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An investigation on the trend of using textism among freshmen

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Abstract

Mobile phone ownership and the use of text messaging have both increased rapidly worldwide in the space of decades, but the media continuously concerned that students' literacy is being negatively affected by their use of text messaging language. Although a large number of researchers have tried to find out the relationship between students' use of text messaging and formal writing performance, none of those can explain clearly about these effects. Since many people still complain about the bad effects of textism on doing tests, and academic writing... of students at different ages, the awareness of using textism in the right situations and to the right people becomes an essential requirement. The hypothesis suggests that the students are able to avoid textism use in exams despite media reports to the contrary. By using the questionnaire, the study makes an effort to explore three main problems: the trend of using textism among the freshmen, the students' attitudes towards textism, and whether these students can be aware of using textism in the right contexts, and to the right person.

Keywords: Textism, sociolinguistics, mobile phone ownership

Introduction

Textism (noun) is "a word or abbreviation typically used in a text message" (Collins English Dictionary, 2016). Textism is "the language used in text messages, characterized by the use of abbreviations, single letters, and symbols" (MacMillan Dictionary, 2016). "Textese is an abbreviated vocabulary that includes letter/number, contractions or shortenings of words, emoticons ..., and vowels, punctuation, and capitalization (Gupta and Tuteja, 2015, p. 1088)^[1]. Although there are various definitions, textism (or textese, text speak, teencode...), in short, it is the kind of language used in text messages at first, and has now penetrated into many fields in everyday life.

According to Lee (2011)^[5], the categorizations of these textisms adapted from the literature include Contractions (e.g. txt, plz,), Shortened words (e.g. Tues), G clipping (e.g. goin), Other clippings (e.g. hav, wil,), Formal acronyms (e.g. BBC), Initialisms, text abbreviations (e.g. asap), Symbols (e.g. &), Omitted apostrophes (e.g. cant), Emoticons (e.g. ☺), Letter/number homophones (e.g. h8), Non-conventional spellings e.g. (e.g. fone), Accent stylization (e.g. elp), Separated words which are normally together (e.g. newspaper), Combined words which are normally apart (e.g. ina) (Carrington, 2004; Varnhagen *et al.*, 2009)^[8, 10, 1]. However, this list only mentions textism in English, a categorization of textism in Vietnamese is also needed providing. Kemp, N. (2010)^[4] examined the use and understanding of textisms, and links with more traditional language skills, in young adults. Sixty-one Australian university students read and wrote text messages in conventional English and in textisms. He realized that textism messages were faster to write than those in conventional English, but took nearly twice as long to read, and caused more reading errors (Kemp, 2010)^[4].

With the prejudice that using textism may bring about bad effects on students' writing and spelling skills, many authors have tried to find out the relation between text speak and students' literacy marks or spelling mistakes. The article by Nguyen, V. H. and Dinh, T. H. (2014)^[7] dealt with non-standard variants of language among teenagers nowadays and their impact on the so-called pureness of Vietnamese. The authors draw up a colorful picture of how teenagers' language is different from standard language in terms of slang, code-mixing and code-switching, borrowing, and symbols used in daily communication. The authors also

surveyed this phenomenon and came to suggest some useful solutions to protect the Vietnamese language in the process of globalization. Another study by Nguyen, T. T. T. (2013) [6] also tried to investigate the reasons for using “language @” and searched for ways of controlling them. Although the research successfully pointed out the subjective and objective reasons for using teen codes, it made readers see that the bad effects of textism are obvious and need controlling.

On the contrary, the study “The effect of text messaging on 9- and 10-year-old children’s reading, spelling and phonological processing skills” (C. Wood, E. Jackson, L. Hart, B. Plester and L. Wilde (2011) [12] concluded that there was no significant evidence that texting was good or bad, it did find that by using textisms, children improved their spelling skills when compared to other children in the intervention group. The study also found that the number of messages sent and received was positively correlated to lexical retrieval skills. In brief, it is too early to have any solid answers on how texting will affect people’s social interactions with one another, leaving space for other researchers to continue. With the hypothesis that if students are aware of the cases and frequency of using textism, they can avoid its negative effects, the study makes an effort to investigate whether the freshmen in Ho Chi Minh City are aware of textism, as well as to explore their attitudes towards this sociolinguistics phenomena.

Research Methods and Finding

Participants: The research was conducted on 90 first-year students in Ho Chi Minh City, aged from 18 to 22 from different classes. The results were finally analyzed by using SPSS.

