A STUDY ON LANGUAGE STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE USE OF SHORT MESSAGE SERVICE (SMS) IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Short Message Service (SMS) is a text messaging service component of phone, web, or mobile communication systems, using standardized communications protocols that allow the exchange of short text messages between fixed line or mobile phone devices.

SMS text messaging is the most widely used data application in the world, with 3.6 billion active users, or 78% of all mobile phone subscribers. The term SMS is used as a synonym for all types of short text messaging as well as the user activity itself in many parts of the world. These are used not only in the Mobile communication devices but also with various chat engines on the internet, like Gtalk, Skype, Yahoo messenger, Whatsapp messenger, Facebook chat etc.

Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to analyse the linguistic variations that has taken place to the English language with the trend of SMS related to Mobile phone messages and other chat engine texting formats. Further, it aims to analyse the language use of the SMS with special reference to English.

Data for study

An attempt is made in the present study to analyse the language of electronic medium as used by the non-native speakers of English, especially Indians. The language of electronic medium is dealt with respect to its grammatical features, lexical features, discourse features, punctuation and other miscellaneous features. The text in the data has been created by people of different age, sex, profession and states of India whose mother tongue is not English. Though age group has not been considered while collecting data, 80% of the messages are

created by those who are below the age of 25. Majority of them are college students. An analysis of earlier studies showed that there is a need for a detailed study of the language used by non-native speakers on English on electronic medium. So, use of English on this medium by Indians has been considered for study.

Collection of Data

For the purpose data has been collected from four sources.

They are:

- ❖ E mails (Electronic Mails)
- ❖ Synchronous Chats of Social Networking sites
- ❖ Messages from various Chat engines.
- ❖ SMS (Short Messaging Service)

SMS on mobile phones include personal conversations, forwarded messages and promotional advertisements sent in SMS form. More than a 1000 SMS were observed and 145 distinctive ones have been chosen for study.

Collected data was studied separately based on the source of the message. Any deviation from regular language was noted down on individual cards. Any feature that is not used in written language is considered as a deviation here. They were later divided into different classes. They were grammatical features, Abbreviations, Re-spellings, Mistakes and other miscellaneous features. Grammatical deviations were further classified into omissions, substitutions and interjections. Abbreviations and re-spellings were studied based on the mode of changing or shortening of the regular spelling.

The messages which were expressed completely in any non-English language but with transliterated English script were not considered in the study as only e-English has been taken up here, while the cases of code mixing are dealt with under discourse features.

Methodology used

The methodology used for the present study can be termed under the qualitative approach. A qualitative analysis on the collected data was done to understand the deviation from the standard form of English. Though its Indian English that is followed, the deviations from the standard form that now seems to be taking the main form of existence has be found through various linguistic analysis regarding the type and manner the words have been mutilated and used. For the study, initially the required data was collected and then sorted according to the already framed categories for easier analysis. The sorted data was analysed as to how it has deviated from the standard usage of the language.

Data Analysis

Language structure and language use of English SMS

1. Omission

The elements omitted from different kinds of sentences are illustrated below

1.1 Subject of a declarative sentence

1. am fine. What about u?

I am fine. What about you?

The first person singular subject 'I' is omitted

1.2 **BE verb from progressive tense form of a declarative sentence**

2. all my calculations goin wrong

All my calculations are going wrong.

The BE verb 'are' is omitted before the verb form 'going'

1.3 The operator verb DO from an interrogative sentence

3. hw u know me?

How do you know me?

4. i know wat abt them?

What do i know about them?

The operator DO is omitted before the subject 'you' in (3.) and before the subject I in (4.) with a change of place of 'wh-' interrogative.

1.4 Subject + BE verb

5. there?

Are you there?

6. at kals.

I am at Kalveerampalayam.

The BE verb 'are' and subject 'you' are omitted in yes/no interrogative in (5.) The subject 'I' and BE verb 'am' are omitted in the declarative sentence with prepositional phrase as predicate in (6.)

