

The Communicative Functions, Topics, and Gender in SMS Text Messages. The Case of Algerian EFL Master 1 Students of the Department of English, M'hamed Bougara University of Boumerdes

Les fonctions communicatives, les sujets et le genre dans les messages SMS. Le cas des étudiants algériens de Master 1 EFL du Département d'Anglais de l'Université M'hamed Bougara de Boumerdes

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Introduction

Given SMS texting popularity among youngsters, SMS messaging use has gradually become one of the main axes of recent research. Much of this research has focused on the linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic aspects that influence the creation and use of text messages. What young texters do with the messages and the topics addressed by the texts have been the two central questions that have animated the related research. In this particular context, the current research has explored SMS texting among Algerian EFL students by examining the functions and subjects discussed in their messages. The study has also tackled gender differences concerning function and topic issues and considered the gender impact on the use and content of SMS texts.

Notwithstanding the valuable insights offered by western studies, the study has attempted to complement previous comparable works in western research on the topic. While the major part of the studies have stressed the users' communicative functions, exceptionally little attention was paid to the substance of messages and the contrasts in texting use and subjects according to gender. The same gap has been observed in the Arab and Algerian literature which display little consideration of the topic and a clear trend to deal with the issue from a single scope of communicative functions. Hence, to fill the noted gaps in research, four fundamental questions have been posed as follows:

1. What do the Algerian EFL students use SMS messaging for?
2. Do the communicative functions differ according to gender?
3. What are the topics dealt with in the students' messages?
4. Do the topics differ according to gender?

As stated earlier, particular attention was ascribed to the effect of gender

on the two issues. With reference to the second and fourth research questions mentioned above, two null hypotheses were adjoined to provide empirical evidence on the real impact of sex, and statistically account for any similarities and differences in the use of the communicative functions and topics. By looking throughout the literature on the topic of gender in SMS studies, a growing dissatisfaction with most conclusions on the topic was felt among scholars as most works were based on exploratory types of research and case studies which bear rare empirical evidence on the issue.

Thus, forming null hypotheses was motivated by our additional goal to build the conclusions of the present study on more objective and empirical grounds. Given the very nature of the present investigation context and population, starting with a null relationship between the two variables is deemed crucial for objectivity reasons. The hypotheses were set as follows :

Ho 1: There is no relationship between the communicative functions and gender.

Ho 2: There is no relationship between the topics addressed and gender.

1. Literature Review

Recent research on the use of SMS texting includes studies on the linguistic features of texting and the pragmatic use of messages among youngsters in different countries. In some seminal works on the sociolinguistics of youngsters' text messaging, categorizing the texters' functions marked the major part of the investigations. In Britain, for instance, Thurlow and Brown (2003) succeeded to identify nine texting communicative functions used by British youngsters. The mentioned categories, named communicative orientations, incorporated: informational-practical orientation, informational-relational orientation, practical-arrangement orientation, social arrangement orientation, salutary orientation, friendship maintenance orientation, romantic orientation, sexual orientation, and last, chain messages, referring to jokes or word-plays shared between texters (Thurlow & Brown, 2003). Broadly, texters use SMS texts to inform, maintain social interactions, and express sexual and romantic emotions, along with friendship maintenance, which is signalled as the most utilized orientation.

Consistent with Thurlow and Brown findings, Doering's (2002) examination of German texters highlighted five main communicative functions including specifically: contact, information, appeal, obligation, and declaration. The study revealed the noticeable use of contact function amongst participants, which refers to the arrangement of appointments, greetings, relationship statements, and emotional support. In the same vein, Ling (2005) investigation on Norwe-

gian teen and young adult texters found that 75% of the text messages were used for coordinating everyday life activities, grooming, and performing requests. The remaining messages tended to provide information, command, and personal news. Regarding the American young texters, Ling and Baron (2007) reported most American students' use to keep in touch with acquaintances, arrange meetings, and share news. Almost similar findings were reported by Battestini et al (2010) on American undergraduate and graduate students using messages mainly for planning, maintaining relationships, chatting, information seeking, and commenting on sport/Tv/News, in that specific order.

In England, Thurlow and Poff (2011) examination of a collection of messages created by British texters showed the prevailing *relational* orientation of the majority of texts. Messages were employed to sending friendly salutations, making social arrangements, and maintaining friendship. Meanwhile, the exceptionally few reported transactional messages (accounted for only 15 % of all messages) were used for information exchange, coordination, and practical arrangements (Thurlow & Poff, 2011). The same conclusions were noted and corroborated in some other studies which stressed the affective/relational functions supremacy over the transactional/practical functions (Androutopoulos, 2000 ; Kasesniemi, 2003 ; Ling, 2005 ; Bernicot et al, 2012b).