Research instruments: The questionnaire consists of ten questions presented in Vietnamese, which were easy for students to read, understand, and answer. The answers were analyzed by using IBM-SPSS version 22 to bring about the exact results, some statistics are shown in charts to make them easy to see. The questionnaires piloted will give the author the statistics about the reasons for using, the frequency, the cases of using, and the attitude toward textism. For further understanding, some samples are analyzed to give readers a closer look at how youngsters write this language.

Findings and discussions

Reasons for using textism

The open question in the questionnaire stated 7 common reasons for using textism: economic reasons, convenient ways of communication; showing individual creativity, uniqueness, and personality; showing real feelings/emotions; keeping secrets from adults; and it is a popular mode among the young and an open part for self-listing.

Table 1: The reason for using textism

Economic	Creative, unique	Real emotions	Secret keeping	Regular mode	NOT use	Other
yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
54	19	65	9	8	3	0
60%	21.1%	72.2%	10%	8.9%	3.3%	0%

The number of people choosing “showing real emotions” (72,2%) presented a persuasive reason for using textism, implying that typing words normally is not enough to show personal feelings. The other reasons like economic reasons, a manifestation of creativeness and uniqueness are also considerable, respectively 60% and 21,1%. The results unexpectedly showed that the young care more about feeling expressions than economic textism. The further reason may be rooted in Vietnamese culture that people are unfamiliar with expressing their feelings or emotions directly through words. As can be inferred from the statistics, the need to show personality in recent times is increasing a lot, the youngsters nowadays seem to love themselves more and have the intention of being different. The text was created not only to exchange information but also to help the owners show their thinking, their attitude, and especially their characteristics. Looking at the text message, one can be inferred as a naughty or charming person, a humorous or serious person, all depending on the symbols and the frequency of using that symbol in the text. Also, it is not a surprise when young people use textism as a “code” so as not to let their parents or relatives know the content of the message, which counts for 10% of the reasons for using it. This reason can be easy to understand as the awareness of privacy may be highest among youngsters.

According to Lee (2011) [5], textism is caused by specific characteristics of text and instant messaging and is governed by constraints that do not appear in other spoken and written languages. The motives or reasons for students’ use of

textism may be as follows. Firstly, in text messaging, there is a constraint on space where mobile phones have generally only allowed 160 characters per message (Plester & Wood, 2009) [8]. Thus, the shorter is the more economic. The second motive is the constraint of time. Text and instant messaging require people to type more slowly and more error-prone than speaking (Varnhagen *et al.*, 2009; Herring, 1999, 2003) [10, 2, 3]. This habit started quite a long time ago when 9-digit mobiles were still on trend. As a result, when the use of mobile phones shifted to touching screens, this habit kept on affecting the way of typing among people. As mentioned in previous research, it is because of time-bound given that there is a need to send messages rapidly as part of real-time communication (Plester & Wood, 2009) [8].

Table 2: Analysis of the texting on 9-digit keypad mobile phones

Letters	Textism	Less Press	Ex.
i	j	Keypad “5” x 1 time	tuj, aj
gi	j	Keypad “5” x 1 time	j vay?
c	k	Keypad “5” x 2 times	kua
qu	w	Keypad “9” x 1 times	wi, wen
b	p	Keypad “7” x 1 times	pj, pun
ph	f	Keypad “3” x 1 times	fai, fo

Cases and frequency of using textism in Vietnam

a. The cases of using textism

With the reasons of showing emotion and showing personality, it is no surprise that the most common cases people use textism are in sending message with 54.5%

admitted using. While exchanging information with friends, abbreviation is used most frequent (87.8%), followed by

using emoticons (85.6%).

Table 3: Types of Textism used in texting, SMS

Change consonants	Change vowels	Using emoticons	Using abbreviations	Using foreign languages	Using symbols	Using others	NOT use	Using new types
37	58	77	79	58	19	1	0	1
41.1%	64.4%	85.6%	87.8%	64.4%	21.1%	1.1%	0%	1.1%

As can be proven the usefulness of saving time, over 70% of people apply textism frequently when taking notes (sometimes 31%, often 30%, always 11%). Hardly could we meet anyone who didn't take any notes during their study.

The symbol of abbreviations can be seen quite often in notebooks (70%). Interestingly, using expletive foreign languages is also commonly applied with 25.6% of people admitted using.

