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***Texting and Digital Communication:  
Effects on Students' Behaviour***

Extended Essay submitted to the Department of English  
as a partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the **Master's Degree in Language Studies**

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## **Statement of Originality**

We, Ms. Djamila BENDAHMANE and Ms. Imane BENSARI,

declare that this Master's dissertation in *Language Studies* entitled

***Texting and Digital Communication: Effects on Students' Behaviour***

is the result of our own work containing literature review on the topic and original fieldwork. It includes nothing that has been submitted elsewhere except where specifically pointed out. All information included in this dissertation has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct fully referencing all material and results that are not original to our research work.

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Tlemcen University, June 2018

## *DEDICATIONS*

*from Miss Djâmila BENDAHMANE*

*I dedicate this research to the persons who mean the world to me, my parents, who gave me the right atmosphere to complete my work and supported me emotionally and financially.*

*I would also like to dedicate the fruit of my success to my beloved sisters and brothers and to Cerine, the sweetest niece in the world, 'my little girl' as I like to call her.*

*Without forgetting all my close friends who were good companions to me, a particular dedication goes to Imane, my dearest friend and my partner in this work.*

.....*Djâmila*

*from Miss Imâne BENSARI*

*This humble study is wholeheartedly dedicated to my beloved parents who have been my source of inspiration and given me strength when I thought of giving up; they have continually provided me with their moral, spiritual, emotional, and financial support. I also dedicate this work to my brother, sisters, nephews, nieces, relatives, my closest friends (Téma, Souhila ,Meriem and Mimi Boukli) who have always been there for me, my sweetest friend Djâmila who has always shared words of advice and encouragement during all these five years at the university, and finally to the one and only best friend Inès Benzerdjeb who has always been my greatest inspiration .*

.....*Imane*

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## **Abstract**

The present research work stems from the observation of the omnipresent use of the mobile phone and texting, and the Internet and digital communication among today's young people around the world. In order to check the effects of these practices, we have conducted an investigation of a sample population consisting of students from the Department of English in Tlemcen University. An on-line questionnaire administered to 130 students revealed interesting results, mostly quantitative data that we analysed to check the extent to which text messaging is used and its impact on the youth's linguistic behaviour. A qualitative approach is also used, particularly by analyzing an interview with a number of young adults on the one hand and an overall observation of real samples of texting and messaging conversations. The results show that there are indeed some effects on students' linguistic practices, though slightly visible in their academic writings, and on young people's social behaviour in terms of their virtual relations with others.

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## General introduction

Text messaging has become so widespread worldwide today, used as a common means of communication, that writing letters to be posted and sending post-cards are rarely used and often seen as out-of-date and obsolete behaviour. The invention of the telephone and soon later the cell phone has indeed transformed the world of communication from writing to texting.

Writing is the secondary means of human communication as it interprets language in a set of visible manuscripts and marks. It does not symbolize the language but it is a means that allows the languages to be read. It is a major process that should be mastered after speech by human beings. Writing has evolved over time, from images and encrypted codes that were difficult to read, to scripts and alphabets which are handled and mastered today by every educated person.

But with the emergence of the dawn of modernity and globalization, the world has changed through the development of various devices that allowed writing to break distances, from the Telex down to the smart-phone and other devices. This change naturally includes forms of writing and the way language is expressed. Writing has changed for many, leaping from paper to digitization, and quickly resulting in what is called *cyberlanguage*, *netspeak* or *texting*. On the way to return to the first set of symbols, abbreviations and images that are not easy for readers to understand, which led to the appearance of a set of dictionaries of texting language.

Nowadays, with the development of telephone processes and the rise of technologies and most importantly the internet, texting language or netspeak has become a widely used means of communication among people, in particular with the availability of cellphones and smartphones for everybody and everywhere.

In this research, we intend to study the way young students use texting in everyday settings and how such practices impact their linguistic and social behaviour. It is interesting to go over developments of writing through history until it became what it is now, covering the background of texting and the circumstances of its inception.

This research also provides a summary of the most important features of text messaging based on the use of text messages by the community. We also aim to link this research with different linguistic and sociolinguistic phenomena and study the results of each phenomenon.

In order to collect significant data about texting and computer-mediated communication, two research tools have been used in this investigation:

- a questionnaire was submitted on-line to a number of students at the department of English, Tlemcen University;
- an interview was carried out with four respondents.

As Algerian citizens in general and EFL learners in particular are multilingual, we intend to investigate the use of texting and messaging in their shortened forms and in the different languages available as well as their mixing. Our practical research is based on the study of the effects of texting on EFL students from our department of English, but we also proceed a broad observation on various Internet users, more precisely social media users. The aim behind the use of all these platforms is to look for answers to a few questions, formulated as follows:

1. To what extent do student use texting and for what purposes?
2. How does texting affect language use?
3. What effects does digital communication have on texters' behaviour?

It has been shown that the youth category in today's societies is the most often involved in texting and other forms of digital communication as well as web surfing. This category includes university students, perhaps more than other youth and teenagers, because of their numerous relationships, social ties and the desire to discover the world and communicate continuously via various virtual networks. We thus put forward the following hypotheses:

1. The young adults are affected by texting, as a result of spending a lot of time in a virtual world where the language of communication is texting. We also hypothesize that they use texting instead of formal languages, so as not

to waste time and not to exceed the required size, some virtual sites, as for phones, limit the number of characters.

2. Given the excessive use of texting among students and other categories of the society, we hypothesize the appearance of so many word forms and ways of writing, since the purpose of texting is mainly to gain time and sometimes to respect the limit of message length. One effect is obviously on the texters' writing capacities and grammar rules.

3. Another hypothesis we put forth lies in the texters' social virtual relations which might have both positive and negative impacts on their behaviour.

Our work consists of three chapters, each one discusses different headings but the content is linked and integrated. In the first chapter, our objective is to present a historical view about texting and its inception circumstances; we bring together writing and writing systems since texting is a writing style and at the same time a way of communication. In this part we also point out the association of writing with technology, as a tool for exchanging information by sending short texts containing symbols, to be combined in the first place with the commercial field through the emergence of telex and telegraph. In addition to the gradual evolution of texting, a new kind of interaction and how humankind has moved from face-to-face communication to digital contact over the availability of virtual applications where the writing boards exist as a tool of expressing feelings and opinions by writing as if they were speaking.

In the second chapter we focus on the various factors that have influenced texting and in turn affected by the phenomenon of text messages, such as social networks, which are a gateway to openness more on different types of digital text messaging, we consider to study the linguistic features of texting. In addition to the study of the convergence between text messages and some social factors such as age and gender, sociolinguistic phenomena, code switching in particular, and the use of different scripts to write Arabic. We finish the study with a part to negotiate the negative and positive aspects of texting and its impact on literacy, society, etc.

The third chapter is the practical part of our research. In order to obtain objective, logical and trustworthy data about the field of interest, we have used the two different methods mentioned above: an online questionnaire and an interview whose data are analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. To get a broad view about texting and on-line messaging and their effect on society, an overall observation of anonymous texters and social network users is considered. Our research ends with some conclusions about the ever-increasing use of smart-phones and computer-mediated communication.

# Chapter 1. From writing to texting: a Historical overview

## 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we attempt to consider some history and origin of texting, a phenomenon that developed during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to become an overwhelming practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in particular with the ‘explosion’ of Internet applications and web-based channels. However, communicating through messages has always existed in different forms of writing and symbolizing. First, we study how writing evolved over time from mere forms and symbols to letters and manuscripts, and how these fundamental principles changed humanity and led to the dawn of a new world. Secondly, we mention the most important technologies that contributed to the development of writing and changed the way these were used by revolutionizing long-distance communication. This led to the transformation of writing from mere manuscripts on paper to messages that can be sent automatically by early devices such as the telegraph developing later into a telex system, then more rapidly by a number of machines until the advent of the mobile phone and the Internet through which instantaneous messages can be sent.

The era of a new rapid way of communicating messages has emerged, *texting*, thanks to the technological progress that allowed the invention of many devices and today the mobile phone. Furthermore, with the advances in computing and the generalized use of the Internet, those habits of sending short messages (SMS) soon expanded - without being abandoned at all - to an overall behaviour overwhelmingly used today in digital communication and what is often referred to today as computer-based communication (CMC), including emailing and web pages, but in particular through platforms like the social networks *Facebook* and *Twitter* and others. But before considering such developments, we believe it would be instructive to give an overview on writing, the basis of all types of texts and messages, how it progressively complemented humans’ speech through the ages and developed to become an important means of recording events and history.

## 1.2A brief history of writing

The invention of writing more than 5,000 years ago is probably the greatest achievement of humankind. Without writing, it would have been impossible to know the history of mankind or human knowledge transmission. Its steady development through time has led to all types of revolutions in knowledge, economy, religion which have had great impact on our societies. Coulmas (2003:1) says it is “difficult to imagine an aspect of modern life unaffected by writing”.

Humans progressively invented various types of symbols carved on clay tablets, rocks, stones and plates or written on surfaces like animal leather skins or bones and cave walls. Gradually, different types of writing systems such as early cuneiform writing started emerging to become conventionalized and used to record facts, statistics and history. With the introduction of papyrus making (a term from which the word ‘paper’ is obtained), the process of writing spread quickly from generation to generation, recorded documents and eventually transmitted ideas and information across time and space. Soon, historical facts were recorded and started to reveal various types of culture in different parts of the world. Coulmas (ibid.) states that “Writing not only offers ways of reclaiming the past, but is a critical skill for shaping the future.” He even dares saying that

It is not risky to call writing the single most consequential technology ever invented. The immensity of written record and the knowledge conserved in libraries, data banks, and multilayered information networks make it difficult to imagine an aspect of modern life unaffected by writing. (Coulmas, ibid.)

Writing is indeed one of the most complex media of human communication and “exerts a conservative force - sustaining social orders by preserving their histories, laws and values”, as Fasold (2006:430) asserts. It is the major skill for representing language and conveying ideas, but most importantly for recording and preserving history, knowledge and all types of events and transactions. Clark (2003: 8) states that “writing is a reflection of what already has been formulated in the mind of the writer and, by implication [...] writing can occur only after the main ideas are in place.”

But how does this compare with texting? Texting is indeed a type of writing, but it usually represents the spoken form.

*Omniglot Encyclopaedia* defines writing as “a method of representing language in visual or tactile form”<sup>1</sup>, that is, either carved symbols that can be touched on clay, wood and rocks, or visible text written on surfaces like skins and paper. But so many writing systems have been used throughout history to reach what we know today about the various types of alphabets.

### **1.2.1 The writing system**

A writing system is a conventional form of representing spoken language visually. In the *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Writing Systems*, Coulmas (1989: 560) defines a writing system as a

set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way, with the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question and the rules by virtue of which its units are encoded in the writing system.

Thus, writing is a supplementary form of transmitting information created by the necessity of preserving facts in accurate and durable ways on various types of surfaces, including paper of course, but also electronic supports and screens. A text is obviously meant to be read by people who share the code in which it is written or typed. Various types of writing systems have been invented for that matter.

### **1.2.2 Types of writing systems**

Writing systems or scripts can be classified by which units of language are graphically represented. Human language can be abbreviated to writing in two fundamental ways, by the use of symbols which express the sounds of speech or by the use of symbols which directly express the meanings conveyed by the spoken sounds. Numerous writing systems combine the two writing methods.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.omniglot.com/writing/definition.htm>



- *Ideograph*: An ideogram or ideograph is a graphical symbol that represents an idea, not a word; it does not rely on alphabets and phonemes. Good examples of ideographs are Chinese characters, or simply numbers like 1, 3, 7...

- *Pictograph*: A pictograph or pictogram is a symbol exemplifying a concept, object, activity, place or event by illustration. Pictography transmits thoughts through illustration like ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs.

- *Logograph*: A logographic writing system is based on logograms or glyphs, each representing a morpheme in a spoken language. Coulmas (2003:40), describes these as “writing systems whose basic functional units are interpreted as words”. Logographs are not only a type of ancient writing systems; they are strongly used today in texting to achieve various purposes. Talking about words that have long been abbreviated in the English language, like ‘exam’, ‘vet’ and ‘fridge’ which were criticized in the beginning, but eventually accepted, Crystal (2008)<sup>2</sup> explains the recent use of shortened forms and logographs in texting saying: “What novelty there is in texting lies chiefly in the way it takes further some of the processes used in the past.” That is, the new conditions of today’s life and technological developments require that writing become more and more concise.

- *Syllabary*: A syllabary is a “system of written symbols used to represent the syllables of the words of a language.”<sup>3</sup> As opposed to the systems mentioned above, it is a phonetic writing system with symbols corresponding to syllable units. In Japanese, for instance, each symbol is a spoken syllable.

- *Alphabetic or Segmental scripts*:

The term ‘alphabet’ is built on the basis of the names of the first two Greek letters, *alpha* and *beta* which in turn most probably come from Arabic ‘*alif* and *baa*’. An alphabet is a group of letters that are typically organised in a static order,

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<sup>2</sup>From Crystal’s article ‘2bornot2b?’ which appeared in *The Guardian* on July 5<sup>th</sup> 2008.

<sup>3</sup><https://books.google.dz/books?id=XneTstDbcC0C&pg=PA546&dq=syllabaries+define&hl=fr&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi4rLzh94XaAhWMulMKHWYxDzIQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=syllabaries%20define&f=false>

each of which representing one phoneme usually. In this context Connel-Linton (2006:411) states that “Alphabetic systems are organized, more or less, according to the phonemic principle of a one-to-one relationship between letter and phoneme.”

