

Exploring the impact of texting on the formal writing of English second language high school learners

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement and contains no material which has been submitted for obtaining any other qualification nor, does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of textspeak on the formal writing of a selected group of English second language high school learners. The general aims of the study were to establish how widespread the use of textspeak (the kind of language and spelling often containing short forms of words that people use when they are writing text messages) is among high school learners in the chosen community, sourcing the relevant English language educators' perspectives on the phenomenon of textspeak, assessing whether there is any evidence of the use of textspeak features in the written work of learners as well as identifying the types of textspeak features if any, used by grade 8 and 11 learners in their written work.

Seventy learners from a Setswana dominated school in a lower income community in Potchefstroom, North West province participated in the study. The study included 32 grade 8 learners and 38 grade 11s. Questionnaires were completed by the learner participants to determine the frequency and volume of their textspeak use and features of textspeak they reportedly use while texting. Learners also wrote an essay attached to the questionnaire for the purpose of discovering whether textspeak features were present in the written work. Textspeak resembles standard English in many ways however, it has defining linguistic properties that distinguish it. These features included lack of punctuation, punctuation used inappropriately, use of abbreviations and acronyms, use of letters and numbers, use of more punctuation than is necessary, use of shortenings/contractions, use of slang, use of smileys, grammar as well as spelling errors which are not textspeak related.

The results of this study indicate that high school students are ardent textspeak users and that socio-economic variables do not factor significantly into cell phone accessibility. Many reported using textspeak in their written work. However, the written work shows that textspeak represents a tiny fraction of language. Despite containing a few textspeak features, the essays contained a lot of non-standard features which were not textspeak related. These errors pertained to concord, word classes and punctuation, and were a result of not applying formally taught rules. Consequently, with the small number of textspeak features made by a relatively small number of students (mostly in grade 11), there could be other factors that influence students' writing.

Put differently, from the results of this study, there is little need for concern about the impact of textspeak on the future of standard written English. This is not to suggest however, that

possible dangers of textspeak are ruled out; 80% of the teachers' responses hint to the negative impacts of textspeak. Five English language teachers from the same school also completed a questionnaire regarding the visible textspeak features in the learners' written work. They commented on the use of textspeak in relation to academic writing. Four of the five teachers indicated that textspeak hampers written literacy. One educator noted that textspeak has a positive impact on written literacy.

KEY TERMS

Literacy, Standard English, Text messaging, Textspeak, Textism.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMC: Computer-Mediated Communication

EFAL: English First Additional Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

HU: Hermeneutic Unit

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

SE: Standard English

SMS: Short Message Service

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1 CONTEXTUALISATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 Introduction

"Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing."

– Benjamin Franklin

By teaching learners to write, educators empower them to interact profoundly in the modern world. Good writing is a skill that lets voices be heard amidst the chaos of information around us. Modern communication channels open the world to African learners, but unless they are equipped to express themselves clearly and effectively, their voices will be lost in the noise. For too long, South Africa has been experiencing an educational crisis with learners' reading and writing skills proving inadequate (Spaull, 2013). South African literature has been focused on improving school learners' reading skills, which is understandable. However, in the meantime, little attention has been paid to writing abilities. This is problematic, given that standardised assessments mostly require students to demonstrate their proficiency and communicative abilities in writing. Furthermore, written communication is the only form of communication that is irrevocable in the professional sector. English being the predominant lingua franca, it seems essential to ensure that African students are enabled to engage in the modern global community. Margaret Atwood once said: "A word after a word after a word is power." If this is so, applied linguists in South Africa as well as teachers, must rise to the challenge to help equip our students with the ability to produce words and use them effectively. The present research aims to take on this challenge by exploring the relationship between the use of textspeak amongst school going ESL learners and their formal writing abilities. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the present research. The topic is contextualised to motivate this investigation before the research question is presented and research aims formulated. Finally, my ambitions in terms of making a research contribution are stipulated.

1.2 Texting

Texting is an activity that many teenagers engage in on a day-to-day basis, (Drouin & Davids, 2009:49; Everett, 2016:1; Dansieh, 2011:222). Vosloo (2009:2) indicates that texting is the written *lingua franca* of many youth today. Texting refers to the brief text messages between mobile phones (Verheijen, 2013:583) which may be exchanged via e-mail, Facebook, Twitter,

Messenger, WhatsApp, SMS, amongst others, (Drouin & Davis, 2009:50; Majola, Pillay & Hlongwane, 2019:28).

A new written vocabulary has emerged as the use of text messages spread across the globe such that there are standard dictionaries posted on the internet and Google search for this written language (Drouin & Davis, 2009:49). This text messaging language is referred to by a variety of terms, including “textspeak”, “SMS language”, “textisms”, “netspeak”, “SMS speak” and “textese”, (Steyn & Evans, 2015:200; Verheijen, 2013:583; Odey, Essoh & Endong, 2014:88). I will use the term “textspeak” throughout this thesis to refer to any form of texting.

Even though textspeak has been applauded for its communicative benefits, concern over its effects on writing is a continuous subject of research. There are conflicting views on whether textspeak affects students’ literacy or not, and if so, how it influences it. According to Verheijen (2013:582) and Dansieh (2011:222), the phenomenon of text messaging has brought in its wake three main schools of thought, discussed below.

The first group, spearheaded by Crystal, claims that texting has a positive impact on literacy. Crystal (2008:9) believes that the widespread concern about the negative impact of texting on children’s literacy is unfounded. He argues that sending frequent texts can actually help children to read and write because of the abbreviations used. He suggests that text messaging does not really pose a threat to students’ literacy as many fear it can. He argues that there is evidence that shows that textspeak helps, rather than hinders, literacy. It has added a new dimension to language use (Crystal 2008:10). Plester and Wood (2009:1 100) also claim that rather than causing havoc on language literacy practices, texting may provide children and adolescents with ‘increased exposure to text’ and extra opportunities to engage with language. They believe that any engagement with the written word, including reading and writing textisms (a word or abbreviation typically used in a text message) in digital form on mobile phones, is beneficial for children as they may be exposed to more words in the environment than ever (Plester & Wood, 2009:1 109). Titanji, Patience and Ndode (2017:1) also contend that text messaging has a positive side to it as more students write than ever before.

On the other hand, the second group asserts that text messaging contributes to the decline of Standard English. John Humphrys (2007) argues in a newspaper article that texters are:

vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours 800 years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped.

This statement depicts concerns that the use of textspeak may cause literacy problems. Sutherland (2002) also reflects this concern when he regards textspeak as “unimaginative, bleak, bald shorthand”. He highlights that textspeak “masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness.” Dansieh (2011:222), Geertsema, Hyman and Van Deventer (2011:475) and Vosloo (2009:2) state that many teachers lament the problem of textspeak in schools. Vosloo (2009:2) notes that text messaging has provoked a very strong negative response from parents, teachers as well as language experts. Lee (2002) (cited by Vosloo, 2009:2) describes it as “the continuing assault of technology on formal written English”. Vosloo (2009:2) also adds that learners are not able to use appropriate language in different contexts; their informal textisms appear in formal writing. Thubakgale and Chaka (2016:223), Geertsema, Hyman and Van Deventer (2011:487), Mphahlele and Mashamaite (2005:168) identify several non-conventional written forms in students’ writing, such as lack of capitalization, incorrect spelling usage as well as poor punctuation. This, they argue, has led to fluctuation of lower grades. They conclude that texting inevitably will erode the younger generation’s ability to spell, punctuate and capitalise correctly.

The third school reports conflicting findings or no significant correlation at all, (Verheijen, 2013:582; Dansieh, 2011:222). Researchers in this category include Drouin and Davis (2009), Wood, Jackson, Hart, Wilde and Plester (2011) and Al-Salman and Saeed (2017). They argue that there are no clear positive or negative links between adolescent texting practices and literacy. Drouin and Davis (2009) for instance, explored the usage of textspeak among 80 college students in a western university in the USA and tested whether the use of textspeak had a significant negative relationship with literacy performance. 34 textspeak users and 46 non-textspeak users were assessed for their proficiency and familiarity with textspeak as well as their standardised literacy levels and misspellings of common textspeak words. Results showed that there were no significant differences between the two groups in standardised literacy scores or misspellings of common words. In relation to this, Wray (2015), examined the views and opinions held by teachers about the impact of texting on children’s literacy development. 27 primary school teachers were interviewed in depth and a number of key themes emerged. These teachers did express negative view about the impact of texting, and of technology use generally upon their students’ literacy, although many also

mentioned positive effects. A majority did feel concerned about the effects of textspeak but these feelings were tempered by a range of other factors. None of these teachers blamed the use of textspeak exclusively for declining levels of student literacy, suggesting that the media portrayal of this issue 'had been over-simplistic at best' (Wray, 2015:280).

Similar trends are seen in South African-based research on the topic for example, as Steyn and Evans (2015). Steyn and Evans (2015:214) suggest that text messaging does not pose a threat to students' formal writing. This was observed after carrying out a proof-reading protocol to investigate whether the media hype about the supposedly detrimental effect of textspeak on teenagers' formal English skills is justified. A post-positivist research philosophy was assumed coupled with a quantitative design. A purposefully designed proofreading protocol allowed for the collection of empirical data from 288 respondents from three South African secondary school learners with English first language proficiency. These schools were from the upper middle class socio-economic sphere in the Pretoria metropolis. The proofreading protocols were administered to grade 8,9,10 and 11 learners. The results indicate that the 288 respondents did not struggle to identify textisms implying that the target population had a sufficiently precise grasp of register to discredit media claims that textspeak is akin to language decay. They concluded that they see textspeak as offering a new layer to language use rather than supplanting standard literacy conventions (Steyn and Evans, 2015:215).

Geertsema, Hyman and Deventer's (2011) study on the contrary, suggests that textspeak has a negative impact on written literacy. Geertsema, Hyman and Deventer (2011) explored the perspectives of grade 8 and 9 English (as Home Language) educators in Gauteng, South Africa, regarding the possible influence of SMS language on certain aspects of adolescents' written language skills. The research design was of a non-experimental nature. Questionnaires were used to gain survey data from the participants. Purposive sampling was employed. The sample of participants comprised 22 educators employed at independent schools within Gauteng province in South Africa. The 22 educators had sufficient experience and academic training in the instruction of English as a Home Language. The survey indicated that the majority of educators viewed SMS language as having a negative influence on the written language skills of grade 8 and 9 learners. The educators observed that students do not always adhere to Standard English with respect to spelling, punctuation and sentence length. The teachers regularly encountered non-conventional spellings based on textspeak, incorrect use of full stops, commas and exclamation marks. Shorter, simplified sentences

were also found sporadically. The use of textspeak was perceived to have a negative impact on students' academic writing.

Freudenberg (2009); Winzker, Southwood and Huddleston (2009), also came up with slightly different results. Freudenberg (2009) employed a qualitative research design to establish the widespread use of textspeak among the learners and to establish whether their writing samples contained textspeak. The study was undertaken at an English-Afrikaans dual-medium school in the Western Cape and it involved 88 learners. Data were collected in two forms: responses to questionnaires and samples of learner writing. Freudenberg (2009) used the questionnaires to determine the frequency and volume of participants' use of textspeak as well as the features of textspeak. The participants' written English samples were intended to assess specific features of textspeak. The results reveal that the learners were avid users of textspeak and were able to transcribe textspeak into Standard English. However, the samples of written work did not contain a great number of instances of textspeak features. Freudenberg (2009) suggests that learners can assess when it is and is not appropriate to use a certain variety of language, and this could be because of the school with a strict language policy, one which does not tolerate the use of textspeak.

In addition to rendering inconclusive results, these South African-based studies were typically carried out in middle class families, and/or amongst English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) speakers (Steyn, 2015; Freudenberg, 2009), focusing either on empirical work (such as Freudenberg, 2009), or on qualitative perceptions of teachers (Geertsema et al., 2011; Steyn and Evans, 2015). Consequently, the present research concerns the extent to which the perception that students' academic writing skills are declining as a result of their utilisation of texting, is plausible. In order to contribute to the body of literature and ensure comparative results, I investigate the phenomenon within a lower income sphere with learners who would not necessarily have ready access to, and use of, mobile phones. Teachers' perceptions are also compared to empirical analysis of samples of student writing. In so doing, I intend to contribute to the ongoing debate on the extent to which texting affects literacy by offering empirical evidence in a South African context.

The present study departs from the assumptions that the prolonged use of textspeak could affect the learners' ability to shift between textspeak and standard language (Geertsema, Hyman & Deventer (2011:485). In terms of design, the study follows Freudenberg's research

design to allow for direct comparison and include both empirical analysis of written samples, as well as consideration of teacher perceptions.

1.3 Aims

Consequently, the aims of this study are to:

- Establish how widespread the use of texting language is among high school learners in the chosen community.
- Sourcing the relevant English language educators' perspectives on the phenomenon of texting.
- Assess whether there is any evidence of the use of features of textspeak in the English written work of learners in the selected lower income community.
- Identify the types of textspeak features if any, used by grade 8 and 11 learners in their written work, in a lower income community.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the consideration above, the following main research question is formulated as follows:

To what extent, if any, are teacher perceptions valid regarding the way in which texting habits of ESL learners in a lower income community influence learners' formal writing?

In order to address this question, the following sub questions need to be asked.

- What are the English language educators' views on the phenomenon of texting in relation to learners' written work, in a lower income community?
- What are the learners' views on the impact of textspeak on their formal writing?
- How widespread is the use of texting among high school learners in a lower income community?
- Is there any evidence of the use of textspeak features in the English written work of learners in a lower income community?

1.5 Conclusion

Chapter 1 presents a clear context in which the research project is based, creating a foundation for the reader to understand the procedure followed throughout the dissertation. The need for further research is motivated by the lack of consensus about the extent to which textspeak affects formal writing in a positive or negative way. The chapter presents the central research question, as well as the sub-questions through which the central research question

will be answered. The concept of *textspeak* and its relationship to formal writing is defined and explained in the subsequent chapter.

2 A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE EFFECTS OF TEXTSPEAK ON ESL AND WRITING DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first briefly consider concerns about the influence of textspeak on ESL development. This serves to highlight the purpose of this chapter – defining textspeak and evaluating literature on the topic – and the present research at large which aims to explore the impact of textspeak of high school learners' formal ESL writing. Then I consider the notion of textspeak more carefully in order to define the concept for the purpose of this study. To do so, I define Standard English as well as formal and informal writing. I then consider what makes textspeak different by identifying the characteristic features of textspeak that should guide an empirical investigation aiming to identify features of textspeak in ESL student writing, based on a literature survey. Therefore, the first aim of this chapter is to review critical findings from various empirical studies both globally and in South Africa on the impacts of textspeak on written literacy. In this way, the present research is contextualised and positioned for comparison to relevant research on the topic. The second main aim of this chapter is to draft an operational definition of text speak so that it may be distinguished from standard English that is prescribed for formal writing in South African schools.

2.2 Perspectives on the Effects of Textspeak on Learner Writing

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are contrasting views on whether textspeak affects formal written Standard English or not. Some, educators included, believe that textspeak is destroying Standard English and secondary school learners' ability to write properly, (Vosloo, 2009:2; Dansieh, 2011:222; Geertsema, Hyman and Van Deventer, 2011:485). Despite these negative assertions, others hold a positive view of texting, highlighting the creativity and expressive opportunities that it affords (Crystal, 2008:10; Plester & Wood, 2009:1 100). They claim that rather than causing depredation to language, texting may provide children and adolescents with "increased exposure to text", extra opportunities to engage with language (Plester & Wood, 2009:1 100). The third school of thought reports conflicting findings or no significant correlation at all, (Verheijen 2013:582; Drouin & Davis, 2009:46). They claim that text messaging is not correlated to learners' poor written language. These schools of thought were briefly discussed in Chapter 1. A more comprehensive survey is provided in this chapter.

I now review arguments and empirical results that inform each of these perspectives to contextualise the empirical component of the present study.

2.2.1 Studies Reporting a Negative Correlation

Empirical studies which verify the concerns introduced in Chapter 1 have been carried out in different parts of the world. This section discusses a number of studies that report a negative correlation between textspeak and formal writing abilities.

Mensah, Atuahene, and Nti-Adarkwah (2023), examined the effects of textspeak on academic writing of first-year pre-service teachers of Offinso College of Education in Ghana. They employed a descriptive survey. 50 pre-service teachers were selected for the study as well as 5 English language tutors. The instruments used were questionnaires, interviews as well as essay-type tests. The study revealed that the vocabulary items students used in their texting contained numbers, reduction, clipping and shortening. These are characteristics of textspeak. The letter/number homophones they used include '*gr8t*' for great, '*2moro*' for tomorrow, '*b4*' for before and examples of the shortenings they used are '*u*' for you, '*luv*' for love, '*bro*' for brother etc. The use of these vocabulary items showed that texting had a negative effect on written literacy.

Odey, Ndobbo and Endong (2014) explored the effects textspeak on the writing skills of Nigerian university students. The study focuses specifically on students at the college of education in Akamkpa. Based on a content analysis of 250 SMS messages generated by 50 third year students of the institution and the answer scripts produced in an examination situation by these students, the paper demonstrates that intensive use of SMS texting affects students' language literacy. Texting influences them to transfer the pattern of textspeak consciously or unconsciously into their essays and reduces the quality of their writing. The five most dominant features include vowel deletion, alphanumeric homophony, punctuation errors and initialization among others. These results which show that textspeak affects learner written literacy in a negative way are consistent with those reported in Roelofse (2013).