Table 4: Types of Textism used in writing, taking notes

Change consonants	Change vowels	Using emoticons	Using abbreviations	Using foreign languages	Using symbols	Using others	NOT use	Using new types
yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
16	21	6	63	23	16	4	12	0
17.8%	23.3%	6.7%	70%	25.6%	17.8%	4.4%	13.3%	0%

Surprisingly, although people have the demand to keep secret the information exchanged, up to 33% of those asked never used "code" in the diary which is conventionally thought of as a secret store. The reason may lie in the fact that the diary is a difficult-to-access source of information. Besides, with a diary, people can express all their feelings in full words, hence, there is no need for a short form.

The result, accompanying to the analysis before, affirms that the students are well aware of in which cases and to which extent they should use textism. Up to 86.7% of the participants never use textism in doing tests, assignments, or academic writing. The result is opposite to what people think of the negative effects of textism on academic writing as can be seen on media.

Table 5: Types of Textism used in doing tests, writing assignments

Change consonants	Change vowels	Using emoticons	Using abbreviations	Using foreign languages	Using symbols	Using others	NOT use	Using new types
yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
0	1	1	1	0	1	6	80	0

On the other hand, they usually use more text speak in personally taking notes or diaries (44.4% and 20%). It is because of the convenience and economic features of

textism, which help them not only to write faster, but also to keep secrets from others.

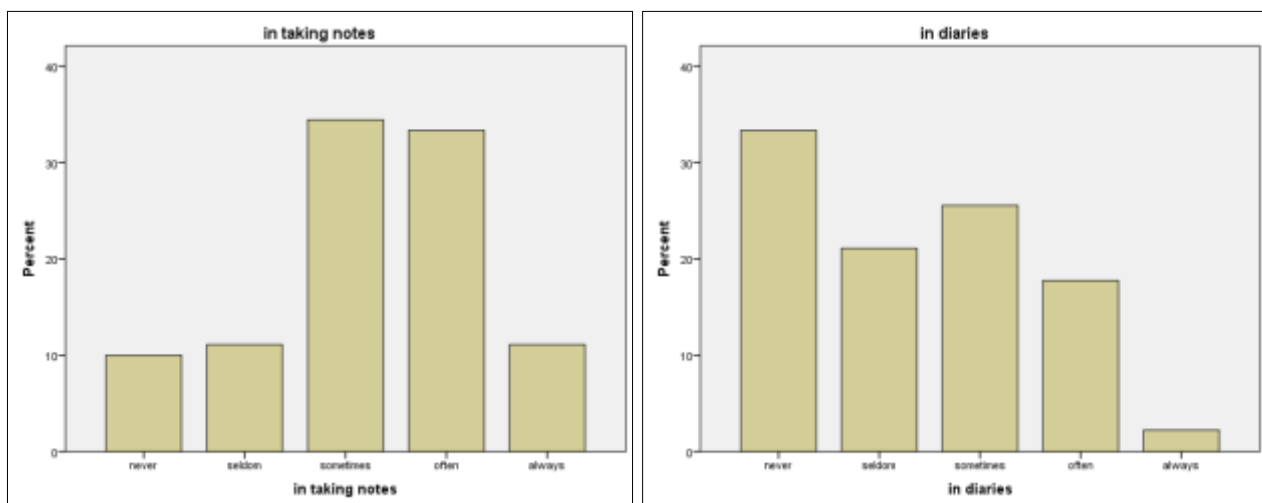


Fig 1: Common cases of using textism

The following analysis of some samples will provide readers with a deeper look at how textism is applied in different cases, toward different subjects.