The Latin (or Roman) alphabet, as well as the Cyrillic alphabet, are massively used in many continents and revised to write hundreds of languages. The Arabic alphabet too is used to represent about forty non-Arab languages like Azerbaijani, Pashto, Persian, Kurdish, Urdu and many others; Turkish was written in Arabic script until the 1920’s with the fall of the Ottoman Empire; some Spanish texts too used Arabic alphabet until the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **1.3 Messaging from clay tablets to computer tablets**

Writing is often thought of as a natural phenomenon in human culture, but in reality it is far from being comparable to the speaking ability which people develop naturally to communicate. In fact, though writing started to develop thousands of years ago, it can be seen as ancient technology used to represent speech, the primary means of communication, by means of drawings, written symbols or any type of sign. If we could make a big jump in time, we may see the transformation from writing on Sumerian clay tablets (more than 5000 years ago around today’s Iraq), by means of symbols that stored and processed large amounts of information and calculus, to today’s computer tablets using the Internet and digital technology! In-between, a great number of inventions were realized to get messages across, as mentioned above. With the industrial revolution in Europe and the developments of science and advancement, on the one hand, and the necessity of communication to farther and farther places and between continents, information started to be sent through other means, as shown below.

#### **1.3.1 Telegraphy**

While written letters have to be transported physically, telegraphy was invented by the late 1830’s early 1840’s to send messages by means of a device that uses electric pulses on the basis of a special system named Morse code after its inventor Samuel Morse, using dots and dashes. According to Carré (1993:18),

telegraphy is “a network for point to point transmission of signals represented initially by visual codes, then by bars/dashes, and then by written messages composed of alphanumeric characters.” The telegraph was basically limited to receiving and sending one message at a time and was soon to be replaced by another device, the telephone, using voice this time.

### 1.3.2 The Telephone

The telephone is a machine or device designed for the simultaneous transmission and reception of the human voice between two places connected to a telephone line through the switch and there is a telephone on each side. The telegraph and telephone are both wire-based electric systems. The telephone construction was credited to a number of inventors, but Alexander Graham Bell's success with this device came as a direct result of his attempts to improve the telegraph. The first regular telephone exchange was established in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1878, and various types of styles of the device were made, including Bell's rotary dial model by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, more practical models were constructed until the emergence of the revolutionary mobile phone by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Algeria, the mobile phone was not available until the turn of the century (early 21<sup>st</sup> century). It was the PTT (Postes, Télégraphes et Télécommunications) which had the monopoly of the national landline telephone; then it was restructured under the name *Algérie Télécom* until the advent of two mobile phone operators, *Djezzy* (Orascom, Egypt) and *Nedjma* (El Wataniya, Kuwait) in 2001 and 2003, respectively. Mostari (2009:379) writes in this respect:

The existence of commercial competition between these operators led to a fall in the price of mobile phones and mobile phones became accessible to most people. Consequently, Algerians of different ages and socio-economic status have been able to access new or used mobile phones. In the early 2000s, having a mobile was a form of a social demarcation, but now, it has become a general part of life.

Soon, more and more Algerians, particularly adolescents and young adults, started having access to cell phones and to SMS messaging, of course. Mostari (ibid.) goes on explaining that

With the widespread availability of mobile phones, SMS text messaging has become an important part of the way Algerians communicate and nearly a billion text messages are sent in Algeria every month (*Les accros de l'internet*, 2008). Mobile phones are the most widely used communications technology among Algerians and about 92% of the population possess at least one mobile phone (*Les accros de l'internet*, 2008, statistics from 2007).

Knowing that Algeria is characterized with a complex sociolinguistic profile, an issue was to be investigated as to what language is used in SMS texting.

### **1.3.3 The Telex**

The Telex is a direct improvement of the telegraph as it had the capacity of sending multiple messages. The first Telex Service Data was introduced in 1933 in New York. This system of sending and receiving text messages had a significant impact on international business and trade. The effect of telex was to automate messaging, to improve efficiency and to reduce the costs of sending messages. In fact, the telex became widely used till the development of the net when electronic communication started outdoing all other types of communication.

### **1.3.4 CMC, The emergence of computer communication**

Up to the mid-1960's, it was hard for scientists to imagine how two computers could be connected. Two decades later, millions of computers around the world were inter-connected and vast amounts of information could be shared electronically. The notion that computers can be used as devices for language transmission presupposes that computers are networked with one another. Networking for the purpose of transmitting completed documents, data and computer programs dates back to the late 1960s. By the early 1970s, the earliest experiments were underway for transmitting messages in natural language intended for specific individuals or groups of recipients. Computer mediated communication (CMC) was quite restricted to specialists in the beginning, then became more and more personal and then available to everyone! Indeed, CMC is a modern communication that appeared in the middle of the 20th century when it could be realized by the use of two computers or more, then later included several forms of communication such as SMS texting, e-mail, chats and instant messaging (IM).

Herring's (1996:1)<sup>4</sup> provides a simple definition saying that "CMC is communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers." Similarly, Thurlow *et al.* (2004:15) tell us that "the label 'computer mediated communication' essentially refers to any human communication achieved through, or with the help of, computer technology."

It is well-known that CMC has an impact on social relations on the one hand and language behaviour on the other. Zitouni (2013:80) says that "Computer mediated communication is a 'supernatural technological phenomenon' which covers a wide range of issues, crossing several disciplines and having an unprecedented impact on human language".

- **CMC Modes**

CMC includes several electronic messaging tools and systems that can be summarized into two principle modes synchronous and asynchronous where population can easily interact with each other from different places.

- **Synchronous**

Synchronous conversation or synchronous chat is a simultaneous communication where the respondents can send messages, read and reply at the same time, i.e., the interaction goes instantly. Baron (2010:1) says in this context that "In synchronous CMC, transmission is essentially instantaneous, and interlocutors are assumed to be physically present to read and respond to messages, whereas in asynchronous CMC, neither of these assumptions holds." Synchronous conversations are largely represented by IM, computer conferencing and chat groups, whereas SMS texting and e-mailing are said to be asynchronous.

- **Asynchronous**

An asynchronous conversation, on the other hand, is a sporadic conversation that does not occur in a single time and can be answered later or ignored; in other words the response is optional. In this context Crystal (2006:267) considers that, "the

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<sup>4</sup>Herring (1996) quoted in Thurlow *et al.* (2004:15).

asynchronous context gives students time to read, understand, and respond, without the pressures of real-time interaction.” Asynchronous communication is represented in SMS, voice mails, e-mail, blogging, forums interactions and comments where people have time to respond. Crystal (2006:135) explains the Synchronous/Asynchronous difference in the following terms:

In a synchronous setting, a user enters a chat ‘room’ and joins an ongoing conversation in real time.<sup>3</sup> Named contributions are sent to a central computer address and are inserted into a permanently refreshing screen along with the contributions from other participants. The online members of the group see their contributions appear on screen soon after they make them (all being well: see below), and hope for a prompt response. In an asynchronous setting, the interactions also go to a central address, but they are then stored in some format, and made available to members of the group only upon demand, so that people can catch up with the discussion, or add to it, at any time – even after an appreciable period has passed.

Thus, in a synchronous situation, the user in a chat room for instance, expects his/her contribution to be read in real time and replied instantly; in fact, it can be seen as a spoken conversation in a written text form, while in asynchronous exchange, the users have the freedom to read the text whenever they are available, to delay it or even ignore it. However, in social network platforms like FB Messenger or Twitter, the exchange can be either synchronous or asynchronous depending on the users’ availability and physical presence; that is, a Messenger conversation can often occur in real time with long discussions without interruption, or text messages can be sent and wait for replies which might never come.

### **1.3.5 The e-mail**

The term *email*, for electronic mail, first made its appearance in the US in the early 1970’s when messages were sent from computer to computer on ARPANET<sup>5</sup>, based on technologies that became technical foundations of the Internet. Soon, messages could be distributed by electronic means from computer to computer or from smart-phones later on through email services like Yahoo and Gmail. Emailing today has become very useful for communication, particularly for daily business

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<sup>5</sup>Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, a system built to connect numerous computers.

activities, commerce, but also for academic purposes and information sharing. In parallel, using the cellular phone to send short messages started gaining more and more ground until its generalization and soon email communication became possible on smart phones.

#### **1.4 The revolution of Texting**

Throughout the last decades and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the development of mobiles and smart-phones, texting has become the most widespread means of communication, particularly among adolescents. In fact, using texting, and other types of messaging subsequently, has surpassed all forms of communication including writing letters, emailing and even phone calling, though it has not substituted this latter. Clayton (2018:40) describes texting revolution in the following terms:

In the old days, we didn't much write like talking because there was no mechanism to reproduce the speed of conversation. But texting and instant messaging do – and a revolution has begun. It involves the brute mechanics of writing, but in its economy, spontaneity and even vulgarity, texting is actually a new kind of talking. There is a virtual cult of concision and little interest in capitalization or punctuation. [...] Texting is developing its own kind of grammar and conventions.

Can you imagine your life without texting? Without having the ability to inform your parents that you'll be late for dinner or that you're stuck in a traffic jam? No I don't think so! The digital age has come and SMS messaging has simplified our life, allowing us to send a message when a call receives no reply or when we do not want to disturb the receiver, or when we are unable to talk, for instance in a meeting or in class. Texting is literally exploding, particularly in Western society; but people in other types of society are following. In fact, the phone function is perhaps the last feature used by smart-phone owners who prefer messaging, in addition of course to all the other applications available. Clayton (ibid.) goes on stating that "Civilization, then, is fine - people banging away on their smartphones are fluently using a code separate from the one they use in actual writing, and there is no evidence that texting is ruining composition skills."

### 1.4.1 What does texting mean?

Text messaging or texting, sometimes referred to as ‘cyber language’ are terms with one meaning, although in this dissertation we prefer using ‘messaging’ to cover both SMS texting and any other type of web platform used to communicate, i.e., sending brief messages using mobiles but also tablets and computers through the various applications available today. Thurlow and Poff (2011:1) say that “The terms ‘text messaging’ or just ‘texting’ refer to the brief typed messages sent using the SMS (‘short message service’) of mobile/cell phones, PDAs (‘personal digital assistants’), smartphones or web browsers.” Referring to the youth in general, Skierkowski and Wood (2012:746) indicate that “texting has become an integral aspect of their daily communicative behavior, and that among close peer networks, texting is the preferred means of contact.”

So much evidence shows that today texting has become a necessity as people, younger ones in particular, rarely spend a day without texting their friends or relatives. In the Algerian society, such behaviour has practically replaced so many events in social life and relations, such as exchanging visits, wishing a happy birthday to a friend or relative, or congratulating a classmate on a graduating occasion and even condolences. All these and more can be texted in a minute, and indeed, a major means for spreading the culture of sending messages is the cell phone, or rather the smart phone, owned today by virtually everyone, regardless of age or social status. As regards such necessity, Elwood-Clayton (2005:201)<sup>6</sup> asserts that

Texting has become incorporated into local sensibilities with many users dependent on this type of communication. Increasingly, many respondents – especially young users – consider their cell phone to be a necessity.

Texting and the use of cell phones are two complementary sections that have affected the global world. In her book *Collectibles New & Selected Poems*, Coffenberger (2011:46) chose to mention the cell phone and texting according to their strong impact on the society, as texting has become a solid way of

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<sup>6</sup> In Harper *et al.* (2005) *The Inside Text: Social, Cultural and Design Perspectives on SMS*.



communication through which the news can be spread as quickly as possible, as expressed in the following excerpt:

*This morning we met  
At the Inter Net Café  
An indulgence of  
Cappuccino and yogurt bars.  
Again the markets crashed.  
Cell phones quickened,  
Texting spreads the news.*

Yes ! Texting spreads the news...; but we have to remember again that messaging has developed and taken a new dimension with the accessibility to the Internet and the possibility to spread short or long messages, to share pictures and videos as well as books and documents in much easier ways than with the SMS, though the linguistic forms of texting remain with more or less the same characteristics in FB messaging, for instance. Today's phones include all these applications.

#### **1.4.2 The mobile phone**

The mobile phone, also known as a wireless phone, cell phone, or cellular, is a small portable device used for calling, but also increasingly for text messaging, using other web-based applications like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., and surfing on the web. The Oxford dictionary defines this device as, “A phone with access to a cellular radio system so it can be used over a wide area, without a physical connection to a network; a mobile phone.”

The first mobile phones in the 1950s up to the 1970s were too large and cumbersome; they were considered as ‘car phones’ as they allowed taxi drivers and emergency services to communicate. Soon, with technology advances and cheaper means of production, more types of portable phones were designed, and people wanted to have freedom to talk on the phone away from their cars and to carry it around in their pocket in order to communicate wherever they are.

- ***Martin Cooper – the inventor of the handheld mobile phone***

The notion of a pocket phone was Martin Cooper's original idea, and with the help of his Motorola team, the first mobile phone was born in 1973 though it weighed two kilos. Cooper is regarded as the father of the cell-phone, though his team had long worked on car phones. In an interview by CNN, he replied:

There were no large-scale integrated circuits, no computers, no closed-circuit televisions, no LCD screens -- I can't tell you all the things that did not exist in 1973. But, we'd been building phones for years and years in cars, and we [Motorola] thought the time was ready for personal communication, 'cause people are just naturally mobile." "We knew that someday everybody would have a [cell] phone"

Then, when the first mobile was ready in 1973, Cooper called a friend saying "Joel, I'm calling you from a cellular phone, a real cellular phone, a handheld, portable, real cellular phone." The mobile was born at last and people started feeling somewhat freed from their home or office where they had to sit to be able to call someone. A handheld telephone was perhaps unimaginable at the time, but technology makes miracles, as they say. Then, following the principle of transmitting messages through wireless means, texting started being sent through these mobile phones.