In conjunction with western studies on the issue, communicative functions were reported in a few Arab and African country studies. A study conducted by Al Rousan et al (2014) identified five communicative functions used by Saudi undergraduate students. By examining a corpus of messages collected from male and female texters, the findings showed students' inclination to use messaging to achieve friendship maintenance, socialisation, school collaboration, coordination, and last, exchanging information. Likewise, Achili's (2014) sociolinguistic analysis of 120 messages belonging to EFL Algerian students of the University of Algiers uncovered eight communicative functions of texting. These last were employed, specifically, to coordinate social life, express feelings, inform, present wishes, greeting on special events, discuss school matters, request, and comment on events.

Communicative functions among Nigerian texters were also investigated. Chilwa (2008) distinguished three main categories that enclose economic (business and commerce), social (religion, politics, education, and other social concerns), and personal (greetings, feelings, prayers, etc.) functions. Consistently with previously-mentioned scholars' conclusions (Thurlow & Poff, 2011 ; Thurlow & Brown, 2003 ; Ling, 2005), the study revealed that 60 % of text messages were relationally oriented as the majority of texts served the personal

mentioned category or function.

Ultimately, most of the related investigations showed the texters' notable use of SMS texting to maintain and reinforce friendship, along with public and school life management. Put together, the findings also suggested the existence of more commonalities than differences among texters across countries and languages. Yet, beyond the most obvious convergence in texting functions among texters, the outlined results need to be interpreted in light of various factors that may impact the employment of SMS functions as shown in diverse studies on SMS use and gender.

2. SMS Communicative functions and gender

One of the scholars' major findings on SMS use exists in its extraordinary capacity to enhance relationship formation and maintenance. Interestingly enough, discrepancies in use across gender were observed and documented. Early studies on the relationship between texting and gender showed a mixed pattern of results across countries. In Norwich and Finnish studies, the gender divide is well-documented in Ling (2005) and Kasesniemi's (2003) works which revealed females' inclination to employ messages to manage emotionally-loaded interactions contrary to males' texts that endorse practical texting orientations. Female texters seemed to place greater emphasis on emotional exchanges and maintaining social relationships while male texters' tended to place greater emphasis on information transmission in a very brief way (Ling, 2005 ; Kasesniemi, 2003).

The relational/ Informational dichotomy was also observed among French texters who displayed girls' higher tendency to create more relationally-orientated messages (Goumi et al, 2011 ; Bernicot et al, 2012a, 2012b). The latter are mostly connected to the length of messages, with girls' clear tendency to write longer and lexically dense and complex texts in most studies (Rafi, 2007, Ling, 2005 ; Kasesniemi, 2003). These dissimilarities were explained in light of sociolinguistic theories which sustain the sex significant impact on language use in communication, be it in face-to-face or digital communication frames. For several scholars (Lakoff, 1975 ; Trudgill, 1972 ; Tannen, 1994, 1997 ; Cameron, 1998, 2003), gender differences were explained by psychological, symbolic, and socio-cultural reasons that make women and men use language in distinct ways.

The reference to the relational vs. informational orientations showed a noted consistency with some scholars' view on the importance of establishing intimacy among females than males in face-to-face interactions (Tannen, 1997 ; Tannen & Kendall, 1997). By highlighting the females' need to establish and

maintain relationships via longer and emotionally-loaded talks, the symbolic use of language, with underlying socio-cultural roles and sex-based hierarchies of power are put forward. In this instance, males, contrary to females, communicate more in public contexts where they seek more opportunities for negotiating status and preserving their social identity of the dominating sex (Tannen, 1997 ; Tannen & Kendall, 1997).

Undoubtedly, most of the reported research studies on SMS texting significantly helped to shed light on the various facets of SMS messaging and gender. The reported studies depicted several disparities in results over countries and studies. Despite the medium likelihood across countries, population, and gender, the use made by the texters is revealed inconsistent and unstable. This certainly informs about the complex nature of SMS texting as being importantly stamped by several other factors such as age, language, and communicative context. Overall, the digital divide persists, and the scholars' task would be striving to unravel texting differences and provide documented accounts on the real impact of gender on texting and the factual contribution of the related variables.

