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Adopting a Standard Lingo for SMS Texting: A Possibility or a Mirage

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Abstract

Texting is a useful method of communication patronised by individuals and organisations. This paper investigates the possibility of adopting a standard lingo for SMS communication. The study used a survey strategy and a random sampling technique to select 418 students from two tertiary institutions in the Wa Municipality of the Upper West Region, Ghana. The feasibility of a standard lingo for SMS texting community and its ensuing benefit of effective communication were established. Results show broad support for a general and standard SMS lingo, with the implications for social effective discourse and interaction. These results indicate that the texting community will readily accept the language and the fears of people regarding texting will be allayed. Therefore to avert the affective nature of the current situation as well as promoting SMS socialising dimension, development of this contemporary life language should not be delayed further. The study revealed that 45.6% of the respondents use their own abbreviations and short form of words in SMS communication which affect effective SMS communication. Poor network service, difficulty in understanding SMS messages, and drudgery of typing were identified as the leading constraints to SMS communication. Since a significant number of tertiary students are immersed in SMS texting, addressing these hindrances will enhance SMS communication.

1. Introduction

The newest language being formed is the language of texting [25]. Sentences and phrases are now compressed into acronym and symbol forms. SMS messaging is one of the most commonly used methods of mobile communication [27]. It is a quick, cheap, easy and popular communication medium. Short Message Service, text messaging or 'texting' generally refers to the transmission of text between mobile phones. It is a practice of exchanging brief written messages over wireless networks [10], [27] and can be conveniently used in circumstances where voice call is not practical. As a novel medium of communication, many mobile technology users engage in its use with most sending at least three text-messages a day [8]. [5] reports that American teenagers sent and received, on average, 2,272 messages monthly and nearly 80 messages a day. In North America (as of 2006), 40% of cell phone users actively used SMS with Europe having an average of 85%. Globally, in 2000, 17 billion text messages were sent which reached nearly 500 billion in 2004, almost 85 text messages per person [5]. It is estimated that 8 trillion text messages were tapped out in 2012. Even in the advent of phones with e-mail and web capabilities, SMS remains the baseline of mobile digital

communication, and permeates nearly every social group [28] soaring way above any other medium of communication [1]. Zenithsms.com reports that SMS being sent in Ghana are in millions daily [32]. From the statistics cited, it is evident that SMS use is increasingly phenomenal.

1.1. SMS Technologies

1.1.1. SMS Messaging

SMS variously referred to as texting, sending text messages or text messaging is the text communication service component of a mobile phone or mobile communication system that allows the exchange of short text messages of up to 160 characters. It is basically typing and sending a short electronic message between two or more mobile phones, fixed or portable devices over a phone network. Users can also send text messages from a computer to a handheld device. The term originally referred to messages sent using the Short Message Service (SMS). Web texting is made possible by Web sites called SMS gateways. Standard SMS messaging uses at most 140 bytes (1120 bits) of data; so one SMS message can contain up to 160 characters if 7-bit character encoding is used [9], [1]; 70 characters if 16-bit Unicode UCS2 character encoding is used or 224 characters if a 5-bit mode is used. As is characteristic of technologies, there are other forms of text messaging services such as Enhanced Messaging Service (EMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS). Other forms of messaging service are discussed in 1.1.2 and 1.1.3.

1.1.2. Enhanced Messaging Service (EMS)

Enhanced messaging service is an extension of the SMS. It provides SMS with functionalities such as text formatting (bold or italic fonts), limited picture and animation support. This service allows users to send and receive ringtones and combinations of simple media to and from EMS-compliant handsets. If an EMS is sent to a phone that does not support it, the message will be displayed as a standard SMS.

1.1.3. Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS)

Multimedia messaging service type of text messaging is an evolution of the SMS. With a MMS, a message including pictures, video or audio content can be sent to other mobile devices. Most new cell phones with multimedia capabilities support MMS which can contain a lot more information than a typical SMS. MMS messages usually have 1000-character limits in addition to whatever file is being attached [24].