### **1.4.3 Texting through cell phones**

The first SMS was sent on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1992 by Neil Papworth from his computer to a cellphone; the message 'Merry Christmas' was written without any type of shortening or abbreviation. At that time the cellphones did not have an alphabetical keyboard, until 1993 when the first phone keyboard was made by the telephone company named Nokia which launched the first mobile phone capable of sending SMS messages. These were free, but could only be sent between two people on the same network, a norm that remained for many years.

Then, all phone models were equipped with keyboards capable of sending messages on any phone network and to one or multiple receivers. Even their social relations and habits began to change influenced by this new way of interaction.

Referring to the effects of new technologies on the society, in particular young people texting on mobile telephony, Ling (2007: 61) says in this respect:

Indeed in the last decades we have seen the rise of a series of technologies that fundamentally change the way work is done, family life is coordinated, romancing is accomplished, schooling is survived.

As a matter of fact, texting has become an incredible means of getting in touch with friends, family members, etc., whenever we want, particularly with the extension using social networks like *FB messenger*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* or *Whatsapp*. Indeed, texting has developed its own rules, as Ahmad (2014:30) explains:

Texting is the process of sending and receiving written messages using a mobile phone. It is a stunning phenomenon and marks a new era of electronic language. It has highly abbreviated and alpha-numerical styles that represent a continuous evolution of a unique language.

Therefore, texting is nowadays that well-known act of sending messages using the Short Messaging Service (SMS) with mobile device systems, including phone cells, but also tablets and even PCs. It allows the exchange of electronic messages between these devices; ‘short’ here refers to the size of the message which is limited to 160 characters that consist of alphabetic and numeric elements as well as emoticons like :-)) and emojis like ☺ used in a later period to express personal feelings and moods. A whole more or less conventional system of abbreviations and shortened forms is used in texting as a time-gaining way and money-saving method, the aim being to convey the message in the shortest possible form. Texting has become so popular today that in many communities, the US and the West in particular, most people would rather type messages than speak on the phone. A survey<sup>7</sup> shows that US phone users send and receive five times as many texts as the number of phone calls each day. But in reality, texting is a bit put aside or used only in certain circumstances. The reason is that there are so many other Internet-based channels and applications that people use to send their messages and much more than just the restricted SMS. Photos and videos can be sent, live recordings of

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<sup>7</sup>The International Smartphone Mobility Report by mobile data tracking firm Infomate.

events as well can be viewed by your friend who couldn't attend physically. We can even buy and sell through the Internet.

Here in Algeria too, young people have taken the habit of texting, which they prefer to calling. One reason is that it is cheaper than phoning as the rates for texting are always lower than those for a call, usually half less to be paid, i.e. 10 Dinars/a minute for a call vs. 5 dinars for 160 characters. In addition, a short call can take at least 2 minutes while an SMS is very concise, and thus what can be said at 20 Dinars can be texted at 5 Dinars. Another reason for texting preference is that these young people might find themselves in situations where they can't speak or they do not want to be heard talking on the phone. We will also see that people in general, and youngsters in particular, use increasingly more text messaging by means of all these network-based applications which do not require any payment.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

Writing was undoubtedly the greatest invention that humans realized for their needs to communicate ideas or events in an asynchronous mode, or to record and store information that might be difficult to keep in mind in its spoken form. Various types of writing systems developed in the past and some are still used today, including alphabet-based and pictographic systems.

With the advent of the CMCs, the computer and the mobile phone, it has become possible to write messages by typing on a keyboard. Sending SMSs has been used for a few decades now as a means of replacing phone calls; but messaging through Internet-based applications has certainly surpassed SMS use.

## **2. Texting and Social Factors**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Social media are web platforms, constructed to allow people to access the Internet to communicate, share and add ideas and different other contents. Kaplan and Heinlein (2010: 61) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange or user-generated content”. Talking about the rapid development of Internet-based platforms and social networking, Page *et al.* (2014:5) say “The platforms that have become associated with the umbrella term *social media* include sites and services that are now well-known and have been adopted on an international scale.” It is emphasized that the term social media should not be restricted only to social networks like FB and Twitter, but it refers to other websites that are also strong sharing platforms. These Internet-based sites and services include forums, blogs and different social networks such as video-sharing sites (*youtube*), photo-sharing sites (*Flickr*) and virtual worlds.

### **2.2 Texting and Social media**

It is currently popular that social media play a role in changing the language style in one way or another, which has contributed significantly to the development of texting that appeared in the first light through telephone messages and emails and has now evolved into a type of language used by many Internet users during their daily dealings. For example, the use of some logographs referring to a word, like @ for ‘at’; since @ is available in their keyboards, the use of a ready-made character is better than typing a word. But is there any change in the way language is written? The same thing for emoticons where they were only codes at first, : +) appear for the recipient as a smiley ☺. Crystal (2006:24) says that “a set of characters on a keyboard determines productive linguistic capacity (the type of information that can be sent); and the size and configuration of the screen determines receptive linguistic capacity (the type of information that can be seen).”

Texting changes the written style of language in its form but certainly not in the meaning. In reality, we choose the needed language according to the context, situation and the person to whom you text. A texter would not text his director the same way he would text his close friend. Page *et al.* (2014:28) say that “Language is not an abstract system, but is always situated in a particular context. It can be seen as a set of practices that arises from communicative needs in specific contexts and situations.” Texters use language as if they were talking that is why some words are reduced, the punctuation is not taken into consideration (in speaking there is no punctuation, but there is intonation) and the use of emojis to add facial expression. In this vein, Davis and Brewer (1997:2) say that “electronic discourse is writing that very often reads as if it were being spoken – that is, as if the sender were writing talking.” .

Thus, texters exchange ideas and feelings using linguistic and paralinguistic forms as if they were really talking to each other, though it is far from being face-to-face communication as messages can be preserved in their written form to be read and re-read whenever it is convenient, “whereas speaking is viewed as time-bound, dynamic, transient”, as Davis & Brewer (*ibid.*) say. In fact, texting uses language features from both speaking and writing.

### **2.3 Linguistic features of Texting**

A number of recent studies have been interested in investigating the linguistic features used in texting and almost becoming conventionalized, to the extent that we speak today of SMS language. The linguistic features have forms that are based mostly on making words and sentences as short as possible, and we wonder if such practices may affect students’ literacy skills and spelling proficiency. The forms used vary according to the language, but the overall aim is to type as quickly as possible and to get a short text. Examples from French and Arabic will be mentioned, but we will focus more on English samples as these include a number of forms categorized as follows.

### 2.3.1 Acronyms and Initialisms

Acronyms and initialisms are two types of abbreviations, shortened forms of phrases formed from the first letter of each word; an acronym is pronounced as if it was one word, like LASER (for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation) and LOL [lo:l], while in initialisms every letter is pronounced individually, as in CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and in MDR in texting (French *mort de rire*). In this context, Finegan (2012:56) says that “Shortenings in which the initial letters of the words in an expression are joined and pronounced as a word are acronyms: UNESCO, NATO, radar (radio detecting and ranging”, while initialisms “are pronounced as a sequence of letters.” (ibid.). A similar distinction is provided by Yule (2014:56) who says that

Acronyms are new words formed from the initial letters of a set of other words. These can be forms such as CD (“compact disk”) or SPCA (“Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals”) where the pronunciation consists of saying each separate letter. More typically, acronyms are pronounced as new single words, as in NATO, NASA or UNESCO.

Today, acronyms have become widely used in texting and not only for some phrases or words but can refer to long sentences used by texters to reduce the length. A good example used in texting language by young people is *idk* meaning ‘I don’t know’, or as exemplified by Crystal (2004:86): “The acronyms are no longer restricted to words or short phrases, but can be sentence-length: AYSOS [‘Are you stupid or something?’], CID [‘Consider it done’], CIO [‘Check it out’]...”

Text messaging in Arabic is increasingly used among young Algerians, particularly when it comes to ready-made expressions associated with religion like *إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون* or *السلام عليكم* (Islamic greeting and ‘to Allah we belong and to Him we shall return), respectively. But given some basic differences in the Arabic writing system, in particular the non-representation of vowels, acronyms and initialisms are not used. When discussing the point, our supervisor suggested the use of *م ب ض* [m b D] to imitate English *LOL* and French *MDR*, but it didn’t catch and no-one uses it.

### 2.3.2 Clipping and shortening

Clipping, truncation or shortening is to shrink the word into one of its parts. According to Crystal (2008:1) in his *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*,

clipped forms or clippings are reductions of longer forms, usually removing the end of the word (*ad* from *advertisement*), but sometimes the beginning (*plane*), or both beginning and ending together (*flu*); and blends combine parts of two words (*sitcom*, *motel*).

Thus, clipping is a writing strategy favoured today by young people who use it a lot in texting and messaging for the sake of economy in time and money, or just for laziness. They would prefer to use clipped forms like *mike*, for microphone or *champ* for champion. In fact, many clippings have become part of Standard English, including words like *bus*, *photo*, *exam*, *flu* and *gym*. In French, words like *télé*, *auto*, *manif* ... have become very common in the language. But no clipped forms seem to be used in Arabic again because its consonantal and syllabic structures are different from those of Western languages.

### 2.3.3 Emoticons and GIFs

Emoticons, or emojis, make up an additional feature created to be used in texting and CMC. They are like pictographs and hieroglyphs, where shapes and/or pictures represent facial expressions or moods, which were invented by necessity to express feelings. Crystal (2006:39) says that “The limitation was noted early in the development of Netspeak, and led to the introduction of *smileys* or *emoticons*”. These non-verbal responses, first based on typed keys to look somewhat like a smile :-) ☺, or sadness :-( ☹ or even a wink ;) , soon became more sophisticated in the form of ready-made digital images or icons like 😊 or 😮 or even whole sentences like I ❤️🏀. These refined emoticons have thus been called ‘emojis’, a better way of representing various emotions, feelings and even actions. However, it seems that sometimes some emojis might be misinterpreted depending on culture or religion. A good example of misuse is 🙏 which originally means ‘Please!’ (Asian culture), but is often used to mean ‘I’m praying’ (Western culture) or ‘Applause’.



A further development in pictographic representation of meaning and feeling includes moving pictures referred to as GIFs. GIF is the acronym for Graphic Interchange Format defined as “a form of computer image that moves as an animation, because it consists of frames, like a movie with no sound.”<sup>8</sup>. Gifs are sent because they are funny and they summarize ‘your day’ or whatever emotion you feel in a single moving image. What is particular about Gifs is that they consist of very short video-like endlessly repeated moving pictures.

#### 2.3.4 Letters, numbers and non-conventional spelling

The *Collins English Dictionary* defines a logogram as “a single symbol representing an entire morpheme, word, or phrase, as for example the symbol (%) meaning per cent”. Numbers are types of logograms: 7, for instance, represents the word ‘seven’, but in texting it is also used to replace the Arabic pharyngeal consonant ح (phonetically represented as [ħ] ) as it has no corresponding letter in Latin alphabet and its written shape looks a bit like that of 7. In Algerian Arabic, it is used for example in the expression *Sa7a* [saħħa] which means ‘OK’. A few other Arabic numbers are used to replace consonants that do not exist in English or French and other European languages. Here are a few examples in which people text or chat using Latin script with numbers replacing such consonants:

- *ta7ki 3arabi* > “Do you speak Arabic?”
- *9allu ni 5ayef* > “He said to him ‘I’m afraid’.

Letters too can play the role of logograms when for example the letter ‘u’ in English is used to mean ‘you’. As a result of constraints in SMS use, such reduced forms have become commonplace in SMS texting and on-line messaging in general. Various combinations of letters and numbers have been invented to end up in shortened forms to convey a given idea. Such combinations may have different forms for the same word or phrase Volckaert-Legrier *et al.*<sup>9</sup> (2015:1039) say in this respect:

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.picture-power.com/what-is-a-gif.html> accessed on May 15th 2018.

<sup>9</sup> In Zheng, Y. (2015). *Encyclopedia of Mobile Phone Behavior*; IGI Global, New York, USA.

This new form of writing is characterized by a variability of linguistic forms (the same word or expression can be written in different ways: “rien de neuf (nothing new)” can be written “rien d9”, “rien 2 9”, and “ri1 2 9”). By playing with the compression of words to limit the number of characters used, these spelling processes allow for a text to be abbreviated.

There are many other examples used in texting; for instance “good night” can be written *good n8*, *Gnight* or *G9*. Such spelling processes allow texters to save space and to gain time. There are also a number of English words, for instance, that are shortened by means of unconventional spelling like *nite* for ‘night’, *luv* for ‘love’ and *thru* for ‘through’, and in French *koi* for ‘quoi’ (what?).

### **2.3.5 Punctuation and capitalization**

Punctuation is represented by a number of marks, including full stops, commas, question marks, etc..., as well as capitalization, used to make sentences clearly understood. Mostly to represent intonation in the spoken form, punctuation helps the reader to know when he stops and for how long and which words have to be emphasized. Crystal (2006:94) describes this writing tool as follows:

Punctuation tends to be minimalist in most situations, and completely absent in some e-mails and chat exchanges. It is an important area, for it is the chief means a language has for bringing writing into direct contact with (the prosody and paralanguage of) speech, as well as conveying a great deal of information about grammatical construction.