3. Method

A quantitative/ correlational method was adopted in an attempt to provide empirical data on the issue addressed. As previously stated, the main objective of the present paper was to analyze the nature of SMS messaging functions and topics in the Algerian EFL students' messages and account for possible gender differences. The selected methodology is believed to be insightful in terms of the substantial spectrum the quantified results offer to get closer to the practices of individuals and groups. By analyzing the frequency of the communicative functions and topics, the data can explore the results of what they do, and eventually, explore the variation in use across the SMS users. Further, the implementation of the correlational type of quantitative studies is dictated by the descriptive nature of the research as well as the type of questions asked and hypotheses set concerning the students' gender. Such an analytical approach can yield exceptionally insightful results which add to the enlightening of the issue at stake.

3.1. The participants

The study took place at the Department of English of the University of Boumerdes, Algeria. To build a representative sample of Master 1 degree class, from a total population of 146, the required sample size for the study with 95 % confidence level and 5 % margin of error was 124 Master students. Therefore, 124 advanced EFL Master 1 students were selected based on voluntary partic-

ipation. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 27 years old (Mean = 22, SD = 1.30). All the participants were Algerian and speak Non- standard Arabic, Berber, Standard Arabic, along with French, as a second language, and English, as a foreign language and language of instruction. Regarding the gender differences issue, raised so far in the research questions of this study, the 124 students' sample was stratified to form two equal groups of 62 males and 62 females.

3.2. Data collection and analysis procedures

A corpus of 360 messages was collected from the students' sample. The participants were asked to provide from 5 to 10 messages sent in the previous weeks and transcribe their texts verbatim onto paper. The messages were subsequently transcribed into an electronic document. To promote the selection of representative text messages, the informants were requested to choose messages that were genuinely representative of those they generally sent. The majority of the content consisted of text communication between young adults, mainly among friends, classmates, and family members.

The analysis covered the identification of functions and topics that were categorized and calculated. The codification of each category went through the summary of the statements in a single word or a one-idea sentence which were assigned a score to assist the computation of the frequency of the categories, in general, and the frequency of the categories according to gender. This procedure helped to synthesize big amounts of data in such a way to reveal possible and insightful patterns represented in tables and figures.

Subsequent to the calculation of the frequency of the categories among the two genders, the next step consisted of using a series of non-parametric Chi-square tests to reveal the meaning of the results. This crucial step was deemed necessary to make this work gaining more validity and reliability as accuracy and exactitude in results were targeted as well. The confirmation or rejection of the stated hypotheses can insightfully inform about the impacting role of individual variables and their importance in construing texting language.

To this end, the data gathered from the frequency counts were analyzed by employing the statistical package XL Stats, a software package which is commonly used in descriptive/quantitative studies in social sciences. Most commonly, the correlation coefficient shows significance when the p-value is equal to 0, 05. This mostly indicates that a change in the value of one variable will be systematically associated with a change in the other variable.

4. Results and Discussion

To answer the question of : What do the Algerian EFL student texters use SMS messaging for ? , the first adopted step in the analysis of the data consisted of sorting out the different functions that SMS serve in students' interactions. It is important to mention here that all the text messages contain various instances of code-switching whereby a mixture of Non-standard, Standard Arabic, Berber, French, and English languages, was noted. Being multilingual, the students take advantage of this linguistic diversity to perform messages in one or two languages, and in some other cases, in three and four languages simultaneously. Table 1 below provides an account of the categories.

As seen in the table, coordinating social life is the most dominating category in the list. The students use the larger part of messaging to maintain social relationships by staying in constant contact with friends, classmates and family. Planning, arranging, and rearranging time and activities seem to be facilitated by the messages' brevity and practicality with minimum words but efficient content. Messages cost affordability and rapidity may represent also a plausible reason for the use of messages instead of phone calls or emails. The data also show the students' coordination for football matches, visits, shopping or eating activities, among other activities.

Table 1. SMS functions and percentages

Texting Functions		Total %
Coordinating social life	66	18.33 %
Expressing feelings	63	17.50 %
Informing	60	16.66 %
Greeting	48	13.33 %
Presenting wishes and greetings on special events	45	12.50 %
Requesting	30	8.33 %
Discussing school matters	27	7.50 %
Commenting events	21	5.83 %
Total	360	100 %

Additional to their need to manage everyday life activities, the students' also use messages to strengthen and maintain their relationship by sharing feelings, experiences and ideas. The data reveal that despite the dominating pragmatic orientation of messages, interpersonal purposes are also important to students.

