

**Investigating the impact of SMS speak
on the written work of
English first language and English second language
high school learners**

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained herein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of SMS speak on the written school work of English first language (L1) and English second language (L2) high school learners. The general aims of the study were to establish how widespread the use of SMS language is among high school learners, and to assess whether there is any evidence of the use of features of SMS speak in the English written work of these learners.

Eighty-eight learners from an English-Afrikaans dual medium school in a middle class neighborhood in the Western Cape participated in this study. The participants included 43 grade 8s and 45 grade 11s, of which 51 were English L1 speakers and 37 English L2 speakers. The participants completed questionnaires from which the frequency and volume of their SMS use was determined, as well as the features of SMS speak they reportedly use while SMSing. In addition, samples of the learners' English written work were examined for specific features of SMS speak. These features included (deliberate) spelling errors, lack of punctuation, over-punctuation, the omission of function words, the use of abbreviation or acronyms, and the use of emoticons and rebus writing.

The results of this study indicate that high school learners are avid users of SMS and/or MXit. All participants reported using features of SMS speak in their SMSes, and many reported using SMS speak in their written school work. Despite this, the samples of written work did not contain a great number of incidences of SMS speak features. It seems that the general lack of SMS speak in the written work of these learners is a result of being able to assess when it is and is not appropriate to use a certain variety of language: These learners are proficient in SMS speak and use it when chatting to friends on MXit, but they can produce written work that adheres to the formally approved standards of written high school English. That said, a number of SMS speak features were indeed present in their formal written work, which indicates that SMS speak had some impact on the written work of these learners, which could in turn be attributed to the high frequency of their SMS usage. However, not all of the non-standard features of their written English could necessarily be attributed to the influence of SMS speak; specifically some of the spelling and punctuation errors could be unrelated to SMS speak, as they have been noted in the written English of high school learners from before the advent of cellphones.

The learners in this study were from a school that has a strict language policy, one which does not tolerate the use of SMS speak in written work. Seven of the teachers completed a questionnaire compiled for all teachers at the school in question. Responses to this questionnaire, especially those of the language teachers, indicated that teachers either deduct marks for features of SMS speak in written language or refuse to mark written work that does not conform to the formally approved standards that the school has set in place. It is possible that the actions of the teachers and the language policy of the school play a significant role in the lack of SMS speak features in the written language use of the learners.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie het die impak van SMS-taal op die geskrewe skoolwerk van Engels eerstetaal (T1)- en Engels tweedetaal (T2)- hoërskoolleerders ondersoek. Die algemene doelstellings van die studie was om vas te stel hoe wyd verspreid die gebruik van SMS-taal onder hoërskoolleerders is en om uit te vind of daar enige tekens van die gebruik van SMS-taalkenmerke in die geskrewe Engelse werk van hierdie leerders is.

Ag-en-tagtig leerders aan 'n Engels-Afrikaans- dubbelmedium skool in 'n middelklas buurt in die Weskaap het aan hierdie studie deelgeneem. Die deelnemers het 43 graad 8's en 45 graad 11's ingesluit waarvan 51 Engels T1-sprekers en 37 Engels T2-sprekers was. Die deelnemers het vraelyste voltooi waaruit die frekwensie en volume van hulle SMS-gebruik bepaal is, sowel as die hoof kenmerke van SMS-taal wat die leerders berig dat hulle gebruik terwyl hulle SMS. Verder is voorbeelde van die leerders se Engelse geskrewe werk ondersoek vir spesifieke kenmerke van SMS-taal. Hierdie kenmerke sluit (doelbewuste) spelfoute, 'n gebrek aan puntuasie, oorpuntuasie, die uitlaat van funksionele items, die gebruik van afkortings of akronieme en die gebruik van emotikone (sogenaamde "smileys") en letterraaisels ("rebus writing") in.

