scrupulous scanning of the entire corpus of text messages, the findings show that most of the messages are not lengthy like spoken utterances and consist of single-clause units or two- to three-clause units. A few messages entail the combination of more than three clauses. Unlike speech, rare are the occurrences of multiple coordination with and; clauses are rather connected with commas or fused. Take the following examples:

“Father, come and pick me from work, I had a flat tire”

“Hey ralph, i cant get to the party because my car broke down can you give me a ride?”

“My dear plz i need ur help wz my homework so if u can stop by for a while it's urgent love u”.

### 4.2.2 Deixis

The second feature of spoken grammar is deixis or the way speakers orient themselves and their listeners about person, time, and space relating to the immediate situation of speaking (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Similar to the spoken language, the participants' messages include many deictic references such as pronouns (I, you, we, my, his), adverbs (now, yesterday, today, there), and determiners (this, that, these, those).

A detailed analysis of the determiners this, that, these and those based on Carter and McCarthy's examination of spoken deixis shows that these words occur respectively 155, 47, 4, and 3 times in the compiled corpus. Explicit reference to time is made by the use of this followed by a time reference (67) such as this Saturday, this morning, this day, this year and many others. A selected list of concordances through WordSmith Tools shows that the determiner this can signal past, present, or future. About half of the occurrences are related to plans and arrangements such as “Im inviting u 2 my bday this saturday at 10pm at Roleo”. Deictic time references referring to the past occur as well, and they usually represent an event that happened earlier such as “Can u plz send me ur hwk on wtsp now cz ive been busy this week”. Present-time references are the least frequent ones, and they usually refer to wishes such as “Hi dear omg its yr bday happy bday and wish you all the best this year. love you”.

On the other hand, the determiner that is not used as a deictic time reference. No occurrence for that with a time reference is found in all the messages. Unlike the frequent use of this with time references, only 1 of 155 occurrences of this refers to a place as in “Hi I'm planning to try this new restaurant next to my house tomorrow at 9. Would u like to join me?” Similarly, only 1 of 99 occurrences of that refers to a place as in “Hi mate, we r going tday 2 that new restaurant @ the end of the street. At 7 pm, we'd like u 2 com.” Other deictic references include texting-medium reference (12) like this message, these texts; shared experience (34) like this amazing surprise, these words; that

amazing night, those things, and anaphoric reference (75) like “this is not acceptable”, “is that clear?”, “keep that in mind” and many others.

Moving on to pronouns, the findings show frequent use of the pronouns with all their variations deictically notably you (1304), I (971), me (295), it (187), we (168), her (75) and other pronouns.

Last but not least, as in spoken discourse, adverbs of place and time are deictic as they rely on the situation in which the texters are such as tomorrow (85), today (69), there (51), now (26).

### 4.2.3 Ellipsis

Studying ellipsis involves investigating major words missing from a sentence, thus examples of ellipses are found by manually searching for the denoted elements and through concordance which is the caveat of this method. Similar to the spoken language, Internet lingo involves numerous instances of initial and medial ellipses. The elision of the subject pronoun I occurs frequently especially when associated with mental process verbs (wish, hope, love, thought) such as [ø] will see. Other speech-like elisions, though infrequent, entail the ellipsis of:

- a. An auxiliary with/without subject pronoun as in “Hey [ø] wanna come to the party tmw?”
- b. Interrogatives with no auxiliary or subject as in “[ø] in tonight cine @ le mall 8h?”
- c. The pronoun it and demonstratives as in “[ø] already done”
- d. Existential there as in “Yeh sure [ø] no problem”
- e. Prepositions as in “yo. pick me up [ø] jbeil in 10”

One kind of ellipsis that is specific to texting is the omission of the first person pronoun I and its substitution with am or um as copula and auxiliary such as “i wanna b a part of ur success yet am too far to be a big part of it”; “Heyy um plannin a surprise party 4 my bf tomo at roadster will u b there.reply plz”.