In the third position, informing is revealed crucial in the way students employed text messaging to share personal and practical information. By asking questions and answering others, the students' are kept and keep friends and family members updated on events and news. The data also indicate that the major requests concerned information about locations, sports events' news, and school events and updates, among others.

These particular findings confirm Thurlow and Brown (2003), Battestini et al., (2010), Doering (2002), Grinter and Eldridge (2001), Ling (2005), Kes-esniemi (2003), Achili's (2014) findings, supporting the informational and socially-oriented nature of messages. Friendship maintenance is also reflected in the use of greetings, wishes on special occasions such as New years' eve, the Aid and Ramadhan religious occasions. Sending messages to greeting or wishing welfare also represent the students' sustained need to stay close to their friends and family, and solidify their social attachment. This finding expresses much consistency with Battestini et al., (2010) and Thurlow and Brown's (2003) conclusions. Most of the text messages in this study and the cited works above highlighted the texters' proclivity to enhance their relationships through shared activities and a marked need to express emotions and exchange content that look to be important to them.

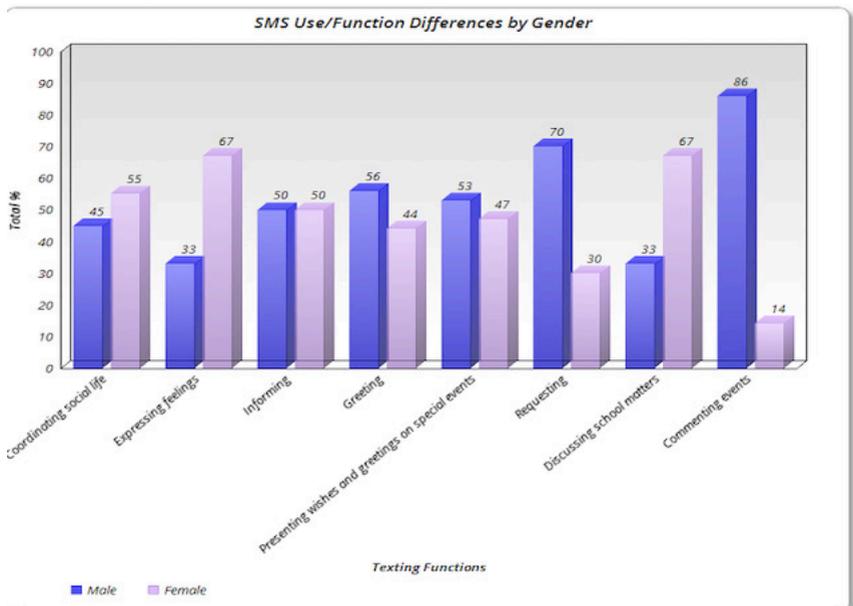
Less significant but insightful is the students' pragmatic use of texting to seek help and favors from their friends and family members, and comment on events. Seeking help and favors is certainly face-threatening and requires high levels of trust and intimacy. Yet, this last is crucial in building groups' solidarity that is essential for friendship maintenance. Students' asking for help is reflected in instances where they run out of credit or when they need to perform longer conversations on the phone. Further, commenting on events, namely sports ones and personal experiences are revealed in the students' messages. The data show the students' reactions, namely to football game events and personal experiences. Despite the weak proportions of messages dealing with both categories, the study indicate that text messaging is important in texters' expression of their surrounding environment and the major events that mark their daily interactions.

Interesting enough is the small share of messages dealing with the discussion and collaboration of school matters. The study reveals the students' lack of interest in texting for educational purposes. The text messages sent are limited to inquire about school topics, teachers, courses, exams, and other school work. They also use it to coordinate times with their classmates. The subordination of the discussion school matters to other functions shows the students' primary

concern over friendship maintenance and socialization than their educational issues. While opportunities to create dynamic interactions on classroom tasks are presented to ask questions, send feedback, discuss topics and exams, the participants seem to see in socialization and phatic exchanges more interest by stressing personal, pragmatic, and interpersonal uses of SMS texting, and prompting open and intensive communication.

