Innovations to Fill Pragmatic Gaps in Instant Text Messaging

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Abstract

This study aims at looking for some orthographic innovations that texters use to convey some pragmatic gaps that occur among them. That is because it is not always easy for texters to succeed at interpreting the pragmatic force for received text messages since the interaction lacks the advantageous properties of face-to-face communication, such as, the tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and the like. Although text messaging is regarded as linguistic ruin in terms of peculiar spelling orthographically, texters exploit such forms in addition to emoticons as compensatory adaptations for supplying extra pragmatic information not found in the standard word forms.

Collecting data from the website http://www.damnyouautocorrect.com, the researcher relies on his analysis on the contextual meaning of the text message in terms of attending to the speech acts, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts between communicants. More than that, the analysis incorporates the way how texters perceive each other's intentions and the amount of the corrective feedback implemented during the interaction. Thus, the analysis is divided into three categories: peculiar spelling, e.g. *nooooo*, whole word capitalization and peculiar spelling, e.g. *WHAAATTTT*, and whole word/phrase capitalization, e.g. *SO CUTE*. Peculiar spelling found in the sample indicates refusal and acceptance, while whole word capitalization and peculiar spelling reduplication category indicates surprise, correction and emphasis, and capturing attention for request. Finally, whole word/phrase capitalization serves to provide exaggeration, confirmation, apology and irony. On the other hand, the questionnaire is analyzed statistically to look at heavy texter's impressions about the usage of emoticons, e.g. ☺, ☹, :), etc. The responses that were received from 33 heavy texters through Facebook-based survey confirm the notion that emoticons usage facilitates expressing the emotional conditions, the intended meaning, and the exchanges of information as well as reducing misunderstanding between communicants.

The findings indicate that texters use to harness the phone's keyboard as a means for delivering the pragmatic implicature by employing peculiar spellings for the sake of mutually intelligible conversation.

Keywords:
Text Messaging- Pragmatics- Computer-mediated Communication- Fingered Speech- texting

I. Introduction

There used to be a time when communication would take place by either face-to-face or letter writing communication. With the technological revolution, things have changed in that people can communicate regardless of the geographical distance and the time discrepancies. Telecommunication, including computer-mediated communication and mobile phones, has helped pave the way into a globalized world. Indeed, telecommunication has changed the dynamics of interpersonal and social communication, and thus, perceived as agents of social change. Consequently, mobile phones redefined the patterns of social channels of interactions and relationships among individuals. Sometimes, there are some circumstances that govern the preference of using text messages as a medium of communication rather than phone calls. The low cost of the text message and the freely downloaded and used communication programs popularize text messaging, especially among young people. Nonetheless, users of such sort of communication encounter some misunderstanding difficulties.

It is not always easy for communicants to succeed at interpreting the pragmatic force of received text messages since the interaction lacks the advantageous properties of face-to-face communication such as the tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and the like. Texters, relying on the orthographic (typographic) mode to deliver their intentions, employ various orthographically driven innovations in order to carry out the intended pragmatic force successfully. The receiver of the text message is, of course, responsible for decoding the message to reach the illocutionary force, and consequently of mutually intelligible conversations. Although text messaging is regarded as linguistic ruin in terms of using peculiar spelling orthographically, texters exploit such forms in addition to emoticons as compensatory adaptations for supplying extra pragmatic information not found in the standard word forms.

II. Literature Review

Recently, researchers have turned their attentions to text-messaging language as compared to other natural communication system. Many measure the usefulness of text messaging largely by the amount of achieving the intended-to-be-conveyed goals. The following literature identifies text messaging within other computer-mediated communications and touches on the linguistic and pragmatic related implications addressed in the area.