Roelofse (2013) examined the effect of language typically used on social network sites such as Facebook on the written academic work of a selected group of high school learners. The general aims of the study were to determine the prevalence of access to Facebook and thus of exposure to Facebook-speak amongst high school learners, and to establish whether any

evidence of Facebook-speak features are identified in the written academic work of these learners. Eighty-eight learners from an English-Afrikaans dual medium school in a middle-class region in the Western Cape participated in the study. The participants included 44 Afrikaans medium learners and 44 English medium learners of which 51 were in grade 8 and 37 were in grade 9. Questionnaires were completed by the learner participants to determine frequency and volume of Facebook use and self-reported recognition of features of Facebook-speak. Learners also completed a written exercise attached to the questionnaires for the purposes of discovering what counts as Facebook-speak features. The specific features the study anticipated were (deliberate) spelling errors, unconventional punctuation features, over-punctuation, the exclusion of functional words, the excessive use of abbreviations and acronyms and the incorporation of emoticons in written academic work. Additional features identified were the nonconventional use of tenses and sentence structure. The study hypothesised that high exposure to Facebook-speak and limited exposure to formal academic writing have an effect on the academic work of the learners. The study therefore compared the actual academic marks the learner participants achieved in one semester for two of their subjects, namely their First Additional Language and History, and related these marks to questionnaire data. Five teacher participants from the same school also completed questionnaires regarding the visible features of Facebook-speak in the learners written work. The History marks were lower than the First Additional marks across both grades and all the classes. In considering the possible relation between Facebook-speak and academic performance, the study found that the Afrikaans L1 learners achieved lower marks in both their First Additional language (their L2) and History in comparison to the English L1 learners using the same measures. This possibly indicates not only high exposure to Facebook-speak, but also limited exposure to standardised forms of Afrikaans as it is used in other genres. The written exercise completed by the learners accounted for the majority of data that substantiated the hypothesis that Facebook-speak impacts the written academic work of learners at school.

De Jonge and Kemp (2012) conducted a study on the relationship between texting and literacy. 52 Australian high school students and 53 Australian University students translated sentences from Standard English into textspeak. The students also completed spelling, reading and non-word reading tests, and experimental tasks measuring morphological and orthographic awareness. The results were negative showing that textisms usage (number of messages sent per day, the textism density and the number of textism categories used) was

significantly negatively correlated with literacy scores for spelling, reading and non-word reading and morphological awareness. De Jonge and Kemp (2012) argue that frequent texting may interfere with literacy development or provide an opportunity for young people who are less competent in literacy to mask poor spelling.

Dansieh (2011) examined the transformative impact of SMS text messaging on student written communication skills. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to the collection of data were adopted. Two sets of survey questionnaires – one for the students and the other for lecturers - were developed to gather data for the quantitative analysis. Marked examination scripts were also sampled. Using this survey method, he examined how pervasive the use of SMS texting is among polytechnic students; its possible effects on students' writing skills; and what lecturers and students themselves think about the phenomenon. Based on responses from 430 survey participants, the study argues that even though mobile phones are handy ICTs, for harnessing and disseminating information, they could have their dark side too: the SMS text messaging function could heighten the tendency among students to adopt non-standard uses and contracted forms of English words in their classwork, examinations and research reports especially in an academic environment where English is the L2 of most students.

In summary, all these studies show that Standard English (SE) deteriorates on account of exposure to textspeak. Common features noticed in all these studies include non-conventional spellings, punctuation errors as well as shorter sentences. Despite some studies reporting a negative correlation, other studies found textspeak to be beneficial in the attainment of SE. The next section discusses a selection of these studies.

2.2.2 Studies Reporting a Positive Correlation

Verheijen and Spooren (2021) examined whether the use of computer mediated communication (CMC) and non-standard informal written language harms youths' literacy skills. An experiment was conducted with 500 Dutch youths of different educational levels and age groups to assess if social media use affects their school writings. They investigated whether chatting via WhatsApp directly impacts youths' performance on a narrative writing task, in terms of writing quality and spelling, or their ability to detect and correct deviations from the standard language in a grammaticality judgement task. They found that WhatsApp-use had a direct effect on the story writing task, but only on participant's spelling: adolescence who were primed with WhatsApp immediately beforehand produced significantly fewer

misspellings in their narratives. It is worth noting that these participants were probably not using textspeak in WhatsApp messaging. Recent developments in auto correct and auto complete functions on smartphones mean messages do not rely on the same extent on textisms as traditional SMSs where the length restriction and time consuming nature of typing out a full message restricted character use and encouraged textspeak. This study gives no cause for concern about negative transfer from social media to school writing. Rather, it suggests that CMC use may provide youth with greater orthographic awareness and positively affect their spelling performance (Verheijen & Spooren, 2021).

Majola, Pillay and Hlongwane (2019) carried out a study to investigate the relationship between texting and language development amongst intermediate phase learners in Uthungulu district in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. The study used a quantitative approach to ascertain if texting affects spelling. The target population were learners in the intermediate phase, which are learners from grade 4 to grade 6. There were 213 learners who took part in the study from 5 different schools. All learners were from African schools and learnt English as a second language. In the study, spelling tests were used and they consisted of 20 randomly selected words that are frequently used in texting. There were also 2 sections with dialogues. In the first section, 28 words were identifiable for translation from SE to texting language. 12 words from the second section were to be translated from texting language to SE. The findings of the study reveal that there is a positive relationship between textspeak and SE. It also shows that textspeak cannot come into existence without one first learning and knowing the Standard English language. In other words, one first has to have a fair level of proficiency in a language before one can effectively understand and produce textspeak code.

Plester, Wood and Bell (2008) investigated the relationship between children's texting behaviour, their knowledge of text abbreviations and their school attainment in written language skills. In the first study of two studies, 65 11 and 12-year-old children were recruited to the study from a school in the Midlands of England to provide information on their texting behaviour. They were also asked to translate a Standard English sentence into a text message and vice versa. The children's standardised verbal and non-verbal reasoning scores were also obtained. The results show that children who used their mobile phones to send three or more text messages a day had significantly lower scores than children who sent none. However, the children who, when asked to write a text message, showed greater use of textisms tended to have better performance on a measure of verbal reasoning ability, which

is highly associated with Key stage 2 and 3 English scores. Thus, textspeak helps - rather than hinders - written literacy (Crystal, 2008). They argue that texting has added a new dimension to language use, but its long-term impact is negligible (very small or unimportant as to be not worth considering). In the second study, 35 children (10–11-year-olds) were recruited from year six classes in two schools. Their performance on writing measures was examined more specifically. The children were asked to complete another assignment, a text message translation exercise. Spelling proficiency was also assessed, and KS2 writing scores were obtained. Positive correlations between spelling ability and performance on the translation exercise are reported, and group-based comparisons based on the children's writing scores also show that good writing attainment is associated with greater use of textspeak, although the direction of this association is not clear.

Overall, these findings suggest that textspeak contributes positively to written literacy. In consideration of the findings by Majola, Pillay and Hlongwane (2019) discussed above, these studies seem to support the notion that more proficient language users may text more readily. The suggestion is that good language proficiency makes learners more communicatively competent to express themselves via different modes and channels.

However, there are other studies that do not report either conflicting findings or no significant correlation. These studies are reviewed below.

2.2.3 Studies Reporting Conflicting Findings or No Significant Correlation.

Al-Salman and Saeed (2017) investigated the effects of text-messaging on the academic writing of Arab EFL students. The corpus of data for this study was collected from the Arab Open University and consisted of a random sample of 130 essays which were written by freshman students in two English language courses: Communication Skills in English (60 students) and EL 117 Essay writing (70 students). Three tools of qualitative and quantitative methods were employed: (a) Analysis of sample writings of 130 students; (b) a questionnaire designed to elicit teachers' feedback on the students' use of textspeak in their formal academic writing and the teachers' attitude toward such uses; and (c) a survey that investigates use of e-chatting in both Arabic and English. The research findings show that Arab EFL students' writing does not reveal a heavy use of texting features, which suggests that this phenomenon neither poses a threat nor adversely impacts students' written English. The teachers however, expressed conflicting views as regards the overall impact of SMS texting on their students' writing. 50% of them thought that SMS texting positively affects

learners' written work. The other half held an opposing view. Thus, the impacts of textspeak are still debatable as perceptions are not necessarily reflective of practices.

Another study which suggests no correlation between textspeak, and formal written literacy is a study carried out in Pakistan by Aziz, Shamim and Avais (2013). The purpose of this study was to determine the presence or absence of textspeak features in the academic writing of 50 undergraduate students (aged 19 to 25) enrolled at an Institute of Information Technology in Pakistan in two-degree programmes (Bachelor of Computer Engineering and Bachelor of Telecommunication Engineering). Triangulation was used to collect data in the form of questionnaire data for learners and 15 educators as well as samples of the learners' written work. A major finding of this study pertaining to student essays is that there was no significant prevalence of textspeak features in these essays. Aziz et al. (2013) noted that the learners were context conscious and could switch to the appropriate register or style when writing formally. In addition, the presence of one punctuation mark used in place of another indicated that there could be other factors like carelessness or lack of knowledge or emphasis from the educators or the system. They thus concluded that their study demystified the belief that textspeak destroys SE (Aziz et al. 2013).

Similarly, Wood, Jackson, Hart, Wilde and Plester (2011) conducted an intervention study with 114 British elementary school learners ($M = 9.83$ years old) to investigate the direction of any relationship between texting and literacy. The study differed from other studies in that none of the participants had ever owned a mobile phone. Participants were divided randomly into an experimental group and a control group. After receiving a brief explanation about how to use it, those in the experimental group were given access to a mobile phone which they could use just for texting in the half term break and on weekends for 10 weeks. Their text messages were transcribed exactly as written on mobile phones. All the students completed the spelling test, and no significant differences were found between the experimental and control group regarding their literacy attainment during the experiment. Wood et al. (2011) concluded that having access to a mobile phone for texting during several weeks neither adversely nor favourably affected literacy skills. However, they suggest that this might be attributed to the duration of the study or to the restricted access to mobile phones.

Shafie, Darus and Osman (2010) examined the effects of frequent usage of textspeak on undergraduate academic writing. The study had 264 diploma students. There were 94 male texters and 170 female texters between 18 and 22 years who were taking three different

English courses. The data included participants' SMS messages, class assignments and examinations scripts which were analysed to detect the existence of SMS language. The findings reveal that there were few occurrences of SMS language in the written work. There is an awareness among the participants that textspeak must not be used during academic writing in form of their class assignments and examinations. This suggests that students know the different style of language to be used during formal and informal situations. This ability to switch and use the language accordingly enable young people to use proper English and texted English appropriately.

In a related context, Drouin and Davis (2009), carried out a study to find out the potentially detrimental effects of textspeak on literacy. Participants were 80 college students (24 males and 56 females) with a mean age of 21.8. 34 text speak users and 46 non-text speak users were assessed on their proficiency and familiarity with text speak as well as their standardized literacy levels and misspellings of common text speak words. Participants met with the experimenter individually in a private room and completed an e-mail task, word ID task, a reading fluency assessment, a spelling test and then did the survey. These experimental and standardised measures were used to assess college students' use of and familiarity with the textspeak vocabulary, their distinction between textspeak and SE registers and the relationship between use of textspeak and literacy. Results showed that while textspeak users were proficient with the vocabulary, both groups showed familiarity with textspeak. More importantly, there were no significant differences between the two groups in standardized literacy scores or misspellings of common text words. Thus, the analyses showed that the use of textspeak is not related to low literacy performance. Nonetheless, although the effect of textspeak was not evident, more than half of the college students in this sample, texters and non-texters alike, suggested that they thought that text speak was hindering their ability to remember SE.

At least some of these studies seem to suggest that good proficiency in English enables learners to discern between contextual demands of communicative form. This suggests that learners are able to use standard English forms in their formal written work and then switch to text speak in the appropriate context. In order to distinguish between standard English forms and textspeak for the purpose of the present research, I outline these contexts below. The aim is to draft an operational definition of textspeak to inform my empirical research. To measure something, one first has to describe its characteristics. This is the second main aim of the present chapter.

2.3 Standard English

People rely on standards all the time, like when cooking, in the way they dress, in playing sports and even when employing table manners. Ways of doing things are prescribed and, in this case, prescription depends on an ideology or a set of beliefs that things be done in a particular manner, (Milroy, 2002:1). Other mediums of exchange such as money, weights and measures are strictly standardised so that there can be no variation in the values assigned and this is to ensure reliability and confidence (Milroy, 2002:19). Likewise, assessing students' performance in English written literacy requires standards as a point of reference. According to Milroy and Milroy (2002:19), standardisation aims to ensure fixed values for the counters in systems and in language it means preventing variability in spelling and pronunciation as well as establishing correct meanings of words by selecting fixed conventions regarded as correct. They conclude that the whole notion of standardisation is to enable everyone to use and understand language in the same way with minimum misunderstanding and maximum efficiency. I acknowledge current debates on accepting varieties of world Englishes but for the purpose of the present research, British English is considered the standard as it is the standard currently used in South African schools.

According to Hickey (2012:3), language is a human behaviour over which people have historically made a considerable fuss thus the establishment of a "standard" variety, with the implication that any other version is not as good. In this case, textspeak is regarded as unconventional as it deviates from Standard English writing; the norm that is deemed acceptable. I consider the notion of Standard English (SE) here in order to establish a norm against which to measure the impact of textspeak on ESL learners' formal writing.

Trudgill (1999:118) defines Standard English as the variant of English that is usually used in writing (especially printing) and is associated with the educational systems of English-speaking countries world-wide. In his essay, "Standard English; what it isn't", Trudgill (1999:123) highlights that SE is a sub-variety of English among many. He explains that sub-varieties of languages are usually referred to as dialects. He states that SE is an unusual dialect as it is by far the most important dialect in the English-speaking world from a social, intellectual, and cultural point of view (Trudgill 1999:123). He maintains that SE is a dialect that least of all, raises critical judgements about it-self and generally carries prestige within a country and is well established. To be precise, SE allows for the belief in one identifiable and

stable English variety that is intrinsically correct and leads to better communication among the people. SE is used as a benchmark for language testing.

Crystal (1994:24) highlights that SE is distinguished from other dialects of the language by its grammatical forms. These grammar, morphology, syntax, slang, and vocabulary are most widely accepted and understood. He describes Standard English as follows:

- The defining language features are grammar, vocabulary, and orthography (spelling and punctuation), but not pronunciation (Crystal, 1994:24);
- It is a dialect with no territorial base;
- It is a dialect that carries the most social prestige which is recognisable to well-educated citizens;
- Used in community institutions such as universities, courts, schools, and government;
- SE is understood although not necessarily spoken by most members of the speech community;
- Most people reserve SE for writing tasks, for instance, formal business writing. Only a minority of the population speak English as their mother tongue. Most people speak regional dialects.

SE applies in formal and informal contexts and depending on which one applies. SE rules are employed more rigorously in formal contexts and laxer in informal contexts.

2.4 Formal and Informal English Writing

Communication in any language is done with style and register (Ape, 2014:1). According to Munoz (2007:5), the term register has been used as a cover term to refer to language varieties associated with particular social situations, for instance conversations, political speeches, or university lectures. Munoz (2007) points out that register is not defined in linguistic terms but rather situational parameters. Style on the other hand refers to intra-speaker variation (Munoz, 2007). Stylistic variation results from the fact that different people express themselves in different ways, and the same person may express the same idea quite differently when addressing different audiences, using different modalities or tackling different tasks (Bell, 1984). Despite this terminology distinction, it is nevertheless difficult to separate clearly register and style in this study as style relates to the varying level of formality of each of the different registers.

There are two forms of writing styles, and these are formal and informal writing (Kaur & Saini, 2014:4). According to Kaur and Saini (2014:4), these two patterns have entirely different ways

of writing and so the classifying techniques differ. Formal Written English is a convention, a recognised set of practices built on a structure, authority, or system, (Hyland & Jiang, 2017:41). It focuses on the usage of standardised linguistics and grammar (Johannesson, 2022:7). It involves well organised discourse, often with complex syntax and vocabulary, which closely follows the conventions of Standard English and is often sensitive to prescriptive judgements. Park (2007:1), notes that formal writing style is academic in tone and is commonly used in academic textbooks, business letters, university essays and contracts. Slang and colloquial vocabulary are avoided, (Park, 2007:1). Park (2007:1) also adds that when formal English is used in writing, sentences tend to be long and complex, grammatical rules are followed strictly.

On the other hand, informality is the opposite (Hyland & Jiang, 2017:41) and demarcated as the absence of formality. Linguistic features of informal English are considered non-canonical and non-standard, meaning that the structures have not been recognised in grammar books (Johannesson, 2022:6). Informal language is loosely structured, involving a high level of colloquial expression and often departing from standard norms (Park, 2007:1). In addition, this type of style is adopted in day to day conversation, real time data like tweets, Facebook statuses, emails etc, (Kaur & Saini, 2014:4). Variations of English such as colloquial English, textism or Netspeak are generally considered to be instances of informal English due to their use of non-standardised linguistic and grammatical features, (Johannesson, 2022:6).