As concerns the second research question : Do the communicative functions differ according to gender ?, the analysis consisted of coding these categories and counting down the number of messages according to each category across gender. The 360 messages were often only a single reply in an ongoing dialogue. It is important to mention here that some messages contain from one to two or more functions whereby students greet, inform and comment simultaneously. As such, each part was counted separately regarding its category and explained accordingly. Given this caveat, the same eight categories are shared by both sexes and the results are cross-tabulated as illustrated in the figure 1 below.

Figure N° 1. SMS Functions Differences by Gender



Additional differences are noticed in the proportions dealing with school issues and requests. Girls seem to be more interested in school matters by interacting more about their school life. This texting behavior may be explained by women perceptions of school achievements and independence as a way to

beat the powerlessness imposed by the Algerian male-dominating society. This is also supported by women’s preference to use half the number of messages as males in asking for favors or help from their receivers to display autonomy and independence. Less significant degrees are reported when dealing with informing or telling the news, greeting, expressing salutations for special occasions. In these particular cases, both girls and boys use messages nearly in the same way and with the same amounts.

Subsequent to the categorization and calculation of the functions among the two genders, a fine-grained analysis of the results was targeted to disclose the effect of gender on the use of the reported functions. This went through the adoption of a series of Chi-square tests to confirm or reject the null hypothesis stipulating the absence of correlation between the use of the functions and gender. As mentioned earlier, this step is deemed important to build conclusions on empirical grounds as the calculation of frequencies is often not sufficient for drawing possible correlations between variables. Table 2 presents the results of the Chi-square results.

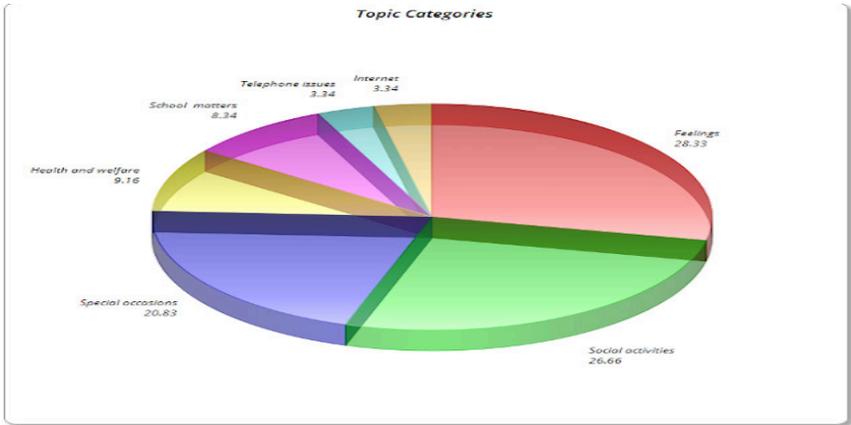
Table 2. Chi-square Test Results

Chi-square observed value	27, 010
Chi-square expected value	14,067
DDL	7
p-value	0,000
alpha	0,05

The results of the Chi-square tests show that the p-value is of 0,000 which is inferior to the p-value alpha = 0, 05. This refutes the null hypothesis stated so far and indicates the significant relationship between gender and the use of the communicative functions. Provided the relevance of the tests, the results prove the positive impact of gender and confirm the different use of the functions by male and female students.

Dealing with topics in SMS messaging is a complementary attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the communicative functions. This step aimed at shedding extra light on the content of text messages, on the one hand, and gender differences, on the other hand. On the question : What are the topics dealt with in messages ?, seven (07) shared topics were identified. The categories and their percentages were represented in figure 2 below.

Figure N° 2. Topics Categories



As seen in the figure, the participants use SMS texting to talk about specific subjects that highly concord with the previously-cited functions. Based on the number of occurrences of each topic, the expression of feelings seems to dominate the content of messages. The interpersonal purpose of messaging is confirmed here again with the students' penchant to benefit from the personal and non-intrusive features of messages to communicate freely. Talking about social activities is revealed at the second position. The latter concerns participants shopping plans, eating out, visiting each other, playing, and watching football matches together. Occasional texting on special occasions makes participants talk and share greetings on New Year's Eve and far more special occasions of the Muslims' religious Aids.