1.2. Uses of SMS Messaging

Texting is a useful method of communication, personally and professionally. Global use of SMS messaging is pervasive and phenomenal [10]. In some countries, SMS lingo is incorporated into school work. Scottish schools are reported to allow the use of SMS expressions in their essay writing preparation by quickly drafting their essay thoughts and ideas onto paper and then switch to Standard English when editing and revising the essay [6]. Students also

translate SMS scripts into Standard English, or translate a classic piece of literature (such as Shakespeare) into SMS language. It is believed that those exercises demonstrate the students' comprehension of the text. SMS messaging is used to access various services such as Google and MSN from portable devices. This mobile facility is also used in group texting to announce memorable occasions to a large number of people at a time, either from a list of contacts or to all the users within a particular area. This service is called broadcasting [1] and is used by companies to contact groups of employees or by online services to distribute news and other information to subscribers. Advertisements have been increasingly influenced by SMS language. SMS messages make advertisements more memorable. Unilever is specifically mentioned to use SMS advertisement to attract teenage girls to buy their novel range of deodorant [22]. It is reported that in Russia 40% of users received advertising via text messages [7]. Mobile news services are expanding with many organisations providing "on-demand" news services by SMS. Some also provide "instant" news pushed out by SMS. Mobile payments were first tried in Finland in 1998 when two Coca-Cola vending machines in Espoo were enabled to work with SMS payments [14].

SMS language can be a useful teaching and learning tool as it could arouse students' interest in the form of communication lesson. Texting is used by a cross-section of people to attend to emergencies. Parents have been reported to find it quick, much more at ease knowing they can text to check on their children if there is an emergency. Students find it much easier to text than to leave class to answer a call [20]. In Ghana, talk shows on radio and television stations allow listeners and viewers to participate in their programmes by sending SMS messages. SMS technology is also used to check on the efficacy of drugs, agricultural products and prices on the Ghanaian market and across Africa [13]. Texting technology is also used in sending election results from polling station to party executives, friends and party faithfuls in Ghana.

1.3. Motivation for Using SMS Messages

Brevity is premium in the world of digital communications. From all indications, it appears SMS messaging will continue to be the dominant and the preferred means of communication for a number of reasons. Among the fertile grounds to opt for SMS messages include the continuous cheaper cost of mobile devices; relatively cheaper cost of SMS messaging and the readily available SMS facility on mobile phones nowadays, as almost every mobile device can send and receive SMS messages. The same cannot be said about the other means of communication such as instant messaging (IM) and Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) or technologies such as Java Micro Edition [1]. For instance, not every cell phone supports WAP. To communicate at a reduced cost, texters find a way of being brief, precise and straight to the point while still getting their message across. Sending and receiving of SMS messages do

not very much disrupt the attention and activities of people unlike a voice call. SMS messages do not experience incessant statements mostly associated with voice call such as “The number you call is switched off” “the number you have dialled cannot be reached at this moment, please call back later”; “the number you called is not answering/ is out of coverage area, please try again later”. “The call party is not reachable”. SMS is a store-and-forward service. Thus, when a texter sends a text message to a recipient, the message does not go directly to the recipient's cell phone. The benefit of this method is that the recipient's cell phone does not have to be active or within a range for you to send a message. The message is stored in the Short Message Service Center (SMSC) for some time if necessary, till the mobile equipment is located within a range or if switched off till it is on, at which point the message is delivered. SMS messages are permanently recorded. Unlike a phone call, an SMS message is automatically stored where it can be re-read. It promised, “Receive Once, Read Always” (RORA), providing no-cost to the recipient. The message will remain stored on the recipient's subscriber identity module (SIM) card until it is deleted. Further, SMS received is much more likely to be read at any point in time within a day, since majority of mobile phone users have their mobile equipment on them at all times of the day. They respond to every sound their phone makes as quickly as they can.