In textisms, punctuation and capitalisation are almost always neglected, for the same reason as the use of abbreviations, acronyms and numbers, but also probably by laziness from the part of the texters. However, they use them in exaggerated forms to emphasize the idea they want to convey. Multiple marks of exclamation as in “Yes!!!!!!!!” and question marks as in “WHAT?????” are much favoured and “words in capitals add extra emphasis.” (Crystal *ibid.* p. 92)

### **2.3.6 Abbreviations**

Abbreviations have long existed as shortened forms of relatively long words from which the first part is usually kept, as in *lab* for ‘laboratory’ or more recently *pic* for ‘picture’; but there are also examples in which the first part is dropped, as in

*plane* for ‘aeroplane’ and *flu* for ‘influenza’. The word abbreviation itself can be represented in two forms, *abbr* or *abbrev*. These are used as “an attempt to communicate information fast, accurately, and with minimum of confusion and misinterpretation.” (Kent and Lancour 1968:1). Indeed, the writing style of the new generation has radically changed as there might be confusion and misinterpretation in the various types of abbreviations. While texting, young people use a lot of abbreviations in order to gain time, effort and to save place (most of web forms are limited in  $x$  amount of characters; so it is necessary to abbreviate). However, different forms of abbreviations used in random ways can be attested, including vowel drop as in *tmrw* for ‘tomorrow’, *btwn* for ‘between’ or *mrc* for French ‘merci’, and even acronyms like *lol*, or initialisms like *mdr*, so that it becomes hard to differentiate the various types of abbreviations and clippings. In the Algerian context, many Arabic words and phrases typed in Latin script are abbreviated in one or more of these forms: in *slm*, for example, the vowels are dropped just like the French equivalent *slt* for ‘salut’.

### **2.3.7 The use of Latin script for non-Latin alphabets**

With the advent of digital conversations, the community's need for language differed. A large segment of people from non-Latin countries began to use Latin script as an alternative to their original alphabets. At first, the reason was that the digital device in their possession did not contain their language characters. Today, though technology has evolved and practically all types of characters are available in computers and smartphones, the need for Latin script persists to a certain extent. This phenomenon is commonly attested in multilingual countries whose writing system differs from other languages, such as Arab countries, Greece, Russia, China and others. Page *et al.* (2014:29) state that, “In social media, we find examples of when one language is written in the script of another”.

- **Arabizi**

Arabic chat alphabet, Arabizi or Arabish are all terms for one sense: the use of Latin script to type Arabic text in digital communication. Allehaiby (2013:53)

says “Arabizi is defined as an encoding system that uses the Latin script and Arabic numbers instead of Arabic letters.” Diab (2015:92)<sup>10</sup> describes it as follows:

Arabizi is a form of Arabic written in Romanized script also known as Arabish where people use digits intertwined with letters to express words in the dialect. It is a very common way of writing Arabic in social media in particular.”

One main reason behind the use of Arabizi was the lack of the Arabic keyboard in phone devices, though today most mobile phones and platforms possess built-in systems for Arabic alphabet. Another reason why Arabic texters continue to use Latin script is the routine, the habit of typing which many texters find much easier than Arabic keyboards. A third reason for using Romanized Arabic lies in the practicality of switching from Arabizi to Western languages like English or French, which results in a homogeneous text, particularly with the use of borrowings into dialectal Arabic; you may find in Algerian Arabic, for instance an utterance like:

*ki djit ndimari lloto 3ayyatli felportable* = ‘When I was about to start the car, he phoned me.’

However, given the rich consonantal inventory of Arabic, a few numbers are used to replace seven to nine consonants that have no equivalent in Latin alphabet:

ء	ح	خ	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع	غ	ق
2	7	5	-	-	6	-	3	-	9

It is worth noting here that Arabizi is usually avoided when it comes to formal text, i.e., Standard Arabic, and more and more Algerian texters use Arabic script in expressions like *إن شاء الله* instead of *inshaAllah*, or *عيد سعيد* *3id sa3id*, and in long formal IM conversations or Facebook posts and tweets. This may also have something to do with more awareness about the richness of the Arabic language, Arabo-Islamic identity and other socio-cultural considerations.

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<sup>10</sup> In Gelbukh 2015, ed. Part 1.

## **2.4 Texting, CMC and sociolinguistic considerations**

Recent research has been interested in the correlation between text messaging and social behaviour, taking into account age and gender in particular as well as attitudes (Herring 1995; Thurlow *et al.* 2004; Harper *et al.* 2005; Mostari 2009; Crystal 2006, 2010; Zitouni 2013; Ling 2007, Clayton 2018). One thing we can easily attest in digital communication in general is that messaging enables people to message others whatever their age, gender and social status are, except perhaps for SMS texting which usually occurs between same-range age groups.

### **2.4.1 Texting and Age**

Various studies on texting and electronic communication have considered age as a significant factor and have shown that teenagers and young adolescents use more messaging than older adults whose use of technologies in general decreases with age (e.g., Ling 2007). In the context of our study, we have indeed confirmed that younger students use messaging more than older adults, though we have no data on younger teenagers' SMS use (11 to 17) and on elderly people in the Algerian society.

It is obvious that age is the most demographic factor that affects texting. Through all the studies conducted by researchers, it is clear that the majority of texters are teenagers and young adults. Born in the CMC age, they are the first to be influenced by this means of communication. It is part of their lives, while older adults regard this means as a new change in their communication style; some of them accept and adopt this approach and others remain as traditional as before. Age is associated with the extent to which the individual accepts the transfer and change in the manner of communicating with others.

The numerous text messages sent and received every day depends on age. Zheng says that "Younger people send and receive numerous text messages per day, while older people prefer calling or e-mailing." The preferences differ but we cannot restrict the adults' or elders' first choice in only calling or emailing; they

have also become texters but not as much as the youth. Seel (2012:26-26) observes that “While text messaging used to be the teenage communication medium of choice, adults of all ages are now texting instead of calling or e-mailing.”. But on the whole, it appears that the 17-25 age group is the most active in texting, but also, and perhaps more importantly today, in other digital means of communication, Facebook messaging in particular. As for mobile and smartphone ownership, we believe, on the basis of our own observation that younger teens aged about 11 to 15 are not usually allowed to possess phones by their parents and thus very few communicate by means of SMS or other types of text messaging.

#### **2.4.2 Texting and Gender**

One demographic factor that has also been investigated in relation to Internet users, texting and CMC is gender. Some studies showed that there are no significant differences between females’ and males’ texting: women write slightly longer than men and use some more emoticons depending of course on whom they text. According to David Crystal, an expert in language and linguistics, women

- text more than men
- text longer messages
- text more grammatically correct messages
- use more abbreviations and emoticons
- retain traditional conventions of orthography
- use more salutations and farewells
- express a wider range of content (Crystal 2008)

An investigation by Thomée *et al.* (2007:1312) has shown that both genders using too much CMCs and SMS may suffer from sleeping difficulties:

For women, surfing the Internet was associated with developing sleep disturbances in the form of *repeated awakenings*. For men, high frequency of mobile phone calls and SMS messaging was associated with developing *difficulties falling asleep*.

Other studies, on the other hand, haven't found any major impact of texting and messaging on young people's behaviour, except for cases of romance discussions in male/female relations.

However, we did not have the opportunity to examine gender-linked differences in the Algerian context, except for the fact that student girls spend much more time texting and FB messaging than boys, that males use more codeswitching than female texters and that boys favour calling on the phone more than girls, as we shall see in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter.

### **2.4.3 Language choice and Code switching in CMC**

As most studies on digital communication and language use have been undertaken in monolingual settings like the US and the UK, only style shift and formal vs. informal language have been somewhat considered (Crystal, 2006, 2008, for instance). Indeed, depending on the type of digital conversation, and particularly on who is texting to whom, people choose appropriate styles on a formality continuum, though young people tend to use text messages full of casual texts that include slang used in common speech in addition to abbreviations, initialisms, acronyms and other linguistic features that have become specific to texting and IM.

But another issue which is rarely discussed alongside texting and IM is codeswitching, a linguistic phenomenon that occurs among bilingual or multilingual speakers in many speech communities. Gumperz (1982:59) provides a simple definition of the phenomenon saying it is “[...] the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems.” The French colonisation of Algeria, which lasted more than 130 years, and the language policy imposed on Algerians, turned the country into a bilingual society where French was the only language of education, administration and other institutions. Today, more than 50 years after independence and in spite of the efforts made for a general Arabisation of the institutions, Algerians continue to use French in many contexts and to mix it with their dialects. In this regard, Dendane (2007:143-44) reminds us that

With French as a solidly-rooted language in Algeria, code-switching has long become a linguistic tool that many Algerian speakers use in their communicative strategies. Indeed, in the early years of socialisation, the Algerian children are exposed to a rich diversity of linguistic material along with the natural acquisition of their mother tongue.

Thus, Algerian Arabic (AA) is in fact a dialectal form in which a great number of French expressions and borrowings embedded in the language, acquired and used naturally to the extent that other Arabic-speaking people do not understand Algerians' speech, except for our neighbours, Moroccans and Tunisians, whose countries were also occupied by the French. In addition, as many Algerian people master French to a large extent, Arabic/French bilingualism is a natural means of communication used in everyday interaction, though codeswitching will depend on certain factors such as topic of discussion or domains of use. Fishman (2000b:84) has mentioned a number of reasons for the choice of a language to use in a bilingual community, insisting on the fact that "one is more likely to be reserved for certain situations than the other." As mentioned, there are reasons behind codeswitching; Following Fishman (2000b:90ff), Schmidt (2014:27) lists some of these:

One reason is that bilinguals are trained to deal with a specific topic in only or mainly one language [...]. Another reason is that they lack the specialised terms of a certain topic in one language. [...]. Another reason for code-switching is the fact that some notions are better expressed in one language than in another.

An Algerian doctor, for instance, would not be able to explain symptoms of a given sickness in Arabic or in AA, because he studied medicine in French.

With the advent of texting and digital communication, many people switch from one language to the other or mix them in their written conversations. Because texting is in reality speaking in a written mode, individuals tend to switch, in their 'texted' discourse, between the languages or varieties of a language available in their linguistic repertoire, just the way they do it in verbal interaction. Herring *et al.* (2013:680) agree in asserting that "Code-mixing occurs in text messages on social arrangements and information exchange, but less so in romantic messages." As a matter of fact, CS and code mixing in texting are mainly used to fulfil linguistic and



social needs. Tagg (2015:132) points out that the reasons behind the use of CS within a digital communications are the same as in oral interaction:

People in digital contexts appear to draw on more than one language for much the same reasons as in spoken situations: to construct identity, express emotions, show alignments with other people and as a resource for structuring talk.

The texters' need for CS to send a text message varies from one sender to another depending on the identity of the recipient. For example, if the sender is texting a monolingual recipient, he will not need to codeswitch, while in exchanging messages with a bilingual speaker the type of speech used will be different depending on the discussed subject. Let's take the linguistic situation in Algeria, the coexistence of three languages in parallel (Standard Arabic with its dialectal form Algerian Arabic, French and Tamazight). All these can be observed in texting, IM and digital communication in general. Mostari (2010:7) says that

The SMS texts reflect well the existing level of diversity in oral language through mixed utterances, which include *a priori*, sentences or bits of sentences composed of, in order of proportion, Algerian Arabic – the matrix or the base language, French and Modern Standard Arabic.

Two texters can definitely exchange messages in more than one language because part of the topic cannot be discussed in the other language. Here's an example:

A: AssalamuAlaykoum [Standard Arabic] (Hi)

B: Waalaykoumsalam [Standard Arabic] (Hi)

A: Cv? [Abbreviated form of French expression 'ça va?'] (How are you?)

B: hamdoullah [one Arabizi form of the Arabic expression الحمد لله] (I'm fine)

A : 3melt la radio lbara7 ? [AA word (did you perform) + la radio: the shortened form of the French word: la radiographie + (radiography) + lbara7: AA word (yesterday)] AA + French + AA (Did you perform the radiography yesterday?)

B : Non, le radiologue kan en congé [Non: French word (No) + le radiologue : French word (radiologist) + kan: SA كان (was) + en congé: French (in vacation) ] >

A sentence in French in which only one word *kan* 'to be' is embedded (No, the radiologist was in vacation).

A: Ah, sa7a jspr ghedda il va reprendre le travail sinon tu dois trouver un autre.

[Ah: verbal reaction, sa7a : AA ( Okay) + jspr : the shortened form of the French phrase *j'espère* ( I hope ) + il va reprendre le travail sinon tu dois trouver un autre: (I hope he will go back to work otherwise you'll have to find another one)]

B : Inshallah [SA] **إن شاء الله** (May Allah will).

It is worth noting here that while there is practically no shortening features like abbreviations, initialisms and acronyms when texting in Arabic script, Arabizi allows one type of shortening at least: the drop of vowels as in [*bs7tk tsthli fr7tlk*], an expression used to congratulate someone on their success (Congrats, you deserve it, happy for you). In this short conversation, the texters use three codes: Standard Arabic (SA), Algerian Arabic in Arabizi (Arabic with Latin script) and French. They are all varieties of the same community:

- **AA** is the mother tongue of Algerians who speak the dialect mixed with words borrowed from other languages, French in particular because of the colonial history of the country. But the Arabic language proved its existence and the speakers created a way to write like other Arabs. Languages that they can master and express their feelings in the easiest way. Since switching codes using the Arabic alphabet is a little difficult.
- **SA** is the official language of Algeria, generally used for religious and educative purposes (Assalamu Alaykoum, inshallah, el qism). It is also the language of the written form in books, newspapers, etc...
- **French** is the first foreign language politically, although it is considered the second language in terms of social occurrence and this is justified by its great presence in this conversation and most conversations of educated people. There is a large category of people who speak French in Algeria because of the old colonial presence, but some do not write it, limiting the

writing only to the educated. Texters here use French to replace the lack of words and expressions in their mother tongue; there is not a word for 'la radio' in AA, so that is why Algerians switch to the first foreign language whenever it comes to such terms (la radio, le radiologue).