Further, a reference to health and welfare is observed through the use of common expressions of *"how are you"* or *"how do you feel today"*, among other examples. At a communicative level, the use of language to inquire about other members of the same group or community serves as the reinforcement of human boundaries to unify speakers as members of a single group or network. Interacting about school issues by expressing study concerns over the plans of exams, assignments, and coordinating meetings around the revision of courses are also revealed by the data. An additional reference to telephone and Internet problems shows interestingly the participants' susceptibility to use SMS texting in cases of telephone calls and Internet disconnection. The seemingly easy access and use of messages informed about the eclectic employment of the media and the most practical feature of text messages over the other means of interaction. In some messages, the students' complain about the inefficiency of the connection network which made phone calls and the Internet inaccessible

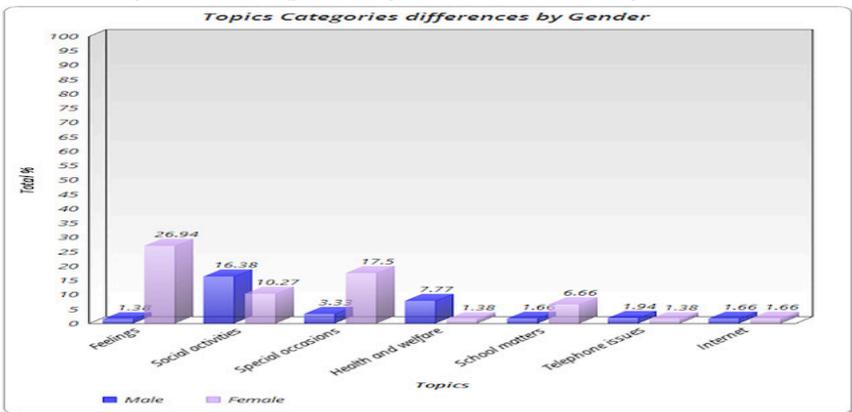
and arduous in many cases.

Throughout the analysis of the data, further interest in males and females' differences in the discussed topics was articulated. To this end, the data looked at answering the question of "Do the topics differ according to gender?" and account for the variation of topics according to the students' sex. From the data, we can see that females tend to express their feelings such as love, friendship, and affection far more than their male counterparts. The same interest in solidifying social relationships is noted in girls' higher proportions to use the expression of salutations for special events such as New Year's Eve, birthdays, and Aid religious occasions. Further, school matters are reported mostly among females whose concern over school issues, organization, and management is reported.

Conversely, males seem to express themselves more substantially when coordinating life and social activities such as shopping plans, paying visits, hanging out, playing football, and watching football events. The latter displayed males' attempts to display inclusiveness and solidarity with other male peers, more specifically, and their inclusiveness to action more than emotional expression. An additional observation deals with males' higher concern over the receivers' welfare, as indicated in the table 3 below.

Additional to the reported differences, gender similarities are observed. The findings show both genders' similar discussion of common topics such as telephone issues, connection, Internet use, and connection problems. By sharing details of their communication difficulties when using the telephone or the Internet, the findings inform, to a certain extent, the students' inclination to use messages only when phone calls or the Internet are not afforded.

Figure N° 3. Topics categories differences by gender



Parallel to the first readings of the findings, a statistical significance was also sought at this level to account for possible correlation between the identified topics and gender. Chi-square tests are used to assess the correlation of variables and confirm or reject the second null hypothesis. The non-parametric Chi-square tests show that the overall p-value is inferior to 0.05 (p-value 0,0001), which indicates that the test is insignificant, and thus prove the significant impact of gender on the students' selected topics. Table presents the results of the Chi-square tests.

Table 3. Chi-square	Test Results
Chi-square (Observed value)	126,445
Chi-square (Expected value)	12,592
DDL	6
p-value	0,0001
alpha	0,05

Consistent with the reported findings on the topics frequency by gender, the statistical treatment of the data confirm males and females' divergence in terms of the addressed topics. This variation in language expresses the two genders' different communicative needs and interests. By engaging in topics of feelings, activity planning, and school matters, among others, both male and female students are seemingly performing social and personal acts of communication that ultimately define both sexes.

Conclusion

This paper was an attempt at exploring the Algerian EFL students' communicative functions and topics across gender. By examining a set of SMS messages, eight essential categories of communicative functions were identified. The functions included coordinating social life, expressing feelings, informing, greeting, greetings on special occasions, asking for, discussing educational issues, and commenting on events. Consistent with previous research findings (e.g. Thurlow & Brown, 2003), this analysis found that the major reasons for using SMS messages were social life coordination, feelings expression, and informing. The latter was followed by greeting, greeting on special occasions, discussing educational issues, raising phone and Internet connection problems, and last, commenting on events.