1.5 Pronoun + BE verb

7. great

That is great

The pronoun 'that' and BE verb 'is' omitted.

1.6. Existential 'there' + BE verb in a declarative negative sentence

8. no facilities

There are no facilities.

The existential 'there' in the subject position with BE verb 'are', which is a part of the adjectival negative predicate, are omitted.

1.7. BE verb + subject and preposition with noun of the predicate in yes/no interrogative

9. still?

Are you still in home?

The BE verb 'are', the subject 'you', the preposition 'in' and the noun 'home' of the predicate are omitted in yes/no interrogative.

1.8. The 'wh-' interrogative sentence

10. i'm fine and u…

I am fine, what about you?

The 'wh-' interrogative sentence 'what about you' is omitted and it is indicated by the use of three dots after the sentence connector 'you'.

2. Substitution

There are a few instances where two or more elements in a sentence are replaced by one different word to convey the same meaning.

2.1. First person singular nominative form and BE verb with first person objective pronoun

11. me fine…

I am fine.

'I' and the BE verb 'am' are replaced by 'me'.

2.2. Sentence is replaced with –ING form of a verb derived from a proper noun from within the sentence.

12. chatting?

Are you chatting through the website?

The proper noun chat is converted into a verb by adding '-ING' and the entire sentence is replaced by it.

2.3 BE verb 'are' with 'is'

13. Howz you?

How are you?

Instead of the BE verb 'are' which goes with the second person subject in present BE of the third person singular is used in its phonetic form/z/. This is not a mere slip but is found at many places in e-English.

3. Lexical Features

Lexical features like abbreviations, acronyms and English transliteration of regional language have come to be considered synonymous with e-language. They may not be the latest developments happened exclusively due to texting. But their usage has been extended and their volume is growing a lot due to e-English. The non-native speakers of English are introduced to the shortening more due to SMS than the practiced abbreviations. Technology and medium of communication surely have their part in the metamorphosis of language. Those who are good at spoken English and not so good at written English, especially spellings, are not hesitant to use a spelling they have created for themselves, by looking at which the actual intended word can be guessed. They are youngsters, they rebel against the existing form of spelling, their IT related professions, their pace-driven changed life style all have contributed to the new form of English used on electronic medium.

This chapter deals with the various lexical features of e-English. They are abbreviations, respellings, native colloquial usage and use of special characters at the place of alphabet.

3.1. Abbreviations

It is observed that the abbreviations in e-English have taken place in ways.

3.1.1. Phonetic contractions

There are instances of abbreviations happening by using a spelling which is perfectly or nearly a phonetic representation of different syllables.

3.1.1.1. Clubbing of two words to make one unit which sounds similar

14. tnq   =>   Thank you

'tn' is representing 'than-' and 'q' is representing '- k you'.

3.1.1.2. Partial representation of the word with required sound

15. coz   =>   because

Only the stressed syllable of the word 'cause' as 'coz' is representing 'because'.

16. z   =>   is

The only consonant sound of the word 'is' is 'z', it is representing the word.

3.1.1.3. Phonetic transcription where 'h' is mute

17. wen   =>   when

18. wat   =>   what

In 17 and 18, 'h' is mute in 'when' and 'what'. So, wen/is the exact phonetic transcription, while 'what' has a near transcription.

3.1.1.4. Near phonetic representation of a part using a number

19. 9t   =>   night

20. 5n   =>   fine

21. 2ng   =>   doing

In 19 and 20, the final consonant sounds of '9' and '5' (/n/ and /v/) are ignored in formatting short forms of 'night' and 'fine'. In 21 voiceless/t/ is representing voiced/d/.

3.1.1.5 Partial word in number form

22. some 1   =>   someone

23. no 1   =>   no one

In 22 and 23, 'one' is put in figures.

3.1.1.6. A number with one or more letters to represent a different word together

24. b4   =>   before

25. gr8 => great

In 24 'b' is representing 'be' and '4' is representing 'fore' while in 25, /-eIt/ of 'great' is represented by '8' which has exactly the same pronunciation.