Linguists categorize communication practices into two classes: natural communication medium such as the face-to-face interactions and technology-driven communication mode. [1] Oni and Osunbade regard Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) as "an umbrella term for any form of communication aided by networked-telecommunication system, e.g., istant messaging, e-mail, text-based conferencing, bulleting boards, etc.". [2]

Reciprocal text exchanges prevailing in such "hybrid communication" of "technical and symbolic resources" are classified into three subsets according to the time of presence during texting: synchronous, quasi-synchronous and asynchronous. The first refers to the exchanges between communicants which occur within their attendance to text messages during texting (instant). The second deals with a short delay in the co-attendance to the text message between communicants. The last indicates that there is a long interval of delay in co-attendance to the text message between communicants, which causes sluggish communication. [1]

Tagliamonte suggests that CMC has recently experienced revolutionary studies in academic fields including linguistics, computer science, sociology and psychology. [3] Attending to text messaging as a sub-branch of CMC, Thurlow and Poff consider the field in its infancy stage wherein sociolinguistic, discourse analytic and pragmatic research examined plenty of aspects, though the field remains as a hot issue in linguistics. [4]

Linguistically, text messaging has come on the borderline between linguistic purists and language instructors. Those polarized mainstreams conceptualize text messaging to contain negative versus positive implications, respectively. [4], [5] As linguistic ruin, purists who endeavor opposing the current linguistic formulation of text messages by youth, the so-called "bastardization of language", claim that this peculiar linguistic system leads to a "breakdown in the English language". [3] On the other hand, language instructors and pedagogists argue that text messaging, like other CMC, accelerates language learning in terms of developing learners' interlanguage pragmatic competence. [6]

Tagg, in her book "Discourse of Text Messaging: Analysis of SMS Communication", attends to the linguistic distribution of the simplified text messages. Her veracious classification covers both lexical and syntactic levels of the text message. Word-level analyses include respelling (e.g. *skool* for *school*), contractions (e.g. *gonna* for *going to*), abbreviations (e.g. *nxt* for *next*), initialisms (e.g. *fri* for *Friday*), ortho-phonetic respellings (e.g. *gr8* for *great*) and clipping (e.g. *gd* for *good*). Syntactic simplifications incorporate some analyses of grammatical aspects such as subject deletion (e.g. will do my lover), discourse markers (e.g. u c for *you see*) and medial ellipsis (e.g. hope ur day good). She concludes that the lexicon and grammar of text messaging is similar to that of spoken-English grammar. [7]

Sociolinguists have broadly examined text message exchanges among young people across various social and demographic groups. The reasons that most of their studies focused on young people are the ubiquity of text message exchanges among youth as well as the fact that most of the participants are university students. Goumi et al, for instance, investigate the length and function in teenagers' text message exchanges. They reveal that there is a correlation between gendered-

language speech and text messaging communication. [8] That is to say, unlike boys, girls do produce longer messages that contain fully-fledged relational and affective messages.

Previous researchers have viewed CMC as lacking non-verbal communication clues that facilitate mutual intelligibility. Amongst these views are the *social presence theory* and *cues-filtered-out approach*, which evoke that interactants' perceptions of the exchanges via CMC seem to be low. Later on, proponents of *social information processing theory* and *channel expansion theory* refute the previous notions and assert that interactants build up their own communicative skills successfully through various means, including typography. [9]

Texters find it difficult to communicate their intentions via text messages since this mode, which relies on orthography, seems ostensibly ambiguous. As a result, additional innovations exploited by texters serve to enhance the communicative force, such as the use of peculiar spellings and emoticons. In their study "Beyond Normalization: Pragmatics of Word Form in Text Messages", Baldwin and Chi analyze 764 non-standard word tokens to trace the presence of extra pragmatic information. The results show that 40% of the non-standard word forms convey emotional information including: surprise, happiness, disgust, sadness, and anger, with happiness as the highest percentage. Additional emphasis of the non-standard word forms represents 38%, while 20% of their data shows expressing the relative distance among interlocutors. They conclude that non-standard spellings of text messaging convey additional pragmatic implications. [10]

Oni and Osunbade assert that emotexts (a blended word from emotive texts), which include exaggeration of capitalization, repetition of punctuation marks, ellipsis, vowel letter extension (e.g. gooood), convey pragmatic force. [2] Moreover, Markman and Oshima, in their study "Pragmatic Play? Some Possible Functions of English Emoticons and Japanese Kaomoji in Computer-

Mediated Discourse", propose that these emoticons exhibit "clarifying the stance or mood taken". [11] That is to say, emoticons contain extra pragmatic force that colors the text message.