Die resultate van hierdie studie dui aan dat hoërskoolleerders kranige gebruikers van SMS en/of Mxit is. Al die deelnemers het aangedui dat hulle kenmerke van SMS-taal in hulle SMS'e gebruik en baie het aangedui dat hulle SMS-taal in hulle geskrewe skoolwerk gebruik. Ten spyte hiervan was daar min tekens van SMS-taalkenmerke in die voorbeelde van hul geskrewe werk. Dit wil voorkom asof die algemene gebrek aan SMS-taal in die geskrewe werk van hierdie leerders toegeskryf kan word aan hulle vermoë om te onderskei wanneer dit gepas is om 'n sekere soort taal te gebruik en wanneer nie. Hierdie leerders is vaardigheid in die gebruik SMS-taal en besig dit wanneer hulle met vriende op Mxit gesels, maar hulle kan geskrewe werk produseer wat voldoen aan die formeel aanvaarde standaard van geskrewe hoërskool Engels. Daar was egter tog 'n aantal SMS-taalkenmerke teenwoordig in hulle formele geskrewe werk wat aandui dat SMS-taal wel 'n impak op die geskrewe werk van hierdie leerders gehad het, waarskynlik as gevolg van die hoë frekwensie van hulle SMS-gebruik. Nie al die nie-standaard kenmerke van geskrewe Engels kon egter noodwendig aan die invloed van SMS-taal toegeskryf word nie; veral sommige spel- en puntuasiefoute kon onverwant aan SMS-taal wees, aangesien hierdie foute reeds waargeneem is in die geskrewe Engels van hoërskoolleerders vóór die bekendstelling van selfone.

Die leerders in hierdie studie was in 'n skool met 'n streng taalbeleid, een wat glad nie die gebruik van SMS-taal in die geskrewe werk van leerders duld nie. Sewe onderwysers het 'n vraelys wat vir al die onderwysers by die betrokke skool saamgestel is, voltooi. Die reaksie op hierdie vraelys, veral van die taalonderwysers, dui aan dat onderwysers óf punte aftrek vir kenmerke van SMS-taal in geskrewe taal óf weier om geskrewe werk te merk wat nie voldoen aan die skool se formeel goedgekeurde standaard nie. Dit is moontlik dat die aksies van die onderwysers en die taalbeleid van die skool 'n beduidende rol speel in die geskrewe taalgebruik van die leerders.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Since the 1990's, cellphones have become an integral part of most peoples' lives. According to Thurlow (2003), in 2003, there were almost one billion cellphone users worldwide, compared to the estimated 600 million people who use the Internet. In May of 2003, 1.7 billion Short Message Service (SMS) messages were exchanged in Britain alone, which adds up to some 13 billion messages per year. In South Africa, the use of cellphones has been on the rise for more than a decade, and with the introduction of cellphone applications such as MXit¹, most South Africans, especially young people, are SMSing every day.

Baron (2000) discusses the ways in which another form of electronic communication, namely email, has transformed the way we communicate. She highlights the fact that email is a platform for informal, conversational and personal communication to take place (Baron 2000: 249). SMS has taken this type of communication to the next level, making it very casual, brief and even potentially less personal. Similar to Netspeak or Internet speak, the SMS or text message provides users with a convenient and user friendly service which has taken the Netspeak revolution to the next level, with regard to having a unique writing style. Thurlow mentions that the average length of an SMS is 160 characters, which he believes heightens the "function of the need for speed, ease of typing and, perhaps, other symbolic concerns" (Thurlow 2002:5).

¹ MXit is a cellphone program that can be downloaded onto a cellphone from the internet and makes instant messaging cheaper and more convenient; the cost is minimal (much less than an SMS) and the users benefit from instant, regular contact with whomever they choose, without needing to be online from a personal computer.