### 4.2.4 Headers and tails

The terms headers and tails are used to refer to non-clausal elements placed either before or after the main clause (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Such items are references- often noun clauses- that are repeated within the same clause with the presence of a pronoun (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Headers orient and guide the listeners and provide them with additional information, whereas tails reinforce and clarify what has been said before (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Headers and tails are rarely used by texters. The method adopted to scan the entire corpus of text messages is to look for pronouns through WordSmith concordances line by line and examine headers by searching for references occurring to the right or to the left.

“Thank you! Coming from you, that means a lot” (Header)  
OMG!!!! YAS we, da queens!!!!” (Tail)

### 4.2.5 Vague language

Another feature of spoken grammar is vague language. Vague language refers to the common and everyday use of words. The use of vague language indicates that shared knowledge exists which is why listeners understand such vague references (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Texted messages show very rare occurrences of vague language expressions (25) compared to spoken language through the use of some words like thing(s), kinda, like, and whatever. Some examples are:

“Hope he’s ok hahahaha”

“I feel kinda sick”

“Hey maria! Do you want to grab dinner some times? Like next wednesday?”

### 4.2.6 Response tokens

In spoken grammar, response tokens refer to the use of words or phrases to acknowledge what a person says and to display interest in what is being said (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Unlike vague expressions, speech-like and text-specific response tokens with all their variations are frequently employed by the participants (1083). Minimal response tokens occur 478 times and mainly entail the use of the following words: yes, no, okay, wow and other tokens too. The non-minimal tokens occur

520 times and include the use of words like thank you, sure, of course, good, don't worry, great, no problem and many others. Some response tokens used by texters are only specific to texting such as the use of hahaha, lol, xoxo, and ouf.

#### 4.2.7 Discourse markers

Oral communication is often chaotic and disorganized, yet speakers tend to organize their thoughts, so they use discourse markers like single-word-items like anyway, so, now, you see, fine, or phrases/clausal items such as I mean, you know, mind you, and as I say (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Such markers do not occur very often in texting (154).

A noticeable discourse marker that is used by texters is the interjection oh to express surprise astonishment, disappointment, or any response to surprising messages. Clusters like oh no, oh my god, oh really are used to express negative feelings of shock or sympathy like "Ohhh reallyy !!! That s horrible ! Sureee", and happy feelings of laughter and triumph like "Ohhhhh I can't believeeeee ???? so doo I .... I'm so haapppyyyy !!!!let's celebrate".

Other examples entail the use of discourse markers to:

- a. Sequence ideas through the use of so and then as in "r u free tmrw? lets have a road trip to mar charbel then lunch in jbeil whos in"
- b. Focus recipients' attention through the use of look as in "Look I'm angry about the way that you talk to me in front of my friends. Don't repeat it"
- c. Monitor shared knowledge by reinforcing some common ideas or checking whether the listeners are following up through the use of anyway, you know, and you see as in "Oh yeah fine thanks. I just had to leave because my girlfriend is coming tonight. I have to prepare everything, you know :)"

#### 4.2.8 Greetings and farewells

In terms of greetings and farewells, the findings show that almost half of the participants use greetings (419) compared to the rare occurrences of sign-offs (63). Informal greetings are mainly found such as hey, hi, hello, yo, while good morning and good evening are rarely spotted. Farewells in texting mainly rely on the use of see you and bye. Besides, numerous messages directly begin by addressing the recipient or stating the aim of their text. Below are some examples:

"Good evening brother, I'm a bit shy to ask you that. But I really need your car for tonight plz"

"Father, come and pick me from work, I had a flat tire"

"same to you. I hope its gonna be also a year full of joy and happiness to you and to your family"

#### 4.2.9 Swearing and taboo expressions

Swearing and taboo expressions are frequently heard in spoken language; they are considered offensive as they express strong feelings of annoyance, anger, and frustration (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Such expressions are mostly related to the body, bodily processes, or religion. In text messages, only 88 occurrences of swearing and taboo expressions are noticed where texters use terms related to bodily processes and religion like god/ omg/ oh my god/ oh my (73), hell/ wth (7), fuck/ f\*\*/ wtf (4), shit, shity, shitt (6), and daaaamn (1). Take the following examples:

"Haha hell yeahh"

"Wth is wrong with u? Why rnt u comn tomo?"