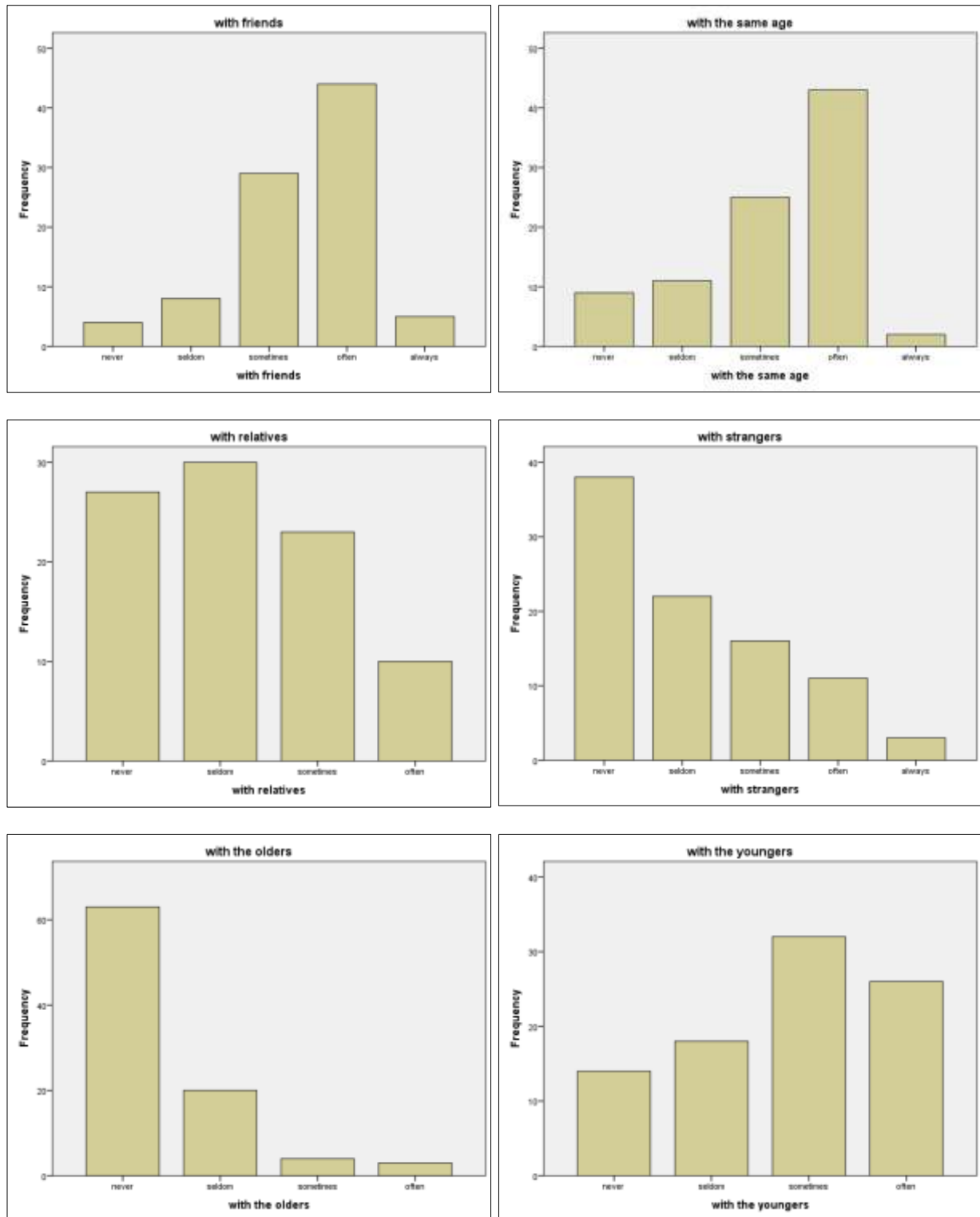



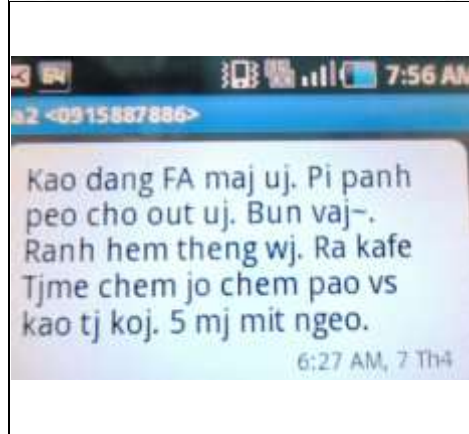

Fig 2: The common target people using textism

To answer the question “with whom do you use textism?” The participants usually apply textism in texting with friends (54.5%) or people of the same age (50%), and later to the younger (28.9%). They seldom use text speak with the older (92.2%), strangers (66.6%) as well as their relatives (63.3%).

To conclude, the students do not use textism unconsciously but intentionally with their clear awareness of using textism in the right contexts, and to the right person.