Lo's study on "The Nonverbal Communication: Functions of Emoticons in Computer-Mediated Communication" uses an experimental approach to measure the effects of emoticon usage on receivers' perceptions. The dependent variables incorporate the perception of the attitude and attention behind the emoticon usage, while the independent variables include manipulating pure-text set and two other emoticon sets expressing opposite-meaning emoticons (e.g. ☺vs. ☹). He concludes that there is a significant difference between perceiving the pure-text set and the two emoticon sets in that the use of emoticons supports perceiving the intended emotion, attitude and attention successfully. [9]

All in all, the literature presented above is an attempt to frame text messaging within other CMC and provide the peculiar linguistic features of this sort of communication as well as the pragmatic implicatures employed to strengthen the communicative intentions. Nonetheless, text messaging is a fertile field that pragmaticians should draw attention to. After all, the literature served above is essential before moving to the methodology of the present study.

III. Methodology

- Data Collection:

The methodology aims at collecting data from texters who use instant text messaging extensively. Since text messages are private in nature, people mostly refuse taking part in research by providing their text messages to be analyzed and interpreted. Given the challenges, the researcher resorted to the website http://www.damnyouautocorrect.com, which is designed to provide posted screenshots of text messages with erroneously autocorrected spellings. The

researcher collected 161 screenshots of the text messages from anonymous participants posted on the website to analyze the pragmatic information.

Furthermore, the researcher designed a questionnaire to measure 33 participants' impressions and opinions towards the usage of emoticon: whether it enhances communication and provides extra pragmatic information. The participants have the characteristic of being heavy texters who spend more than seven hours a week communicating via texts instantly. The design of the questionnaire is aimed to seek discovering the extent to which texters rely on emoticons and benefit from them during text message exchanges. Basically, the questionnaire follows a closed-ended set of ten questions to extract additional views regarding emoticon usage.

- *Data Analysis:*

Analyzing the pragmatic aspects of the text message, the researcher relies on the contextual meaning of the text message in terms of attending to the speech acts, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts between communicants. More than that, the analysis incorporates the way how texters perceive each other's intentions and the amount of the corrective feedback implemented during the interaction. Thus, the analysis is divided into three categories: peculiar spelling, whole word capitalization and peculiar spelling, and whole word/phrase capitalization. Peculiar spelling found in the sample indicates refusal and acceptance, while whole word capitalization and peculiar spelling reduplication category indicates surprise, correction and emphasis, and capturing attention for request. Finally, whole word/phrase capitalization serves to provide exaggeration, confirmation, apology and irony. On the other hand, the questionnaire is analyzed statistically to look at heavy texter's impressions about the usage of emoticons, e.g. ☺, ☹, :), etc.

IV. Results and Discussion

Pragmatic implications in text messaging are employed orthographically due to the lack of face-to-face advantageous properties. Texters use to harness the phone's keyboard as a means for delivering the pragmatic information by employing peculiar spellings for the sake of mutually intelligible conversation. Computer scientists and computational linguists obsessively endeavor creating software programs for amending text-messaging language automatically by providing predictions of what is assumed to be the correct spelling, without realizing the benefits of such peculiarities. Programs that provide automatic prompts for correction such as spelling checkers and auto-correct applications hinder conveying some pragmatic implications easily. Henceforth, this study contributes in supporting the view that non-standard word forms as well as emoticons convey extra pragmatic information.

Providing enough data from both the text messages and the questionnaire, the analysis is classified into qualitative and quantitative. In terms of qualitative analysis, the pragmatic force is deduced from the excerpts of the collected text messages by means of depending on the speech acts, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary act, as presented within the context. Quantitatively, the emoticon usage is identified to testify the validity of the notion; extra pragmatic information is enhanced through emoticon usage. This will be analyzed according to opinions of a group of heavy texters.