The findings showed notable similarities with previous studies on the categories of the communicative functions in text messaging. Coordinating social life, expressing feelings, greeting, and school collaboration was common to the

majority of the studies on the topic. These cross-cultural similarities showed the young texters' intention to use SMS to maintain social relationships, reinforce existing relations, and express solidarity with their social groups. The latter constituted the major focus for the students' communicative acts whereby meaning is shaped and conveyed.

The study also indicated similarities and dissimilarities in the employment of the identified categories across gender. As regards the similarities, text messaging was used, with slight nuances, by both sexes almost to serve up the social life coordination purposes, informing, greeting, and greeting on special occasions. Considering the dissimilarities, the results showed females' noted inclination to employ more expressive messages than boys. The findings came to corroborate several similar research conclusions stating the relational vs. information orientations of messages which are well-documented in the literature. In the same vein, the findings proved text messaging to be more significant for female students when dealing with the coordination and discussion of school matters. Not only did texting help female texters plan and coordinate time and events, but it was also used to share information and arrange their educational life. Further differences displayed males' higher rate to use text messages to express requests and comment on events, namely sports ones.

Concerning the issue of topics in messages, the findings revealed seven subjects forming the most addressed topics. The included topics were love and friendship, performing some specific activities such as shopping, eating out or playing football, greeting each other, talking about special events such as New year's eve and religious events like Aids, sharing information about school issues, and last, talking about telephone, and the use of the Internet connection and problems.

The examination of the data also showed gender differences which displayed females' disposition to express far more feelings while males tended to talk much more about planning activities with friends. In addition, the results indicated girls' concern over presenting more greetings on special occasions. The same females' concern was noticed in the higher occurrences referring to the management and coordination of school matters. Yet, similarities in the number of occurrences were observed among the two groups when it came to the telephone connection issues and phone calling difficulties.

This distinction in the use and frequency of topics confirmed the general assumptions that feature women's emotional orientation when interacting. That women tend to focus on their feelings and their relationships by seeking intimacy and relationship maintenance far more than males is well documented

in the literature nowadays. Variably, while men communication was described as a report form of interaction, women were much more geared towards the rapport form which values emotional and interpersonal relationships (Tannen, 1994, 1997). This argument, again, is supported by one distinction observed in the data when dealing with commenting on events whereby males seemed to provide far more feedback when commenting on football events mainly.

In conjunction with the frequency counts analysis and conclusions, the statistical treatment of the results showed the significant effect of gender on the use of the identified functions and topics. Students' employ text messages for dissimilar purposes and tackle some topics differently. This ultimately converges with the reported assumption of the communicative inconsistency among genders either in face-to-face or digital communication as seen in various previous works on gender.

This study went some way towards enhancing our understanding concerning communicative functions and topics. However, the picture is still incomplete as full coverage based on more academic references and data are highly recommended and needed. Most of the reported studies made an important contribution to our understanding of the processing of communicative functions, but they missed reporting on the messages topic and gender differences when dealing with different subjects. It is important to consider the extent to which the topics dealt with mirror the communicative characteristics of actual text messages.

The study has its limitations that should be acknowledged. First, conclusions based on 360 messages cannot be generalized to make statements about texting in similar settings. Several attempts were made to ensure sample representativeness in terms of participants, yet, statements made all along the data analysis and discussion remain specific to the selected sample and case. Second, the study participants are EFL students' ranging from 17 to 27 years old whose texting practices are likely different from other texters and other texters from different educational contexts.

Another limitation concerns the biased corpus of this study as the messages were re-edited by the students and possible alterations could have been made by the texters themselves. Direct access to the students' messages is often a major problem for most researchers. Yet, efforts to keep messages' language authenticity were made by urging the students to keep the original form of the reproduced texts. Further bias concerns the selected messages as students might have chosen the shortest, the most eloquent or neutral ones, which likely led to an overgeneralization of such messages in the corpus.

Given these limitations, the findings and conclusions made here should be considered preliminary and specific to the selected case. By collecting larger sets of data, involving wider ranges of participants, controlling more accurately the variables, and respecting far more corpus-based requirements and conditions, more reliability and validity can be significantly gained and set in future research.