Netspeak and SMS speak provide a literal representation of the way that people speak, using a variety of features such as emoticons (or “smileys”, for example ☺ or ☹) to convey emotions, and punctuation and capitalization to emphasize words or phrases. One of the main objectives of SMSing is relational interaction. People want to be in contact with friends and other people that they care about, therefore SMS speak is “highly interactive, dynamic and spontaneous” (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic 2004: 125). This type of communication is appealing to young people, providing a new dimension for communication on their cellphones.

Smith (2003:98) reports that “texting is now more popular than any other form of communication for everyday use.” Therefore, because of the widespread and frequent use of cellphones, and in particular of text messaging (or SMS), one could assume that people’s written language may begin to show certain features that are used when writing SMS messages, thus no longer conforming to the formally approved standards of written language. Also, due to the cost efficiency and ease of SMSing and particularly of MXit, adolescents could be spending a substantial amount of time sending SMS and MXit messages, thus using SMS speak regularly and for increased periods of time. This prolonged use of SMS speak could affect the user’s ability to shift between SMS language and standard written language. In a study by a Tshwane University of Technology student, Tamara Rodrigues found that “the use of SMS had a negative effect on [tertiary – KF] students’ writing skills. They no longer used punctuation marks or capital letters” (Momberg in *The Sunday Independent*, 12 November 2006). Rodrigues concluded that “the influence of mobile phone messaging could not be denied any more.”

The concern is that learners who cannot or who choose not to switch between formally

approved written language and SMS speak, could find that they are penalised as they attempt to advance through the education system and into tertiary education. Therefore, it will be of interest to researchers and educators alike to discover whether there is a correlation between the frequent use of SMS speak and the way in which high school learners use language in their written work.

On the website txt2nite.com, there is a forum for discussing various topics related to text messaging. An entry by a user named “The Man of Txt” points out that SMS gives adolescents a “medium that encourages them to explore and play about with the use of [their] language at a time when they are still learning about correct punctuation, grammar, and the overall structure of their syntax” (The Man of Txt 2005: 2). He speculates that this may be seen by some as detrimental to the development of literacy. Journalist John Sutherland expresses an extreme opinion when he comments that SMS speak “masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness. Texting is penmanship for illiterates” (*Guardian*, 11 November 2002). High school learners certainly are exploring ways of using language through SMS speak, and this is taking place in an important phase of their language development (namely in the phase during which they need to acquire skills pertaining to formal written language). Therefore, it is important to understand the extent of the impact that SMS speak has on their school work, and this study aims to fulfil that purpose. Specifically, it aims to investigate the impact of frequent use of SMS speak (including MXit) on the written school work of English first language (L1) and English second language (L2) high school learners. The assumption is that SMS speak could lead to writing that displays features that deviate from standard written English as it is formally taught in high schools in the Western Cape.

The research question addressed in this study is the following: Which non-standard features of English L1 and English L2 high school learners' written English language use can be attributed to the frequent use of SMS speak? The five hypotheses of the study are outlined below:

Hypothesis 1: The majority of high school learners use SMS or MXit on a daily basis for a significant period of time. Therefore, the presence of the features of SMS speak in the written work of the learners (if there are any such features present) can sensibly be attributed to the frequent use of cellphone technology such as SMS and/or MXit.

Hypothesis 2: The reasons given for the frequent use of SMS or MXit indicate that learners are highly motivated to use SMS/MXit on a very regular basis.

Hypothesis 3: Typical features of SMS speak are used by high school learners in their SMSes or when they use MXit, and these features can be found in the written work of the learners.

Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in the extent to which grade 11 learners and grade 8 learners use features of SMS speak in their written work. Whereas the grade 11 learners are assumed to be more competent in SMS speak (given that, on average, they have been using SMSes for a longer period than have the grade 8 learners), the grade 11 learners are also more familiar with the requirements of formal written language; therefore, the greater familiarity of the grade 11 learners with SMS speak will balance out their greater familiarity with the requirements of formal written language.