Such linguistic diversity gives texters and social network users the possibility of using various strategies in typing their messages. Indeed, the Algerian sociolinguistic profile has become rich with the linguistic phenomena co-existing in the society: multi-dialectalism, bilingualism and diglossia, in addition to the use of English by students and even people who have been influenced by this global language. Dendane (2007:144) says in this respect:

What is interesting in the Algerian context is that you just listen to people talking about any topic, be it serious or trivial, or just having a chat, and you will hear a whole lot of back-and-forth switches between AA and French, shorter or longer stretches from one language inserted into the other.

However, though there are certainly positive effects in using texting and digital communication, we have to consider what negative impact there might be on the society and students in particular.

## **2.5 Positive and negative effects of texting**

Today, texting is one the most famous forms of communication in the world, but in spite of this popularity, and maybe because of it, the social and educational debate about it is quite overpowered by its negative effects on the society, and more particularly on teenagers. We will expose in the following some disadvantages of texting and digital communication in general. Then, we will show that it also has some positive impact that has created some debate between linguists because they do not all agree on the point.

### **2.5.1 Negative impact**

- Linguistic impact

Texting has changed people's way of writing and even speaking because it does not always follow the standard rules of the grammar, and because of the

overuse of abbreviations, people start first by using short forms in their texting and then they replace them with symbols like ‘r1’ for French *rien* meaning ‘nothing’ or *u* to mean ‘you’ and the expression *C u l8r* for ‘See you later’. Many researchers show that from time to time teenagers in class write the way they text, because of this overuse of texting. So the language used in texting, full of abbreviations and other unconventional forms, has become permanently stored in their brain. We always see in a dictation contest or in what is known as ‘spelling bee’ that teenagers often fail in this kind of competition.

In his article “Texting makes u stupid”<sup>11</sup>, when discussing about the impact of texting on society, Niall Ferguson (2011) says that because of texting “half of today’s teenagers don’t read books – except when they’re made to”. He expresses society's concern that texting could slowly lower literacy among younger generations. This concern seems to have increased over time, because of the way the relationship between technology and culture has developed. Internet language is ruining students’ capacity to write correctly with their use of acronyms, emojis, abbreviations, slang and often incomprehensible language, no grammar rules, no capitalization and no punctuation. In the same line of thought, UK broadcaster John Humphys said in 2007 that texters are

[...] vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours eight hundred years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; rapping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped.

However, Tagg (2012:14) claims that

[...] while the instrumental functions of texting may encourage brevity and lack of attention to punctuation or capitalization, coordinating events together requires that consideration is given to the interlocutors and this is carried out through linguistic and paralinguistic features.

- Social impact

Texting has also an impact on social interaction; sometimes the texter’s idea does not reflect the real interaction of the sender, or might be misunderstood by the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/how-will-todays-texting-teenagers-compete-67313>

receiver if the texter clicks a wrong emoji which may completely change the meaning of the conversation. It also reduces the face-to-face contact. Because of the possibility of virtually getting in touch with friends and relatives by texting and FB messaging, people hardly ever meet and talk in a more realistic, natural way.

Other negative sides of texting and IM have been mentioned as follows:

- the easy ways of sharing wrong information such as lying about something or someone, persecuting people, creating scandals and so on and so forth; the problem is that the written text is preserved while a spoken menace, for instance, may be quickly forgotten.
- It encourages bad grammar habits and informal communication
- It has negative impact on students' writing skills
- Emojis and emoticons cannot replace tone and facial expression
- Messages can be misinterpreted because of too much use of shortened forms, logographs, letters and numbers
- An important communication cannot take place between texters, even in synchronous mode

People against textspeak propose that people should use full words and full sentences to communicate; but we will see that others find that texting and digital communication have more advantages than drawbacks.

### **2.5.2 Positive impact**

In relation to texting, but also to the other types of messaging, including Facebook and Twitter, a largely exaggerated myth of negative effects on language use and literacy has spread among some journalists and even some scholars as well. In an article that appeared in September 2007 on *Mail Online*, and which he entitled “*I h8 txt msg*”, UK broadcaster John Humhrys bitterly criticizes SMS use describing texters as “vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours eight hundred years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped.” On the other hand, John Sutherland, from University College London,

condemned texting in a newspaper article entitled ‘*Cn u txt?*’<sup>12</sup>, saying “it masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness. Texting is penmanship for illiterates.” (Note that both titles are in Textspeak style). As a reply to this bitter attack, Crystal (2008:13) says “As far as I know I am not dyslexic, mentally lazy, or illiterate. But I text.” As a matter of fact, Crystal wrote a whole book he entitled *Txtng: The Gr8 Db8* with the aim of trying to dismiss misinformation on the phenomenon, to win the debate around texting and wipe out the belief that it will have catastrophic effects on children’s literacy and people’s communicative behaviour. In fact, he has shown that texting is rather beneficial for the young generation and not harmful at all for older generations when he says:

I am fascinated by it, for it is the latest manifestation of the human ability – and young human ability, at that – to be linguistically creative and to adapt language to suit the demands of diverse settings. In Textspeak, we are seeing, in a small way, language in evolution.

In the same vein, Wood, Plester and Bowyer (2008) agree that “when texting, the children have the freedom to ‘play’ with the construction of language that they are learning about at school, and are creative in their use of it.” which shows that due to texting, children will develop their creativity. Recent studies (mentioned in Crystal 2008:161-2) have shown that texting appears to help writing capacities and provides possibilities for linguistic creativity, and even more success among students thanks to the awareness of all the types of shortenings used in texting style. To confirm this positive view, Crystal (ibid. p 9) asserts that “All popular beliefs about texting are wrong, or at least debatable. [...] There is increasing evidence that it helps rather than hinders literacy.”

He also explained that abbreviations have always been used in the past (e.g., *auto*, *flu*, *lab*, *&*, etc.), but young people have learned to use them in playful creative ways which enhances their literacy and metalinguistic awareness. Other positive effects include social and psychological benefits:

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<sup>12</sup> The Guardian; Nov 11<sup>th</sup> 2002.

- The ability to converse with all types of interlocutors from the closest ones, to teachers and to people all over the globe. For students, this can lead to opportunities which were not possible before the invention of emailing and later digital communication possibilities. Thanks to texting and IM, we can easily have access to information about other customs and cultures and we can explain our own identity-linked characteristics.

- Texting has also a positive impact on the population. One of the most important features is conveying the message in the shortest form possible and in only a matter of seconds. However the sender is not necessarily exposed to the receiver, the editor does not have to move from place to place in order to talk to anyone. It also encourages self-expression, giving opinions and self-esteem; in real life, not all persons can speak freely, so texting gives the opportunity to talk without limits and barriers.

### **2.5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we wanted to see how the phenomenon of texting is used among people and how, thanks to access to the Internet, their habits are extended to include Instant Messaging and other digital communication forms including social networks, in particular Facebook and Twitter. One important point considered here includes the linguistic forms used by the youth in the messages sent: so many strategies are used to make the messages as short as possible, first because this makes texters gain money in comparison with making phone calls; but using the various forms of shortening has become a habit transferred even to other types of messaging. In the Algerian multilingual context, we had to mention people's use of the different languages available as well as English as a global language which results in codeswitching, particularly Arabic-French. We have also dealt with texting in relation to social factors, including age and gender and how these correlate, though no significant differences have been noted. The next chapter covers the results of our fieldwork on students' texting habits.

### **3. Students' Messaging Behaviour: the Investigation**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to describe the research tools used for investigating students' texting and messaging behaviour in a context where all young people own a mobile phone and have access to the Internet. Methodologically speaking, empirical research is the most appropriate way of getting reliable data and results to be analysed on the basis of previous studies in the field, with the aim of finding answers to our questions, namely:

- 1) the extent to which students use texting and for what purposes;*
- 2) how texting affects language use; and*
- 3) the effects that digital communication has on students' behaviour.*

To carry out the present research, we have designed a questionnaire which we addressed on-line, using *Google Forms*, to a number of students of English at Tlemcen University. The purpose was to explore texting and digital communication in general among a sample population of 130 students (3rd year Licence and Master 2).

We also prepared a semi-structured interview to four persons, 3 females and 1 male with the aim of discovering what they feel about people's texting and messaging in the smartphone use and CMC age. All along our work, we decided to use another research tool, though it was just a random, non-structured observation of a number of SMS texts and FB messages.

#### **3.2 Data collection and analysis**

The data obtained were to be analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively as the questions have yielded numbers of users, their age and gender, but also what they feel about texting and digital communication and their behaviour both from linguistic and social perspectives. We have to admit that *Google Forms* has facilitated our research as the application gives accurate results and percentages, but



our analysis and interpretation of these results are the most important part of the investigation.

Once the questionnaire was uploaded in Facebook groups of students, we started obtaining responses and it took about ten days before we reached a sample we thought quite satisfying, though the respondents consisted of about three times more girls than boys. That wasn't a surprise; we expected such a difference as there have always been many more female students in the departments of languages.

### 3.2.1 The on-line questionnaire

The first two questions reveal that the group of respondents counts 97 females and 33 males, that is around 74.6% girls and 25.4% boys. In fact, female students have always represented the majority in the language department because they have always been more interested in studying languages.

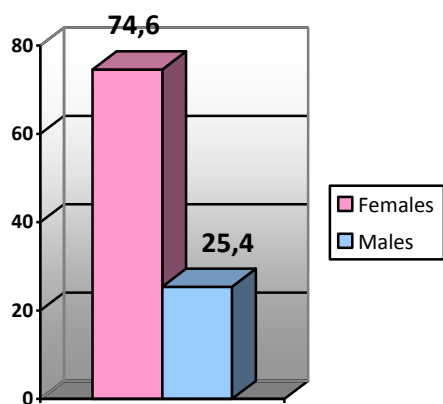


Fig. 3.1 Respondents' gender

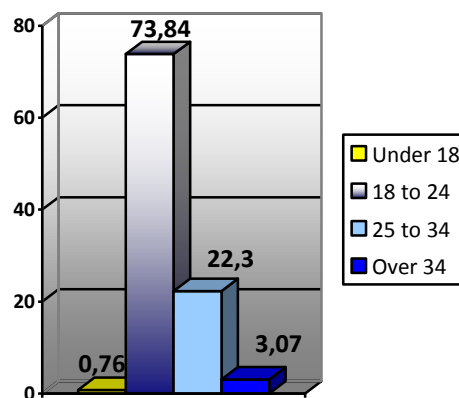


Fig. 3.2 Respondents' age

As for the respondents' age, it was expected that the majority is situated between 18 and 24 years old (73.84%) which is the average age range of university students while 29 informants (22.3%) are aged 25 to 34. The remaining age groups are less visible: 3.07% over 34 and 0.76% under 18.

- **Qu.3. Do you have a mobile smart-phone?**

In Question 3, our intention is to know the extent to which students own a smart-phone, a device that has become available today to almost everybody. It is indeed taken for granted that all people today have a cell-phone and the results show that the large majority use smart-phones (97%), but it was quite surprising to find that four of our informants out of the 130 do not, three of whom are boys. So, we suppose they connect using PCs and laptops.

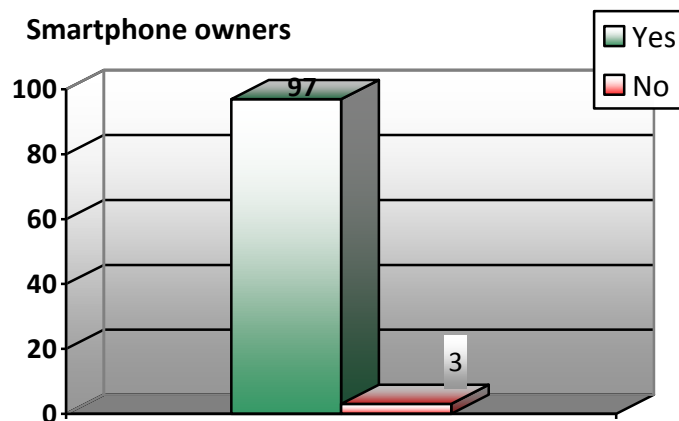


Fig 3.3 Smartphone owners

- **Qu. 4. Do you prefer texting or calling?**

In Question 4, we wanted to know the extent to which the students prefer SMS use rather than making calls and we have obtained the following results:

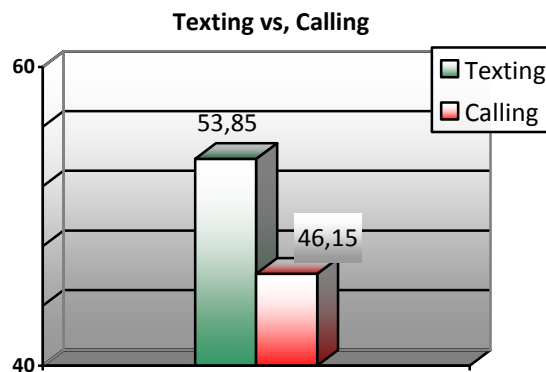


Fig 3.4 Preferences: Texting vs. Calling

In fig 3.4, the results show that a slightly greater segment of the sample represents students who prefer texting (53.85%) while still a good number prefer using calls instead (46.15%). This may indicate that this former group prefers to send texts for a number of reasons, including economic reasons and other issues related to the immediacy and simplicity of the conversation. While calling, the speaker finds himself forced to respond at the time of the call, and the response is sometimes spontaneous and sometimes unstructured, faster than texting since the speaker is privileged and has sufficient time to choose appropriate words.