2.5 Textspeak

According to Steyn and Evans (2015:200), textspeak is the writing convention of shortening words so that the maximum amount of information may be conveyed in the shortest possible time and at the lowest cost. Freudenberg (2009:8) suggests that this form of communication, which she calls “SMS speak”, can be described as a sociolect, typified by using informal language or “slang”, which is not comprehensible to an outsider (Geertsema, Hyman & Deventer, 2011:476). Lyddy, Farina, Hanney, Farrell and O’Neill (2014:547) note that textspeak bears a resemblance to Standard English, most of the language is standard and that the distinctive or non-standard forms occur alongside standard ones. However, there are notable structural differences between them (Drouin & Davids, 2009:49). Bushnell, Kemp and Martin (2011:28) describe textspeak as a hybrid of spoken and written English, textspeak being largely sound based.

According to Plester, Wood and Bell (2008:137) and Drouin & Davids (2009:50), types of textisms (abbreviations typically used in a text message) vary and include acronyms, emoticons (symbols representing emotions), and the deletion of unnecessary words or vowels, punctuation for instance lack of punctuation or over punctuation for example, (*Really!!!!*), and capitalisation (lack of capitalisation or use of capital letters in the word or phrase as well as abbreviations (“c” for see) and other phonetically based variants. Drouin and Davids (2009:50) suggest that this abbreviated written language resembles the early phonological stages of spelling. They state that early spellers typically omit medial vowels and encode only the salient sounds, such as the initial and final consonants, for instance, *gd* for *good*, and use letter names to encode the whole word for example, *r* for *are*. The clear ideology behind the usage of such abbreviations is directly related to less consumption of time, as well as cost of text message (Lyddy, Farina, Hanney, Farrell & O’Neill (2014:547). Therefore, Drouin and Davids (2009:50) conclude that structurally, text speak bears similarity to early spelling in that it uses contracted forms. They however note that there are many additional features in text speak that do not resemble early spelling, for instance: acronyms are used for phrases, for example, *lol* for *laugh out loud*.

The dominant features of textspeak include the use of abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, misspellings, omission of vowels, subject pronouns, and punctuation (Farina & Lyddy, 2011: 146-147). These will be discussed in detail below.

While textspeak resembles in many ways standard English, it has “defining linguistic properties” (Farina & Lyddy, 2011: 146) that distinguishes it. This section explores these properties to inform the empirical component of the study. In order to measure the impact of textspeak on formal writing, one has to know what to identify as either SE or textspeak.

As mentioned before, Standard English is correct and prestigious and defined primarily by proper vocabulary and spelling (Everrett, 2016:22). In contrast, textspeak is identified as something informal and sub-standard (Geertsema, Hyman & Van Deventer, 2011:476). It focuses on unconventional orthographic representations which are unacceptable in SE (Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier & Cheever, 2010:421). So, in terms of normativity, textspeak does not adhere standardised norms of correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar. According to Verheijen (2013:584), what seems to matter most is efficiency as well as getting the message across effectively regardless of the standard language rules that are violated along the way. This is in stark contrast to the argument that effective communication is

supported by SE, as noted above. By implication, textspeak must follow certain rules – albeit a more relaxed set of conventions – to ensure effective communication. In order to gain a clearer perspective about what textspeak looks like, consider the text poet, Norman Silver’s demonstration of textspeak in his poem called “*txt commndmnts.*”

u shall luv ur mobil fone with all ur hart
u & ur fone shall neva b apart
u shall nt lust afr ur neibrs fone nor thiev
u shall b prepard @ all times 2tXt & 2recv
u shall use L O L & othr acronyms in conversatns
u shall be zappy with ur ast*r*sks & exc!matns!!
u shall abbrevi8 & rite words like theyr sed
u shall nt speak 2 sum1 face2face if u cn msg em instead
u shall nt shout with capitls XEPT IN DIRE EMERGNCY+
u shall nt consult a ninglish dictnry

The way the poem is written mirrors the nature of textspeak; it is an accurate reflection of textspeak. First, the style makes use of abbreviations – either ones that are formally recognised, or ones that are made up to resemble the pronunciation of words as they are said – (*abbrevi8, rite, theyr, sed*). Similarly, acronyms such as *LOL* for laughing out loud are used to save space and communicate an expression. In addition, there is a noticeable lack of punctuation markers to regulate the grammatical constructions as in *u shall nt shout with capitls* [comma omitted] *XEPT IN DIRE EMERGNCY*. Punctuation markers are used superfluously, however, as part of words or to demonstrate emotion: *ast*r*sks & exc!matns!!*. There are also numerous misspellings as well as use of numerals for example *speak 2 sum1 face2face*. In this case the number 2 has been used to replace ‘to’. However, an intelligible message has been conveyed, although SE conventions are not applied.

Furthermore, Farina and Lyddy (2011:146-147) identify distinct features in textspeak such as emoticons and typographic symbols, letter/number homophones, shortenings, contractions and clippings, acronyms and initialisms, non-conventional spellings and accent stylisations, and onomatopoeic spellings, for instance, ‘haha’. Following other studies carried out by Herring (2019); Steyn and Evans (2015:207); Drouin and Driver (2014:257); Verheijen (2013 :584); Kent and Johnson (2012:55); Plester et al (2009); Crystal (2008:80); Shortis (2007); and Norman Silver’s poem, I outline some ways of categorising textspeak. Characteristic features of text speak seem to include:

2.5.1 Letter/number homophones

According to Lyddy, Farina, Hanney, Farrell & O'Neill (2014:551), letter/number homophones are letters or numbers used to take the place of a phoneme, syllable, or word of the same sound). Letter/number homophones use a letter or a number to represent a word or part thereof and it is the pronunciation of the individual letters/numbers which is significant as opposed to the overall appearance of a homophone. They are also termed logograms, phonetic reductions, or syllabograms (Farina & Lyddy, 2011:146). The following are examples of letter/number homophones: “*b*” for be, “*gr8*” for great, “*2mor*” for tomorrow, “*RU*”/are you, “*2nite*”/tonight, “*CUL8R*”/ see you later.

2.5.2 Non-conventional spellings and Accent stylizations

Textspeak, unlike conventional English, has no consistent established spelling system (Herring, 2019:3). Non-conventional or non-standard spellings follow legitimate letter-sound correspondences in a language, but they are not conventional spelling for that word (Farina & Lyddy, 2011:146). Crystal (2008:48) states that the list of non-standard spellings is not very great, but they are certainly very distinctive. They include the following: “*coz*” for “because”, “*fone*” for “phone”, “*luv*” for “love”, “*shud*” for “should”, “*skool*” for “school”, “*thru*” for “through” (Crystal, 2008:48). The choice is to create verbal illustration of this word even though every other part of the text message may well be created within a written framework. Textspeak tends to indicate that at least in part, the user maybe thinking of that utterance in its spoken form. Onomatopoeic spellings such as “hahaha” as well as extra letters for instance, “zzzzz” are also common in textspeak (Farina & Lyddy, 2011:147). In addition, accent stylisations, categorized broadly as “youth code” are employed and these refer to words that are spelled in accordance with informal regional speech, for example, “*wanna*”/want to”, “*gonna*”/going to” and “*dat*”/that” (Farina & Lyddy, 2011:147).

2.5.3 Incorrect use of orthographic and punctuation conventions

Like most languages that use the Roman alphabet, English has an upper- and lower-case form of each letter and several interconnected patterns governing their use (Linden, 2020:116). Capitalization is a standard form that is used at the beginning of every sentence, for proper nouns, on abbreviations as well as the personal pronoun I (De Jonge & Kemp, 2012). In textspeak, it is common to omit capitalization/upper case, (Wood, Kemp, Waldron & Hart, 2014:12; Crystal, 2008:81). In textspeak, there are three scenarios in terms of

capitalization: that of omitted capitals eg “*bob*” for “Bob”, capitalization of only the first word and full capitalization of all the letters for instance, “*WHAT!*” (Ling, 2005). In most instances, full capitalization is used for expressing emphasis, clarity or intensity of emotion.

It is also common to omit punctuation, to use multiple exclamation marks or question for instance, “!!!!”, “?????”, often in place of conventional punctuation, either for emphasis, clarity or to express contemplation (Rosen *et al.*, 2010). In SE, in comparison, the exclamation mark (!) should be indicated once to express strong emotions and is used sparingly.

2.5.4 Omission of subject

In a sentence, the subject and the verb are the core elements. However, in textspeak, these can be deleted sometimes (Crystal, 2008). For instance, “leaving soon”/ “I am leaving soon”.

2.5.5 Shortenings, contractions, and clippings

One of the features of textspeak is shortening. According to Crystal (2008:50), a shortening is a word formed by omitting one of its meaningful elements, usually at the end (as in exam for examination) but sometimes at the beginning (as in phone for telephone). In textspeak, days and months are often shortened for instance, “*Tue*/Tuesday”, “*Sept*/ September”, (Crystal, 2008:50). Texters also shorten words by omitting words from the middle and these are often called contractions (Crystal, 2008:45). Examples of contracted words include: “*txt*/text”, “*hmwrk*/homework”, “*mgmt.*/management” (Farina and Liddy, 2011:146). Contractions can also take the short form for instance “do not” becomes “*don’t*”. Clipping is also widely used in text speak. There is G-clipping where the final “g” in a word is omitted, for example, “*washin*/washing”. Then there are other clippings whereby there is the omission of other final letters, typically final consonants, for instance, “*will*/will” and silent vowels, for example, “*hav*/have” (Farina & Liddy, 2011:146).

2.5.6 Acronyms and initialisms

According to Crystal (2008:41), initialism involves reducing words to their initial letters and they are familiar in proper names, such as BBC. Initialisms are often called acronyms although some people restrict that term to the forms that are pronounced as single words,

such as NATO (Crystal, 2008:41). According to Farina and Lyddy, (2011:147), acronyms are sometimes considered as formal shortenings for instance, “UNICEF/ United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund”. On the other hand, initialisms are more informal (Farina and Lyddy, 2011:147). Examples of initialisms are as follows: “brb/ be right back”, “ASAP/ as soon as possible”, “LOL/ laugh out loud”.

2.5.7 Emojis and Emoticons

Spoken language, in any tongue is always delivered with emotional or physical cues, whether it is voice tone, eye gestures, hand or any other visual elements. In textspeak, these are not present. However, emojis and emoticons close this gap in a creative and highly visual way and ensure that the writer’s thoughts and feelings are expressed in a concise and fun way (Kemp *et al.*, 2014; Rosen *et al.*, 2010). Emojis are small, colourful, graphical icons that represent facial expressions, objects, actions, and symbols (Herring, 2012:5). According to Herring (2012:5), individual emoji can substitute for letters (parts of words, phrases, and entire utterances). They can be repeated to indicate plurality (Herring, 2012:5). In effect, they act as non-verbal surrogates, assisting writers convey thoughts and feelings digitally by filling the void of facial expressions.

Emojis and emoticons are often confused and used interchangeably. However, there are some clear distinctions. Kralj, Smailovic, Sluban and Mozetic (2015:1) define an emoticon as shorthand for a facial expression which allows the author to express his/her feelings, moods, and emotions and augments a written message with no verbal elements. An emoji is a step further, developed with modern communication technologies that facilitate more expressive messages, (Kralj *et al.*, 2015:1). According to Kralj *et al.* (2015:1) an emoji does not only represent a facial expression, but also concepts and ideas, such as celebration, weather, buildings, food and drink, animals, and plants or emotions, feelings, and activities. Herring (2012:6) observed that as emoji use has increased, emoticon use has decreased.

Below are some examples of emojis depicting different concepts:



Besides the textspeak features that have been mentioned above, there are various other abbreviations and non-standard forms which have been noted. In addition, not all these characteristics can be found in every text message. It is also important to keep in mind that not everyone who texts uses all textisms. According to Lyddy *et al.* (2014:547), there can be a great deal of linguistic variation between various modes and sometimes even within the same mode.

2.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to review literature related to the concerns about the influence of textspeak on ESL development. This was done through outlining the different views on the impact of textspeak on ESL learners' formal writing. Furthermore, the impacts of textspeak on written Standard English were considered, as reported in various empirical studies to establish a point of comparative reference for the present study. Critical evaluations of the findings from various empirical studies both globally and in South Africa on the characteristics of textspeak were outlined in order to inform a working definition for the purpose of this study.

As textspeak is regarded as informal and unconventional as it deviates from SE, the concept of Standard English was defined and discussed as well as formal and informal English. The chapter also conceptualised the notion of textspeak and outlined what makes it different to Standard English. This was done through providing a working definition of textspeak as well as outlining the characteristic features of textspeak. For the purpose of this study, textspeak was defined as the term used to describe this new abbreviated format that many people use while texting (Crystal, 2008).

Chapter 3 will present the methodology of this study, clearly outlining the method of analysis that will be done in chapter 4.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology followed for the purpose of this research. The chosen methodology was informed by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The empirical analysis was guided by the definition of textspeak stated also stated in Chapter 2. Here, I provide a detailed step-by-step report of the research design and procedures I followed in conducting the present research. First, I present the research objectives once more. Then, I address the purpose of this chapter, which is to outline the research methodology followed by the purpose of the present study. The design, data collection and analysis is described and motivated before ethical issues are considered.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010:2) define research as a systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information (data) in order to increase our understanding of a phenomenon about which we are interested or concerned. To carry out research, Creswell (2012:3) and Walliman (2011:29) emphasise the necessity to first define some kind of research problem in order to provide a reason for doing the research. Walliman (2011:30) further states that the problem will generate the subject of the research, its aims and objectives and will indicate what sort of data to be collected to investigate the issues raised and what kind of analysis is suitable to enable one to come to conclusions that provide answers to the questions raised in the problem.

Thus, in order to assess the extent – if any – to which ESL learners' texting habits influence their formal writing, the following sub-questions were formulated to answer the main research questions.

- a) How widespread is the use of texting among high school learners?
- b) What are the English language educators' views on the phenomenon of texting in relation to learners' written work?
- c) Is there any evidence of the use of textspeak features in the English written work of learners?
- d) What are the types of textspeak features, if any, used by grade 8 and 11 learners in their written ESL work?

In order to answer the questions above, the aims of this study are to:

- Establish how widespread the use of texting language is among high school learners.
- Source the English language educators' perspectives on the phenomenon of texting.
- Assess whether there is any evidence of the use of features of text speak in the English written work of learners.

The chosen methodology to answer these questions is described in detail below.

3.2 Research Design

A research design is a plan or framework used to guide how research is conducted, detailing how data will be obtained and analysed (Creswell, 2009:22). In other words, a research design is a procedure for collecting, analysing and interpreting data in a research study. According to Walliman (2011:9) there are numerous research designs that are appropriate for the different types of research projects and the choice of which design to apply depends on the nature of the problems posed by the research aims. Walliman (2011:9) further explains that each type of research design represents different models for doing research and these models have distinct names and procedures associated with them. Creswell (2009:22) advances three types of research designs. These are: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. This study employed a qualitative case study research design, supported by calculation of basic descriptive statistics.

Case studies are a strategy of enquiry in which the researcher explores indepth understanding of a phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is one form of qualitative research methodology. In general, qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change.

In quantitative research, the researcher gathers numeric data, for instance, proficiency test scores or multiple-choice questions (or closed-response item) responses on questionnaires and they then try to objectively analyse the data using a variety of statistical techniques and let the numeric results prove or disapprove a hypothesis so that those results can be generalized from a sample to a larger population (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009:137). On the other hand, in qualitative research, researchers try to understand participants' experiences with the central phenomenon (the focus of the study) in a natural setting, using research approaches such as ethnography, (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009:137; Walliman, 2011:72). Instead of numbers, researchers record qualities rather than quantities, for instance, customs, beliefs and ideas (Walliman, 2011:72). In this type of research, the goal is not to try to prove or disprove something; rather, the aim is to explore and then describe in rich detail the phenomenon that is being investigated, (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009:137).

In mixed methods research, a researcher collects both numeric information and text (from face-to-face interviews, picture descriptions, and so on) to better answer a study's research questions (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009:137). Both qualitative and quantitative have their own advantages and limitations. The goal of mixed methods is not to replace either of these approaches, but rather to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across studies, (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:14). When used in combination in one study, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for a more complete analysis of the research problem, (Green, Caraceli & Graham, 1989) in (Migiro & Magangi, 2010:3 757). The approaches are complementary rather than competitive methods, Migiro & Magangi, 2010:3 757).

However, for the purpose of the present research, I was interested in exploring learners' habits in terms of language use based on their written work. A qualitative research design is therefore most appropriate. I describe the details below.

3.3 Data Collection

As indicated, the design took the form of a case study. Therefore, the data collection and analyses are specifically related to the group of participants. This is ideal for the purpose of

the present research, since the results can then be compared to other case studies in South Africa as discussed in Chapter 2.

3.4 Sampling

I sampled the population purposefully because I was specifically interested to see how results may compare to other case studies. I implemented typical case purposeful sampling to describe and illustrate what is typical in the selected setting (see Palinkas et al. 2015)

Taherdoost (2016:18) notes that sampling is required since researchers neither have time nor the resources to analyse the entire population. According to Thompson (2012:1) and Taherdoost (2016:19), sampling consists of selecting some part of a population to observe so that one may estimate something about the whole population. There are different types of sampling techniques, however, purposive sampling was employed for the study. Taherdoost (2016:23), defines purposive sampling as a strategy in which particular settings, persons or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices. The researcher includes them because they warrant inclusion. According to Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston (2014:113), in purposive sampling, the sample units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions which the researcher wishes to study. It is a sampling strategy done with a purpose in mind. The criteria of the elements to be included in the study are predefined (Ritchie et al., (2013:113) therefore, it is not necessary to include everyone who is available, rather those available who meet the defined criteria. The researcher carried out the study at Resolofetse secondary school in Ikageng, Potchefstroom, a town in the North west province of South Africa. This is a public school in a township. Since it is a school in a lower income area, I assumed that some of the learners possess mobile phones whilst others do not. I followed the study by Freudenberg (2009). Freudenberg used two classes from each grade, (grade 8 and 11) with the hope of getting 100 samples. However, 88 learners out of the 100 were able to submit both the questionnaire and the written sample. Thus, I decided to increase the number of classes so that in the event that some learners fail to submit, there would still be enough samples to work with.