1.4. Texting Statistics of Some Tertiary Institutions in Ghana

Two tertiary educational institutions are involved in this study: (1) Wa Polytechnic and (2) the University for Development Studies; both in the Upper West Region of Ghana.

Wa Polytechnic, like any higher institution of learning in Ghana, has a high mobile phone usage rate among the general population: teaching staff, non-teaching staff and students. Statistics available indicates that 94% of the student population uses mobile phone in general and 13.4% engage in text messaging [10]. These text messages are characterised by abbreviations, acronyms, shortenings and spelling variations. Unlike well developed languages such as English or Spanish which have standard abbreviations and acronyms, the students' SMS messages are hard to pin down to any standard, hence, the difficulty in using this emerging language to effectively communicate among themselves and beyond. Again, because texting is not taught and learned formally, it is assumed that every ‘texter’ develops his or her own abbreviations and acronyms which outcome is not likely to help communicate the intended message always. Even though there is no empirical data on the use of text messages among the students in the University for Development Studies, it is obvious they also use SMS messaging as a means of communication.

2. Problem Statement

In spite of the popularity, pervasiveness and convenience

of SMS text messaging, it has its own challenges too. For instance, does ‘lol’ mean to you ‘laughing out loud’, ‘lots of love’, or ‘little old lady’? This is the incessant problem posed by the current SMS lingo to their recipients. As a result of uncontrolled abbreviations and acronyms, most ‘texters’ cannot, over a period, read, interpret, or comprehend what they themselves have sent. Parents find it difficult to read their wards’ text messages. What most of the recipients of text messages re-echo is “I see, I can’t read, I read I don’t understand” and for the texter “I do, I don’t remember”. For the recipients, it is like illegible handwriting as most SMS messages contain numerous emoticons, obscure abbreviations and acronyms, often to the point that they are indecipherable to the recipient who cannot make meaning out of them.

Another identifiable worry prompting this study is lack of standard rules in the creation and usage of SMS language. Researchers have shown that textism is imbibed with such non-conventional spellings (e.g. *fone/phone*) and shortenings (e. g. *goin/going*) as well as nonstandard forms often to the point that they are indecipherable to the uninitiated [15].

Some text messages just leave people all confused as they contain non-conventional spellings. SMS language contains shortcuts and symbols and any word may be shortened without reckon to any standard or convention which eventually results in misconception. Equally, a section of people express fears that the use of unbridled abbreviations could undermine children's literacy [17].

Further, the SMS lingo is being developed haphazardly by individual or group-initiated abbreviations, acronyms, shortcuts and symbols. Thus, everyone is creating SMS messages everyday and inadvertently contributing to SMS lingo development to different spellings of same word: *bc0z*, *becos*, *becz* [2]. Is that the best way to develop this latest ‘techno-cultural’ language? Attempts have been made to explain text messages in standard language; however, the explanations are fraught with inaccuracies. This study will investigate the preceding issues and move further to find out the challenges which confront the senders and recipients of text messages. Finally, it will explore the various ways through which this mobile cultural phenomenon language [30] could be harnessed to enhance effective communication.

2.1. Objectives

This study is aimed at:

- i. establishing the source of texters' SMS lingo;
- ii. investigating the impact of non-conventional SMS on communication;
- iii. finding the challenges which confront texters as they communicate through SMS lingo and
- iv. establish the possibility of a standard SMS lingo for the mainstream texting community.

2.2. Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it could provide insights into the impact of SMS lingo on communication and provide

empirical data on the source of SMS messages. Further, it adds to knowledge by providing basis for future studies on how to address some of the challenges inherent in textism.

