



# Social network writing trajectory logistics: impact on language proficiency

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## Abstract

Language enhancement is a prerequisite for successful schooling and an essential aspect across curricular. All subjects underpinning the curriculum have texts to be comprehended. Consequently, the emergence of social network writing trajectories has brought about trending logistics of using shorthand and informal language for communication by users. What raises some alarm bells is that as learners fall within the cohort of users mentioned above, their language proficiency, specifically vocabulary and spelling, decreases. This concern probed us to investigate whether social network writing trajectory logistics have any significant impact on language proficiency. For this investigation, a qualitative research approach embedded in a case study design was administered. Using this approach led to better understanding of the underlying motives as perceived by English language teachers in relation to effects on language development. Three university teachers offering tuition to first year entering students were conveniently nominated and interviewed as they timeously reported about lack of academic writing. On analysing gathered data, findings revealed (i) declining vocabulary and (ii) compromised language aspects as major challenges for enhanced learner-language aptitudes. The study therefore concludes that some strategies need to be devised to revamp rubrics used for both summative and formative assessment. Therefore, this study recommends that open learning days where spelling and text-analysis competitions are considered as core and should be infused within academic calendar proceedings.

**Keywords:** Social networks; Writing trajectories; Spelling; Text-analysis; Language enhancement.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Introduce the problem

The sudden emergence of social network writing logistics that have since been brought about by the trending use of shorthand for communication by users has translated to students applying this and informal language. Shorthand texting is perceived to have

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underlying pros and cons when language proficiency is measured (Castles et al., 2018). Shorthand writing is a technique of speed writing that uses symbols, abbreviations, and phrases to relay or represent information. Literature reveals that students experience language decline as they extend this method to academic writing (Vrikki et al., 2019).

The initial development of shorthand texting as a speed-writing technique was established with the uppermost aim to capture notes in a much faster way when compared to the previous and traditional longhand procedures (Barrot, 2020; Canagarajah, 2021). As these shorthand characters and symbols characterise words and phrases, writers normally had an advantage of achieving readability and promptness than it would have been achieved writing out each word completely. In particular situations where handwriting is distinguished as a faster mode than typing, shorthand texting is regarded in social networking as one of the quickest methods of communication.

For efficiency in academic language enhancement, shorthand texting is reported to be negative (Politzer-Ahles et al., 2020). Although some studies have been conducted on the advantages and disadvantages of using informal texting, nothing has been investigated on how this form of writing affects language development for students at institutions of higher education (Romeo et al., 2018). It is for this reason that this paper looks into the emergence of social network writing trajectories and investigates whether social network writing trajectory logistics have any significant impact on language proficiency (Manca, 2020). The research question that the study needed to answer was: What is the effect of social network writing trajectories on language development for students enrolled for language as their major subject?

### *1.2. Describe relevant scholarship*

The sections that follows reviews into extent empirical literature on the subject of interest in this study. The review comprises literature and theoretical framework.

With regards to students enrolled for English language modules to submit academic tasks that containing glaring grammatical errors caused by the writing trajectory emanating from social network language used is unfortunate (Mulvey, 2021). These social network writing logistics may include, but not limited to, shorthand texting and informal language used. These techniques are tantamount to loss of vocabulary and spelling, thus leading to compromised language aspects such as major challenges for enhanced learner-language aptitudes (Phillips & Kara, 2021). Language aspects include grammar, speaking, writing, fluency and text comprehension.

Accordingly, writing trajectories inclusive of shorthand text, have an extensive history and has various forms. Each identified form contains established rules and symbols yet

suitable to certain purposes other than being used for academic text-analysis and text-comprehension. Research has proven that social networking language like shorthand is most effectively used by journalists as they collect and collate notes on urgent incidences or when interviews are conducted. The same method is also applicable for use by secretaries and other experts who are expected to do minute-taking and transcriptions (Chen et al., 2017). This means that with its characteristic of being an informal writing form, shorthand is regarded an essential skill for those who aim at improved note-taking competence and improve their writing momentum as well as effectively organise opinions and ideas (Sammons et al., 2018).