I sourced the data from a total of 110 learners from three grade eight and three grade eleven classes. These learners were given questionnaires to complete, and their written samples

analysed for text speak features. All questionnaires were handed out and completed on the same day.

In addition, I also asked teachers for written samples of the learners who participated in the questionnaires. English language teachers, regardless of the grade they teach, were also given questionnaires to complete to explore their perceptions of how textspeak may be influencing learners' formal writing in this setting. In short, I conducted my sampling based on the following criteria:

- Grade 8 or Grade 11 learners;
- Enrolled at Reselofetse secondary school in Ikageng;
- English second language learners;

The study involved 6 classes; 3 grade eight classes and 3 grade 11 classes. Following the study by Freudenberg (2009), I selected participants from these two grades with the hope that this would provide a balanced sample of high school learners. The grade 11s would have been exposed to the standards of high school English for longer than the grade 8s, thus their English writing skills would be expected to be better than those of grade 8s (Freudenberg, 2009). However, the grade 11s would also have been more exposed to and experienced with texting which might prove to have a greater influence on their written work.

In addition, the educators for this study were selected having a specific criterion in mind. Educators with sufficient experience and academic training in the instruction of English Language were selected for the specific purpose of answering the questionnaires. English language educators were chosen as they might be more sensitive to textspeak and would perceive the use of textisms as problematic. It was also deemed appropriate to use the educators who taught the actual learner participant so as to draw the most relevant comparisons between their responses and those of the learners. Five English language educators participated in the study.

3.5 Instruments

In order to assess the impact that textspeak has on high school learners' written language I needed to (a) establish how widespread the use of texting language is, amongst high school learners; (b) source the English language educators' perspectives on the phenomenon of texting; and c) consider examples of the students' actual writing to determine the extent to which textspeak is apparent and/or influential in their formal writing.

3.6 Questionnaires

Accordingly, two sets of survey questionnaires were used to gather data qualitatively: One for the educators and the other for the learners. I also analysed the written samples of student writing to identify errors and possible influences from texting.

In terms of the questionnaires, I wanted to find out how students and teachers perceived the influence of textspeak on formal writing, as well as establish how often students engage in texting.

I therefore structured the questionnaires to include open-ended and closed questions. I adopted Freudenberg (2009)'s instruments to allow for direct comparison. The questionnaires are attached in Appendix A and B. The questionnaire comprised of ten questions aiming to get information related to the following aspects:

1. Have teachers noticed any changes in the written language since the increase of cell phone technology?
2. Do educators believe that texting influences students' English writing?
3. Do educators think that textspeak has a positive or negative impact on learners' formal writing?
4. Do educators come across examples of textspeak in the learners' formal writing?
5. What do educators do to combat textspeak in the written work of learners?

The student questionnaire was administered to the learners to determine the frequency and volume of their texting. The questionnaires had both closed and open-ended questions.

3.7 Error Analysis

As mentioned, I analysed the samples of student writing, aiming to (i) assess whether there is any evidence of the use of textspeak features in the written work of learners; and (ii) identify the types of text speak features, if any, used by grade 8 and 11 learners in their written work. I employed error analysis, since it "provides a deep insight for understanding of the process of language learning" (Jobeen, Kazemian & Shabaz, 2015:52).

Studying learners' errors may help us to understand "the complicated processes of language development as well as a systematic way for identifying, describing and explaining students' errors" (Jobeen, Kazemian & Shabaz, 2015:52). Error analysis entails the following basic steps: collecting samples; identifying errors; describing errors; explaining errors; and evaluating the errors (Jobeen, Kazemian & Shabaz, 2015). In this case, the form of transfer

that I was interested in was any evidential transfer from learners textspeak to their formal ESL writing. Errors are distinguished from mistakes in the sense that errors are systematic, whereas mistakes are examples of poor performance that are more accidental. Jobeen *et al.* (*Ibid.*) say that errors “are the result of incomplete learning and linguistic incompetency of learners.”

I annotated the written work giving attention to errors which could have resulted from texting. The definition of textspeak presented in Chapter 2 specifically guided my identification of potential features. These errors included: spelling errors; lack of punctuation; over punctuation; omission of function words; and use of abbreviation, acronyms, emoticons, and rebus writing (See Chapter 2 for details).

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of analysing data in various formats. The data analysis for this study followed the study carried out by Freudenburg (2009).

The responses from both questionnaires -i.e., educator and learners - were tallied using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 28.0, a software package used for analysis of statistical data. This provided basic descriptive data of the quantitative responses.

The samples of written work were also annotated for textspeak features using the computer software Atlas.ti (2019: Version 8.4.18.0; see [Atlas.ti.com](https://atlas.ti.com)). This addition is different to Freudenburg (2009)’s procedure. The list of features analysed in the written samples were the same as those which learners were asked to identify in their WhatsApp messages when completing the questionnaire. These are: spelling errors, lack of punctuation, over-punctuation, lack of function words and use of abbreviations and acronyms, emoticons and rebus writing. T

Atlas ti. is useful to ensure the systematic analysis of qualitative data. It is a tool for qualitative annotation and analysis (see Woolf & Silver, 2018).

Qualitative data analysis can be supported by utilizing Atlas.ti. According to Smit (2002:65), Atlas.ti is a powerful workbench for qualitative data analysis, particularly for large sections of text, visual and audio data. Ngalande and Mkwinda (2014:3) describe Atlas.ti. as a ‘container’ that keeps all the data, codes, memos and findings from the same project in a single environment. Atlas.ti. offers a variety of tools for accomplishing tasks associated with any

systematic approach to unstructured data that cannot be meaningfully analysed for formal, statistical approaches (Ngalande & Mkwinda, 2014:3). This software offers support to the researcher during the data analysis process in which texts are analyzed, and interpreted using coding and annotating activities (Smit, 2002:65). Smit (2002:65) further explains that Atlas.ti. provides a comprehensive overview of a research project, which is called Hermeneutic Unit (HU) in Atlas.ti., and it facilitates immediate search and retrieval functions. Furthermore, this programme also has a network-building feature which allows one to visually connect selected texts, memos, and codes by means of diagrams (Smit, 2002:65; Ngalande & Mkwinda, 2014:3). Thus, it helps the researcher to manage, extract, compare and explore the data within the text for analysis.

For the purpose of the present research, I first arranged all the written scripts according to grade and then scanned the samples. These texts were then uploaded per grade into the computer software programme, Atlas. ti. (2019: Version 8.4.18.0). In this analysis, the software was used to label or code the textual features for identification purposes using a descriptive name such as 'lack of punctuation, use of abbreviations.' The codes were divided into ten categories. These are: grammar, lack of punctuation, punctuation used inappropriately, use of abbreviations and acronyms, use of letters and numbers, use of more punctuation than is necessary, use of shortenings/contractions, use of slang, use of smileys as well as emoticons, and lastly, wrong spelling (not textspeak related). They each contained the characteristic features which were identified and discussed in the literature review.

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

I collected the data during the first week of term three when the learners were not busy with exams. Two questionnaires relating to texting were devised as discussed. The first questionnaire was completed by the learners and the second one by the English language educators. The procedure at the school consisted of five steps:

- | | |
|--------|---|
| Step 1 | The researcher met with the headmaster and provided him with the consent forms and discussed, the purpose of the study. This was weeks before the data collection in order to allow learners time to return the signed consent forms. |
|--------|---|

- Step 2 The learners in the six classes were given a letter to take home to their parents which provided information about the study and this gave them an opportunity to object to their child's participation.
- Step 3 The learners in these six classes were given approximately 10 minutes to complete a one-page questionnaire. This time was sufficient as the questionnaires are short, and students were not placed under any pressure. They were also asked not to consult with one another during the process so as not to influence each other's responses. Prior to handing out their questionnaires, I explained the purpose of the study explicitly to all the participants in simple terms. I emphasised that their participation was completely voluntary and that the information they provided would remain anonymous.
- Step 4 I then asked the English teachers for samples of the learners' written work. The samples were in the form of a creative writing assignment. Learners and their parents had given consent for this.
- Step 5 The English language educators were also given questionnaires. These sourced their perspectives on the phenomenon of texting in relation to literacy.
- Step 6 The questionnaires were analysed with the help of the North-West University Statistical Consultation Services and I reviewed the descriptive statistics (discussed in Chapter 4).
- Step 7 I conducted the error analysis of the sampled scripts and reflected on the results in view of the survey answers (also discussed in Chapter 4).

Although these steps are identified separately, the empirical work overlapped. For example, steps 1 and 2 were completed in the same time period; steps 3, 4 and 5 were completed in the same time period; and steps 6 and 7 were completed during the same time period. I report the results and reflect on them in Chapter 4, which constitutes the final stage of this research.

3.10 Informed Consent and Ethical Issues

Working with human participants always raises ethical issues. According to Walliman (2011:42) research which study people and their relationship to each other and to the world, need to be sensitive about issues of ethical behavior. Walliman (2011:45) further argues that this kind of research often impinges on the sensibilities and rights of other people thus researchers should be aware of necessary ethical standards which should be observed to avoid any harm which might be caused by carrying out or publishing the results of the research project.

All learner respondents and their parents, caregivers or guardians were informed fully of the nature and purpose of the research project by means of the learner and parental consent letters. The letters of consent emphasized that no learner would participate against his/her will and that no parent, guardian or caregiver would be obliged to give consent for the relevant learner under his/her care to participate in the study. In addition, it was emphasized that non-participating learners would not be in any way penalized or discriminated against, and participation was completely voluntary. Even if a parent or guardian or caregiver granted consent for the learner to participate in the study, the final decision of whether or not to participate rested on the learner.

The participants were instructed not to write their names on the research instruments. This ensured that no single response would be traced back to any specific participant, thus ensuring participants' anonymity.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has described the qualitative methodology that was employed in carrying out this study. It has outlined the research design, participant selection, the sampling method, the instruments used, the data analysis techniques employed and ethical clearance issues. The next chapter carries out the data analysis, presentation, and interpretation.

4 DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the results and presents the findings and interpretation of the findings, based on the qualitative data analysis described in Chapter 3. The information and interpretation of the results are based on the data from the questionnaires administered and the analysis of the essays composed by the sampled respondents. The questionnaires' results and essay analysis served to source appropriate data to answer the research questions set out in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

Teachers' and students' perceptions were determined qualitatively via the survey responses and compared to a qualitative analysis of student participants' writing, following Freudenberg's (2009) research design. This chapter is presented under the following sections: section 4.2 presents the results from the questionnaires administered to the students; section 4.3 presents results from questionnaires from the educators; section 4.4 presents and discusses results from the written essays and lastly, section 4.5 provides a brief synthesis of the findings and interpretation of the results.

4.2 Analysis and discussion of learners' responses

Out of the 110 learners, who were supposed to participate in the study, only 70 learners were able to submit both the questionnaire and the written sample (along with the signed parental consent), giving 63.6% response rate. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2012), 50% - 60% response rate is sufficient, 61% - 70% is considered good and above 70% is considered excellent response. Therefore, that response rate for this study was satisfactory. Five English language teachers also completed questionnaires.

Demographic data of learner respondents are reported first before learners' perceptions about their text messaging habits are presented.

4.2.1 Distribution of respondents according to grade

Learners develop language skills according to age as well as the grade they are in. This aligns with the notion of a natural order of language development (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Krashen, 1987). One may expect more advanced learners to demonstrate better command

of ESL in their formal writing than the learners in lower grades. Therefore, learner respondents were asked to indicate their grade. Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of learners in Grade 8 and 11.

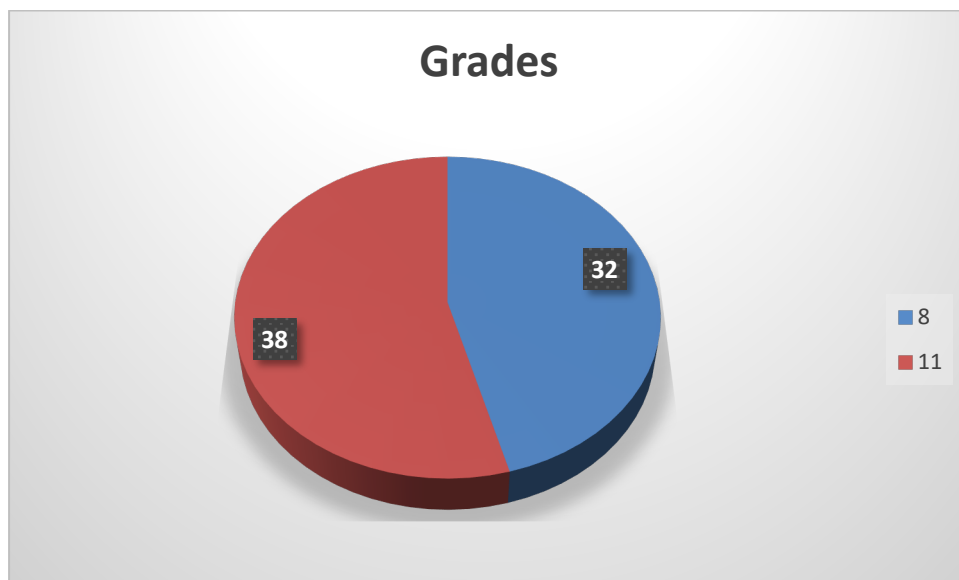


Figure 4. 1: Distribution of learners according to grade.

The results presented in figure 4.1 show that 32 (45.7%) of the respondents were in grade 8 and 38 (54.3%) were in grade 11. This indicated that the views of the respondents concerning the impact of text speak on formal writing cut across the groups chosen for the study.

4.2.2 Distribution of learners according to gender

This study also sought information on the gender of the learners. Ling, Baron, Lenhart and Campbell (2014:433) found that there are gender differences in texting style. Females take longer when texting as compared to males and are more likely to use emoticons in their writing. Therefore, the researcher considered the possibility that different genders may vary in the extent and/or manner in which textspeak may influence their formal writing.

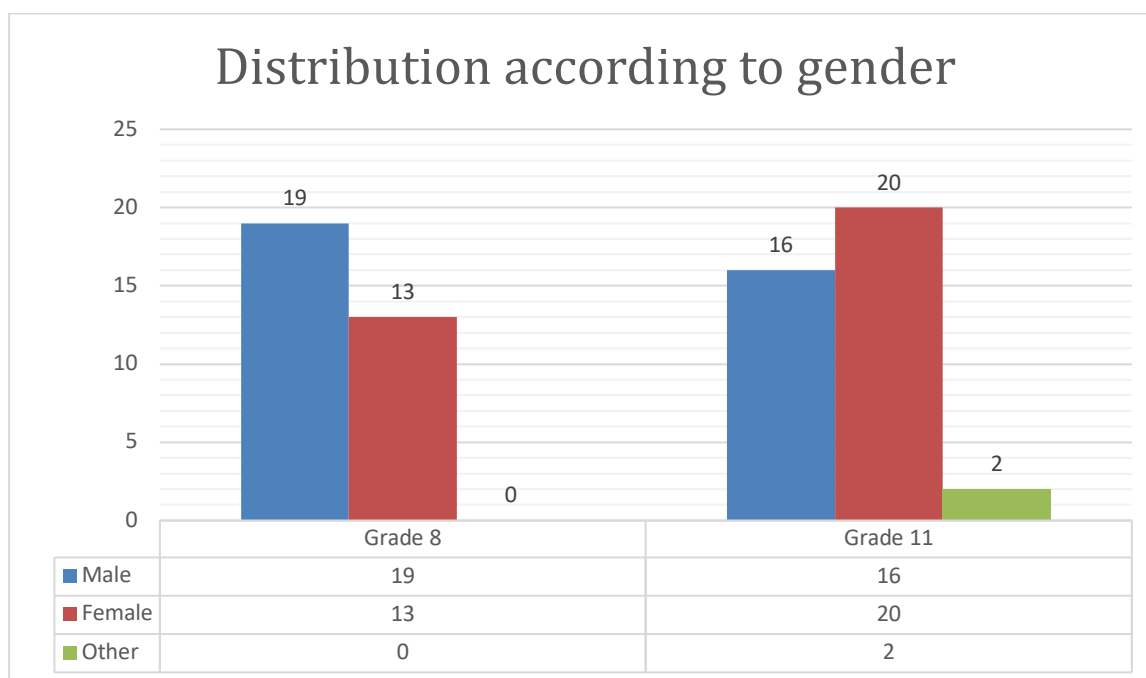


Figure 4. 2: Distribution of learners according to gender.

Regarding the gender of the participants, results in figure 4.2 indicate that 35 (50%) of the respondents were male (19 in grade 8 and 16 in grade 11) and 33 (47.14%) were female (13 in grade 8 and 20 in grade 11). 2 (2.86%) indicated 'other' and these were found in the grade 11 class.

I observed a notable difference from the participants' written essays regarding gender. The essays written by female participants were longer in length as compared to their male counterparts. Females seem to express more detail as they write.

4.2.3 Main language spoken at home.

The language mostly spoken at home was also recorded and results are presented in figure 4.3.