3. Conceptual Framework

Since SMS telephony was developed in 1984 by the trio, Friedhelm Hillebrand, Bernard Ghillebaert and Oculy Silaban and first used by Neil Papworth in 1992 to send a message from a computer to a mobile phone [6]; [14], texting has become a global mobile cultural phenomenon. Mobile phone subscribers have accepted the new technology with groundswell interest with the first mobile phone to mobile phone SMS text message sent in Finland in 1993 [6]. In June 1993, Brennan Hayden, an engineer in Irish wireless company, Aldiscon, sent the first commercial text message in Los Angeles to signify the birth of a new form of communications [29]. Since then, SMS messaging has become an integral part of the lives of mobile equipment users, the much preferred means of using the mobile phone to communicate and a popular means of communication [14], as it is simple, ubiquitous, easy to use and cost-effective [29]. World renowned linguist and prolific writers such as David Crystal have tried to look at the phenomenon of text-messaging and consider its effects on literacy, language, and society. They try to give education on the interpretation of the mixture of pictograms, logograms, abbreviations, symbols, and wordplay typically used in texting [11].

3.1. The SMS Concept

Texting is the latest technological manifestation of the human ability to be linguistically creative and to adapt language to suit the demands of diverse settings [14]. The advent of mobile phones gave birth to SMS as a method of communication. Initially supported by GSM networks, SMS was made available in all digital networks with the first machine-generated SMS message sent in the UK on 3 December 1992. Subsequently in 1993, a person-to-person SMS was sent in Finland. The prepaid services in the late 1990s made SMS the communication method of choice amongst the young, a trend which spread across all ages.

3.2. Characterisation of SMS Messages

SMS messaging like telegraphs involves the use of abbreviations and attract charges based on number of characters/words sent. SMS language is widely used for brevity and is characterised by acronyms, abbreviations, reductions and shortenings, omission of parts of speech, and variations in spelling. Renowned writers such as Crispin Thurlow, López Rúa and David Crystal proposed some marked characteristics of SMS language. Their propositions indicate that SMS are markedly characterised by initialisations represented as acronyms and abbreviations where a number of words and phrases are represented by more than one abbreviation. They observed that 'lol' could mean laugh out loud, lots of love, or little old lady. Again,

words with no common abbreviations have their vowels expunged with determiners such as 'a', 'the', etc. omitted in order to conserve time and space. Generally, there is conspicuous absence of vowels and punctuation marks in SMS language and messages. However, according to David Crystal apostrophes occur unusually frequently [11].

Statistics indicates that Norwegian sampled texts contained 6% abbreviated words [15]. American texting corpus recorded less than 5%, but textism is relatively high in English Language than any other language [15]. They also reported that in Wales, SMS messages are abbreviated (19%) of message content.

Farina and Fiona's [15] study summarised the feature of SMS texting as:

Text language makes use of emoticons (:-)), typographic symbols (xxx), acronyms (BBC), initialisms (lol), letter/number homophones (l&), shortenings (tues), contractions (wknd), gclippings (goin), other clippings (hav), non-conventional spellings (fone) and accent stylizations (gonna). Additionally, onomatopoeic spellings (woohoo), omitted apostrophes (cant), and hybrids (two or more of the above) are found. (p. 148).

3.3. Source of Texters' SMS Lingo

Texting is a written lingua franca of many youth today [31] even though it is yet to be recognized as a standard language. For now, there is no formal source for SMS lingo. Therefore, SMS messages interpretation is purely based on experience. SMS lingo, words and phrases used are hardly found in standard dictionaries. As an emerging language, SMS language is yet to have a globally acclaimed dictionary for quick reference, decoding and interpretation. Vodacom as a service provider is reported to give SMS dictionary to its clients as a supplement to their cellphone purchase. Also, the Oxford English Dictionary is reported to include technology lingo in which initialisms such as OMG (oh my God), LOL (laughing out loud), FYI (for your information), TMI (too much information), IMHO (in my humble opinion) and BFF (best friends forever) have been formally added. Preliminary investigation identified two sources of text messages: user-developed abbreviations and those copied from friends or relatives. This means that with the current state of SMS lingo, sender's and recipient's construction and interpretation of the text messages depends mainly on creativity and imagination.