When communicating on social network platforms, users of shorthand texting often justify their practice of informal texts as ways to interconnect in a much more quick and efficient manner. For other users, informal writing is regarded a cultural norm that entangles friendship and peers communicating with a similar language (Rose et al., 2018). These users further contend that informal shorthand texting normally creates an atmosphere of relaxation within friends as they adhere to non-formal writing conventions (Toth et al., 2020). Needless to mention, it then becomes a habit, leading university students enrolled for English learning modules to engage in writing texts containing informal language (Von Salisch et al., 2015). This practice leads to a collapse in language enhancement.

However, it is uncertain whether disjuncture in formal writing is a result of unmaintained limited emphasis on academia for improved academic writing skills in ones' educational and professional experiences (Turner, 2018). It is for the above-stated concerns that we deemed it fit to investigate whether social network writing trajectories have any significant effect on language development for students enrolled for language courses.

### *1.3. State hypotheses and their correspondence to research design*

This study was guided by the Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) Theory (Cummins, 1996). BICS signifies aptitudes that a person needs to acquire for functional day-to-day social and face-to-face interactions. This is in line with infusing language into the content comprehended for that particular moment, including essential language used when content in context is unpacked during teacher-learner engagements. Therefore, BICS is a necessary theory for development of language learning, especially for second language learners. This theory perceives language learning as a two-way endeavour to mitigate inappropriateness of varying language and text dynamics.

From the language enhancement viewpoint, BICS implies that to curb language challenges emanating from shorthand informal text comprehension during language learning, teachers are expected to consider aspects of language, thus escaping retarded

learning (Ball & Loewe, 2017). Studying a foreign language, especially for second language students, needs one to be conversant with language dynamics like spelling, text-analysis, vocabulary, fluency, speaking, reading and writing. This paper denotes that because students have preference of using informal texts during general interactions, this practice might impart negatively on language development, thus compromising the necessary language aspects (Law et al., 2019). Therefore, we examined whether social networks writing logistics impacted English language learning.

## **2. Method**

In research, these are methods, materials, techniques or specific procedures which researchers use to help in categorizing, selecting and treating data about a subject that under a specified inquiry. Therefore, the research approach, design, population and sampling, research instruments, and data collection are discussed in this section.

### *2.1. Research approach*

For the purpose of this study, the qualitative approach was deemed relevant. It is suited for research where there are engagements between the researcher and study participants (Dawson, 2019). As collaborations were further extended due to the nature of debates, there became an emergent understanding in relation to university postgraduate students' experiences in their real-life situations when expected to undertake the journey of academic writing activities.

### *2.2. Research design*

This qualitative investigation was underpinned by a case study design. This type of design is characterised for generating in-depth yet considerate understanding of compound concerns that are identified as the ones entangling humans in their real-life situations (Yin, 2014). For this purpose, there emerged some interest within authors to explore how university students could be capacitated for accomplishing academic language enhancement through academic writing workshops.

### *2.3. Population and sampling procedures*

The population for this study entailed all students enrolled for first year in the selected university, an institution of higher learning in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Therefore, the sample for this study comprised four purposefully selected participants, all were registered for the first year in their undergraduate studies. Research indicates that identifying participants in a purposeful manner is when a researcher selects those with experience in relation to the investigated field of study, and those who are relevant, as well as accessible (Dawson, 2019). Participants willingly agreed to take part in this study after

assurance that both their identities and responses were to be kept anonymous and that at any given point in time when they felt threatened, they could withdraw from the study (Yin, 2014).