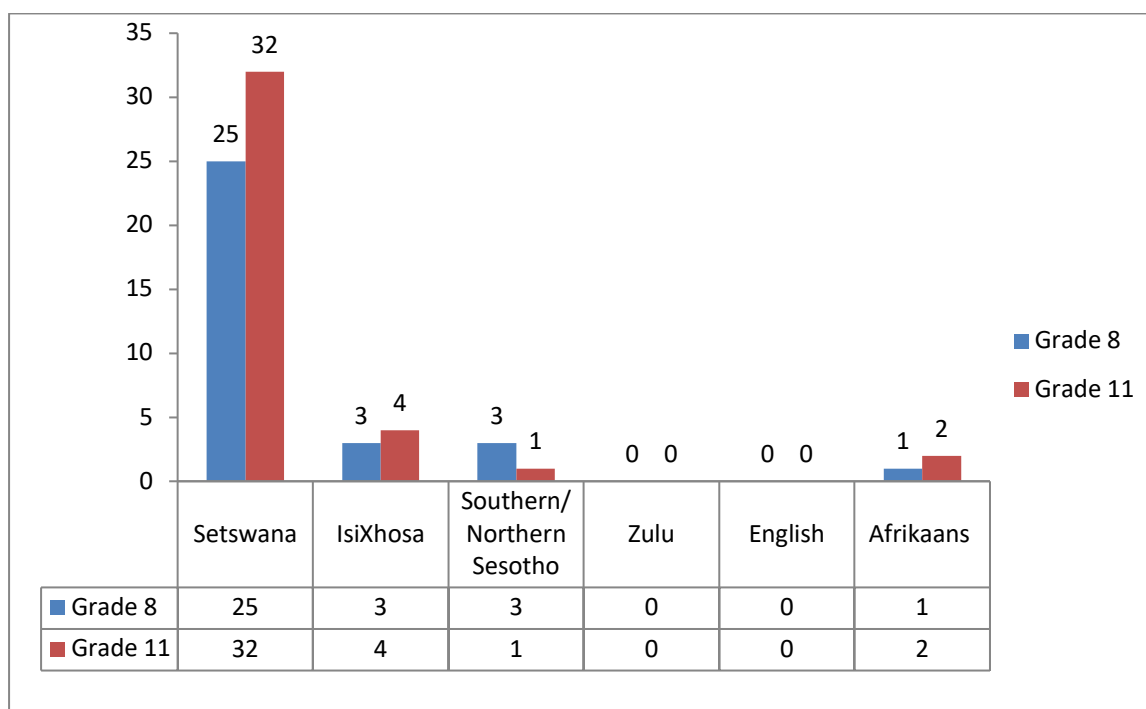


Figure 4. 3: Distribution of the main languages spoken at home.

Figure 4.3 shows that, when respondents are grouped according to their first language, the largest part of the population are Setswana speakers. 57 (81%) learners speak Setswana as a home language, 7 (0.1%) speak IsiXhosa, 4 (5.71%) speak either Southern or Northern Sesotho. There are neither Zulu nor English home language speakers. 3 (4.29%) are Afrikaans home language speakers. One learner indicated that they speak both Setswana and Afrikaans as a main language at their home.

The analysis of the essays did not reveal any particular differences in the types of errors made by learners other than the fact that the learners generally seem to have a problem with grammar (ungrammatical sentences due to concord errors as well as inappropriate sentence construction). However, most errors in the students' writing that were identified and are relevant for the purpose of this study may be attributed to the learners being users of English as an additional language. Thus, one cannot directly attribute any of the errors to textspeak.

4.2.4 Cell phone ownership

The participants were asked if they owned a cell phone. This was done in order to find out if they had access to text messaging.

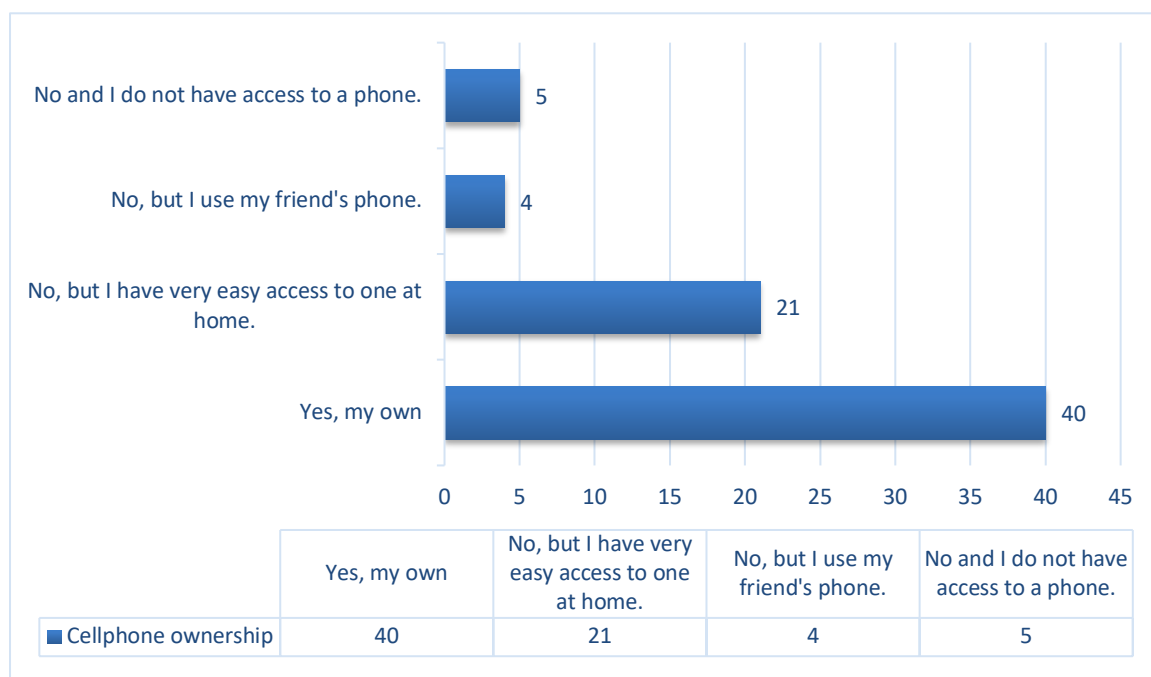


Figure 4. 4: Distribution of cell phone ownership.

The data in figure 4.4 reports cell phone ownership. A total of 40 (57.1%) learners, 17 in grade 8 and 23 in grade 11 had a cell phone of their own. 25 learners (35.7%) had no cell phone. However, amongst the 25, 21 (30%) indicated that, even though they did not own a cell phone, they had easy access to one at home and the other 4 (5.71%) students also stated that they use their friend's phone. Thus, only 5 learners out of 70 learners did not have any access to a cell phone at all and their essays however, were not different from the other essays. They contained the same errors. Thus, a total of 65 (93%) of the sampled learners have access to text messaging.

The access to cell phones amongst these learners is consistent with the study carried out by Kreutzer (2009). Kreutzer (2009) carried out a study to assess cell phone usage in a South African township school. The chosen school was an exclusively black neighbourhood ranging from shacks and squatter camps to small brick and mortar houses. Just like this study that was carried out in a low-income community, the study reported intensive use of cell phones. Detailed activity based questions indicated that virtually all respondents were found to have used a cell phone on the previous day with 91% respondents making calls or sending

messages on a typical day, (Kreutzer 2008:18). According to Kreutzer (2008), there was no significant difference in phone usage patterns between this group who used and borrowed other people's phones and the possibly well to do groups of cell phone owners.

4.2.5 Social chat apps regularly used by learners.

Respondents were asked which social apps they use regularly. Following the results presented in Fig 4.5. WhatsApp is the most common app used amongst the learners. 24 (75%) of the grade 8 learners used WhatsApp. 29 (76%) of grade 11 made use of WhatsApp. Whatsapp is a cross platform instant messaging application that has become incredibly successful. According to Ormazábal (2017) It allows images videos and audios to be sent to friends, colleagues and family over different networks and it also supports group messaging. Additionally, there are no advertisements on WhatsApp (Ormazábal, 2017). Furthermore, it possesses extensive range of emojis that have become the latest trend in social networks.

Facebook was also a popular social platform amongst the learners with 21 (55%) of the grade 11 accessing Facebook.

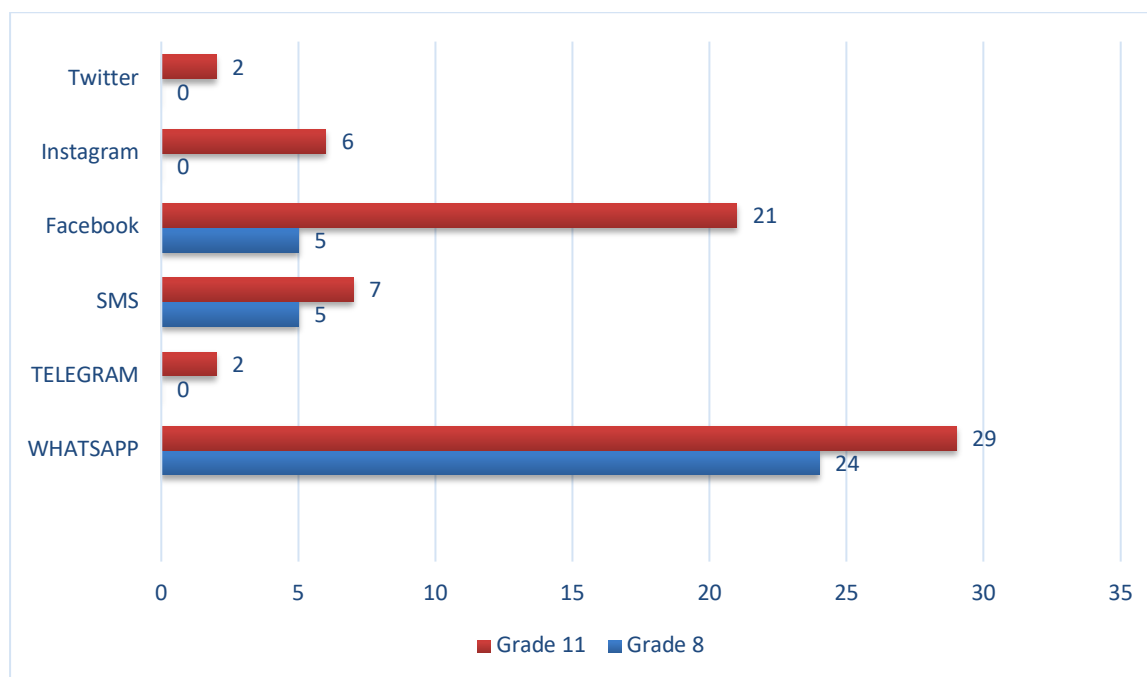


Figure 4. 5: Social apps regularly used by learners.

However, Facebook was not very popular with the grade 8 learners. Only 5 (15.6%) accessed Facebook. Grade 11 learners also accessed other apps which the grade 8s did not. Six grade 11 learners have Instagram accounts, two have Twitter accounts and two used Telegram. TSMS was fairly popular with both groups. 7 (18%) grade 11 respondents used SMS and 5 (15%) grade 8 used SMS.

These results suggest that the learners are fairly active on social media, though they do not necessarily have a large social footprint. Their main concern is communicating and for this, Whatsapp is most appropriate. This may imply that these learners are likely to engage in textspeak when they do use social media.

4.2.6 Frequency and Volume of WhatsApp/Facebook/Twitter/SMS Usage

Learners were asked to indicate how frequently they use social media apps to communicate. They reported their perceptions with reference to how often in general and how long they tend to be on social media on a given day.

The percentages shown in the parentheses in Table 4.1 are the percentage of the learners in that grade who reported using WhatsApp, Facebook, SMS, Instagram or Twitter for that interval or length of time. Thus, for example, 40.6% of all the grade 8s said that they use WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, SMS, or Twitter daily.

Table 4. 1: Frequency and volume of WhatsApp/Facebook/Twitter/SMS usage.

Volume	Number (percentages)		
Frequency	Grade 8 Learners	Grade 11 Learners	All
Daily	13 (40.6.%)	24 (63.16%)	37 (52.9%)
A few times a week	11 (34.4%)	9 (23.68%)	20 (28.6%)
Hardly ever	4 (12.5%)	4 (10.53%)	8 (11.4%)
Never	4 (12.5%)	1 (2.63%)	5 (7.1%)
TOTAL	32 (100%)	38 (100%)	70 (100%)
Number of hours per day			
Never	1 (3.12%)	0	1 (1.4%)
Less than 1 hour a day	16(50%)	10 (26.3%)	26 (37.1%)
1-2 hours per day	6 (18.75%)	4 (10.5%)	10 (14.3%)
2-3 hours per day	3 (9.38%)	3 (7.9%)	6 (8.6%)
3-4 hours per day	1 (3.12%)	3 (7.9%)	4 (5.7%)
More than 4 hours a day	5 (15.63%)	18 (47.4%)	23 (32.9%)
TOTAL	32 (100%)	38 (100%)	70 (100%)

Table 4.1 reveals that many of the grade 11s make use of social media applications as compared to the grade 8s. The table also shows that more grade 11s spend more than 4 hours a day on these applications than the grade 8s.

These results are consistent with Freudenberg's (2009) study. Freudenburg (2009) suggested that having more grade 11s texting for a longer time a day could be due to their age, more exposure to cellphone technology and a more active or established social life. Overall, a total of 57 learners from both grades text either daily or, a few times a week. This makes it 81% of the respondents.

One can infer that most of the learners are engaged in texting and most of them are exposed to textspeak on a regular basis, despite the fact that they are from a less privileged community than Freudenberg's population. Furthermore, since the Grade 11 students spend more time on these apps, it may be that their writing displays a greater influence of textspeak. Based on the written work, the grade 11 essays were well written showing more experience and practice in formal writing as compared the grade 8s. In terms of textspeak features, there was not much use of textspeak in both grades' essays (see analysis of written work).

4.2.7 Learners' reasons for using WhatsApp/Facebook/SMS

Students were asked to explain why they text. Several reasons were provided by learners from both grades. Most of the reasons seemed to apply to both groups.

Table 4. 2: Learners' reasons for using WhatsApp/Facebook/SMS per grade.

Number of participants reporting the reason	Talk to friends	Get information	Make arrangements	Keep in touch	Fast	Easy to use	Emergencies	Boredom	Cost effective
Grade 8	11 (34%)	7 (22%)	8 (25%)	17 (53%)	5 (16%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)	5 (15%)	16 (50%)
Grade 11	26 (68%)	23 (60%)	7 (18%)	33 (87%)	3 (7%)	12 (31%)	1 (2.6%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)

*Note. Participants were allowed to give multiple answers to this question, therefore the frequency counts and percentages given in each cell in this table is independent of those in other cells.

Respondents' reasons for texting range from *talking to friends* 37 (52 %) to *emergency* 2 (2.8%) (Table 2). *Keeping in touch* was the strongest reason why participants text. This reason was greatest amongst the grade 11. *Cost effectiveness* is also a major reason for texting among the grade 8s. 50% of the grade 8s, indicated that they text because texting is affordable. WhatsApp was identified as the cheapest and most affordable way to communicate. Some added that sometimes they get free WhatsApp data from service providers. *Getting information* was cited as another reason for texting (57%). Participants from both grades stated that they text their classmates to *obtain information* about homework, projects or anything pertaining to schoolwork or outside school events. Furthermore, WhatsApp also enables them to have *group chats* whereby they are able to discuss and share information. Another category (21%) of the respondents indicated that they text in order to *make arrangements*.

4.2.8 Features of textspeak reportedly used when texting messages.

Figure 4.6 presents responses from the questionnaire regarding the textspeak features participants make use of when texting. As can be observed from the graph, emoticons were found to be the most commonly used features by the participants.

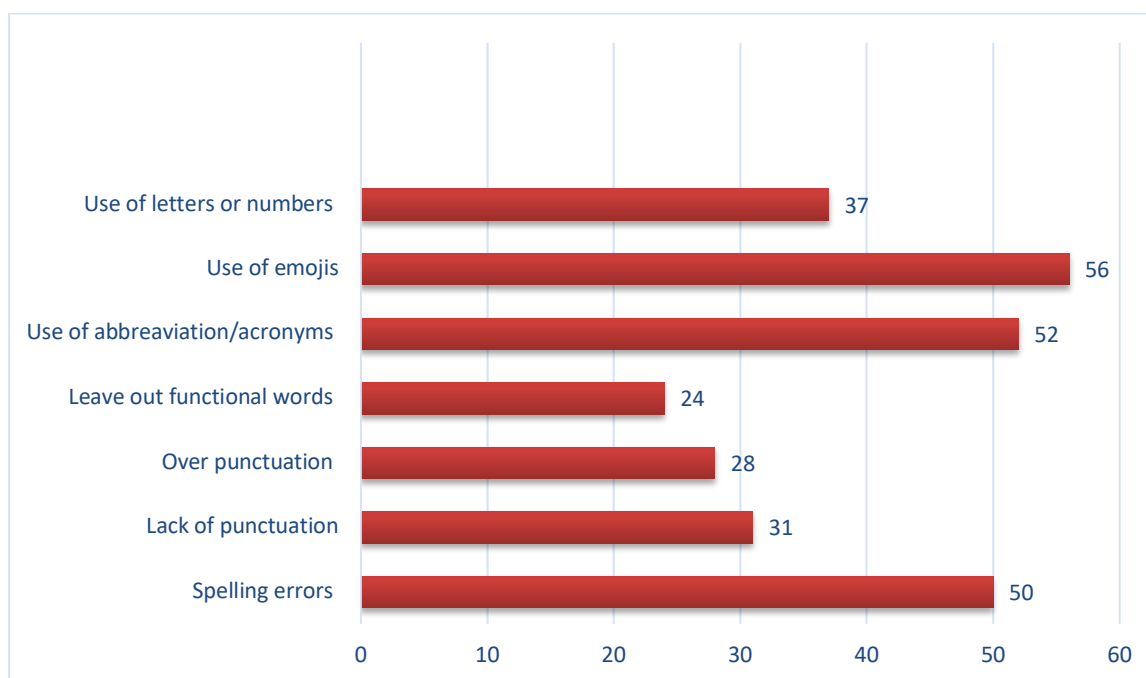


Figure 4. 6: Self-reported features of textspeak used in texting by all participants.