- ***Qu. 5 Do you prefer SMS texting or Messenger use?***

As we know there are so many web-based communication channels today, such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, etc..., and people spend much of their time using one or another of these applications to send and receive messages, we have decided to ask our students what they prefer, SMS texting or messenger use. The bar graph below is obtained from the students' answers:

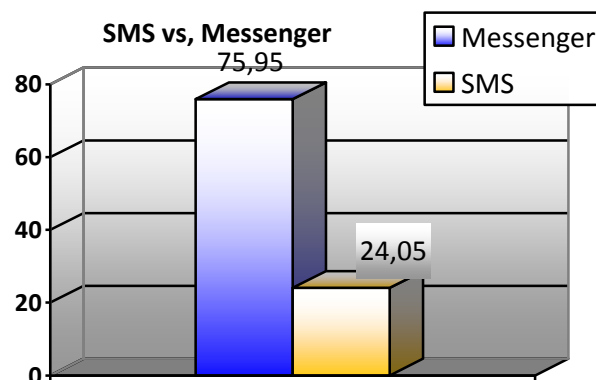


Fig 3.5 Preferences: SMS vs. Messenger

The results clearly show that Messenger is used by three quarters of the students (75.95%) and only 24.05% use SMS. Here, we can say that the respondents prefer sending a message over Messenger because it is totally free and it is a synchronous exchange; i. e., when you send a message the requester waits for an answer. In fact, it is written chat in real time. However, SMS texting is to be paid for and it is limited to 160 characters. In addition, it is asynchronous exchange. One may

wonder to what extent these preferences are gender-related. So, we looked into the details of the answers and we found out that the proportion of girls who prefer calling is quite lower than that of boys, about 38% vs. 57% respectively.

- *Qu. 6. How often do you text?*

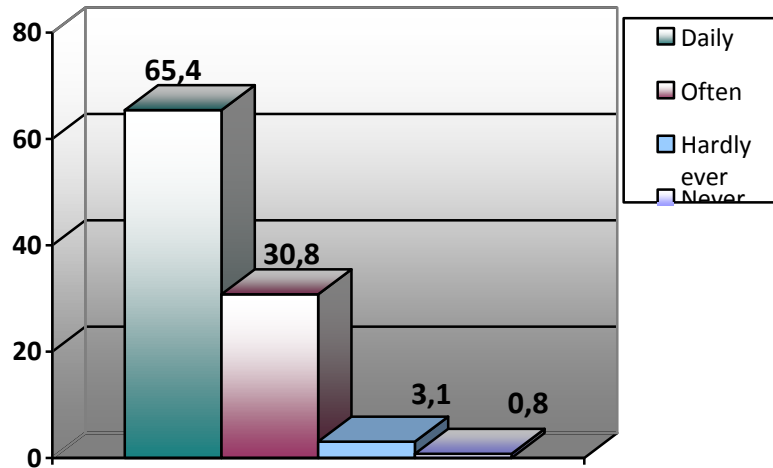


Fig 3.6 Texting/Messaging frequency

The graph above (Fig. 3.6) is a representation of the frequency spent in using texting. 65.4% agreed that they use texting daily; 30.8% often use it and 3.1% use texting hardly ever and only 0.8% never use texting or messaging. This claims that the majority of students (96.2% = daily + often) overuse texting/messaging in their daily life, which may have an impact on their writing style and skills as well as on their social relations, though this latter requires a deeper investigation.

Considering the gender factor, we have obtained the following results:

Table 3.1 Texting/Messaging frequency by Gender

How often?	Daily	Often	Hardly ever	Never
Females	47.85	24.8	1.6	1.5
Males	17.55	6	1.5	0

The table above and the corresponding graph below indicate clearly that girls use texting and messaging much more than boys: > 70 girls out of 97, i.e., **72.65%** often do it as opposed to only 8 boys out of 33 boys, i.e., **23.55%**. How can we explain this difference?

One explanation might lie in a socio-cultural consideration: In a rather conservative society such as that of Algeria, girls in general are less overt than boys who prefer living an outward life to have real contacts and face-to-face interaction with people in the outside. So, girls have found a way of getting in touch with the outside either from their homes or through their smartphones.

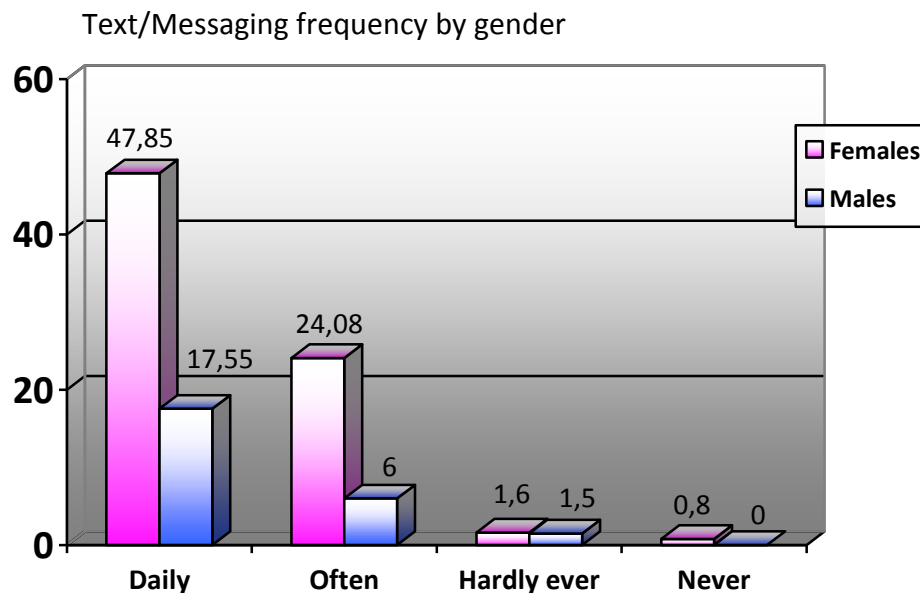


Fig. 3.7 Text/Messaging frequency by gender

This preference may also result from psychological reasons as females use text messaging more due to their emotional tendencies and to express their feelings, while males are more objective; they use any of the devices, either to call or to text, surf in the net or play games.

- *Qu. 7. What device do you use for texting?*

The aim of this question is just to confirm that practically all young people own smart-phones and use them to call, but more importantly to send messages, in

particular through easier means and free applications like FB messenger or Whatsapp and Twitter.

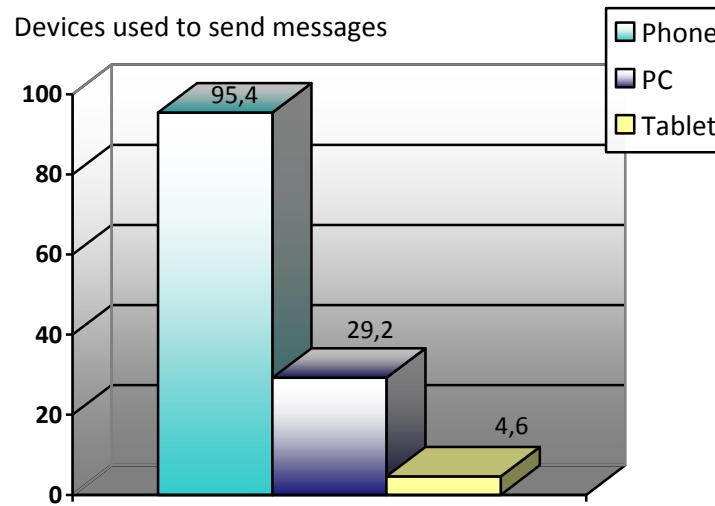


Fig. 3.8 Devices used to send messages

The graph above shows the respondents' preferred devices used to send text messages. For this context, the results were as follows: 95.5% of the students use the phone, whereas 29.9% prefer to use their PC and only few use tablets. Therefore, it can be said that the phone is the main tool that helps to spread texting; the current question complements the previous one in which the results clarify why a large number of informants use text messages on a daily basis.

- **Qu. 8. In what circumstances do you use texting?**, we have obtained the following results:

Table 3.2 Platforms used for Texting/Messaging

Blogs and forums	Social media	Phone messages	Online games
10.8	93.1	47.7	6.2

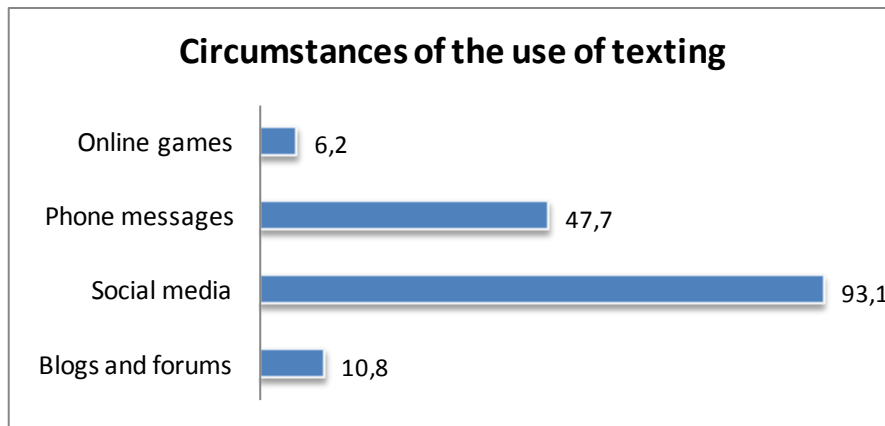


Fig.3.9 Texting/Messaging within CMCs

For this multi-choice question, the informants could choose more than one possibility; thus 93.1%, the highest rate of sending messages being through social medias, means that 121 respondents out of 130 do that. But they may also use one, two or three of the other means to communicate. Next comes SMS use with 47.7%, that is 62/130 do send messages by phone while some others use texting language in blogs and forums (10,8%) and only 6,2% of the informants use it in online games.

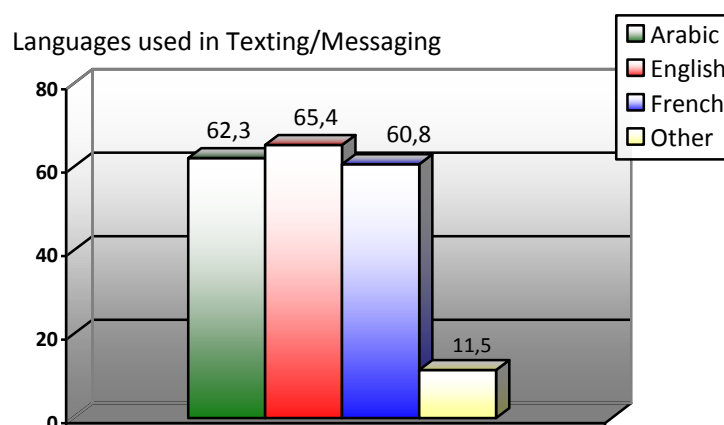
The results reveal the great interest that people, the youth in particular, attach to the Internet and the use of the social media; and apparently Facebook takes the lion's share, as we know. In fact, a world survey undertaken in April 2018<sup>13</sup> tells us that FB recorded 2.2 billion monthly active users in the world as opposed to only 330 million Twitter users, for instance.

➤ **Hypothesis 1:** The responses obtained for questions 5 to 8, as well as our observation belonging to the students' community, confirm our first hypothesis that the majority of students, and by extension young people in general, are much involved in the digital world where the language of communication is SMS texting, but also most of the time other forms of IM, FB Messenger in particular. On their smartphones, calling has become perhaps the less practiced application given the possibilities they have thanks to their access to the Internet.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

- ***Qu. 9. In what language do you usually send messages?***

The Algerian linguistic setting being bilingual, our aim in asking this question is to check the languages our students use when communicating by SMS or more importantly through the other social network platforms. English was expected to be with the other languages as they study it, but also because it has become a global language used worldwide. Here are the results:



The percentages obtained from this multi-choice question show clearly that three languages available to the students are used to more or less the same extent (around 60%, with a little higher rate for English (65.5%). A few of them use other languages. The reasons behind the use of these languages is that English is the language of their studies in the department, while Arabic is their mother tongue and French is considered as the 1<sup>st</sup> foreign language, often used in codeswitching or mixed in Algerian Arabic.

- ***Qu.10 Which of the following do you use when texting?***

Question 10 was intended to inform us about the linguistic features used in students' digital communication and whether they follow the unconventional ways of typing in SMS texting and on other IM platforms.



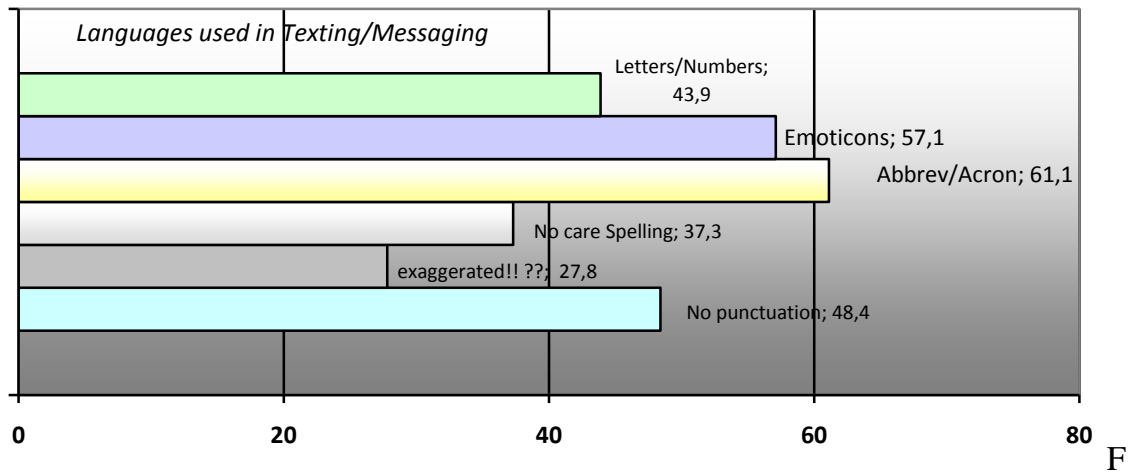


Fig. 3.11 Texting features used

Fig. 3.11 shows that 61,1% of the informants use lots of abbreviations, 57,1% use emoticons, less than half the population ignore punctuation (48,8%), 42,9% use isolated letters and numbers to express Arabic consonants not found in Latin script, while 37,3% do not care about spelling mistakes and only 27,8% exaggerate the use of exclamation and interrogation marks.