3.4. Impact of Non-Conventional SMS Messages on Communication

SMS has changed the way people use language to communicate. Its usage involves typing on the keyboard and since typing is much slower, the length of typed messages is kept short and space-saving strategies become imperative. The use of abbreviations is one way in which time and space can be saved in the SMS communication, commonly involving acronyms, initialisms, symbols, and shortening of words. In this type of communication, voice is replaced by

the use of creative adaptation of spelling, punctuation and capitalisation [16]. Language as a functional tool can be used formally or informally in communicating, be it speaking or writing. Writing tends to be more formal as there is more conscious manipulation of vocabulary and syntax [16]. Informal use of language can be realised in slang, which is used by young people, coequals and by groups of people with special interests [16]. Because SMS lingo is markedly characterised by acronyms, abbreviations, reductions and shortenings, omission of parts of speech, and variations in spelling, it is better understood by making conscious effort to learn its nitty-gritty, which is lacking for now; hence, the difficulty in fathoming SMS message content which has ultimate ominous repercussions on communication. The fact that one acronym or initialisation could have more than one meaning indicates the conspicuous absence of SMS lingo standard which does not auger well, for now, the use of SMS lingo in effective communication.

It is the belief of a section of English users that text messaging is detrimental to the linguistic development of developing young people and eventually will corrupt the standard form of English language as a language of communication. John Humphrys, a Welsh journalist and television reporter cites ambiguity as one problem associated with SMS language. Further, SMS lingo words that are similar to Standard English words are a source of confusion to English users in terms of spelling and will most likely increase the prevalence of spelling mistakes which can possibly impact negatively on communication. Writing and sending information using SMS lingo through mobile phone though quicker, is harder to decipher and comprehend [26].

4. Methodology

This study used a survey strategy and a random sampling technique was employed to select 418 students from two tertiary institutions in the Wa Municipality of the Upper West Region of Ghana: 1) Wa Polytechnic and 2) University for Development Studies (Wa Campus).

Data was collected using self-administered questionnaire, which was pre-tested with students from Wa Polytechnic who use SMS messaging to communicate. The students were selected using simple random sampling of picking YES or NO written on pieces of paper, put into a container and mixed thoroughly. Those who picked YES were selected to participate in the pre-testing and the necessary modifications were made after the pre-testing.

Two final year students were selected and trained to assist in administering the questionnaire to the respondents. The study was explained to the respondents and they were asked not to indicate their names on the questionnaire to assure anonymity. Out of the 450 questionnaire administered, 418 were retrieved (response rate of 92.9%). The data was prepared for tabular and graphical presentation, analysis and interpretation. The processing and analysis of the data were done using Microsoft Office Excel 2007 software application.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1. Background Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 indicates the gender and age of the respondents. Majority (73%) were between 18 -25 years; male (70.1%), and female (29.9%). The high youth percentage affirms Kamran's claim that majority of the youth are extremely high users and fond of texting [21]. The age variety and the gender composition indicate that SMS digital communication permeates every social group [28].

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	(N=418)	
18-25	305	73.0
26-35	98	23.4
36-45	9	2.2
≥ 46	6	1.4
Total	418	100.0
Sex		
Female	125	29.9
Male	293	70.1
Total	418	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

5.2. Reasons for Using Text Messages in Communicating

Respondents' reasons for using SMS in communicating range from low cost (51.9%) to fashion (1.2%) (Table 2). Low cost is the strongest reason for using SMS texting because it is relatively cheaper than voice call. Further, it is the reflection of the economic stature of the region and by extension the country as a developing nation. Convenience recorded the second highest (26.8%) because it is most appropriate to use during lectures. Respondents prefer SMS texting during lectures to leaving the lecture hall or theatre to make voice call [20]. Further, it is convenient to use SMS texting at a noisy environment where voice call may not be possible. Reliability was cited as a reason for using SMS (10.8%). As a store-and-forward service, SMS communication does not require the recipient's device to be active, available, or within range. It is one of the surest means for communicating as correspondents are sure that their messages will be delivered. Another category (9.3%) of respondents indicates they use SMS when they want evidence of their correspondence and do not want to waste time talking to their correspondents. Fashion trails the reasons with (1.2%) because mobile phone and its services nowadays are a necessity and not a 'fashionable' device.