56 of the 70 (80%) participants made use of emojis. It could be that these emojis are used repeatedly because teenagers are expressive and want to convey emotions and facial features when communicating (Freudenburg, 2009). Students also make use of abbreviations/acronyms. 52 out of 70 (74%) made use of abbreviations/acronyms. This could be because shortening is a faster way as compared to writing the full word. The third most commonly used feature was disregarding spelling. 50 of the 70 (71%) participants reported that they did not observe spelling rules when writing.

Even though 80% of the learners reported that they use emoticons when texting, emoticons were not present in their essays. There is only one essay where an emoticon was used. Learners also noted that they use abbreviations when texting. These were also not present in the essays. Only a tiny percentage of abbreviations was present. However, 71% of the learners reported that they disregard spelling when texting. This corresponds with the essays. A close analysis done on the students' written essays revealed vividly that they made a lot of spelling errors when writing academic work.

4.2.9 Learners' perceptions regarding the presence of textspeak in their formal writing

When asked whether they use textspeak in their formal writing, there were 40 (57.1%) learners who admitted the presence of textspeak in their academic work. They reported that, ever since they started texting, they write differently. They considered textspeak as detrimental to their academics. They stated that they tend to forget that they are writing in class and they mostly use abbreviated words in their essays. 30 (42.9%) stated that they are able to switch from textspeak to formal when in class because they do not want to fail as the teachers penalize them. One of the comments in this regard included, *I know that I can get penalized if I do not mind my spellings, so I just remind myself that I am in school and must write accordingly*. Thus, some are careful when writing schoolwork.

After examining the 70 essays written by the grade 8s and grade 11s, I detected that contrary to what they had assumed, only a minimal presence of textspeak were found in their essays. As mentioned before, the Grade 11 learners spend more time texting, but they also have more experience in formal writing. Their essays indicate only a tiny fraction of textspeak. Thus, it could be that learners are able to switch from textspeak to academic writing as they reported. The grade 8 essays report a tiny fraction of textspeak. This suggest that they are exposed to textspeak as well but because they have not fully mastered SE, the errors are not much.

4.3 Analysis and discussion of Teachers' Questionnaire

The table provides an overview of the responses of the teachers who completed the questionnaire devised for the teachers and learners who participated in this study. A total of five English language educators completed the questionnaire provided. The table provides information on the number of years the educator had been teaching, the grade they taught as well as the number of learners in each grade.

Table 4. 3 Teacher Profile

Teacher	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Years of experience	6-10 years	0 – 5	More than 20 years	16 -20 years	6 – 10
Number of learners per class	36 – 45	36 – 45	26 – 35	26 – 35	36 – 45
Grades taught	8,9,10	8,9,11	11,12	10, 11, 12	8,9

The results indicate that the school has new and old teachers. 2 of the 5 teachers have been teaching for more than 16 years. It can be observed that these are the ones who teach the senior grades; grade 11 and 12. The teachers with less experience teach the lower grades. There is one teacher with less than 5 years of teaching experience and two with 6 – 10 years teaching experience. One aspect which can also be noted is that the lower the grade, the more the learners. The reason could be that as they draw closer to matriculating, the classes are made smaller in order to provide individual attention to the learners. Alternatively, it could be that some learners dropped out along the way.

4 (80%) of the 5 teachers stated that textspeak has an influence on academic writing . This is also consistent with the learners' observations. They reported that they use textspeak in their written work and it makes them fail. The teachers noted that textspeak affected the learners' academic work negatively. It was noted that textspeak limits the learners' ability to spell correctly and oftentimes learners were not able to distinguish between slang and formal language. One teacher added that this has resulted in a low pass rate in English. *Texting has resulted in students not doing well in English because they use informal shorthand which causes them to quickly loose focus in what is really needed. This has resulted in a lower pass rate in English.* In order to combat the use of textspeak in academic writing, one educator

noted that she makes her learners rewrite a misspelt word three times. If the student made use of a lot of informal speech, then the student would be asked to rewrite the whole essay. Another teacher reported that he stresses on the correct use of formal writing each day and any use of textspeak results in reduction of marks.

However, one teacher out of the five teachers stated that he does not see textspeak negatively influencing academic writing. This was reported by the educator with more than 20 years teaching experience. The educator reported that rather, *textspeak helps the learners with vocabulary and improves their performance by involving them more on the content*. These findings concur with Crystal (2008) that textspeak benefits the learner, rather than eroding literacy, it improves it.

4.3.1 Analysis of written work

One of the most important objectives of this study was to find out the types and linguistic features of textspeak commonly used by high school students. Even though textspeak is reported to be characterised by both standard and non-standard orthography, it was noted that textspeak is fully characterised by informal non-standard spelling, which is not largely understood by everyone. Rather, it is a creation of a language used by a group of people sharing a similar background.

In order to ascertain whether students would be able to differentiate the context of writing (formal or informal), the students were asked to write a formal essay on 'My holiday destination' (grade 8) and 'The day I will never forget or Social media' (grade 11). Atlas ti. was used to analyse a variety of errors. Ten codes were used to cross-check the work. These were discussed in detail in chapter 3. Results are discussed below.

4.3.2 Distinctive linguistic features of textspeak.

After arranging and scanning the essays according to grade (see Chapter 3), I divided the selected features of textspeak into ten categories. These codes are as follows: grammar, lack of punctuation, punctuation used inappropriately, use of abbreviations and acronyms, use of letters or numbers, use of more punctuation than is necessary, use of shortenings/contractions, use of slang, use of emojis and lastly, wrong spelling which is not textspeak related. Lack of punctuation was sub-divided into seven other categories. These are: no

apostrophe, no capitalization, no full stop, no paragraphs, no question mark, sentence very long and lastly no comma, colon or semi-colon. I sub-divided these because when I was analysing the essays, I discovered from the essays that punctuation was a major area on its own that needed breaking down. In addition, although capitalisation does not fall under the category of punctuation, I included it under punctuation as the 2, work hand in hand especially in textspeak. Punctuation is the skill of correctly using the breaks and symbols in writing, for instance comma. The accurate use of the breaks helps the reader to understand the passage exactly as it was meant by the writer. Capital letters on the other hand, are used at the beginning of sentences, for acronyms and proper nouns. Just like punctuation, if these are not used in daily writings, then the text becomes rough and difficult to read. So, both punctuation and capitalization help to make the message clear.

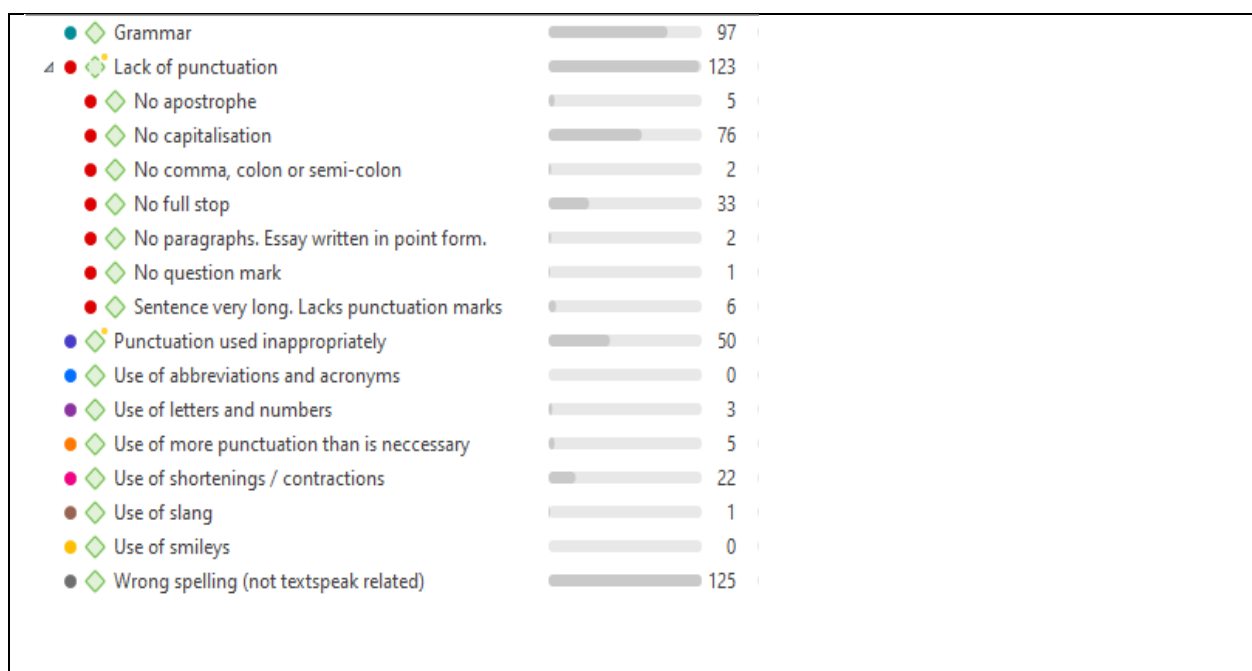


Figure 4. 7: Analysis of grade 8 written scripts.

The results indicate that out of the analysed textspeak features in the grade 8 essays, spelling is the most affected area of language. There were 125 misspelt words, and these were not textspeak related. An example of a misspelt word found in the essay is *policiman* for policeman. From the essays there were 50 instances where the punctuation mark was used inappropriately, for instance, some learners used the comma to end a sentence, or a full stop

was used in the middle of a sentence (see 4.4.3). In addition, out of the 123 lack of punctuation errors, 33 (27%) of the 123 instances were omission of a full stop. This tendency to misuse or underuse the full stop depicts that factors other than textspeak can be responsible for this as it is not only a case of missing full stops which is considered a feature of textspeak. 76 (62%) out of 123 instances consisted of lack of capitalisation. There are neither abbreviations nor acronyms in the essays. From the grade 8 essays, one can conclude that textspeak is not prominent in the grade 8 essays.

Figure 4.8 Analysis of the grade 11 essays.

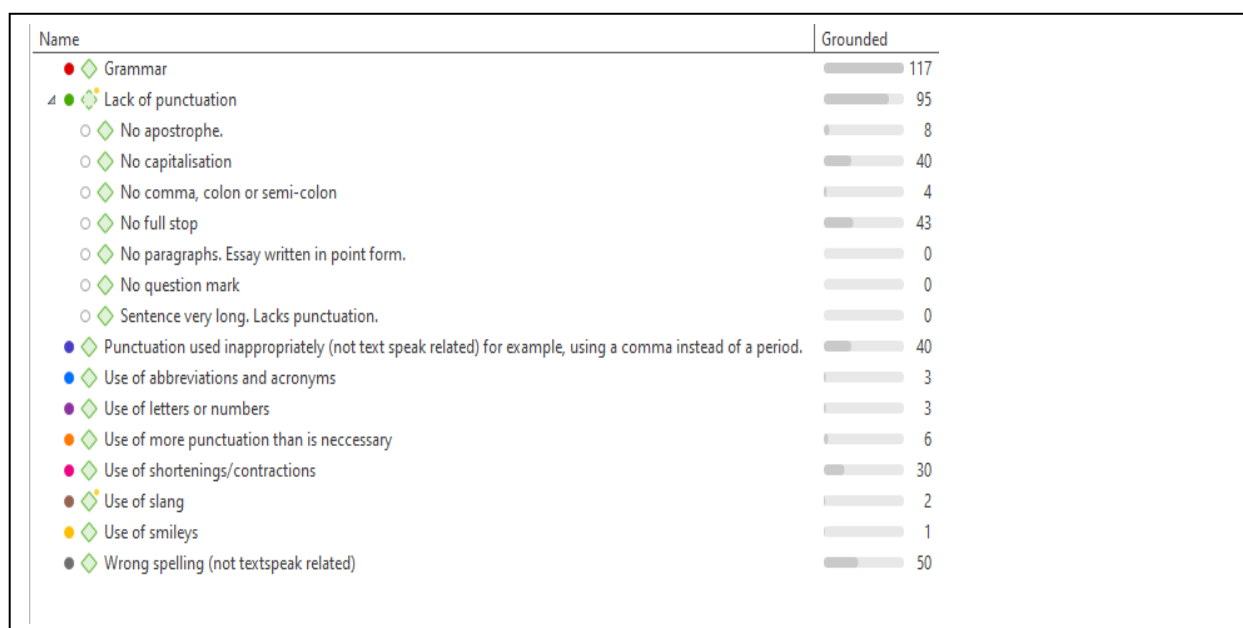
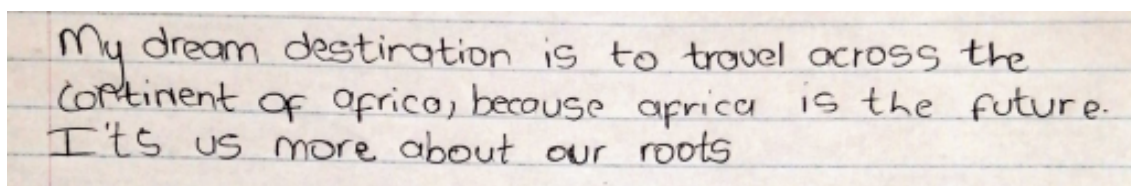


Figure 4. 8: Analysis of grade 11 written scripts.

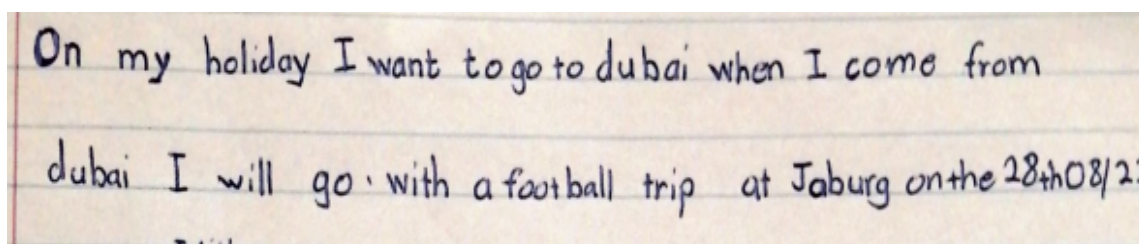
From the analysis of the grade 11 essays, grammar is the most affected area of language. There were 117 cases whereby the sentences were grammatically wrong (this is discussed in detail, see 4.4.11). There were 95 instances where there was lack of punctuation. 40 (42%) out of the 95 instances is the omission of capital letters. There were 3 instances whereby letters/numbers were used and 3 cases where abbreviations were used. From the analysis of the grade 11 essays, one can conclude that textspeak is not a major problem in academic writing as the features of textspeak are not much.

4.3.3 Lack of punctuation

The analysis showed learners omitted punctuation marks in their essays. The grade 8 essays had 123 instances whereby punctuation was not used and the grade eleven had 95 instances, with lack of capitalization being the majority omitted. For the grade 8s, 76 of the 123 omitted punctuation marks were lack of capitalization and 40 out of 95 for grade 11. Results of the analysis showed that more than half of the students had some letters that should have been written in upper case, written in lower case. The most common observed, was the use of proper nouns, mainly cities, written in lower case. This was followed by 'I' written as 'i'. It seems like learners do not know what has to be capitalised and what does not. In addition, a number of learners began their sentences in lower case yet the rule states that a capital letter should be used at the beginning of a sentence. The analysis from these results suggests that learners could be affected by textspeak as mobile phones encourage informal writing as there is no policing of writing conventions. The results could also be that learners are just unaware of the SE formal writing conventions or they just choose to ignore them. Consider the examples below:



My dream destination is to travel across the
continent of africa, because africa is the future.
I'ts us more about our roots

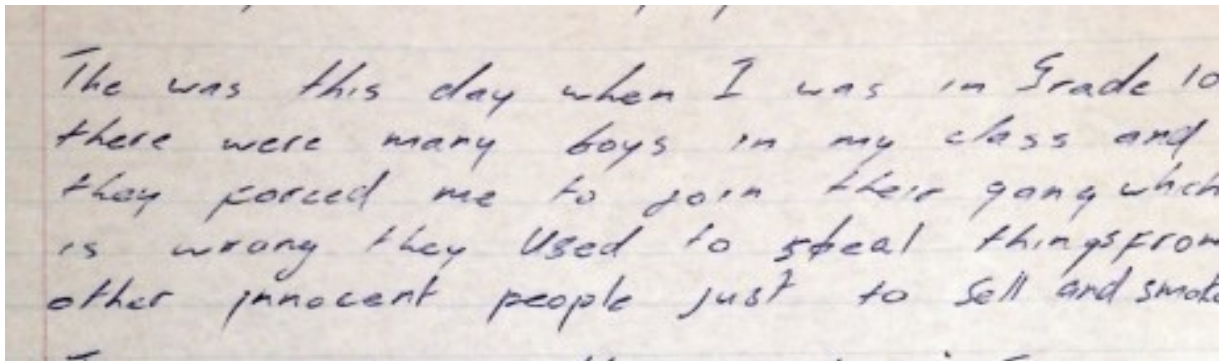


On my holiday I want to go to dubai when I come from
dubai I will go with a football trip at Jaburg on the 28th 08/22

Source: Field Data (2022)

From the examples above, an observation made on the sampled essays showed that a number of learners used small letters for proper nouns yet there is a rule that guides proper nouns as well as the initial letter in a sentence to be in a capital letter. In most essays, words such as Dubai, America, Paris, Africa as well as at the beginning of sentences had small letters.