- ***Qu.11 What types of abbreviations do you use? Cite some examples***

This is an open ended question in which we wanted to know the types of abbreviations used by the respondents asking them to cite some examples. The informants have cited various features of texting including shortening, clipping, acronyms, initialisms and all other types of texting style that we have dealt with in the first chapter. This language behaviour shows that students are aware of texting linguistic features in English and French and their creativity helps in representing Algerian Arabic, their mother tongue, using Latin script and numerals to replace a number of consonants that have no equivalents in French and English phonemic systems. One thing we have been wondering about is how all Arabs seem to have chosen the same numerals for the representation of some Arabic consonants such as ‘3’ for the Arabic pharyngeal ع [ʕ] and ‘7’ for its voiceless counterpart ح [ħ].

- *A few characteristics of shortenings used:*

1. Same words shortened in different ways:

In English: 'Good night' > *gd nght - Goodn8- Gd n8 - Gdn8 - G.N - Gd9- good n9*

'Thanks' > *Thnx- Tnx- thx*

In French: 'Bonne nuit' > *B8 Bn8 bon8*

2. Words shortened in different languages:

*slt*, 'Salut' in French - *slm*, Salam in Arabic سلام.

A few students replied that they do not use abbreviations, but in reality some typed their replies using them, as in "I don't use *abb*".

2. Acronyms in different languages: LOL, MDR, etc...

4. Initialisms: *brb* 'be right back'; *Idk* 'I don't know'; *mdr* 'mort de rire'...

- ***Qu.12 For what purposes do you use abbreviations in texting?***

This question seeks to grasp the respondents' choice of using abbreviations. The reasons stated by most students are time pressure, i.e., gaining time and effort, typing fast in the conversation and avoiding long messages. Some others said it has become a habit to use abbreviations and other forms of shortenings including isolated letters, numbers and emoticons; even ellipses are used as a device to make conversations as short as possible: a good example can be seen in the often used expression *c u l8r* in which, in which in addition to the use of a single letter and a number, the phrase 'I'll...' is elided, the way it occurs in natural speech. A few informants said that they use abbreviations because of laziness, for fun and sometimes to play and create new ones to be used later on, a behaviour which reveals texters' creativity.

- ***Qu. 13 Does texting affect your writing skills?***

In this question, we wanted to know the extent to which students are aware of any impact of texting linguistic features on their literacy and writing skills, and about half of the sample answered negatively, which means that the other half are somewhat aware of the effect that these may have on their formal writings.

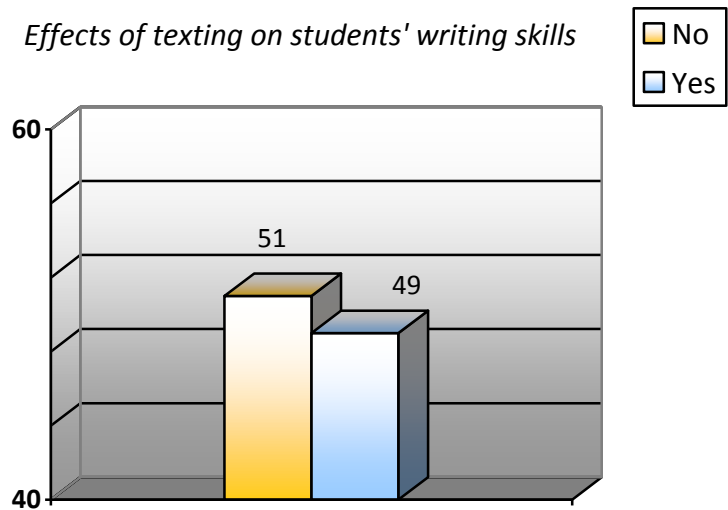


Fig. 3.12 Effects of texting on EFL students' writing skills

The results obtained for this question are quite unexpected and hardly credible as 51%, about half of the informants said ‘Yes’, texting affects their writing skills. There are of course those who argue that ‘cyber slang’ – a term sometimes used to refer to digital messaging – has made its way into popular speech and this popularity may lead students to make spelling mistakes in formal writing, or use abbreviations and acronyms. But there are specialists like David Crystal who believe that texting does not affect students as they are aware of informal forms to be avoided when they write an essay in class, for instance. It is even suggested that they use some of these shortenings and clippings in their rough paper or when taking notes but carefully avoid them when writing ‘seriously’ in an exam for example. So, we wonder why such a good number of informants reacted that way to the question. A better way to check negative effect on their writing skills would be to examine some of their exam papers or dissertations.

As for the other 49% of the respondents, they answered negatively saying that texting does not influence their writing skills which must also be checked through assessing their formal writing in the English language or even French, though the standard form of Arabic is not concerned with this issue

- *Qu. 14. Do you happen to use texting in writing an academic paper or exam?*

This question is complementary to the previous one. The pie chart above shows that the majority of students (80%) do not use texting style in their academic papers.

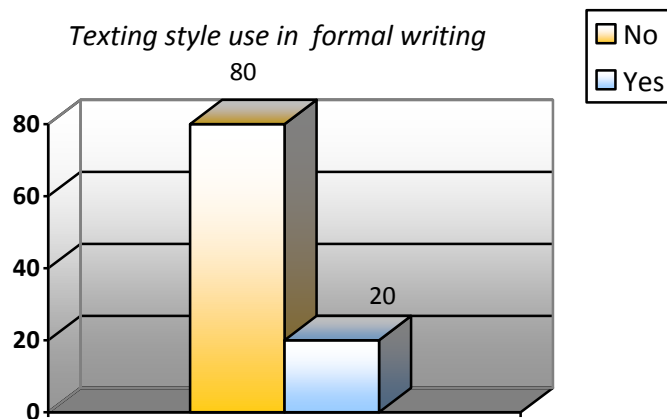


Fig. 3.13 Use of texting style in writing an academic paper or exam

It is quite strange that 20% recognize they do use texting in their research papers and exams, though they know that the use of informal language is unacceptable in academic studies. In fact, doing a small comparison between the previous results (Qu. 13) where the proportion of students affected by texting is 51% while only 20% say they use texting style it in their formal written production; this means that there is disagreement in their replies.

- **Hypothesis 2:** The respondents' answers to questions 10 to 14 seem to a certain extent to confirm our second hypothesis that texting style may eventually affect students' literacy and writing skills, though such a statement needs a deeper investigation such as the assessment of students' exam papers and formal writings and what texting features really appear in their writings. We believe that the only textspeak linguistic features we may find in their papers are abbreviations and clippings such as *lab* and *flu*, which after all have long become accepted in Standard English, as well as some acronyms like the UK or the UNESCO.

### 3.2.2 The Interview

Attempting to check our hypotheses, particularly from a qualitative point of view, we have administered a semi-structured interview to four adults, 3 female teachers of English and a young man still working on his doctorate thesis in English. The interviews were carried out in a quite informal atmosphere and the interviewees were made aware of the significance of the research topic as it concerned primarily Students of English and their ways of texting and using CMCs.

The interview consists of seven open-ended questions most of which were similar to those in the questionnaire for students, though the focus here is to obtain qualitative data, reliable as well, as the interviewees responded with all freedom in their own words.

Apart from question 1 for which only one responded negatively on SMS use, all interviewees replied more or less in the same way for each question, saying that, depending on the interlocutor,

- they use the three languages they know;
- there is a slight negative impact on writing skills;
- texting and digital communication have influenced social relations;
- they prefer texting to phoning but for some it also depends on situations;
- they all use various types of digital communication tools
- they spend much time connected to friends/people on messenger
- except for question 1

Such replies tell us clearly that students and young Algerians in general have quickly joined the worldwide community in using their smartphone for texting more than phoning, but more importantly by using different IM platforms such as FB messenger, Twitter, Viber and other digital communication applications. What we fear is the increasing addiction to this time-consuming virtual communication while people get less and less in real contact with friends and relatives.

### 3.2.3 Random observation

In order to obtain more data through real examples of texting activities, we have chosen a few samples from SMS texts, Facebook comments and Twitter discussions.

#### Cyber language analysis:

In this part of our study we aim to check how texting language is spreading among texters and internet users in general and how they use it in their daily interactions, analysing the texting features in their comments. We have compared the comments with the corresponding formal writing.

#### Example 1: Twitter comments on a scientific article

User1 Replying to @RT\_com.27m

fake photo or GMO

User2 Replying to @RT\_com.27m

Gmo ?

The equivalent formal version to the above is:

User1: This is a fake photo or Genetically Modified Organisms

User2: What does GMO mean ?

The analysis of twitter comments:

The comment and the reply above have been taken from Twitter. In reality the comments are informal, and the reply was delivered instantly.

#### 1. Syntactic reduction:

The sentence is syntactically not false but is reduced as a result of ellipsis: user 1 and user2 wanted to pass the message directly by saying briefly just what is important.

The omission of the subject and the verb in both comments

~~This is a~~ photo or GMO?

~~What does~~ GMO mean?

#### 2. Acronym:

The use of a non-familiar acronym: GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms)

### **Example 2:**

User3: YES YES YES!!! Humble head down throughout & is the most improved of all the contestants!!! I'm so happy for Kenny !! Well done honey, very well deserved ! His mum, wife & family will be so proud!! No doubt his dad will be smiling from heaven!! LOVE IT!! 🍴👏😘

This comment was taken from Twitter; the user congratulates a Master Chef winner, using lots of expressions with some informal speech and characters.

According to what the user wants to say, this might be the correct form of the comment:

Yes! Humble, head down throughout and the most improved of all the contestants! I am so happy for Kenny! Well done honey, very well deserved! His mother, wife and family will be so proud! There is no doubt that his father will be smiling from heaven! I love it!

Linguistically speaking, the comment is full of repetitions, the user exaggerates the use of punctuation (!!!), the replacement of words by character (logographs:&)

1. Repetition of the word Yes (YES YES YES), with capitalized letters.
2. Random use of punctuation and exclamation marks :
- 3-The use of logographs

The user replaces the word 'and' by the logograph '&' twice in a single comment

- 4- Non formal words:

mother > Mum; father > Dad

- 5-The use of emojis:

- 🍴 :IndicatesMasterChef - 👏 :Applauds to congratulate - 😘 : kiss

### **Example 3 :**

User 3 :Tres bél hommage ,tres emouvant, Obispo m a fait pleurer ossi ... Une grde dame au coeur tendre é partit... Repose en paix ...

The above comment was taken from a FB French page (TF1, the voice) on the occasion of the death of a French celebrity. It has been written in an informal way; the correct one is as follows:

User 3: Très bel hommage, très émouvant, Obispo m'a fait pleurer aussi ... Une grande dame au cœur tendre est partie. Repose en paix.

Linguistically speaking, the comment contains lots of spelling mistakes (the omission of the acute accent and the apostrophe). The user writes as she speaks, using some shortening forms and exaggerating the use of ellipsis.

**Example 4:**

*Bs7tk khti – frhtlk Cngrts* 😊 (congratulating a friend in Arabizi for success)

Indeed, we often read, on FB messenger especially, messages in which two or three languages are mixed: Arabizi, with its Romanized script, English and French. In fact, as already mentioned, people texting or communicating through social networks type their messages and conversations the way they speak in everyday settings by mixing the languages they know.

**Example 5:**

شكون عنده دروس تاع سيفيليزاسيون تاع سيكند سيماستر يحطهملنا بليز و ثانكيو 😊

'Who's got civilization lectures 2<sup>nd</sup> semester to post please; and thank you.'

In this last example, however, the text is in Algerian Arabic in Arabic script, but still mixing languages; here English words written in Arabic.

Where will all this creativity take young people in the coming years?

➤ **Hypothesis 3:** The interview conducted with a number of young adults appears to partly confirm our third hypothesis that texting and digital communication influence young people in their social relations. But this impact has got both negative and positive sides. As a matter of fact, texting and mostly IM are time-consuming which can be harmful for the youth, especially students. Also, people get less and less in real contact with others, thinking that texting them or sending them messages through FB or Viber is enough. On the other hand, young people today are in touch with a great number of people by means of the various web platforms at their disposal. They can even reach important personalities like a professor abroad, an actor or footballer and even a famous Imam anywhere in the Muslim world!



### 3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have described the methodology and the research tools used for the investigation, i.e., the on-line questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and a random observation of a few texts and messages. The first tool has allowed us to analyse texters' use of SMS and other IM platforms; then we found out their linguistic behaviour, namely their use of a number of features often used to make their messages as short as possible and to follow the 'wave' of using those linguistic creative features. The two other research instruments, rather qualitative, have allowed us to find out that most young people own smartphones, but use them mostly to get in touch with others by texting, and more importantly by instant messaging as they are connected through the Internet from home or using the 4G service. This world of digital communication is said to be virtual, but in fact, people's connections *are* real and so many things have been achieved through texting and digital communication.