#### 4.3 Capitalization and punctuation

In shorthand writing, the grammatical rules of capitalization and punctuation are violated where texters focus on the content of the message rather than its correctness by capitalizing words and placing the correct marks to delimit sentences and correctly structure them.

### 4.3.1 Capitalization

To begin with, the first person pronoun I should always be capitalized even when occurring in the middle of the sentence. The study reveals that texters seem to ignore the capitalization of I in their messages. A concordance of this first-person pronoun shows that I occurs 453 times (including auto-capitalization instances) while i occurs 352 times. Moreover, many words that should be initially capitalized like proper names, names of places, days of the week and so on are written in lower case as in ‘I would love to plan maya a birthday party this saturday. Im thinking my place at 7:00’. Beside violating many capitalization rules, texters tend to capitalize words that should be written in lower case mainly to express positive feelings of excitement and extreme happiness such as “You're the only person that my heart beats for ! I LOVE YOU” or negative feelings of anger, sadness, and shock such as “I CANNOT BELIEVE U DID THAT!!! Never speak to me again!”

### 4.3.2 End marks

In written discourse, end marks such as the period, the question mark, and the exclamation mark are used to indicate the end of a sentence. Similar to spoken language, such end marks do not exist in many sentences where texters abruptly end their sentences without adding any end mark as in “guys whos in for tonight cine at 8:30”. A feature of texted English is the overuse of end marks to express a range of positive and negative feelings such as “Really??? That's great!!!” and “U dissappointed me !!!”

### 4.3.3 Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used to show possession, contractions, or to form the plural of letters or numbers (Ong'onda, Matu, and Oloo, 2011). In texting, the rule of apostrophe inclusion is violated by texters who omit the apostrophe from many words. Such omission leads in many cases to confusion with other words. Ambiguity mainly lies in the use of:

- a. Its (18) for it's (it has and it is) and the possessive adjective/pronoun its as in “its okay everything is alright”
- b. Your/ur (276) for you're (you are) and the possessive adjective your as in “yes, your right omg thats horrible”
- c. Were (13) for we're (we are) and were (simple past of be) as in “lk tnght were gonna watch the movie u told us abt”
- d. Ill (13) for I'll (I will) and the adjective ill as in “ill do it now”
- e. Well for we'll (we will) and the noun and adverb well as in “well spend the day at le mall”.

Other miscellaneous omissions that do not affect the comprehensibility of the message include Im (69) for I'm (I am); lets (12) for let's (let us), dont (10) for don't (do not), and cant (10) for can't (cannot).

## 5. Discussion

The present study aims at examining the features characterizing Internet lingo in Lebanon and investigating the extent to which texted English is similar to the spoken language. It can be noted that texted English, in general, is a deviant form of writing that resembles speech in many aspects.

In terms of orthography, texted messages include a large number of unconventional yet varied English words. A quick scan of the entire corpus shows that the majority of the text messages include two or more shortened words each. The participants have seemingly resorted to this writing style because it is easy, fast, and time-saving.

The collected corpus of text messages shows a substantial use of some contractions by texters. Clippings and phonetic spellings are a shorter yet understandable version of the original words that are widely spread, which proves that texters find it easier to omit some letters/syllables or type the words as they say them. As for acronyms and alphabetisms, even though they are detected in Textisms, their restricted usage is probably because such contractions remain vague and hard to decipher by non-native texters. Apart from the well-known initialisms, a cluster of random letters might be indubitably confusing for some people. Moreover, the paucity of colloquial and regiolectal respellings is probably justified by the fact that English is a second/foreign language in Lebanon, and its acquisition is still



limited to formal English. Speakers of English in Lebanon are exposed to informal/regional language through indirect means such as songs, movies, or connections with natives, yet the rate of such exposure is still low, which explains the scarcity of colloquial and regiolectal contractions.

As for the expressives, logograms remain uncommon in Textisms because, in most of the well-known smartphones, symbols and characters are not directly placed on the keyboard like letters; therefore, texters will need a two-step process to access the list of symbols in a separate key. Graphics like emoticons are also not excessively used in the obtained corpus. This is probably due to the fact that emoticons, like logograms, are a two-step process and are not easily accessed by texters. Moreover, emoticons that are associated with positive feelings are used more than the negative ones.