IV.I. *Qualitative Analysis:*

To start with, there are three types of non-standard word forms employed to convey extra pragmatic information: peculiar spelling, e.g. sooooo, whole word capitalization and peculiar spelling, e.g. WHAAAT, and whole word/phrase capitalization, e.g. OH MY GOSH.

IV.I.I. Peculiar spelling:

- Refusal

A: I'm heading to bed :) let the count down commence

B: nooooo. I will be on SMS

A: Oye… I will talk to you tomorrow

In the previous conversation, *A* wants to sleep, whereas *B* does not want *A* to leave. Hence, *B* resorted to peculiar spelling "nooooo" followed by his/her sentence showing resistance to be with *A* on SMS "I will be on SMS". This sentence indirectly intends to convey the head act of refusal "noooo" to mean "be with me on SMS." *A*'s perlocutionary act implicates that he/she understood *B*'s intention of refusal, and thus, justifying that with a promise to call tomorrow.

- Acceptance

A: How are your classes this semester? Hard?

B: Yes. Very hard so far. So I've been hitting the bong really hard

A: I will tell your mother.

B: OMG. I meant books! Hahaha that was so funny

A: suuuuuuure you did :)

B: fucking autocorrect!!!

As evident from the above, *A*'s reduplication of "u" in *suuuuuuure* is employed to emphasize the acceptance of *B*'s justification. Although *B* expressed more extra justifications later, it seems that *A* interpreted *B*'s intention accurately before her justification. Nevertheless, her last message was declared to save face by stating the justification explicitly.

IV.I.II. Whole Word Capitalization and Peculiar Spelling:

Whole word capitalization and peculiar spelling category serves to convey extra pragmatic information such as showing surprise, correction and emphasis, and capturing attention for request. This can be shown in the following excerpts:

- Surprise, Correction and Emphasis:

A: Guess what I found for baby hayley!!

A: Crotchless panties

B: WHAAATTTT?!?!? U want ur 6 mo. Old GRANDDAUGHTER to wear CROTCHLESS PANTIES?!?

A: Oh my gosh, I meant CAMO PANTS …ew, how did that end up as crotchless panties?

B: Ugh, I was about to disown u!! Lol

Both, whole word/phrase capitalization and spelling reduplication in *B*'s usage of WHAAATTTT conveys surprise and/or anger. However, if it were only *what*, it might only indicate asking a question or seeking more clarifications. In contrast, capitalizing *granddaughter & crotchless panties* is employed to draw *A*'s attention to what was just said/written. *A*'s response assures that she interpreted the orthographically peculiar word forms to convey other implicatures, and thus, she re-read her previous sentence again to look for what is going on. After exploring the erroneous autocorrection, she justifies "*oh my gosh, I meant…"* Again, *B* uses capitalization for emphasizing the corrected form of her erroneous words *Camo pants* and drawing a distinction.

- Capturing Attention for Request

A: Girllllll show me your tortoise!!!!

A: TATTOO GOD DAMNIT

A: Hahahaha. That's the best auto correct fail I have ever received

B: And there's pictures in my winter break album on Facebook!

A's intention in duplicating "l" in *girl* stands for calling attention for request. It is used to substitute the intonation in face-to-face interactions. Following that with the capitalized TATTOO, *A* intends to correct the misspelled word *tortoise. B*'s perlocutionary act shows that she understood the plot that *A* intended to say *tattoo* in the first message, which has been auto corrected erroneously. *B* realized the call for request and consequently answered "in my winter break album on Facebook."

IV.I.III. Whole Word/Phrase Capitalization:

Whole word/phrase capitalization is exploited in text-messaging language to function for conveying pragmatic information. It is used, for instance, for exaggeration, confirmation, apology and irony.

- Exaggeration and Confirmation

A: OMFG

B: SO CUTE !!!! < 3

A: IKR !!!!!

B: Oh my god I wanna molest her so bad!!!

B: **MEET stupid autocorrect !!!

A: your never meeting her now….