b. Students’ awareness of using textism

Table 6: Students' awareness of using textism

Sample texts	Analysis
	<p>Relationship: Mother - child Frequency: 3 words / 30 words = 10%</p> <p>Forms: + Change consonants: "nhon"- "ng" into "nh". + Change vowels: "chyeu"- "i" into "y" + Use expletive English: "bye" replaces "tạm biệt"</p> <p>Motives: + to make the text become more cute and childlike as a child is talking to her mother. + to save characters of the message and moves of fingers as typing "bye" is shorter and quicklier than "tạm biệt"</p>
	<p>Relationship: friends Frequency: 26 words / 32 words = 81.3%</p> <p>Forms: + Chage consonants: tao-kao, bi-pi, banh-panh, beo-peo, quy-wj, café-kafe, gio- jo, bao-pao, tao-kao, coi-koj, nghe-ngeo. + Change vowels: may-maj, oi-uj, buon-bun, hong-hem, thang-theng, quy-wj, ti-tj, coi-koj, mi-mj, nghe-ngeo. + Use expletive English: FA (Forever Alone), kafe (café), out, mi mit (minute). + Use slangs: FA (lonely), panh peo (bánh bèo- girlfriend), out (break up), chem jo chem pao (chém gió- chatting). + Use numbers to replace words: 5 (five) + Use abbreviations: vs (vói- with)</p> <p>Motives: + to save characters of the message and moves of fingers when typing. + to show the closed relationship between friends. + to keep theirs secrets from others.</p>
	<p>Relationship: lovers Frequency: 24 words / 27 words = 88.9%</p> <p>Forms: + Chage consonants: zê (về), cko (cho), paj (bài) + Change vowels: maj (mai), thj (thì), xju (xíu), dj (đi), paj (bài) + Use abbreviations: r (rồi), đg (đang), hx (học), ns (nè), r (rồi), nk (na), 15p (15 phút), nt (nhân tin), ns (nói), j (gì), hx (học), r (rồi).</p> <p>Motives: + to save characters of the message and moves of fingers when typing. + to show the very-closed relationship between lovers. + to keep theirs secrets from others.</p>

As a result of the analysis, the levels of textism-using frequency are based on the relationships between people taking part in the conversations. Although they are all informal conversations, the closed relationships between friends or lovers bring about more use of textism than the others. Also, the forms of textism used are more varied than in the conversations with the older. Most of the young rarely use textism in the family, showing that they reckon clearly the boundary in the use of this symbolic language.

Students' attitude towards textism: Another important

part of the questionnaire surveyed the attitude toward using textism. There are 43% of people said "yes" to agree about the usefulness of abbreviations and symbols. They thought it would benefit a lot when they could shorten the time taking notes and exchanging information through messages and emails. It could be easy to explain the case with the development of modern life when people are becoming more and busier and the need to save time is increasing a lot. Although there are 26% of people thought textism didn't bring any help to their study, the advantage of using it is obvious and the trend of using it will not stop in the future.

Table 7: Students' awareness of using textism

		Useful			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	26	28.9	28.9	28.9
	Undecided	21	23.3	23.3	52.2
	Yes	43	47.8	47.8	100.0

Total		90	100.0	100.0	
Agree					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	11	12.2	12.2	12.2
	Neutral	69	76.7	76.7	88.9
	Agree	10	11.1	11.1	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Being asked whether they agree to the use of textism, a big number of students chose the answer “neutral” as they were still afraid of bad prejudice against teen codes or “language @” (76.7%). However, in other questions about where and when to use textism, they provided the proving the agreement to and the wide use of textism.

Conclusion

Limitation

The first limitation is that the author was just a novice in using SPSS, with the hope that doing is learning. Therefore, it took a long time to input all data and access all variables. The results are also not as colorful as many professional researchers. The second limitation is due to the sampling of research. As mentioned before, the convenient samplings may affect the validity of the study. Although the author has tried to find participants at different ages and in different classes to make the study generalized, a bigger number of participants as well as the more various ages in choosing samplings may bring about a better result in researching.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Appeared as the result of combining discourse and writing, textism has taken its role in modern communication. The small research is first committed to investigating the trend of and the attitude towards using textism among the freshmen in Ho Chi Minh City. The result showed the wide application of textism in life when the information age put forward the need to transfer more and more in less time and with less effort. On the other hand, the result is opposite to what people think of the negative effects of textism on academic writing as can be seen in the media. It seems that people are exaggerating the disadvantages of textism and forget that a coin always has two faces. The youngsters between the ages of 18 to 22 are well aware of their behaviors in general and their use of textism in particular since they can intentionally use text speak in the right situations and with the right person.

Further research may focus on a comparative study between English textism and Vietnamese one, or the effect of using textism in other fields. Last but not least, since many people are still concerned about the negatives of textism, the author has a new idea of writing a code-switching software to translate all textism into the academic writing vocabulary, for example, when a student type “caj gj”, his screen receives “cái gì”. It looks like an automatic translator, as well as an updated version of the autotext function in Microsoft Word. Therefore, no one can complain about the bad effects of textism soon.

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