Moving on to sentence structure in texted English, all the messages shared between texters are ungrammatical and flawed in many aspects as they strictly reflect spoken grammar. Almost all the messages are short ones that consist of small units.

First of all, texted clauses are characterized by their briefness and shortness, where most of them are one-, two-, or three-clause units that are mainly combined with commas or are fused together. This is probably due to the fact that communicating the message between texters is more important than abiding by the grammar rules. Texters feel the urge to type their ideas directly without a second thought of which punctuation marks, coordinators or subordinators to use.

Moreover, just like the spoken discourse and unlike written discourse, which is clear for readers, internet lingo includes many deictic references to space and time that are created by the shared background between the texters. However, as texted English does not involve direct, immediate communication, the occurrences of deictic references in the participants' texts are still limited compared to the spoken discourse that is heavily based on deixis. Yet, even if this emerging register lacks face-to-face interaction, fast responses and minimal delays between texts place senders and receivers within the same circle. In particular, the determiners *this* and *that* are frequently used by texters mainly to refer to future arrangements and plans. This finding goes in line with the use of deictic adverbs of place and time signaling future events and arrangements. Moreover, determiners are also employed to refer to shared physical objects and events as a result of the intimacy between texters. Finally, first and second person/object pronouns frequently occur in texting thus narrowing the scope of interaction down to both senders and receivers.

Different types of situational ellipsis that resemble speech are detected in the collected corpus, yet the uniqueness of Textisms through the usage of copular *be* with the omission of its subject is highly noticed. Brevity seems to be achieved in texted English through speech and non-speech like elliptical elements, thus showing that texters tend to omit several elements from their messages due to the shared background between them and the high degree of familiarity of texting.

Unlike the spoken discourse, the lack of headers and tails in texting shows that users are not urged by the need to orient others. Texters do not feel the need to type additional information or reinforce some ideas due to the briefness associated with texting, the intimacy between texters, and their familiarity with the message content.

Vagueness is seldom detected in the compiled corpus of messages in contrast to oral communication. Even if texted English entails many of the speech features, it remains a written means of communication, which logically explains the paucity of vague terms. Undoubtedly, texters seem to share the same background and have interpersonal awareness between them witnessed in the use of some vague terms. Such usage establishes an intimate and informal relationship between texters; however, the physical constraints imposed by Textisms somehow restrict the frequent use of such unclear terms and require more clarity.

Texted English also entails several instances of minimal and non-minimal response tokens that show texters' direct contact and interaction with each other. As texting is synchronous by nature, both interlocutors feel as if they are having a face to face conversation, where texters ask and answer questions or comment on statements, thus triggering the frequent use of response tokens.

Additionally, the compiled corpus encompasses diverse occurrences of discourse markers even if they might not be relatively abundant compared to other features of the spoken discourse. Although the interjection *oh* appears frequently, its use remains pragmatic. According to Schiffrin (1987), *oh* is used in speech to mark the division of conversation between interlocutors. In Textisms, texters have a

little cognitive urge to limit their transition of ideas, so they tend to use the interjection oh in an attempt to recreate oral conversations.

As for greetings and farewells, informal salutations like hi and hey are also found in a big number in texted English compared to the formal salutation words and expressions. This is due to the intimacy between texters and the informality of the medium being used. Unlike greetings, sign-offs are not found in big numbers probably because texters do not decisively end their messages as they expect a reply from others. Sign-offs are informal too, such as see you with all its variations. This may be because see you somehow softens the bluntness of the message as texters do not see each other. Unlike face-to-face interaction where facial expressions, gestures, voice tone, and intonation play a major role in sending the exact message, written communication remains dry and straightforward. Texted messages might be concluded more abruptly which is why texters tend to use see you thus projecting future arrangements and plans. Besides, it is worth mentioning that a big number of messages lacked greetings and farewells simply because the texters' main aim is to get their messages through without formal salutations.

In contrast with spoken language, swearing and taboo words and expressions are infrequently used in texted English. Such infrequency might be due to the fact that when texters write such expressions, they get the chance to think twice about what they are writing down as all typed words appear in front of them on the screen. Hence, texters might consider deleting some expressions and would rather be more conservative in their writing. In spoken language, such expressions appear more frequently as speakers cannot control what comes out of their mouth spontaneously.

The last category to be analyzed in texted English is capitalization and punctuation. In Textisms, the grammatical rules of capitalization and punctuation are violated where texters focus on the words rather than placing the correct marks to delimit sentences and correctly structure them.

The case of the first person 'I' is worth discussing. Clearly, texters do not feel the urge to capitalize 'I' as this process on their handheld devices requires two steps: texters need to use the upper-case key and then the letter 'I'. When 'I' occurs at the beginning of the message, the phone system automatically capitalizes it. This means that texters do not capitalize the first letter intentionally which is justified by the high number of the lower-cased 'i'. Moreover, texters tend to ignore the capitalization of many words (proper names, names of places, days of the week.) for the same reason mentioned previously. Sometimes, texters opt for the entire capitalization of some words to show either positive feelings of excitement and extreme happiness or negative feelings such as anger, sadness, or shock. This proves that capitalization is a mediator to translate feelings into words and to reach for others' emotions.

Moreover, end marks rules are also violated by texters. Sentences are abruptly ended without placing any mark at the end. This shows that texters do not want to add more characters to their messages. However, this lack of end marks might sometimes lead to confusion where the recipients find themselves unable to guess whether the message is a statement or question, especially if their lack of end marks coincides with situational ellipsis where question words or auxiliaries are omitted. Beside the lack of end marks, texters sometimes overuse some punctuation marks to display positive feelings of excitement and happiness or negative feelings of anger and sadness. As texted English does not involve any face to face interaction or verbal messages, texters feel the urge to express their reactions and feelings through the excessive use of end marks.

As for apostrophe use, texters tend to omit apostrophes because it is easier for them to write using the keyboard in front of them without accessing the symbols, which is a long process. Undoubtedly, the omission of apostrophes leads to confusion in many cases where some words might imply a different meaning.

## 6. Conclusion and policy implications

Technology is taking over almost every single field; its presence has become inevitable yet mandatory. This is the 21st century: the age of speed and progress where mobile communication has radically changed all concepts and notions. Language is no exception; it has also been affected by mobile technology thus giving rise to a new electronic writing style called Textisms. This study sets out to explore the linguistic features of text messages in the Lebanese context by scrupulously investigating this emerging style. Some people support the use of Textisms; some despise it; others

simply feel perplexed by this new trend. When it comes to technology, nothing is predictable or guaranteed, but everything could be amended to serve language learning and cater for this generation's needs.

This research's main implication is a pedagogical one. Teaching proper language and achieving predefined objectives while keeping up with students' progress is every teacher's aim. As noted earlier, Textisms in students' writing do not pose any major threat as they simply reflect the spoken language and require knowledge of the second language to be produced. Using texting involves phonological competence, creativity, linguistic and communicative awareness. Therefore, there is no need to fear this emerging writing style or consider it a taboo in class; it can be used academically if monitored properly by the teachers. Texted English is only a register of the language, and instructors should possibly its use in simple tasks that require speed such as note taking and first draft writing. Such opportunities prove that language learning is a dynamic and evolving process that enables students to acquire in the optimal ways. However, keeping up with technology and staying up to date does not have to be done at the expense of proper language learning. Learners should be taught correct English, and they should be well aware of how to properly switch between the two styles. Texted English should be a means to an end- a way of expression that bolsters language learning instead of ruining it.

Many limitations of this present study warrant consideration. First, this study is based on 1,890 messages using Plester, Wood, and Joshi's scenario-based elicitation method and all the linguistic features identified previously are related to the collected corpus. A bigger corpus might lead to different results, so future studies could expand the scenarios and collect a bigger number of messages. Researchers can expand the scenarios more and include a higher number of simulations to elicit more answers from the participants and therefore obtain a more varied corpus. Real text messages or synchronous chat history (WhatsApp, Viber, facebook Messenger) could also lead to more authentic results even if this method is very time consuming and less ethical than the simulated one. Additionally, this study is conducted in Lebanon where English is a second/foreign language; therefore, it will be interesting to conduct a comparative study between native and non-native texted English for a deeper understanding of this new register.

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