Table 2. Respondents' reasons for using SMS texting.

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Low Cost	217	51.9
Convenience	112	26.8
Reliability	45	10.8
Fashion	5	1.2
Others	39	9.3

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

5.3. Sources of Respondents Text Messages

The source of respondents' text messages is presented in Figure 1 with the respondents creating their own messages leading with 191 (45.6%). Having over 45% creating and using their own text messages indicates the linguistic creativity of the texting community and their adaptation to language to suit the demands of diverse settings [14]. Though this development depicts the uniqueness in the use of the mobile device and for that matter, SMS text messaging, it does not auger well for effective communication. The trend has the potential to affect effective communication as these individually crafted messages, with no regard to standard, are used for collaboration and social discourse. A total of 160 respondents, representing 38.3% source their friends' text messages lingo words for communication. The adoption of friends' SMS by this percentage indicates a sense of belonging and affinity in the texting community. The acceptance of friend's text messages and subsequently using them is an indication that the texters understand themselves, hence promoting effective communication among them as these text messages received are understood by the recipients. One important concept being projected by adopting other people's SMS messages lingo is reusability. This is where parts of a code can be re-used in other related environment, which is one important attribute of technology. This concept brings about efficiency. The internet was also identified as a source of SMS messages (13.9%). The low percentage (2.2%) recorded for using the dictionary as a source is attributed to the absence of a standard dictionary for quick reference and decoding of SMS messages [22].

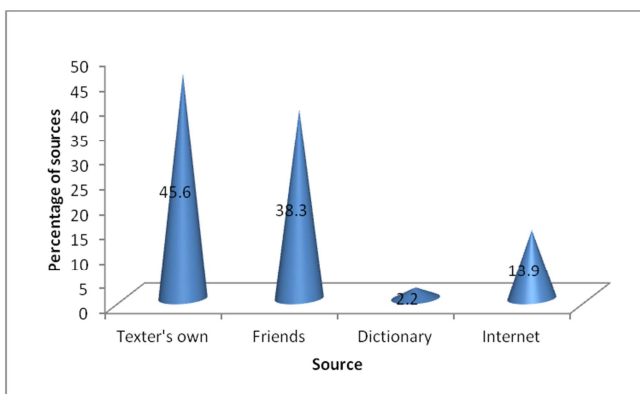


Figure 1. Sources of respondents' SMS messages.

5.4. Impact of Non-Conventional SMS Texting on Communication

Figure 2 indicates that 87.5% of respondents understand the messages received. This lofty percentage corroborates Kamran's claim that the youth do most of the mobile phones communications within their age group [21]. Similarly, the revelation adds credence to Nantel and Sekhavat's [23] assertion that the adoption of text messaging translates into a sense of belonging. Some respondents indicated that they are "boys boys" and therefore understand the messages sent and received. "Boys boys" reasonably infers a sense of belonging

which is a characteristic indication of the text generation. As a proof, in response to a question: "How do you know your recipients understand your text messages?" "siple b'c after receiving d msg he tnx me for th@". This is interpreted as "It is simple, after receiving the message, he thanks me for that". It should be noted that the rest of the society, which is larger, may have difficulty, which does not auger well for effective SMS communication. 12.5% of the respondents have difficulty in understanding text messages. This percentage plus the rest of the society [23] is too high to adversely affect effective SMS communication.