B's phrase SO CUTE is a response to a child's picture sent by *A. B,* by capitalization, expresses exaggeration of praising the child's picture. *A*'s perlocutionary act, expressed by her response IKR "I know, right", indicates that she interpreted *B*'s message as intended and so of

confirming the notion that the child is so cute. The other form of capitalization in MEET is used as a correction strategy of the erroneously autocorrected word *molest*.

- Apology

A: hey can you get pregnant before you come over today?

B: What.

A: OH MY GOD. I meant to ask if you could get pringles at the grocery store.

A: pringles … the chips … NOT pregnant .. gahhhh

B: omg ahh hahahahaha

A's message OH MY GOD expresses apology by exploiting capitalization to draw *B*'s attention to her erroneous auto correction. Furthermore, the capitalized *not* is intended to emphasize the intended word.

- Irony

A: I'll text yoy when I get home

B: Haha ok babe :)

A: Otaay :)

A: Haha just walking around and there's like 5 dogs following me

B: DON'T LET THEM VIOLATE YOU. RUN

A: Hahahahaha

Capitalization is also employed to express irony, as *B*'s capitalized sentence shows. *A*'s response clarifies that she understood the intended sentence pragmatically and so of her laughter.

IV.II. Quantitative Analysis:

The questionnaire responses were received from 33 participants through Facebook-based survey. It speaks to heavy texters who spend more than seven hours a week chatting with friends

(or others) via instant text messaging. The findings confirm the notion that emoticons usage facilitates expressing the emotional conditions, the intended meaning, and the exchanges of information as well as reducing misunderstanding between communicants. The following, table (1), shows participants' responses to the statements in percentage of *strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), strongly disagree (SD), and disagree (D)*. See Appendix (1) for more details.

Table (1)

No.	Item	SA %	A%	N%	SD%	D %
1	Emoticons facilitate expressing my emotional conditions while texting my friends.	16.22	67.57	10.81	2.70	2.70
2	Emoticons make the atmosphere and tone gentler than only text-based messages	21.62	62.16	8.11	2.70	5.41
3	Emoticons aid the meaning of my text message, instead of additional explanations.	27.03	45.95	21.62	2.70	2.70
4	I feel emotionally engaged when using emoticons during texting my friends.	21.62	40.54	27.03	5.41	5.41
5	Using emoticons contribute to easier communication.	32.43	51.35	8.11	2.70	5.41
6	Using emoticons enhances relationships between communicants.	20.51	41.03	20.51	2.56	15.38
7	It is easier to use emoticons to express my feelings than to write that up.	23.68	42.11	21.05	2.63	10.53
8	Emoticons promote the exchange of information with each other.	10.81	43.24	27.03	2.70	16.22
9	Emoticons reduce misunderstanding when texting my friends.	27.03	40.54	13.51	8.11	10.81

The table above indicates that 83.79% of the participants either agree or strongly agree that emoticon usage facilitates expressing emotional conditions, while 72.98% agree or strongly agree that it aids identifying the contextual meaning of the message. Regarding the emotional engagement with the texter when sending or receiving emoticons, 62.16% agree or strongly agree on that. 83.78% of the participants agree or strongly agree that using such emoticons

contributes to making easier communication and 61.54 agree that it enhances relationships between communicants. Finally and most importantly, 67.57% of the participants agree or strongly agree that emoticons reduce misunderstanding between communicants, whereas 18.92 take the counter side.

V. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the current study authenticates that text-messaging communicants exploit different strategies to get their intentions interpreted. That is to say, they compensate the face-to-face communicative advantages via the technical medium, the text message, through orthography and emoticons. Thus, pragmatic aspects are delivered through orthographically-driven innovations such peculiar spelling and whole word/phrase capitalization or both. Peculiar spelling was found to convey refusal and acceptance. On the other hand, whole word capitalization and peculiar spelling serves to provide surprise, correction and emphasis, and capturing attention for request, while whole word capitalization indicates exaggeration, confirmation, apology and irony. Participants' responses of emoticon usage suggest that texters do benefit from emoticons pragmatically. Supportive meaning as well as easier-to-be-conveyed and interpreted intentions give emoticons a constellation of advantages that texters find indispensable when communicating their goals.

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