Full stops were also omitted by some learners from both grades. The sample below also shows how learners omitted full stops. This was a common scenario amongst a lot of grade eight essays. 33 of the 123 cases were omitted full stops and 43 of the 95 essays in grade 11 had omitted full stops. The commas and apostrophes were omitted by a few students.

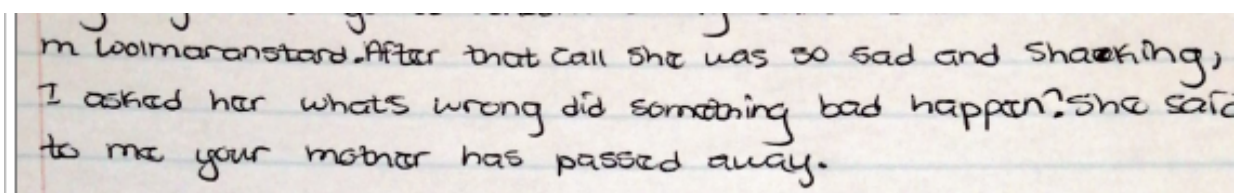


Source: Field Data (2022)

The above essay is from a grade 11 essay. It can be observed that the learner omitted full stops to mark the end of a sentence. Capital letters were also not used to mark the beginning of a sentence.

4.3.4 Punctuation used inappropriately.

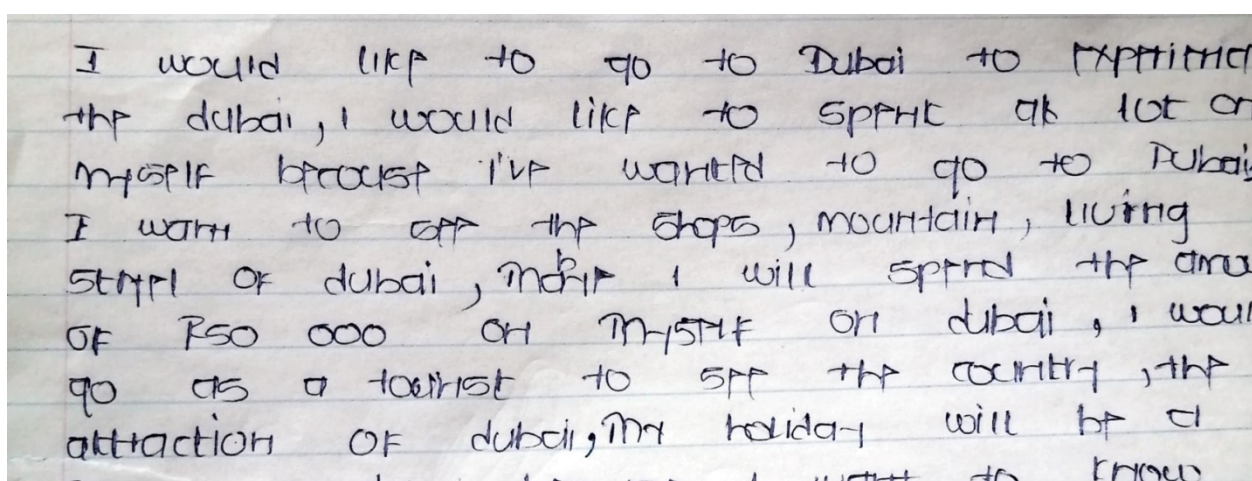
Results for this study reveal that sometimes the students do not know how to punctuate correctly. There are 50 instances in the grade 8 essays whereby punctuation was used inappropriately and 40 in the grade 11 essays. The comma was used at the end of a sentence instead of being used in the middle of a sentence to separate clauses within a sentence, phrases within a clause or words within a phrase, in order to succinctly and unambiguously express meaning (Lingard, 2016). In the example below, the learner ended a sentence with a comma instead of a full stop. *After that call she was so sad and shaking,* This was a common case with most essays in both grades. In addition, one would also expect quotation marks for the last phrase. *She said to me, "Your mother has passed away".*



m Wolmaranstand. After that call she was so sad and shaking,
I asked her what's wrong did something bad happen? She said
to me your mother has passed away.

Source: Field Data (2022)

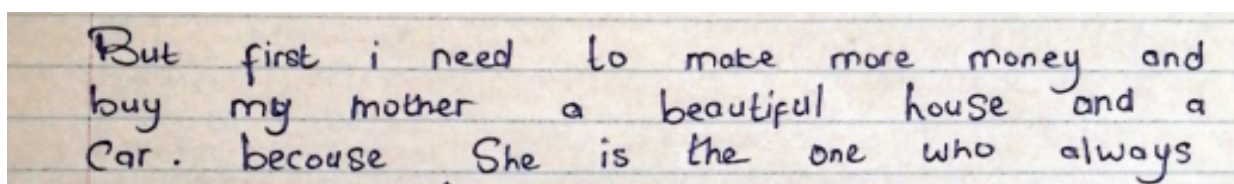
In the example below, the learner also used the comma instead of a period to mark the end of a sentence. *I would like to go to Dubai to experience dubai*, Instead of a period, he/she used a comma. Throughout the essay, the learner used commas instead of periods to mark the end of a sentence. In addition, the learner did not capitalise proper nouns.



I would like to go to Dubai to experience
the dubai, I would like to spend a lot on
myself because I've wanted to go to Dubai
I want to see the shops, mountain, living
style of dubai, more I will spend the amount
of 750 000 on myself on dubai, I would
go as a tourist to see the country, the
attraction of dubai, my holiday will be a
great one I want to know

Source: Field Data (2022)

The other punctuation mark found to be wrongly used was the full stop. The full stop which is commonly used to mark an end of a sentence, in this study, learners placed it anywhere in the sentence. In the example below, a full stop was used in the middle of a sentence, between 'car' and 'because'. The conjunction is then followed by 'She', written with a capital letter.

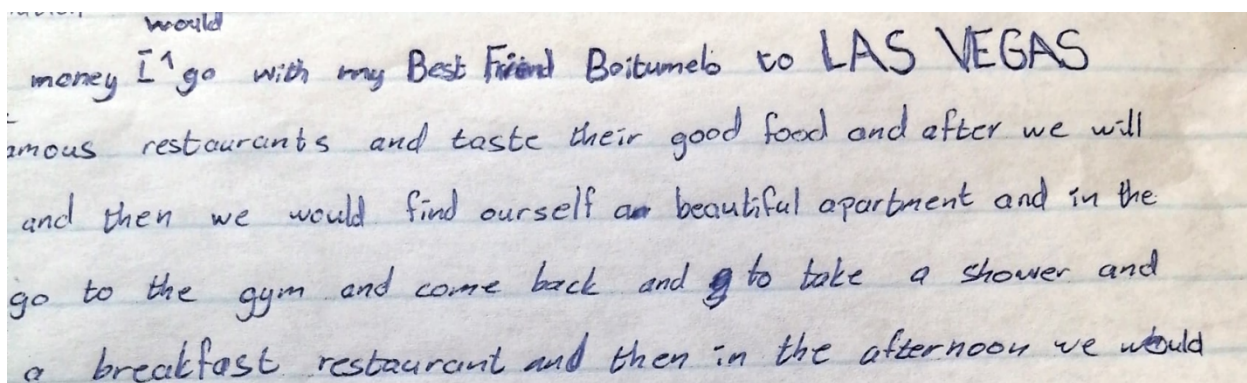
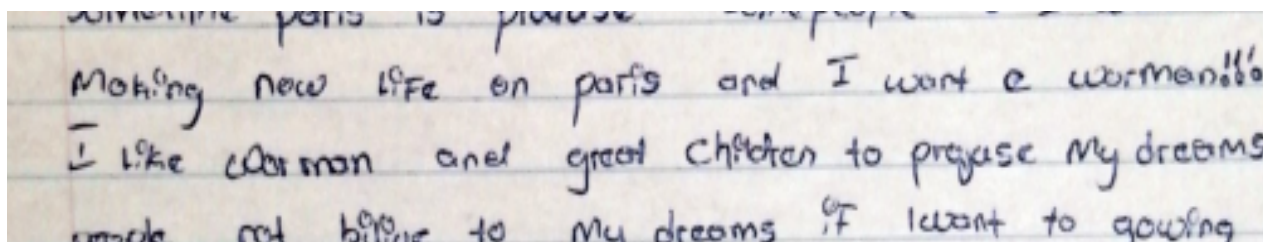


But first i need to make more money and
buy my mother a beautiful house and a
car. because She is the one who always

Source: Field Data (2022)

4.3.5 Use of more punctuation than is necessary.

There were a few instances where students used more punctuation marks than required. In the 32 grade 8 essays, there were only five instances where learners used more punctuation marks unnecessarily. In the 38 grade 11 essays, there are 6 cases where punctuation marks were overused, with three instances coming from the same essay. The example below shows the exclamation mark used more than it should have been.



Source: Field Data (2022)

In the above example, the learner used capital letters unnecessarily. The learner used capital letters for Las Vegas (LAS VEGAS). This is a common textspeak aspect, for emphasis.

4.3.6 Use of letters and numbers

The use of letters of the alphabet and numbers that sound like a word were rarely observed among the features of textspeak in this study. There were only three instances in the grade eight essays and three from the grade 11 whereby these were used. The three cases in grade 11 were from the same essay. Examples of the words written by the learners are: 2nd for second, 3rd for third. Grade 8 learner wrote the numbers in numerals, seven as 7.

4.3.7 Wrong spelling (not textspeak related)

This study investigated the spelling errors found on the students' essays. Out of all the items under investigation, incorrect spelling was found to be on the top of the list for grade 8s. This corresponds with the educators' observations who noted on their questionnaires that poor spelling was an issue with the learners. There were 125 out of 1 236 (10%) words which were not spelt correctly. Grade 11 had at least 50 out of 2 439 (2%) of wrongly written words. A close analysis done on the students' written essays revealed vividly that they made a lot of errors when writing academic work. A lot of words with misspellings were found in the essays. There are some examples of words in the table below that were found to appear frequently in the essays.

Table 4. 4: Misspelt words

Grade	Misspelt word	Correct spelling
8	Tought	Taught
	knees	niece
	univercity	university
	policiman	policeman
	whay	way
11	Quiet	Quit
	exiting	exciting
	principle	principal
	their	they

From the results presented in Table 4.4 above, it can be observed that grade 8 learners struggle with spelling. They use sounds to write the words but, in this case, it is not textspeak related. On the other hand, grade 11 are able to spell words correctly but they use words

which sound the same but wrong spelling (homophones). In the example above, a learner wanted to write that he went to the principal. Instead of principal, he wrote principle.

4.3.8 Use of abbreviations and acronyms

The essays indicate that abbreviation and acronyms did not occur frequently in the essays. With only 3 occurrences altogether from the grade 11 essays, their use is too infrequent for one to conclude that textspeak affects literacy. Examples of the abbreviations found in the essays include NYC for New York City and SA for South Africa.

4.3.9 Use of shortenings / contractions

Contractions/shortenings are another textspeak feature. Technically, a contraction is a word or phrase that has been shortened by dropping one or more letters. In other words, it is a shortened form of a word or group of words with missing letters usually marked by an apostrophe. In this study, the researcher found that some students used shortenings/contractions in their academic work. There were 22 out of 1 236 (1.8%) words in the grade 8 essays where contractions were used and 30 out of 2 439 (1.2%) words in the grade 11 essays.

Table 4. 5: Contractions found in students' essays.

Contracted words	Definitions
Won't	Will not
Don't	Do not
Doesn't	Does not
Couldn't	Could not

Table 4.5 above reports those contractions that were most frequently identified in the data.

4.3.10 Use of slang

Slang is another distinctive linguistic feature that makes up textspeak. An analysis made on the essays however showed that the students do not make use of slang when writing academic work. There were only three instances where slang was used. A grade 8 learner used the word '*goner*', for *going to* and '*wanna*' for *want to*, as well as *lekker* for great was used by a grade 11 learner. Thus, there were 2 out of 1 236 (0.1%) slang words from the grade 8 essays and 1 out of 2 439 (0.04%) slang words from the grade 11 essays.

4.3.11 Use of smileys

This is another feature of textspeak. The study revealed that students do not use smileys in academic writing. There was only one instance where a learner in grade 11 made use of an emoji in written work.

4.3.12 Grammar

Amongst the aspects that this research was investigating, grammar is one area that has received a lot of violations. Here grammar has been used in the broad sense commonly used in school lessons, in stylistic guides and in more general settings. Learners are expected to construct sentences that are in a specific order and connected in specific ways (Canagarajah 2013:1). Kukurs (2012: 193) points out the many instances of the incorrect use of English grammatical rules in learners' written work such as grammatically incorrect sentences like 'she is smile', 'I see beautiful flowers in garden' and 'sarah is happy.' This was the case with 27 of the 32 (84%) grade 8 essays. The pervasiveness of errors in grammar they made distracted me and made it difficult to understand the writer's meaning. From the 27 essays, 9 of these were difficult even to extract the meaning from them. Consider the examples below:

By my Site my dream is
 to be rich man who gener help
 People on other's but People who
 go to School and get Education
 every time i'm dreaming about
 to stay at dubai to rest my
 life but on that dream you need
 to take it Seruse and do kugour
 work at School .

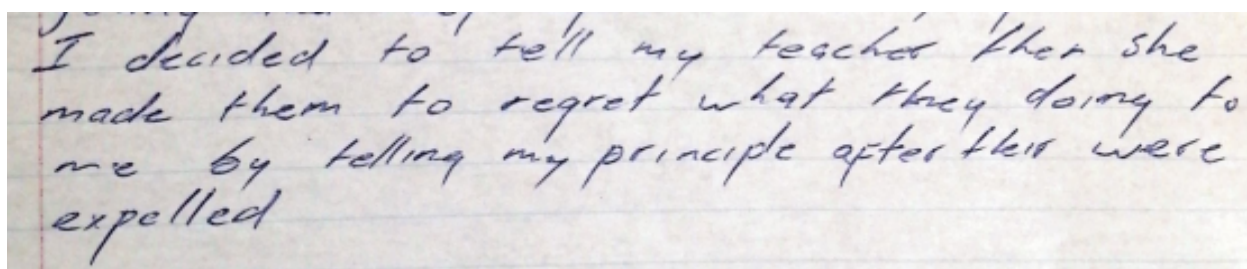
my dream in the holidays i dream
 by me the shouse that i want in the
 my mom shold do the surprise
 holidays. The way i am * i was
 in that holidays that mom speen w
 my dream is about mom and ded
 was so happy to tell me my
 by me the shouse my ded tell
 something that i dont know in

Source: Field Data (2022)

From the above examples from grade 8 scripts, a lot of grammatical rules have been violated and in addition, it is not easy to pick up what the writers were intending to say. The essays have poor spellings, and it is hard to get the intended message. This is the case with at least 7 other grade 8 essays. Thus, 9 out of 32 (28%) essays were difficult to decipher the intended meaning.

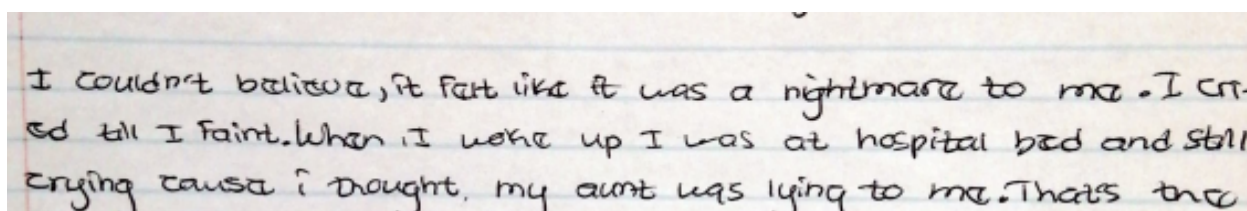
The grade 11 essays on the other hand had grammatical errors mostly caused by subject verb agreement as well as other violations but they were minor as compared to the grade 8 ones. It was easy to pick up the grammatical violations as the essays were well written. 24 out of the 38 (63%) grade 11 essays were well written with minor mistakes. From the other

14 out of 38 essays, (37%), one could decipher the meaning even though there were grammatical errors. Consider the example below:



Source: Field Data (2022)

From the example above, one is able to figure out without much difficulty what the learner was trying to say. *I decided to tell my teacher then she made them regret what they were doing to me...* The learner omitted 'were'. It is the similar case with the example below from another grade 11 essay. *I cried till I faint.* The learner should have added –ed in order to make the past tense for faint. Basically, the grade 11 essays were well written as compared to the grade 8.



Source: Field Data (2022)

4.4 Final Consideration

Based on the analysis and findings reported above, the data suggests that textspeak is not a major influential factor to the detriment of formal writing in English as a second language.

