

Text Messaging Items as an Assessment Tool for Certain Language Skills

JUANCHO M. BABISTA

titserchoy@yahoo.com

Southern Luzon State University

Abstract - This study attempted to determine the effectiveness of test messaging items for certain language skills. It sought to find out what skills can be measured by text messaging test items, to determine the efficiency of text messaging items for testing certain language skills, and the effectiveness of the testing instruments in assessing certain language performance. The research employed written text analysis. A sample test composed of three sets of text messages in three forms, Filipino text, Taglish text, and English text messages were made. A short paragraph in Filipino, Taglish, and English were transcribed into text messages by senior Education students who are majoring in English. After comparisons, they came up with the best text translation of the items. The test items were administered to freshmen Education students of the Southern Luzon State University. The subjects were asked to transcribe the messages in complete sentences. Results reveal that text messaging test items measure the respondents' competencies in reading comprehension, grammatical structures, phonetic ability, and usage. Based from the computed mean for different skills, the study revealed that the students have high level of comprehension in three

languages used, high level of ability in grammatical structure in Filipino and average level of ability in grammatical construction in English; high level of ability in phonetics in Filipino and English based from their spelling of words; and high level of ability in correct usage based from their sentence construction.

Keywords - text messaging, reading skills, language skills

INTRODUCTION

Instant messaging (IM) or text messaging has become a way of life, especially for the present young generation, from preteens to mid-twenty something, and even the older groups who have caught up with the times. This form of new wave communication is taking the skills and lingo of instant messaging.

Text messaging (Dizon, 2007) is the sending of short text messages to a device such as a cellular phone or pager. Text messaging is used for messages that are no longer than a few hundred characters. The term is usually applied to messaging that takes place between two or more mobile devices.

The question of ruining the English language has become a global issue. Web reports and responses to 'blogs' reveal that even in English-speaking countries, the English language is suffering the same problems of syntactic and grammatical decline. Likewise, some exam markers have expressed concerns over the use of text messaging language in exam answers.

CNN.com reported that an Irish study demonstrates that text messaging has a negative impact on written language skills in teens. While a true causal link was not established by the study, researchers did find a significant correlation between increased usage of SMS and instant messaging and increases in punctuation and grammar mistakes. This will come as no surprise to most teachers who regularly receive papers with a dismal demonstration of basic English skills. CNN quotes the article from the Irish Times: "The emergence of the mobile phone and the rise of text messaging as a popular means of communication would appear to have impacted on standards of writing as evidenced in the responses of candidates," the report said,

according to Wednesday's Irish Times. "Text messaging, with its use of phonetic spelling and little or no punctuation, seems to pose a threat to traditional conventions in writing."

WhiteSmoke, Inc. analyzed more than 5,000 pieces of business and other writing and reveals that 85% of written correspondence among adults and business professionals contain grammatical errors. Although the firm is a grammar checking-software producer, the results are found alarming.

The same scenario is happening in the Philippines, with two languages in focus: English and Filipino. Gullas (2006) mentioned that the rapid decline in language skills would inevitably "erode the competitiveness of the country's human resources, both here and abroad in an increasingly globalized village." In addition, he worries over the stiff competition from China and India as pretty soon employment of Filipinos overseas will soon be taken over by these strong competitors. For instance, Pinoy engineers in the Middle East risk being nudged off by Indian and Chinese engineers who not only speak better English, but analyze and write reports in English better.

The same report by Gullas states that the European Chamber of Commerce shares the lawmaker's worries. It also reported that 75% of the country's annual 400,000 college graduates have "sub-standard English skills." On top of that, local teachers in English and mathematics are leaving the country in droves for better paying overseas jobs. The symptoms of such overseas exodus of the country's mentors pop up like worry warts on the educational system: in all international achievement tests, Philippine students wallow near the bottom in all subjects. Moreover, official achievement tests plied out to high school seniors in the 2004-2005 school year showed that a mere seven of every 100 students could read, speak, and comprehend English well enough to enter college. The popularity of fractured prose and butchered grammar in text messaging has infected millions. Too popular soap operas and anime have been dubbed in the existing vernacular tongue, a hybrid of sorts that has become the norm rather than an atrocity. The Web reports that the Philippines sends on the average 400 million text messages a day or approximately 142 billion text messages a year, more than the annual average SMS volume of the countries in Europe, and even China and India. The wireless has become an important

“coming of age” marker. Therefore, text messaging is inevitable and must be utilized to aid and assess language instruction.