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Abstract

This study explored the communicative functions and topics addressed in SMS texting and the differences in use across gender. 360 text messages created by Algerian EFL students were collected and analyzed. Eight categories of function emerged from the data, namely coordination of social life, expression of feelings, exchange of information, greetings, greeting on special occasions, discussion of the Internet/ phone connection issues, and comment on events. Further findings on the covered topics highlighted seven main topics, namely love and friendship, planning activities, greetings, special occasion greetings, school topics, and the Internet/ phone connection subject. Regarding gender, distinctions in terms of SMS use and topics were additionally noted. The results highlighted differences in SMS use with females' employment of text messages for expressing feelings and coordinating school issues, contrary to males who used messages for requests and commenting on events. Differences were also reported regarding the topics addressed in messages. The findings revealed females' higher inclination to discuss love and friendship issues, greeting on special occasions, and school matters. In contrast, males were substantially more concerned over the recipients' welfare and planning of social activities. Consistently, the statistical treatment of the results confirmed the gender impact on both issues of function and topic.

Keywords

SMS text messaging, communicative functions, topic, gender, Algerian EFL students

Résumé

La présente étude a pour objet d'examiner les fonctions de communication et les thèmes abordés dans les SMS, ainsi que les différences d'utilisation selon le genre. A cet effet, 360 SMS créés par des étudiants algériens en langue anglaise ont été collectés et analysés. Huit catégories de fonctions ont émergé des données, à savoir la coordination de la vie sociale, l'expression des sentiments, l'échange d'informations, les salutations, les salutations lors d'occasions spéciales, les problèmes de connexion Internet / téléphone et les commentaires sur les événements. D'autres résultats sur les sujets abordés ont mis en évidence sept thèmes principaux, à savoir l'amour et l'amitié, la planification des activités sociales, les salutations, les salutations pour les occasions spéciales, les sujets scolaires et le sujet de la connexion Internet / téléphone. En ce qui concerne le genre, des distinctions entre hommes et femmes ont également été signalées, démontrant l'emploi de SMS par les femmes pour exprimer leurs sentiments et coordonner les problèmes scolaires, contrairement aux hommes qui utilisent des messages pour demander et commenter les événements. Des différences ont également été signalées concernant les sujets abordés. Les résultats ont montré que les femmes étaient plus enclines à discuter de problèmes d'amour et d'amitié, de salutations lors d'occasions spéciales et de questions scolaires. En revanche, les hommes étaient beaucoup plus

préoccupés par le bien-être des bénéficiaires et la planification des activités sociales. Eventuellement, le traitement statistique des résultats a confirmé l'impact du genre sur les questions de fonction et de thème.

Mots-clés

SMS, fonctions de communication, sujets, genre, étudiants algériens en anglais langue étrangère

مستخلص

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو فحص وظائف الاتصال والموضوعات التي يتم تناولها في خدمة الرسائل القصيرة، وكذلك الاختلافات في الاستخدام حسب الجنس. ولهذه الغاية، تم جمع وتحليل 063 رسالة نصية كتبها طلاب جزائريون باللغة الإنجليزية. ظهرت ثمان فئات من الوظائف من البيانات، وهي تنسيق الحياة الاجتماعية، والتعبير عن المشاعر، وتبادل المعلومات، والتحية، والتحية في المناسبات الخاصة، ومشاكل الاتصال بالإنترنت / الهاتف والتعليقات على الأحداث. أبرزت النتائج الإضافية حول الموضوعات التي تمت تغطيتها سبعة مواضيع رئيسية، وهي الحب والصدقة، والتخطيط للمناسبات الاجتماعية، والتحية، والتحية للمناسبات الخاصة، والموضوعات المدرسية، وموضوع الاتصال بالإنترنت / الهاتف. فيما يتعلق بالجنس، أبرزت النتائج أيضاً الفروق بين الرجال والنساء، مما يدل على استخدام الرسائل القصيرة من قبل النساء للتعبير عن مشاعرهن وتنسيق القضايا المدرسية، على عكس الرجال الذين يستخدمون الرسائل للسؤال والتعليق على الأحداث. أبرزت النتائج الاختلافات أيضاً في الموضوعات التي تم تناولها. وبالتالي أظهرت النتائج أن المرأة كانت أكثر ميلاً لمناقشة قضايا الحب والصدقة والتحية في المناسبات الخاصة والأمور المدرسية. في المقابل، كان الرجال أكثر اهتماماً برفاهية المستفيدين وتخطيط الأنشطة الاجتماعية. في النهاية، أكدت المعالجة الإحصائية للنتائج تأثير الجنس على مسائل الوظيفة والموضوع.

كلمات مفتاحية

الرسائل القصيرة، وظائف الاتصال، الموضوعات، النوع، الطلاب الجزائريون في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية