A Linguistic-Stylistic Analysis of Text Messaging: A Case Study of University of Dar es Salaam Undergraduate Students

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Abstract
This study is a linguistic-stylistics analysis of text messaging by exploring texting sentence types and complexity. The study used a mixed method approach and was tested using the theories of style under three moulds, which are: style as a deviation from a norm, style as a product of context, and style as a choice. In an attempt to meet the objectives, data was collected using the elicitation tool, and a total of three hundred text messages were collected and recorded in Microsoft Word. The data was then coded, computed, and quantified using the SPSS program version 19 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), and the data was finally analyzed using the checklist. The findings revealed that text messages constrain the syntax of the messages, notably in sentence length and complexity.

Introduction

There are different modes of communication that have been developed over time. Among them are the linguistic innovations of text messaging. Technological advancement has enriched these modes, especially in the growth of instant and short messages. The terms "texting" or "text messaging" refer to the brief typed messages sent using the Short Message Service (SMS) of mobile/cell phones, smart phones, or web browsers (Thurlow and Poff, 2011). It has been a common feature of most mobile phones since the late 1990s. In this study, the terms "text messaging" and "texting" will be used interchangeably to refer to both the medium and the language, and

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the term "texters" will be used to refer to individuals who use texting.

Moreover, text messaging is a private communication that allows users to rebel against the standard rules of a language (Ongonda *et al.*, 2011). In this sense, texting does not always follow the standard rules of grammar (Bush, 2005), but the behaviour is acceptable among texters. Retie (2007) quotes Reid and Reid (2005), asserting that there are two different groups that emerged from text communication. The first group is that of talkers, who prefer talking on the phone but use text messages as a convenient complementary medium; second, texters form a group of people who are uncomfortable talking on the phone and prefer sending text messages. This dichotomy, however, may not be as important because texters prefer to use messages for a variety of reasons, not because they are uncomfortable with the medium.

Unlike those linking texting with technological restrictions, others, like Rafi (2008), are of the view that the Short Message Service (SMS) syntactic and lexical choices made by the texters are linked to a child's language. For example, he identifies the way a child expresses his or her feelings through the simple present progressive tense, e.g. *mom eating* for "Mom is eating" and *eating* for "I am eating". However, the empirical data show that texting overlooks orthographic and syntactic rules of a language with great emphasis on written sounds and compressions; for example, "8" for *ate*, "*2*" for *to*, "two" and "too," "4" for *four* and for, "bcoz*"* for *because,* and the like. This happens because the language used in the text is social and interactive in nature. It also has a close link with the spoken language, where people do not use long and complex sentences, but this does not make it look similar to a child language.

 In defending the language of texting, Lin and Tong (2007) posit that texting should be seen as a new, creative, hybridized variety of literacy in its own right rather than a "broken form" of a traditional print language. They cite Goggin (2004), who argues that texting is a new form of literacy that is uniquely suited to the unique characteristics of the new communication medium, rather than a degenerated form of print literacy. Hence, messages are both linguistically unremarkable and communicatively adept.

 Texting is the latest new way to communicate quickly among people, and texting is mostly used among youth and young adults in

chatting. Beasley (2009) offers three benefits of texting: Texting permits interlocutors to communicate with others from just about anywhere; it permits them to communicate silently, which can be beneficial in noisy environments, like in a cafeteria, when having an effective conversation on the telephone would be difficult or where extraneous communication must be done quietly, such as in a classroom, and allows users to communicate both synchronously (i.e., two-way communication that occurs simultaneously) and asynchronously (i.e., two-way communication that is delayed).

What is more, the texters are said to be crippled by their inability to see, hear, or touch their fellow counterparts. Locke (2000), as cited in Hezili (2009), describes this phenomenon as "going off-voice", "off-face', "off-eyes" and "off-body". This deprivation generated the need for other linguistic cues such as punctuation and spelling to provide emotional support. The examination of this register of conversations in the Tanzanian context adds to the diversity and prevalence of each linguistic strategy used and its functions in conveying the intended meaning. As Hezili (2009) observes, currently, there is a rapid growth of people chatting on the internet or text messaging each other when compared to the past few years. She says that communication has never been as rapid as it is today, with a completely new evolution of the language.

It has been observed that online interactive media such as text messaging have influenced syntactic aspects of language. This paper explores the syntactic characteristics of text messages in order to determine how they have resulted in a paradigm shift in the traditional uses of language. Doring (2002): 7 allows for the reasonable use of syntactic and lexical short forms, which save character space or touches of the handset keys as compared with using the full forms of words (Doring, 2002: 7). A few empirical studies have shown researchers' interest in this syntactic innovation. For example, Ong'onda, Matu, and Oketch's (2010) study showed that cordial syntactic features are reflected in syntactic modifications and spelling variation in Kenyan text messages. Haryono & Kholifah (2018) found the same in their analysis of Indonesian, English, and Japanese linguistic characteristics of short text messages (SMS) performed by the students. Earlier on, Oladoye (2011) investigated the syntactic and lexico-semantic analyses of selected SMS text messages among the University of Ilorin students. The results showed that among the word classes, the most frequently occurring element was the noun, with a 39.22% frequency. In addition, all the

text messages had noun elements in them, the most prominent of which was the word sequence, which had 20.5%.

In light of the above studies, it can be concluded that short messaging constrains as well as provides room for innovativeness in the syntax of various languages. However, there are few studies in that regard conducted in Tanzania, e.g., the study by Dillon (2010), Semkwiji and Hassan (2011), and Bagger (2010), which did not exclusively focus on sentence length and complexity. Therefore, this study is intended to fill that knowledgeable gap.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Enkvist et al. (1964) and Azuike (1992), cited in Nnadi (2010), who looked at six broad moulds into which style can be cast. These molds were style as good writing, style as a deviation from the norm, style as the individual, style as content and/or form, style as choice, and style as a product of context. This study dwelt only on three theories. The theories are style as a deviation from a norm, style as a product of context, and style as a choice.

Style as a deviation from a norm is the first theory used in this study. Norm here means the accepted and normal usage within specific speech communities. A deviation would then mean a departure from the accepted norm. In this theory, linguists try to make explicit the role of frequencies and statistical analysis in formalizing the difference between the text and the norm. Enkvist et al. (1964) say that the style of a discourse is the message carried by the frequency distributions and transitional probabilities of its linguistic features, especially as they differ from those of the same features in the language as a whole.

Yet another theory used in this study is style as a product of context. Here, style is deemed to be conditioned by the socio-cultural factors that influence the making of an utterance, whether written or spoken. The writer is regarded as part of the context of what he or she writes, and thus every text is a constellation of contexts and styles.

Style as a choice is another theory adopted in this study. The point is that different linguistic structures can generate the same meaning, and which of the structures the writer employs is a matter of choice. The choice between two lexical items that suggest the same

meaning (e.g. salt and sodium chloride) is context-dependent, and the same applies to features at various levels of linguistic analysis. Stylistic choice has to do with the choice of style markers. Non-stylistic choice involves the choice of syntactically neutral items. Style markers are those linguistic items that only appear, or are most or least frequent, in a certain context. They are contextually bound linguistic elements (Enkvist et al., 1964). The current study fits into this framework since text messaging is personal communication. Therefore, texting deviates from normal writing due to the choice of words and the context of interlocutors.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted the case study design. The University of Dar es Salaam main campus was chosen as a case study. The design was regarded as an arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aimed to combine relevance with research purpose. This design aimed to find out how language is used in text messaging, the features it portrays, and provide new insights about the phenomenon as supported by Kothari (2004). Therefore, it was hoped to look closely at the problem and explore different literature related to the study.

UDSM was adopted as the case study due to its demographic size and complexity of students who find it difficult to meet frequently, hence decide to use texting for chatting and sharing indoor information among themselves. Also, it was chosen because it was a place where informants together showed more willingness to present their messages. It was the potential area to get messages written in English and Swahili. This gave the researcher a chance to access all the data and information required for the study.

The target population for this study was undergraduate students and their text messages while in the area of study. The researcher decided to work with that particular group because of her strong conviction that it is a kind of group of people who prefer chatting compared to the other groups found at the campus due to their age, as most of them are teenagers and young adults.

The participants were selected using purposive and stratified sampling. The reason for opting for the purposive sampling technique was the criteria of readiness and willingness of participants in availing the messages and important information that are otherwise private to satisfy the objectives of the research.

The stratified sampling was employed to bring in such strata as gender differences, year of study, and marital status.

Forty students were involved in the study by providing their text messages. The messages that were collected were those sent using mobile phones, and these were found in the "sent" folder rather than the inbox. The majority of these respondents were single (36, or 90%), as contrasted with only four (10%) who were married. This implies that their networking was likely deemed to be more extensive and fluid since they were free to chat compared to married respondents. In terms of age, the largest number of respondents (26, or 65%) were aged between 21 and 23, which is indicative of the vibrancy of networking for academic (being university students) and social-interpersonal non-academic issues. As for their sex, 21 of the respondents were males, which is 52.5% of the total sample, and 19 (47.5%) were females. Furthermore, 16 (40%) of the respondents were from the then College of Arts and Social Science (CASS), a college encompassing the disciplines related to communications, literature, language studies, and social studies in which language use is given special attention, both formal and informal compared to other colleges. The group second to CASS had 11 (27.7%) respondents from the School of Education, then 6 (15%) were from the College of Natural and Applied Science (CONAS), another 3 (7.5%) were from the College of Engineering and Technology (COET), and 4 (10%) from the School of Law.

This study relied on one research instrument, which is the elicitation of messages from the respondents.

The Findings
A Sample of the Messages Collected
This session acts as an introductory part before delving into findings per research objectives. It therefore presents the nature and gives a description of the message collected from the field, focusing on the language used, sentence length, and complexity as summarized in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Sample of the Message Collected

Sample of the message		Number of messages	Percentage
Language used	Swahili	143	47.7
	English	132	44
	Mix English dominant	12	4
	Mix Swahili dominant	13	4.3
	Total	300	100
Sentence length	Short and basic	116	38.7
	Short non-basic	116	38.7
	Long	68	22.6
	Total	300	100
Sentence complexity	Simple	126	42
	Compounded	75	25
	Subordination	99	33
	Total	300	100

In Table 3.1 above, the Swahili messages are more numerous compared to English messages because the language is familiar to most Tanzanian undergraduate students and it is used mostly in social activities like personal communications. The code mixing and code switching of the language are due to the co-use of both languages. In terms of sentence length, the majority of the messages are short since the aim of interlocutors is to reduce the space of messages, which results in having short messages. Moreover, the frequency of communication helps to reduce the number of words. In sentence complexity, the table shows that many messages have simple language compared to compounded or subordinate sentences because texters communicate in a simple language that can be understood by all. The total messages collected from the field were 300, and each category is discussed separately in sub-sessions.

Languages Used

This sub-session surveys the language used in texting as collected from the field. The study shows that among the 300 collected messages, the majority of the messages were in English and Kiswahili. The Kiswahili messages were 143 (47.7%) while the English messages were 132 (44%), a difference of 11 all recorded from the respondents' "sent" folders. The findings also show there is code switching whereby in 13 messages (4.3%) Swahili was the dominant language while in 12 messages (4%) English was the dominant language, as summarized in Figure 3.1 below.
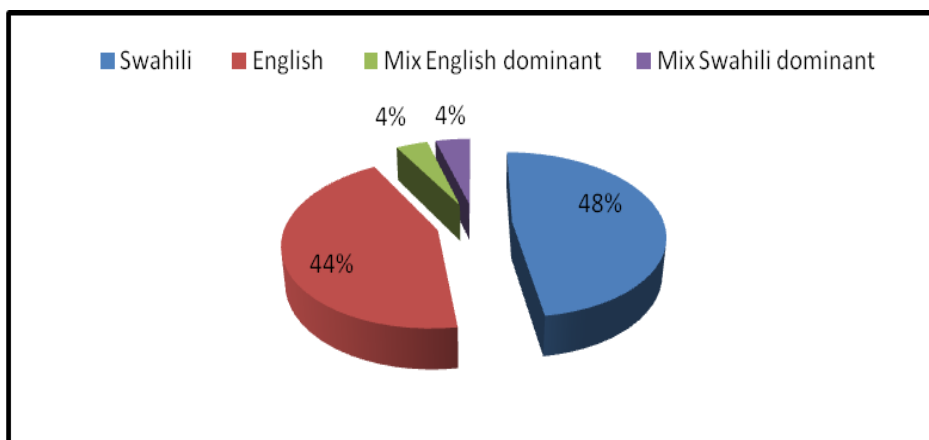
Figure 3.1: Languages Used

This implies that in Tanzanian universities, English and Swahili are the major lingua franca for interpersonal communication, and in some cases, the users tend to mix the languages, as is common for bilingual and multilingual speakers. The Swahili messages had a high frequency of occurring because it is the language that is used more outside lecture rooms and is mostly used in social activities such as in the canteen, hospital, and in local media. English, on the other hand, is the language of instruction in higher learning, but it is rarely used outside the lecture rooms. These results are supported by the fact that texting is the primary means of personal communication among interlocutors and they are free to use any language (Retie, 2007).

Additionally, most of the English messages that were collected were forwarded messages to respondents and were composed by someone else. The case is different from Swahili messages, whereby texters were able to compose different messages. Generally, which language texters choose to use does not matter since the aim is to communicate in the language they are most comfortable with the topic.

Sentence Length
The study also looked at the sentence length of the messages collected. They were grouped into three parts: short and basic, short non-basic sentences, and long sentences. The findings indicate that 116 (38.7%) sentences were short and basic, as well as short non-basic sentences. The messages that contained long sentences were only 68 (22.7%). The findings indicate that the sentences used in

forming the messages had different lengths, as presented in Figure 3.2 below.
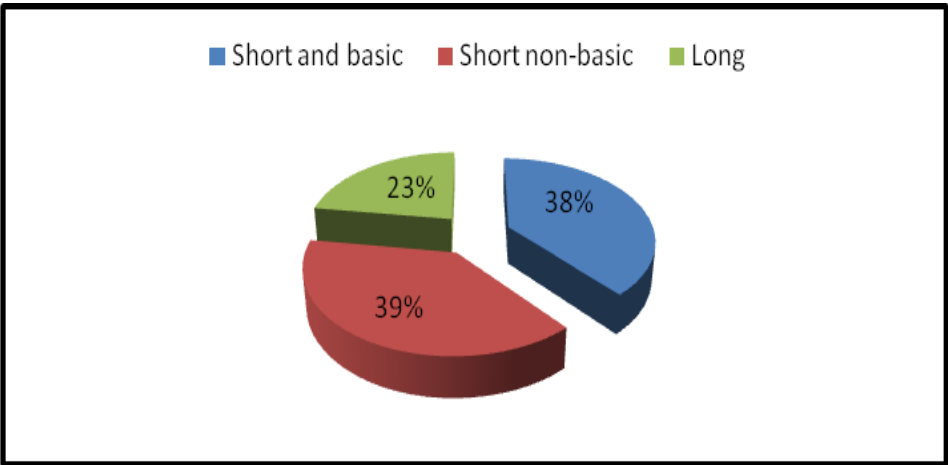

Figure 3.2: Sentence Length

The findings imply that messages are short in terms of letters of the alphabet, which means sometimes texters have little to chat about due to regular communication or time pressure. However, this depends on the type of message, i.e., if a receiver can understand the sender's intention and also the relationship between the sender and the receiver. More importantly, some of the text messages are short due to the very nature of language economy, which characterizes texting, whereby the interlocutors reduce the long message into a short one. This is illustrated in plate 3.1.

1. M. 71a: *Hi mate, are you ok ay? I am sorry that I forgot to call you last night. Why don't we g o and see a film tomorrow?* (112 characters).
2. Hi m8: *a u k? sry I 4gt 2 cal u lst nyt, y d on we go c film 2mor* (6 4 characters)

Plate 3.1: Example of Texters' Language Economy

As revealed in plate 3.1, the difference between these messages (1 and 2) is 48 characters, hence instead of using the first message (a), a person will prefer to use message (b).

An analysis was also made of the 68 (22.7%) messages that were long sentences (they consisted of three to four sentences), and most of these had no or few abbreviated words or shortening forms. For

example, 53 (17.3%) has no abbreviation. Because most phones limit messages to 160 characters, any addition of words or letters forces the message to be divided into pieces and sent in separate chunks, which can be costly. Consequently, those texters reduced the number of characters so as to minimize the cost of sending messages. However, due to its frequency, the use of shortening has changed to be a common behavior of texters and the style of text messaging.

A similar study by Lyddy et al. (2014) examined the textual characteristics of 936 text messages in English (13391 words) by university students in Ireland. Message length, nonstandard spelling, sender and message characteristics, and word frequency were analyzed. The data showed that 25% of the word content used nonstandard spelling, with the most frequently occurring category involving the omission of capital letters. The types of nonstandard spelling varied only slightly depending on the purpose of the text message, while the overall proportion of nonstandard spelling did not differ significantly. Similarly, Hussain & Lukmana's (2018) study on characteristics of "textisms" in text messaging revealed that the study revealed that people shortened words and even sentences to the minimum syllable length by removing vowels.

Sentence Complexity

The findings on sentence complexity show that 126 (42%) messages were simple sentences, which means that they did not have any aspect of subordination, while 99 (33%) had subordinate clauses or incomplete sentences. The other 75 (25%) had compounded sentences largely found in the long messages, as illustrated in figure 3.3 below.
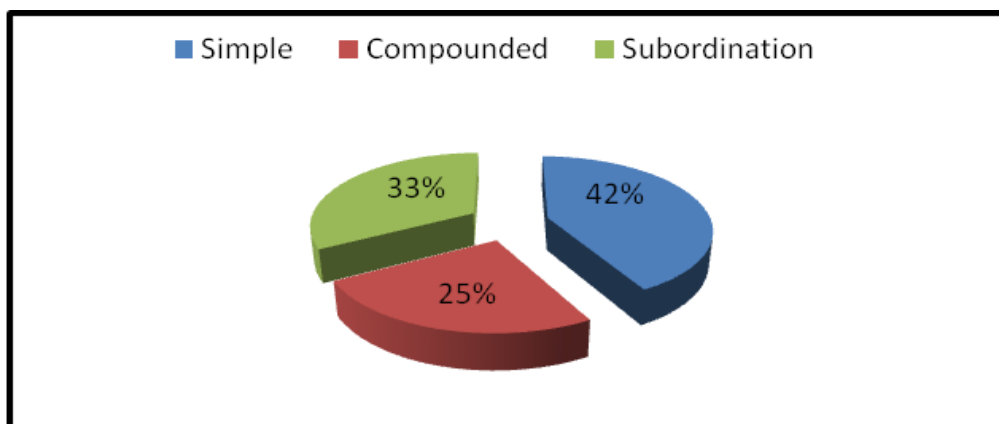

Figure 4.3: Sentence Complexity

Simple sentences exist due to the fact that sometimes texters communicate using simple phrases or clauses. For example, when a representative lies to the request, the communication's opening can also be used to sign off on the communication, as shown in Plate 3.2.

1. *M.29: Hello, how are you today? What is your personal dei?*
2. *M10: Thank you, I got the chapa*
3. *Do you want to eat first thing in the morning?*
4. *M174: 208 bidaye*
5. *M223: ki2 npigie nkwambie*

Plate 3.2: Texters' use of short-hand language

The examples in Plate 3.2 above show that interlocutors use simple language and short sentences in their day-to-day communication due to the frequency of communication among them. This immediate communication gives them a chance to chat and exchange any information that occurs immediately in their environment and daily situations.

Similar studies include Chaka, Mphahlele & Mann (2015), the findings of which showed that the morphological structure of the textisms used in the participants' text messages deviated much of their syntactic structure did not conform to that applicable to formal, standard English, whereas much of it did.

Generally, these findings can be explained using theories of style developed by Enkvist *et al.* (1964) and Azuike (1992) as cited in Nnadi (2010), under the mold of style as a product of context, which clarifies that every text is guided by context and style. The mould claims that language is part of human social behaviour, which means that language events do not take place in isolation from other events; rather they operate within a wider framework of human activity. Additionally, any piece of language is therefore part of a situation and so has a context and a relationship with it. It is this relationship between the substance and form of a piece of language that gives what is referred to as the meaning of the utterances.

Summary
The findings have shown that: a) Swahili messages were more dominant than English messages. One can therefore say that because Swahili is the first language for most Tanzanian university students and it is the language that students are familiar with,

though there is a tendency for code mixing and switching of the languages due to the co-use; b) Most messages had short and simple sentences compared with compounded sentences or subordinations; c) There were multiple uses of punctuation marks even though some messages had no marks; and d) Informal words and non-standard words appeared in many messages due to the fact that text messaging is a personal communication, hence interlocutors are free to use any word.

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