3.1.1.7. Single letters whose pronunciations is same as some word

26. u => you

27. y => why

28. b => be

In 26,27 and 28 'you', 'why' and 'be' are represented by the alphabet 'u', 'y' and 'be' respectively, which exactly have the same pronunciations.

3.1.1.8. Single numbers whose pronunciation is nearly same as another word

29. 2 => to

30. 4 => for

The pronunciations of '2' and 'to' and '4' and 'for' match exactly in their pronunciation are seen in 29 and 30.

3.1.2 Omissions

There are instances of omitting some letters in the middle of the word

3.1.2.1. Omitting all the other letters retaining first, last and any one letter in the middle

31. abt => about

32. amt => amount

33. gng => going

In 31,32 and 33 the fist letters 'a', 'a', 'g' and final letters 't', 't', 'g' is retained along with middle letters 'b', 'm', 'n'. The other letters are omitted.

3.1.2.2. Omitting all the other letters retaining first, last and two letters in the middle

34. opin => opinion

35. rgds => regards

In 34, the first letter 'o', the last letter 'n' and from the middle 'pi' are taken to abbreviate the word 'opinion', whereas in 35, first letter 'r' and last letter 's' and from the middle 'gd' is taken to abbreviate 'regards'.

3.1.2.3. Omitting all the letters except the letters representing consonant sounds

36. gdnt => goodnight

37. msg => message

In 36, in the pronunciation of 'goodnight' /gudnait/ the consonants are only used to represent the word, while in 37, /m/,/s/ and 'g' which is one of the letters representing /dz/ are used to represent 'message'.

3.1.3. Initializations:

There are instances of using only the first letters to represent a word

3.1.3.1. Only first letter of a part of a word which is made up of two different parts

38. y.day => yesterday

In 38, the prefix 'yester' is represented by the first letter 'y', the rest of the word is retained.

3.1.3.2. Using first letters of both the words which means the main word together

39. ASAP => As Soon As Possible

40. GF => Girlfriend

In 39, 'A', 'S', 'A' and 'P' the initials of 'As Soon As Possible' are used to represent the place. In 40, 'g' of 'girl' and 'f' of friend are taken to represent 'girlfriend'.

3.1.3.3. There are instances of shortening a whole phrase/sentence by using both phonetic features along with initialization.

41. Wru => where are you

42. Bfn => Bye for now

In 41, the initial of the first word 'where' is used along with 'r' and 'u' to represent 'are' and 'you' respectively. But 'wru' is used as a single word in the sentence.

In 42, the initial of the first word 'Bye' is used along with 'f' and 'n' to represent 'for' and 'now' respectively but 'Bfn' is used in single word in the sentence.

Findings of this research

Various features of e-English have been analysed and discussed in the current study. Apparently, the deviations in e-English are noteworthy. The creativity of the e-communicators in bringing out the change to the regular language is noticed at every stage. The shortening of the sentences, words or the whole discourse are not happening due to mere

lethargy or ignorance of the users. The communicators are not completely ignorant of the rules but the electronic medium has given them a chance to try out their own spelling and sentence structures without minding the traditional rules. There is less of bewilderment of confusion at the new or wrong expression and the communication has been carried on successfully. There was negligible ambiguity in the expressions. Ellipsis of auxiliary verbs was found but not the main verb.

Abbreviations of the words have become synonymous with e-English. It is an obvious feature of the language of this medium. Individuals of earlier generation certainly find it difficult to decipher the words quickly. But a close look and repeated occurrence makes a short form familiar. It is significant to note that more than thirty ways of creating an alternative spelling for existing words are attempted by the e-English users.

The overuse of punctuation marks is found a lot in e-English. It is comparatively more in the computer mediated communication than mobile phones. It is easy to do it with the computer keyboard. The users overuse some of the symbol sometimes when they want to emphasize a feeling. More dots are used to show the thinking time or to shift topic.

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