## **General Conclusion**

The development of writing over time and the emergence of modern technologies especially the one related to the field of communication have had a great impact on the behaviour of people and the way they communicate and write, in particular the way they exchange messages. With the advent of globalization, the meaning of communication has changed. It has witnessed a great leap away from traditional methods or methods that have been exclusive to specific fields, such as the use of telex and telegraph in commercial fields. With the advent of the mobile phone on the one hand and the Internet on the other, communication in its various forms has become accessible to the general public; it includes SMS texting, emailing, and what is called IM (instant messaging) using different social networks and electronic platforms.

This research work has considered SMS texting which has become popular among the young generation, but increasingly among adults as well. We have been able to show that the sample population of students involved in this investigation behave linguistically like other texters in the world by using various types of shortening forms, clippings and abbreviations, as well as other strategies to gain money and time. This new writing style started to be called ‘texting’, then ‘netspeak’ and ‘texaspeak’ and textism or cyberlanguage in general. Even though they are new, all these terms have the same meaning and have become commonplace as a result of the predominance of SMS writing style and social networking. Through this research, we have presented the history and circumstances of the appearance of the text-messaging language, the conditions of its development with the various modern technologies and their impact on society, especially on young people.

Considering the impact of texting/messaging and its relation to various linguistic and social phenomena, we have shown that such practices have a strong link with age and gender, since the youth category is the most concerned with

texting and digital communication. Given the complexity of the linguistic situation of Algeria, we have also observed how students use the strategy of code switching which has thus become a phenomenon associated with texting after it was only related to oral conversation. Texting in our society has also led to the use of what has been termed Arabizi, i.e., Arabic typed by means of Latin script which has become a typing habit among the Algerian youth and facilitates code switching to English or French, though increasing use of Arabic (both Standard and Dialectal) using Arabic script can easily be noticed in texting and social networks communication, particularly in formal conversations.

By means of three research tools which have allowed data collection to be analysed from quantitative and qualitative perspectives, we have tried to demonstrate the impact of texting/messaging on students from the Department of English (Tlemcen University). We have been able to show some effects on their writing skills as well as on their social behaviour. The negative impact on students' literacy has long been exaggerated, for we have found out that it is of minor importance as students seem to be absolutely aware that texting style is to be avoided in formal writings like exams and research papers. However, a deeper investigation that examines might reveal whether there is some textspeak features in students' writings.

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## *Appendices*

### Appendix A

#### ➤ On-line questionnaire to students of English

For a research about texting you are kindly invited to spare a few minutes of your valuable time to answer this simple Questionnaire.

#### 1. Gender

- Male
- Female

#### 2. Age

- under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- Over 35

#### 3. Do you have a mobile phone (smartphone)?

- Yes
- No

#### 4. Do you use texting or calling?

- Texting
- Calling

#### 5. Do you use SMS texting or Messenger?

- SMS texting
- Messenger

#### 6. How often do you text?



- Daily
- Often
- Hardly ever
- Never

7. What device do you use for texting?

- PC
- Phone
- Tablet

8. In what circumstances do you use texting?

- Blogs and forums
- Social media
- phone messages
- Online games

9. In what language do you usually send messages?

- Arabic
- English
- French
- Other

10. Which of the following do you use when texting?

- I ignore punctuation

- I exaggerate the use of !!!! and ????
- I do not care about spelling mistakes
- I use lots of abbreviations and acronyms
- I use lots of ab
- I use letters and numbers to express the way a word or letter sound (I h8t txtng).

11. What type of abbreviations do you use? Cite some examples

.....  
 .....

12. For what purpose do you use abbreviations in texting?

.....  
 .....

13. Does texting affect your writing skills?

- Yes
- No

14. Do you happen to use texting style in writing an academic paper or exam?

- Yes
- No

***Texting style: Abbreviations and shortening forms used***

11. what type of abbreviations do you use ? cite some examples	
LOL PLS ROFL BRB U hbu hru	LOL PLS ROFL BRB U hbu hru

Xoxo XD TY tysm MDR jtdr tfk jtm koi C	Xoxo XD TY tysm MDR jtdr tfk jtm koi C
Lol MDR Jtm Jtdt Ptdr C Tfq TG U instead of you .	Serieux- srx. Vraiment-vm. Ur U Sup B8-dzl-bsh -lge lol tbh, brb, ttyl, smh
Abt (about) tmrw (tomorrow) & (and ) u (you)	I don't use abb
MDR,Lol,Ptdr	LOL. Tbh. Rn.
U=>you, r are , tnx thanks	
mdr , dcr,plz, g9, 2m1	Dr1 , thnx, b1, wlc
slt .dsl. rpd. cv 2r1 . 2m1	C u 2nyt , Gd n8 ,
Bnuit for bonne nuit, dm1 for demain, u for you, btw for by the way	Omg lol tbt
bn8/cv	Goodn8, 4ever, c you
Cv, cu, dcr, jsp, psq, tkt...	Prk. 2 lol mdr u &
Are (r) you (u) demain (2m1) ...	You(U). Goodbye (gb) How are you(H R U) Many others
b8 cv thnx	u, btw, tbh, abt
Slit, slm, lol	Nrml, lge, Pssbl...
brb, asap, ik, bro, wth, np .....	H r u
	nn cv pk
U=you. Gdn8= good night. Btw=by the way.	lol .. brb .. cmn ... hve .. ikr ..dmn
Bcz, mdr, slm, slit	prk tfk tkt ....
u ur	SLM-CV-MS-B8
In my my texting, I usually rely on initialism ,for example, USA (United States of America ) , lol (laughing out of loud ) , OMG( oh my God ) , GF (girlfriend ) BF ( boyfriend) ,cus (because) ... Otherwise , shortening like ad (advertisement) also I use constractions as in he's ,I've I have , Dr ( doctor	Numbers, letters and emoji
	Lge, abt, lol,
Bnjr , MRC , b1	hmd for hamdoulilah

Smth ..gm .....u ....ppl..lge.....PDQ.....lol.....	Lv u/ bb/pc/
	Lol, "u" for(you), "rn" for (right now)
Bnjr jcp	U instead of you
BTW ldk	Wyd. Tfk. I□u. Luv. Na wht ...
Tnx	Lol , Mdr , ASP, U
I don't use abbreviations	
B8	Bn8...jtm...u...gud...cnct...bcz
wth ,brb ,tyt ,wdym ...	MDR svp stp cad prob
G.N for Good Night, Bro for brother	
Lol , tkt pas	Cv
	for example like in french it's 'ça va', but as an abbreviation i write 'cv'
Slm,cv,hmd,	also 'bon8' for 'bonne nuit' (goog night) LOL for ' Laugh Over Limit'
	YOU(u)-ARE(r)-IDK(i don't know)-LOL(laughing out loud)-OMG(Oh my God)-2moro(Tomorrow)-RN(right now)-CUZ(because)-4(for).
Use number when i speak in arabic LIke rani 3ayan lol	doing/doin , love you /lov u
Omg slt plz	Lol/AKA/ Fyi
pk? u r wlcm nvr hmd bn8	
ldk , U, Lol.	fb 2m1
Ur, u	Bjr/slt/bon8/stp/cv/hmd
	about:abt please : plz Thank you:thx Merci:mrc Parceque:psk Bon jour:bnjr Bon nuit:bn8
STP ,, mrc	
fb for facebook b8 for goodnight	Lol
btw (by the way), asap (as soon as possible)	Cv
Slt,çv,tfk...	
Bn8/ tnx bb /cc/ slt /frnc ....	Abt
Bcz . wot .u .nd	& , FB, ftbl, msg,
Facebook= FB , Information=Info , University= univ , it depends .	dzl bcz bcp b1
Instead of typing the whole word, I use abbreviations, for example for=4 you= u	u, ure and u're instead of you, your and you're
Cc ,cv , u, ...	hw r u .. Gd9 ..
BTW ( by the way), TMR (tomorrow)...	Lge bn8....
	Thnx Wlcm
ldk, no prob, c ya	
Hmdl mrc	mrc , koi , mdr ...
Tmrw , wknd, gd nght	stp , good n9 ,slt ,b8
U, je re ,tfq	Cv, B1 , slm,
Slt je pns a pls	Thx
thks slt u	Mrc
Rn, irl, smth	Lol.slm.rns.bj

## Appendix B

### ➤ Semi-structured interview

#### **Interview questions**

1. Do you happen to use SMS? How often?
2. Which language(s) do you use when texting?
3. Do you think there's an impact of texting on language or writing skill?
4. Do you think that texting affects social relations? How?
5. Texting vs. Phoning... which one do you prefer?
6. Do you use other forms of digital messaging? (social networks)
7. Can you imagine the world today without cell phones and internet?

#### **Interviewee 1:**

1- Yes I do use SMS, as much as it is needed.

2- It depends on the interlocutor, but usually French and Arabic, with possible codeswitching.

3 – Yes, sure.

4- Yes, it does affect social relationship. It shortens distance between people and also time.

5- It depends on situations. Texting for short answers, or less personal conversations

6- Yes sure

7- As much as possible; when I arrive home, I open it.

#### **Interviewee 2**

1. Yes, I always do.

2. I use English or French. It depends on the person.

3. Yes, because I have my phone on me all the time.

4. Yes, it does positively and negatively. Positively, we are always in touch but it also makes us distant, for example, in ceremonies like Aid we tend to send a message, though before we used to visit or at least call.

5. Texting.

6. Yes all the time, especially emojis.

7. A lot of time, especially with the 4g I am always connected.

### **Interviewee 3**

1. Yes, it happens to me to use SMS, always.
2. I use French when texting.
3. Yes, as soon as I receive it.
4. No, I don't think that texting affects social relations.
5. I prefer phoning.
6. Yes, I use other forms of digital messaging like Viber, Whatsapp...
7. I spend much time, many hours on messenger everyday.

### **Interviewee 4**

1. I do not use SMS very often; only urgently and when the other person I am addressing has no access to Internet, otherwise I would be using Messenger.
2. I use a mixture of languages: mostly used one is dialectal Arabic, English, sometimes French or only some French expressions. Briefly, I have a unique language behaviour where several languages are incorporated and this also depends on the person I am texting.
3. If they have no clue about foreign languages, I would only use dialectal Arabic.
4. Probably yes, but the impact is very slight for me.
5. Yes, I do. I think it's keeping people close and distant from each other as well, sometimes people are more honest about who they are and feel more comfortable expressing themselves while texting. However, people are having less and less face-to-face conversations.
6. I prefer texting, I always escape phoning.
7. Yes, I do. Well, I have to check my inbox everyday! And the time I spend there depends on whom I am speaking to.

Appendix C :

**Example 1:** Twitter comments on a scientific article

User1 Replying to @RT\_com.27m

fake photo or GMO

User2 Replying to @RT\_com.27m

Gmo ?

The equivalent formal version to the above is:

User1: This is a fake photo or Genetically Modified Organisms

User2: What does GMO mean ?

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**Example 2 :**

User3: YES YES YES!!! Humble head down throughout & is the most improved of all the contestants!!! I'm so happy for Kenny !! Well done honey, very well deserved ! His mum, wife & family will be so proud!! No doubt his dad will be smiling from heaven!! LOVE IT!! 🙌👏😊

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**Example 3 :**

User 3 :Tres bél hommage ,tres emouvant, Obispo m a fait pleurer ossi ... Une grde dame au coeur tendre é partit... Repose en paix ...

The above comment was taken from a FB French page (TF1, the voice) on the occasion of the death of a French celebrity. It has been written in an informal way; the correct one is as follows:

User 3: Très bel hommage, très émouvant, Obispo m'a fait pleurer aussi ... Une grande dame au cœur tendre est partie. Repose en paix.

شکون عنده دروس تاع سيفيليزاسيون تاع سيکند سيماستر يحطهملنا بليز و ثاتکيو 😊

## *Texting and Digital Communication: Effects on Students' Behaviour*

### **الملخص**

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة استخدام الرسائل النصية القصيرة (SMS) والاتصال الرقمي بشكل عام عند الشباب، وخاصة الطلاب منهم، لمعرفة مدى تأثرهم بالظاهرة. باستخدام عدد من الأدوات البحثية مع عينة من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في تلمسان، حاولنا دراسة تأثير أسلوب الرسائل النصية على ممارساتهم اللغوية والسلوك الاجتماعي. تبين النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها أن استخدام الرسائل النصية على الهواتف الذكية والشبكات الاجتماعية أصبح مُمعماً بشكل متزايد ويبدو أن له تأثيراً حقيقياً على الشباب الجزائري.

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### **Summary**

The present research aims at examining the use of SMS texting and digital communication in general among young people, students in particular, to know the extent to which they are affected by the phenomenon. Using a few research tools with a sample population from the English Department in Tlemcen, we have tried to study the effects of texting style on their linguistic practices and social behaviour. The results obtained show that the use of texting on smartphone and social networks is increasingly generalized and appears to have a real impact on Algerian youth.

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### **Résumé**

La présente recherche vise à examiner l'utilisation du SMS et de la communication numérique en général chez les jeunes, en particulier les étudiants, pour savoir dans quelle mesure ils sont affectés par le phénomène. En utilisant quelques outils de recherche avec un échantillon de population du département d'anglais à Tlemcen, nous avons essayé d'étudier les effets du style texto sur leurs pratiques linguistiques et leur comportement social. Les résultats obtenus montrent que l'utilisation de textos sur les smartphones et les réseaux sociaux est de plus en plus généralisée et semble avoir un impact réel sur la jeunesse algérienne.