#### *2.4 Research instruments*

*As advocated by the qualitative nature of this inquiry, semi-structured interviews were administered as data collection tools. This allowed for robust engagements between the researcher and the interviewees as essential and critical themes could be distinguished (Evans & Lewis, 2018). Contained in the interview schedule were open-ended questions which allowed participants ground to respond as far as one wanted. Items asked were centred around viewpoints by undergraduate students regarding solely depending on previously owned information on text writing. , taking note that capacitation activities like academic writing workshops were conducted mid-year, yet, by then, students were already expected by different lectures across varying modules offered, to submit either written texts, tasks or assignments. The time factor proved to be a major limitation as both the researcher and participants were constrained by serving in different sectors. This led to the investigation not finishing at the anticipated time, as some of the appointments secured would be aborted owing to diverse logistical factors.*

#### *2.5 Data collection procedures*

As there were a series of meetings between both the interviewer and interviewees, all responses from each participant were recorded. This was done as means to ensure that no single response was left uncaptured and unnoticed. After several follow up questions that were posed to the participants, there was no more emerging information being shared as participants responded, We then had a feeling that a point of saturation has reached. It was eminent at this stage that participants had fully exhausted themselves. Soon thereafter, analysis of data began. Playing and re-playing of all recordings was done, repeatedly so for the purposes of ensuring that all information was well captured. As this process unwinded, there emerged some similarities, relationships and connections. During this process of analysing data research allows that such sub-categories of responses be classified together as a single category, thus leading to formation of themes discussed subsequently as findings of the study (Patton, 2015).

### *3. Results*

This discussion of findings is structured according to the themes that emerged from the examined data. The two themes guiding the discussion are: (i) Declining vocabulary, and

(ii) Compromised language aspects as major challenges for enhanced learner-language aptitudes.

### 3.1. Declining Vocabulary

Participants were asked whether students displayed the expected fluency level when engaging in English language learning, Participant three (P3) responded thus:

*When engaging in live group discussions with students, I am normally pleased by how vibrant the discussions become. Actually, this practice makes teaching and learning a two-way event because as deliberations are on board, I also learn a lot from them. What then raises some alarm bells is when they are expected to submit written tasks. Grammatical errors are glaring, with lots of spelling errors in the submitted texts.*

Another participant (P1), had a similar response:

*For students in my English teaching module to submit assignments with errors caused by their consistent use of informal texting, causes great worry. Informal texts are only meant for casual gatherings, or rather, spoken language. If texts like these are submitted for both summative and formative assessments, students get deprived due to loss of marks caused by informal texts.*

In line with the previous responses, Participant two (P2) said:

*To entangle effectiveness with efficiency as I collaborate and discuss with students, discussions be it online or in a venue-based environment are normally at an accepted productive level. The only challenge starts to emerge when each group has to beam what they have worked on, only to notice that whatever summary they are submitting is full of shorthand texting. To me this is tantamount to loss of vocabulary as spelling is lost along the way.*

### 3.2. Compromised Language Aspects as Major Challenges for Enhanced Learner-language Aptitudes

Regarding compromised language aspects as another finding of this paper, Participant one (P1) argued that:

*For the students that I teach to be hooked up in frequent use of shorthand texting, this extensive use of textspeak is subject to leading at an expanded exposure to abbreviations or symbols. Nevertheless, such a practice are likely to lead to a declining ability to interpret and understand whatever given text, therefore leading to lowered abilities to comprehend*

*with texts or written work. These challenges might also lead one to have difficulty translating shorthand written texts.*

Correspondingly, Participant three (P3) said:

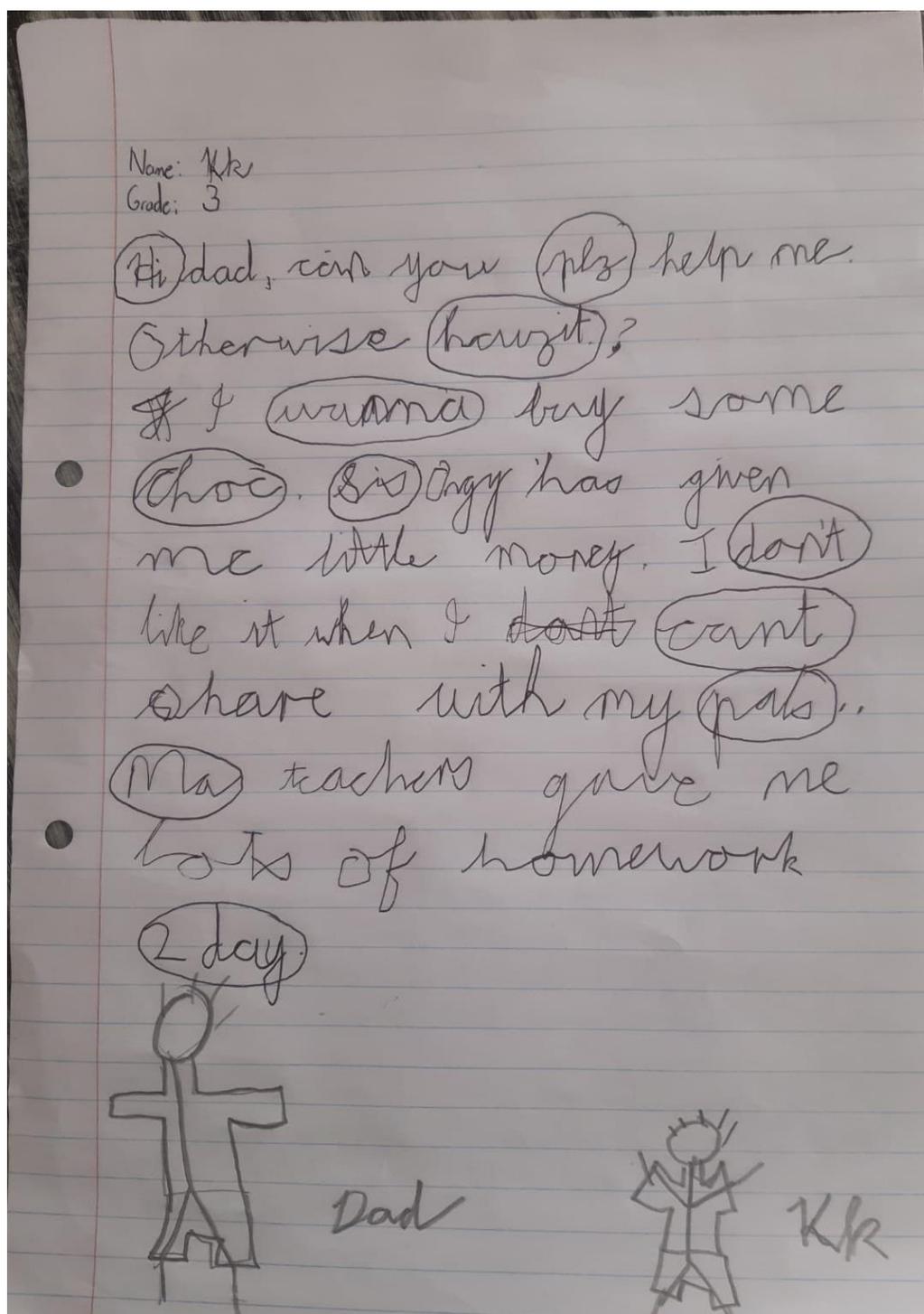
*As I perceive my students' work, I can mention that tasks with shorthand writing are likely to have their positive and negative properties on various aspects of language. It then becomes important to take note of the probable impacts when using text-based communication. Additionally, it is also necessary to strike a balance between the accessibility and efficiency of shorthand writing coupled with the prerequisites for proper language skills in academic platforms.*

Accordingly, Participant two (P2) narrated a saddening event:

*As I was tasked by my mentor to administer an oral activity in a certain school where I participated during Teaching Practise at a grade three class, as means to plant spelling awareness among learners, I gave an instruction that I will read aloud a very short paragraph, then each learner would be expected to respond by writing down what I read. As this was an oral task, I then decided not to write down anything on the board, instead, I expected them to listen attentively, then produce work that was read in the form of sentences.*

The three responses concurred that vocabulary and spelling are affected by shorthand texting. Therefore, students should be conscientised of the fact that informal texts, abbreviations and acronyms are not part of academic writing conventions. For students at higher education institutions of learning not to negatively affected by results of using social network writing logistics, there is need for cautious use of language, as social network writing logistics could lead to a lack of proper exposure to a wide range of vocabulary (Yun & Standish, 2018).