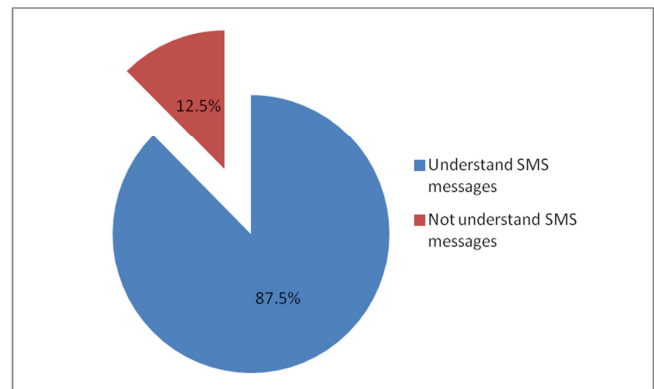


Figure 2. Impact of non-conventional SMS texting on communication.

Figure 3 presents the challenges that students face as they use SMS in communicating. Their major challenge, poor network (28.2%) depicts the inability of the service providers to constantly provide reliable and efficient service to their customers. Figure 3 indicates that 22.2% of the respondents misconstrue SMS messages. This category has problems in understanding SMS messages. The relatively high number of respondents in this category is a reflection of the fact that majority (45.6%) of the texters create and use their own abbreviations and short forms of words without recourse to any standard. They use unbridled abbreviations [17], different spellings of same word [2], non-conventional spellings, nonstandard forms which is indecipherable to the uninitiated [15]. The cost category trails with 1.4% of the respondents. This percentage is low because texting as compared to voice call is cost-effective [29].

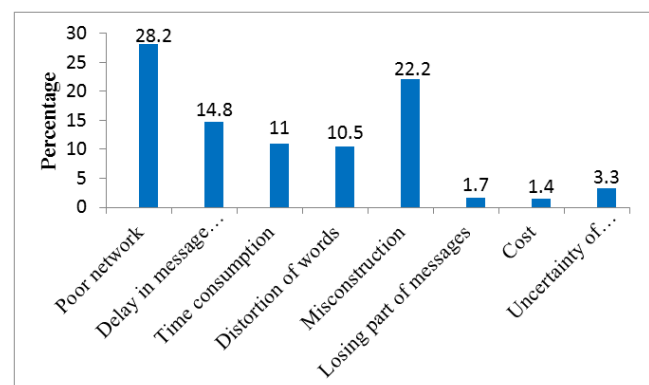


Figure 3. Texters' challenges in using SMS texting to communicate.

5.5. Improving SMS Texting Communication

Figure 4 shows the suggestions of respondents on how to use SMS messages for effective communication. A total of 62.7% cited a standard SMS lingo for texting. This relatively high percentage affirms the need for standardization of SMS messaging. A standard SMS language will promote effective communication as individual or groups initiated unbridled abbreviations, pictograms, logograms, symbols, and wordplay [11]; [17] will give way to universality to ensure effective and harmonious communication. Over 29 percent of the respondents said that reliable network service is desirable for effective SMS communication. Another equally important factor is the device architecture. The arrangement of the characters on the keyboard, as a hindrance to effective communication was identified by 3.8% of the respondents. They suggested that the characters should be made readily accessible to facilitate faster typing. Reduction in cost as one way of promoting effective SMS communication is minuscule (0.7%) because SMS messaging is cheaper than voice call. The dramatic fall from 6 as a challenge to 3 as way to improve SMS communication indicates that cost is not a major challenge to SMS effective communication. "Voice texting" was mentioned as one other way to promote effective communication as respondents have problem in deciphering text messages received. They suggested that if the text is translated into voice at the receiving end, it would enhance or achieve effective communication as the recipient can make use of both sight (reading) and hearing senses in decoding text messages. The minuscule percentage (0.5%) of "voice texting" indicates that the technology does not currently exist.

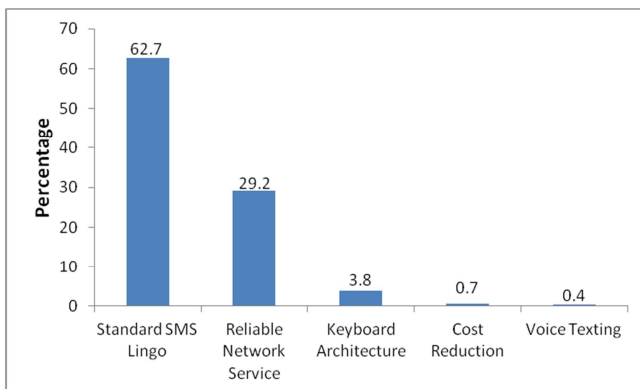


Figure 4. Improving SMS texting communication.