Results revealed that learners in this community have ready access to cell phones. More specifically, 93% of the participating learners have access to cell phones and 81% of them text either daily or a few times a week. The results also show little difference in phone usage patterns between this group and those students who are economically better off. This interpretation supports the findings produced by Kreutzer (2008). The learners from all socio-economic groups are exposed to textspeak. In other words, it is not the case that students in

a low-income communities necessarily have little access to cell phones. It is therefore reasonable to assume that their formal writing will be influenced in a similar extent (either more or less so) by textspeak. Considering that the results reported here do not support textspeak as a main detrimental factor to learners' ESL written performances in secondary school, one could argue that these results support literature that found little to no negative effects of textspeak on formal writing. This study, however, also did not find any particularly positive effects and more results focusing on this option as a possibility may be warranted. However, based on the results presented here, one cannot put forward a strong argument for either of the extreme views; that is, textspeak neither seems to have a strong negative, nor a strong positive effect on the formal writing of the population sampled.

This is not to say that the analysed essays were perfectly written without any faults. From the analysed essays, I came across a lot of grammatical errors. 84% of the grade 8 essays had grammatical errors and 9 (28%) essays were difficult even to decipher the intended meaning. On the other hand, 63% of the grade 11 essays were well written with minor mistakes. From the other 14 out of 38 essays, (37%), one could decipher the meaning even though there were grammatical errors. The grammar errors pertained to concord, word classes and punctuation. The results from the grammatical analysis suggest that grammatical violations do not appear to be linked to textspeak. Most of these non-standard features could be because of not applying formally taught rules.

The analysis also showed that learners omitted punctuation marks in their essays. Participants omitted full stops as well as commas. The results also reveal that more than half of the students had some letters that should have been written in upper case, written in lower case. In addition to lack of punctuation, the essays showed punctuation being used inappropriately. Some learners used the comma in place of a full stop and vice versa. These results suggest that learners are not affected by textspeak but do not apply the rules which guide them when writing academic work.

Abbreviations/acronyms, contractions as well as smileys are common features of textspeak (see Chapter 2). However, these features make up a tiny percentage in the analysed essays. There is only 1 smiley that was found from all the essays, 0.1% of the grade 8 used slang, 0.04% of the grade 11s used slang, Contractions were used by 1.8% grade 8s and 1.2% grade 11s.

Therefore, I do not consider textspeak as a main affecting factor of formal ESL writing; rather, I consider a lack of grammatical mastery and vocabulary knowledge to be potentially strong affective factors in learners' ESL formal writing in secondary school.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study delved into the debate on whether the frequent use of textspeak benefits or hampers academic performance of secondary school learners. The research findings assuage the concerns over the negative threat of textspeak on formal written English. The results suggest that the impact of textspeak may have been overstated. The study showed that text speak dilutes a tiny fraction of the language (mostly from grade eleven essays).

In as much as there is a tiny fraction of textspeak features in the written work of learners, 80% of the educators reported that they come across textspeak features in the learners' written work and this has a negative impact on SE. 20% reported that textspeak affects SE positively.

The next chapter, chapter 5, reviews the research questions and objectives of the study, restrictions of the study, its significance in the body of knowledge, and avenues for future studies, as well as providing concluding thoughts.

5 CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analytically investigate the impact of textspeak on the written work of ESL secondary school learners. To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

- How widespread is the use of texting among high school learners in a lower income community?
- What are the English language educators' views on the phenomenon of texting in relation to learners' written work, in a lower income community?
- Is there any evidence of the use of text speak features in the English written work of learners in a lower income community?
- What are the types of text speak features, if any, used by grade 8 and 11 learners from a lower income community in their formal written ESL work?

To answer the above research questions, the following interrelated research objectives were also formulated in the introductory chapter of this study (see Chapter 1).

- To establish how widespread the use of texting language is among high school learners is.
- To source the English language educators' perspectives on the phenomenon of texting.
- To assess whether there is any evidence of the use of features of text speak in the English written work of learners.

A qualitative research methodology was employed, following Freudenberg (2009)'s research, in order to answer these questions. The organisation of the study is described next.

5.2 Exposition of chapters

Chapter 1 presented the layout of the study and presented and motivated the research questions and aim and introduces the concept of textspeak. It also provided the different views regarding the impact of textspeak on students' formal writing.

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature extensively. I defined the concept of textspeak and its relationship to formal writing. Furthermore, the characteristics of textspeak were discussed. Additionally, I looked at Standard English and discussed how textspeak differs from SE. This chapter also looked at the empirical studies done by different researchers and the different views regarding the impact of textspeak.

Chapter 3 described the methodology adopted for the purpose of this study. The study used a mixed method approach which is defined as an approach to research in the social, behavioural and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter 3 also presented the way the data was collected. The study collected questionnaires from both teachers and learners. Five teachers completed the questionnaires together with seventy learners, 32 grade 8 and 38 grade 11s. In addition, 70 essays from the 70 students were gathered for analysis. The procedure mapped out in this chapter guided the necessary empirical steps for the researcher to conduct the study and obtain meaningful findings.

Chapter 4 presented the empirical findings on the impact of textspeak on the formal writing of ESL learners from a lower income community.

Chapter 5 finally reflects on the research questions and objectives of the study, restrictions of the study, its significance in the body of knowledge, and avenues for future studies, as well as providing concluding thoughts.

The literature review informed the empirical component of the research, which revealed interesting results, as discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

5.3 Study restrictions and avenues for future studies.

This section highlights some limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future researchers.

Firstly, getting the signed parental consent forms was challenging. There were countless visits to the school to get the parental consent forms as the study could not be carried out without these. Once I got at least 70 forms, getting the students was also a major problem as most times they were absent. As a result, I had to make countless visits to the school again in order to get the data. One educator advised me that all learners are only available during certain periods of the year, for instance, during exam time.

Secondly, although the data used is valid, in this case, the essays, a limitation is that only data from those participants who provided written consent could be used. Using the essays from all the learners would have shown a clearer picture of the results. In addition, this study is a case study, and the results are not generalisable. Furthermore, another limitation is that the results are limited to these two age groups, grade 8s and grade 11s. It would be ideal for

future research to use different age groups for a clearer picture. The other limitation is that learners were not asked which language they text in. Majority of the participants were Setswana speakers, and probably some text in their mother tongue. Freudenburg (2009) observed from her study that L2 learners had fewer features of textspeak in their written work as compared to L1 learners. Freudenburg (2009) suggested that this could be because L2 learners text in their mother tongue and therefore use fewer textspeak features as compared to their L1 counterparts when writing in English.

5.4 Contribution of the study

Notwithstanding its limitations, this study highlights a few contributions that need to be acknowledged. The first important contribution is that the findings reinforce the need to differentiate between deliberate violations of grammatical or orthographical convention and genuine lack of understanding of SE rules. The study also informs educators of the key areas in the teaching of English language that need attention. Furthermore, it has also highlighted that textspeak may not be the only factor contributing to the decline of SE. There are other factors too that could be involved. The present study has also extended to the existing body of knowledge about the impact of textspeak on written language by investigating the impact of textspeak on the written work of ESL secondary school learners.

5.5 Discussion

In conclusion, this study delved into the debate on whether the frequent uses of text speak benefits or hampers academic performance of secondary school learners. The research findings ease the concerns over an imminent danger and threat to formal English. The results suggest that the impact of textspeak may have been overstated. The study showed that text speak represents a fraction of the language (mostly from grade eleven essays) and most of these transgressions were at the morphological and syntactic levels which could actually attribute to poor language ability overall.

From the analysed essays, the researcher found a lot of grammatical errors. The grammar errors pertained to concord, word classes and punctuation. However, most of these non-standard features could be because of not applying formally taught rules Freudenburg (2009). Teachers should continue to teach their students conventional rules of formal written language whilst encouraging classroom discussion about the different registers of language

and the awareness of the contexts in which it is essential to apply standard conventions and when these conventions may be relaxed, (Wood, Kemp & Waldron, 2014:427).

In addition, it is important to understand that even though textspeak is a language on its own, it is depended on SE. Textspeak cannot exist without SE. One should first master SE before textspeak. Therefore, I observed from the grade 8 essays that they have not fully mastered SE thus, there are no textspeak features as they for instance, have not mastered correct spelling.

Consequently, with the small number of textspeak features made by a relatively small number of students (mostly in grade 11), I am inclined to believe that other than textspeak, there are other factors that influence students' writing. Given that the learners are exposed to text messaging and that they also spend a remarkable time texting, one would expect to find a lot of textspeak features in their written assignments. It seems that the lack of textspeak features in the grade 11 essays is a result of learners being able to assess when it is and is not appropriate to use certain varieties of language. Put differently, from the results of this study, there is little need for concern about the future of standard written English. This is not to suggest however, that possible dangers of textspeak are ruled out; 80% of the teachers' responses hint to the negative impacts of textspeak.

The findings from the present study are consistent with some general trends found in the research literature connected to the impact of textspeak on academic writing. Drouin and Davis (2009:64) also observed that there are no significant decreases in standardised literacy due to textspeak. However, they noted that the results need to be interpreted with some consideration in mind. According to Drouin and Davis (2009:64), it is not likely that using textspeak abbreviations for words such as *you*, *great*, could lead to a deterioration of performance on standardised literacy tests because of the nature of textspeak communication and standardised assessment. They argued that in textspeak, common words that have likely been overlearned are often abbreviated, but for longer words such as *industrial* or *appreciative* or other such words that might appear in standardised literacy assessments would have to be spelled out because there are no common abbreviations and consequently, textspeak users cannot cut corners on the longer, more elaborate words but only on shorter, common ones (Drouin & Davis, 2009:64).

5.6 Recommendations

Finally, the results of this study demonstrate the need for more research in this area as there are so many unanswered questions. Chiefly, the impact of textspeak on standard writing needs to be studied longitudinally, with the same sample of individuals over a long period of time for instance the grade 8s that were used for this study could be used until they get to matric, monitoring their work. In this study, grade 8s performed poorly in spelling as well, their essays had lots of grammatical errors as compared to those of grade 11s. So, one could monitor their academic writing at each level.

In addition, since the results of the findings of the present study are based on the students from a school in an urban lower income socio-economic sphere, I recommend further research to be extended to other similar schools as well as rural secondary schools (same grade 8 and 11) in order to understand if text speak really affects academic writing. A comparative study could be carried out on the impact of text speak in rural schools, high density schools, as well as group A schools to determine the distinctive differences amongst them. Group A schools have resources and English is usually their Home Language and they would have much practice with SE unlike rural schools and lower income urban schools. The research could also be extended to younger age groups, specifically primary school learners aged 10-12 (grade 5-7).

Furthermore, with reference to secondary school teachers as part of the study, the inclusion of other subject teachers for instance, History, Business Studies, Geography (where learners write essays) should be included in future research to gain full perception of the impact of textspeak on academic writing.

Lastly, for future research, participants should be asked about the language they text in when sending messages. It would also be interesting to find out if there are textspeak features in the mother tongue.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE ON SMS USAGE AND SMS SPEAK ADMINISTERED TO STUDENTS

1. Grade:

8	1
9	2
10	3
11	4
12	5

2. Gender:

Female	1
Male	2
Other	3

3. What language do you use most often at home?

Setswana	1
IsiXhosa	2
Southern/Northern Sesotho	3
Zulu	4
English	5
Afrikaans	6
Other	7

If you selected "Other", please specify: _____

4. Do you own a cell phone?

Yes, my own	1
No	2
I have very easy access to one at home	3
I use my friends' phone	4

5. Do you have any social chat apps that require texting on your phone that you use regularly?
Which one/s?

	Yes	No
MXIT	1	2
WHATSAPP	1	2
TELEGRAM	1	2
SMS	1	2
Other	1	2

If you selected "Other", please
specify: _____

6. How often do you SMS or use MXIT/ WHATSAPP etc?

Daily	1
A few times a week	2
Hardly ever	3
Never	4

7. How much time do you spend SMSing or on MXIT/WHATSAPP a day?

Less than 1 hour a day	1
1-2 hours per day	2
2-3 hours per day	3
3-4 hours per day	4
More than 4 hours a day	5

8. Give reasons why you SMS/ MXIT/WHATSAPP:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

9. Do you think you write differently since you started texting on a phone to what you did before?

Yes	1
No	2

Why/ why not?

10. Do you think that SMSing or using social chat apps affect the way you write at school?

Yes	1
No	2

11. If you answered yes to question 10, do you believe that texting improves your writing (very positive/ positive) or not (negative/very negative) Please motivate you answer.

Very positive	1
Positive	2
Negative	3
Very negative	4
More positive than negative	5
More negative than positive	6

Because, _____

12. Which of the following apply to your language use when you text? Mark all that apply:

	Yes	No
Don't worry about spelling (e.g., make spelling mistakes)	1	2
Don't worry about punctuation (e.g., leave full stops and commas out)	1	2
Use more punctuation than is necessary (e.g., use lots of exclamation marks)	1	2
Leave out functional words (e.g., „the“, „a“ / „an“)	1	2
Use (lots of) abbreviations and acronyms (e.g., „LOL“ for „laugh out loud“; „thx“ instead of „thanks“)	1	2
Use smileys (e.g. ☺)	1	2
Use letters or numbers to express the way a word/letter sounds (e.g., „cu“ / „l8er“)	1	2
Other	1	2

If you selecte “Other”, please specify:

13. When you write for school, do you do anything specifically to write differently to when you write text messages? Please motivate why/why not and give specific examples of what you do or do not do.

Yes	1
No	2

Please motivate why/why not and give specific examples of what you do or do not do.

Questionnaire for MA study of Patricia Marewo.

This questionnaire was sourced from:

Freudenberg, K. 2009. Investigating the impact of SMS speak on the written work of English first language and English second language high school learners. Unpublished dissertation, M.Phil: University of Stellenbosch. <http://scholar.sun.ac.za>.

The student questionnaire was also utilised in:

Winzker, K, Southwood, F & Huddleston, K. 2009. Investigating the impact of SMS speak on the written work of English first language and English second language high school learners. *Per Linguam* 25(2):1-16 ; DOI: 10.5785/25-2-31

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO TEACHERS

1. Which grade or grades do you teach English to? Please mark all that apply:

8	1
9	2
10	3
11	4
12	5

2. How long have you been teaching English?

0-5 years	1
6-10 years	2
11-15 years	3
16-20 years	4
More than 20 years	5

3. On average, how many learners do you teach per class?

10 – 15	1
16-25	2
26-35	3
36-45	4
More than 45	5

4. How many of your students, would you say, have and/or use cellphones regularly?

All of them	1
More than 80% of students	2
More than 50% of students	3
About 50% of students	4
Fewer than 50% of the students	5
Fewer than 20% of the students	6
None of them	7
I have no idea	8

5. Have you noticed any changes in the written language of learners since the increased use of cell phone and SMS technology?

	Yes
YES	1
NO	2
I don't know	3

If YES, please motivate

6. Do you believe that texting influences students' English writing at school?

YES	1
NO	2

Give reasons why

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

7. If you answered yes to question 6, do you believe that the influence is positive or negative? Please motivate your answer.

Very positive	1
Positive	2
Negative	3
Very negative	4
More positive than negative	5
More negative than positive	6

Because, _____

8. If you answered yes to question 10, do you believe that texting improves your writing (very positive/ positive) or not (negative/very negative) Please motivate you answer.

Very positive	1
Positive	2
Negative	3
Very negative	4

9. Which of the following features of written language have you noticed a change in?
Mark all that apply:

	Yes	No
Spelling mistakes and/or errors	1	2
Under punctuation (e.g., leave out full stops and commas)	1	2
Over punctuation (e.g., use lots of exclamation marks)	1	2
Lack of function words (e.g., „the“, „a“ / „an“)	1	2
Use (lots of) abbreviations and acronyms (e.g., „LOL“ for „laugh out loud“; „thx“ instead of „thanks“)	1	2
Use smileys (e.g. ☺)	1	2
Use letters or numbers to express the way a word/letter sounds (e.g., „cu“ / „l8er“)	1	2
Other	1	2

If you selecte “Other”, please specify:

10. Do you take any explicit measures to combat SMS language in your learner’s written work?
lease motivate why/why not and give specific examples if applicable. Please specify

11 May 2022

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **North-West University Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HSS-REC)** on 16/03/2022, the North-West University Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Exploring the impact of texting on the formal writing of English second language high school learners.

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr K van den Berg

Student: MP Marewo (31756700)

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	0	7	1	6	-	2	1	-	S	7
Institution				Study Number					Year		Status			

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single Study

Commencement date: 2022/03/30

Risk Category:

Medium

Expiry date: 2023/03/30

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

- Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the NWU-HSS-REC (if applicable).
- Any research at governmental or private institutions, permission must still be obtained from relevant authorities and provided to the NWU-HSS-REC. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these authorities.

General conditions:

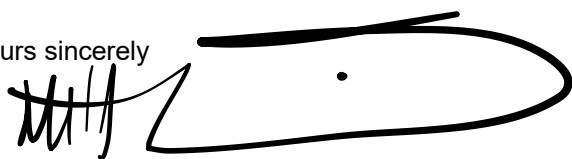
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- *The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-HSS-REC:*
 - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*

- without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the NWU-HSS-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and NWU-HSS-REC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-HSS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- NWU-HSS-REC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via HSSREC-Admin@nwu.ac.za or 018 299 4531.

The NWU-HSS REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU-HSS REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof E. Idemudia
Chairperson NWU Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
8 November 2018

Current details: (22351930) M:\DSS\18533\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Certificates\Templates\Research Ethics Approval Letters\9.1.5.4.1 NWU-HSS-REC Ethical Approval Letter.docm
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