Below is an image of a sample as one of the responses from learners:



Indeed, looking at the above text by one of the learners, it indeed indicates that language of communication used in social networks and informal platforms impacts negatively on processes of teaching and learning. The learner above erroneously started by writing his

or her informal name. Be that as it may, to our perception, the learner has proper and well acceptable language development, except infusion of the so-called informal language yet in an academic learning platform. This results in plenty of grammatical errors which might deprive learners when language enhancement coupled with academic attainment is rated.

#### **4. Discussion**

This paper also established that language used for social gatherings, then infused in academic tasks by university students during their English teaching-learning interactions, can impact on some aspects of language including speaking, reading, and writing. Using shorthand in written communication affects students' ability to express themselves verbally in formal settings. This is because they have become accustomed to using shortened versions of words, acronyms, and abbreviations (Warner, 2018). Findings to this investigation can have potential limitations for one's progress towards effective communication in the sphere of academia. This study also found that having reliance on the use of informal texts can lead students to a lessened focus on language aspects like proper grammar and spelling, coupled with reduced exposure to increased vocabulary and fluency in the language learnt. Furthermore, using shorthand texting has been proved to potentially limit students' ability to effectually express themselves in writing, leading to improved ability to write in formal, academic and professional platforms (Castles et al., 2018).

One other negative part on using shorthand writing is that spelling and grammar can be affected as students were reported to be relying mostly on predictive text and autocorrect. Such strategies also lead to lowered focus on appropriate spelling. In addition, using shorthand texting can implant a negative effect on one's vocabulary through reduced exposure to a wide range of vocabulary words and fluency in the language learnt. As such, being rooted in this kind of texting is likely to potentially limit student ability to express themselves in formal settings where they are expected to display proper vocabulary use (Castles et al., 2018).

The findings of this study are in line with the BICS theory by Cummins (1996) that guided the study, as it denotes that although students prefer the use of informal or shorthand texts, it becomes the task of language teachers to conscientise them that engaging in such a practice is tantamount to a decline in language proficiency. Notably, with its diverse fundamental aspects, language education serves at a multidisciplinary basis as all subjects underpinning the prescribed curriculum depend on texts to be comprehended. This paper denotes that although students have preference of using informal texts during general interactions, this practice might impact negatively on language development, thus compromising the necessary language aspects. Therefore, the study examined whether social networks writing logistics had impact on English language learning.

Summarily, when used for academic purposes, informal texting can have both positive and negative effects on language learning. It therefore requires one to be mindful of such

potential impacts if text-based communication is administered. It is also worth noting that reliance on predictive text in shorthand texting also leads to a decline in proper spelling. This hinders spelling acquisition and reduced ability to correctly spell words in formal settings.

## **5. Conclusions**

The study investigated whether social network writing trajectory logistics have any significant impact on language learning. The study identified that using informal shorthand texting in academic settings proved to have an impact on language development. This also notes that some language aspects were compromised by this practice. This is an overwhelming and yet daunting experience as language learning has diverse aspects like speaking, reading, writing, text comprehension, fluency, spelling and vocabulary. We therefore conclude that if fundamental language aspects are compromised because of reluctance to refrain from using informal language, English language need teachers to implore counteractive strategies. It is then recommended by the study that as remedial strategies to overcome challenges of shorthand texting, teachers should incorporate formal writing into lesson plans. Furthermore, open learning seems to be a prerequisite where spelling and text-analysis competitions are considered as core, and this should be infused within the academic calendar. This would help give students opportunities to practice using proper grammar and spelling when comprehending texts. To encourage critical thinking and improved language learning skills, the study suggests that teachers should foster critical thinking skills through modelling clear and effective writing in their own written communication and in the supplied teaching-learning materials. Another valuable aspect to address the decline in language proficiency is when teachers promote the value of reading by exposing students to a variety of book discussions, literary analysis and writing styles, thus expanding their vocabulary.

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