5.6. The Need for Standard SMS Lingo

In response to the need for a standard language for SMS texting, 251 (60.1%) of the respondents, welcome the idea that it will make communication simple, easy, effective and eliminate communication barriers. Messages of the texting community will do away with ambiguity and recipients will hardly rely on guessing the meanings of text messages or requesting senders to re-send messages. The relatively high percentage associated with the importance of a standard SMS language is an indication that texters will accept, adapt and

adopt such a language which will bring about universality and uniformity in SMS communication and bring to finality the issue of ambiguity. Standard SMS lingo will bring about documentation of the language which will serve as a reference for the texting community. One language deemed threatened and could easily be "corrupted" in the absence of SMS standard lingo is the English language as bemoaned by Humphrys, "how texting is ruining our language" [19]. The introduction of a standard SMS lingo will save the English language and allay the fears of many that, texting could undermine children's literacy [17]. A total of 156 of the respondents (37.3%) indicated that there is no need for a standard SMS lingo. They argued that mobile phone is a personal device and its usage should not be restricted. As they put it "people should be allowed to feel free with their mobile devices". They argued that SMS messages are secret documents. Sometimes SMS messaging is used for privacy and confidential purposes. This assertion corroborates [23] that adolescents communicate with their peers without their parents' knowledge. SMS texting promotes creativity, dynamism and individual differences. The introduction of a standard language for SMS texting could pose information security risk. Only 11 of the respondents, representing 2.6% did not respond to the question posed.

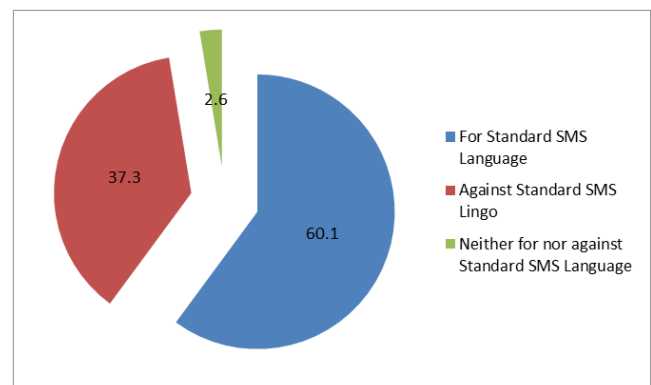


Figure 5. The need for standard SMS Language.

6. Conclusion

This study identified possible success in adopting a standard SMS lingo for effective communication. A survey design was used to measure the readiness of the texting community to accept a new language for texting purposes. The analysis indicates a broad support for the birth of a techno-cultural language as echoed by 62.7% of the respondents. The adoption of a standard SMS lingo will bring about universality and uniformity in the use of SMS texting as a method of communication and bring to finality ambiguity, a major problem associated with SMS language [19]. Documentation of text language will serve as a reference for the texting community. Not only will the introduction of this language promote communication; but do away with mix-feelings and despondencies among users of Standard English [17] the most endangered language. Non availability of a standard language for SMS texting will

adversely affect communication using SMS as texters will resort to haphazard means of creating and using their own SMS messages [14], damaging the originality of some languages. This study therefore provides the first step towards standardized SMS lingo implementation. The major challenge confronting SMS texters is poor network service. It is recommended that service providers ensure network availability, reliability and stability to facilitate effective communication. The study was conducted in two tertiary institutions in the Wa Municipality of Ghana and its findings have limited global applicability. Therefore there is the need for further research in this area to cover larger part of the texting community so as to have diverse perspectives that will lead to a generalized conclusion.

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