FRAMEWORK

Text messaging is something that cannot be removed from the present system, thus, students who are exposed to the current written linguistic jargon cannot but employ that in their daily communications. Rather than constantly blaming the problem of the dwindling language, the problem can be addressed by using it as a tool for assessing language. Text messages format could be used to determine whether text message users can employ both formal/academic English and Filipino languages. Likewise, if problems are determined, educators can find measures to employ the text messages as spring board for language instruction. As the current trend in language teaching and testing is content rather than discrete point, this text messaging is an item for language testing, and teaching, and reteaching.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study attempted to determine the effectiveness of test messaging items for certain language skills. Specifically, this sought to pursue the following objectives:

1. To determine what language skills can be measured by text messaging items;
2. To identify which assessment methods can be used to determine the efficiency of text messaging items for testing certain language skills; and
3. To determine if text messaging items effective as assessment tool for certain language skills.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed discourse analysis and used the weighted mean for statistical treatment. One-hundred eighty freshmen Education students of the Southern Luzon State University were used as respondents. A sample test composed of three sets of text

messages in three forms, Filipino text, Taglish text, and English text messages were made. Short paragraphs with the same message and written in Filipino, Taglish, and English were transcribed into text messages by senior Education students who are majoring in English. After comparisons, they came up with the best text translations of the items. The subjects were asked to transcribe the messages in complete sentences. The answers were then checked using rubrics to provide scores that will relate to their language competencies. Another type of assessment employed was the multiple choice where students were exposed to text messages and they choose from given options the best answer as to the required language skills.

Sample Test Items.

The following are examples of the test items given to the respondents.

Filipino Text Message:

Musta n. n2loy b ang pagti2pon kgbi. Nd aq nakarating dhil wla ng saskyn pauwi. Naiwan aq ng hulng byahe. Cguro ay lasing kaung lhat. Nong oras ntapos ang inuman? Tlgang nghi2nyang aq. Msyado kc ang trapko s Los Bnos

Transcription:

Kumusta na? Natuloy ba ang pagtitipon kagabi? Hindi ako nakarating dahil wala ng sasakyan pauwi. Naiwan ako ng huling biyahe. Siguro ay lasing kayong lahat. Anong oras natapos ang inuman? Talagang nanghihinayang ako. Masyado kasi ang trapiko sa Los Baños.

English Text message:

How r u now. Was d prt1 pust tru lst nyt. I wasn't abl 2 cum bcuz der ws no mor jp n d trmnl. i mst d lst trp. u ol did psibly gt drnk. at wat tym dd d drnkng cshn n. i ws rilr dsapointd. d trfk n los bnos ws 2 hevvy.

Transcription:

How are you now? Was the party push true last night? I was not able to come because there was no more jeep in the terminal. I missed the last trip. You all did possibly get drunk. At what time did the drinking session end? The traffic in Los Baños was too heavy!

Taglish Text message:

Musta n. n2loy b ang parti lst nyt? Nd aq cum bcuz wla ng jp s trmnl. Iwan me lst trp. Cguro ay lng kaung lhat. wat tym nag-nd ang drnkng? dd d drnkng cshn n. i ws Syang rily. trfik kc s los bnos ay hevvy 2 d max!

Transcription:

Kumusta na? Natuloy ba ang party last night? Hindi ako come because wala ng jeep sa terminal. Naiwan ako ng last trip. Siguro ay lasing kayong lahat. What time nag-end ang drinking? Sayang really! Traffic kasi sa Los Bañosay heavy to the max!

Multiple Choice:

In the line, 'ur d only prson n d klas . . . ', what is the correct transcription of 'ur'?

- | | | |
|-----------|---------|----------|
| a. your | d. yore | |
| b. you're | c. year | e. yours |

Which is the best transcription for 'was prtí pust tru lst nyt'

- a. Was the party post through last night?
- b. Was the party pushed through last night?
- c. Was the party push through last night?
- d. Was the party pushed true last night?
- e. Was the party pushed through last night.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The level of comprehension was measured by determining the respondents' ability to transcribe message by idea and not by word-for-word translation. Grammatical structure was evaluated through

discourse analysis basing answers on the accepted Filipino grammar. Example of which is the use of the verb-subject order for Filipino sentences.

Phonetic ability, which also equates with spelling, was determined by putting in vowels where they were deleted in the text message as in 'knin k p b?' and they translated it as 'Kanina ka pa ba?'

Usage was measured by following rules of grammar as in 'ng' and 'nang'.

Over-all results reveal that students do have high level of competency in the mentioned skills as measured through text message item tests.

The level of comprehension was measured by determining the respondents' ability to transcribe message by idea and not by word-for-word translation. Grammatical structure and grammar were determined by students' ability to use inflections, tenses, and the likes as when the phrase 'ws d part pust tru lst nyt?' into 'Was the party pushed through last night?'

Phonetic ability was equated with spelling since text messaging is more of consonant in form and vowels are deleted as 'pust' into 'pushed'.

From the results, it was determined that students have excellent level of comprehension but only good in grammatical structure and phonetic ability. They only registered a fair performance in usage. Therefore, the text messaging items can be used to determine the language competencies mentioned.

CONCLUSIONS

From the data gathered and tabulated, the researcher formulated the following conclusions:

1. The language skills that can be measured by text messaging are:
 - 1.1 Filipino text messages in terms of comprehension skills, grammatical structure, phonetic ability, usage.
 - 1.2 English text messages in terms of comprehension skills, grammatical structure, phonetic ability, usage

- 1.3 Taglish text message in terms of comprehension skills, phonetic ability
2. The assessment method that can be used are transcription, rubrics and multiple choice
3. The text messaging items are effective as a tool for certain language skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and conclusions, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. Replicate the study using higher levels of language construction as in content-based text messages;
2. Duplicate the same study in different periods using language-in-focus lessons.
3. Perform the same study focusing on individual language skills.

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2006 <http://www.google.com.ph/firefox>

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