Hypothesis 5: L1 English learners use more features of SMS speak in their SMSes and in their written work than the L2 English learners, because it is assumed that the L1 English learners SMS in English, whereas it is assumed that the L2 English learners use a combination of English and Afrikaans in their SMSes.

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a brief summary of the development of the Internet and SMS, and highlights the impact that these mediums of communication have on society and language in use. Chapter 3 provides an overview of language variation, differences between spoken and written language, and the influence that the L1 has on the L2. In this chapter, high school learners are defined as users of a particular sociolect, and their group identity is discussed. In Chapter 4, a detailed account is given of the participants in this study and of the process by which data were collected and analyzed in order to test the five hypotheses. The content of Chapter 5 includes the results from the data collected, as well as the discussion of these results, indicating which of the hypotheses were borne out by the data. The conclusion, given in Chapter 6, offers a concise summary and interpretation of the proposed hypotheses and the findings from the results.

Chapter Two:

The Impact of Electronic Communication on Language Use in Society

2.1 The Technological Revolution: From internet to SMS to MXit

Maddison (1983:13-14) in Finnegan (1988:9-10) makes the following perceptive statement, “Ineluctably the advent of microprocessors and information technology will have the most profound and far-reaching consequences ... the view that we are witnessing a truly profound and pervasive change in our society is now so widely held and the evidence for it is so unequivocal that it seems justifiable to speak of the ‘microelectronic revolution’”. This microelectronic revolution began bearing fruit in the early 1980’s, just as personal computers were made available to, and became affordable for, individuals, and ushered in the dawn of computer-mediated communication which would prove this statement to be true.

The mid 20th century saw the invention of the computer. In the 1960’s, computer networks were designed and implemented with the intention of facilitating the transfer of information between computers (Herring 1996:2). Unbeknown to its inventors, this networking would become the foremost medium used for human-to-human interaction by millions of people around the world by the end of the century. As personal computers became more accessible and affordable to the public, more and more people came into contact with the Internet, “an association of computer networks with common standards which enable messages to be sent from any central computer (or host) on the network to any host on any other” (Crystal 2004:66).

The Internet consists of the World Wide Web (or Web), Electronic mail (or email) and Chatgroups. The Web enables people to share information with anyone who has access to the Internet, on any subject matter and in any field of study, including encyclopedias, advertising, games, news, and entertainment (Crystal 2004:66). Email involves the “use of computer systems to transfer messages between users” (Crystal 2004:67), which is a very diverse form of communication that comprises personal and institutional messages of differing lengths and with different purposes. Chatrooms are “continuous discussions on a particular topic, organized in ‘rooms’ at particular Internet sites, in which computer users interested in the topic can participate” (Crystal 2004:67).

As computer-mediated communication (CMC) emerged as the language of the Internet, academics in the fields of linguistics and sociolinguistics became increasingly interested in linguistic features of CMC. Herring (1996:1) defines computer-mediated communication as “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of a computer”. This type of interaction involves messages that are typed on a computer keyboard of one participant and read by another participant or participants on their computer screens either instantly (synchronous communication) or at later point in time (asynchronous communication).

This type of communication is largely found in what Crystal (2001:129) refers to as chatgroups, which are a medium for “world-wide multi-participant electronic discourse, whether in real-time or not”. With CMC, people are able to have “conversations” in real time through the medium of written language. This is possible in synchronous chat, where individuals can type messages to other individuals or groups of individuals from their computers and their messages appear instantly on the recipients’ screen (Werry 1996:47).

One of the largest chat systems on the Internet is known as “Internet relay chat” (IRC) (Werry 1996:49). Users join this system and can choose from many different “channels”, which are essentially electronic communities and consist of people who have a particular interest such as sport, politics, music or simply meeting new people. The members of these channels choose a nickname as an assumed alias when they join, which allows for some level of anonymity (Werry 1996:50).

In *Language and the Internet*, David Crystal (2001) attempts to explain the uniqueness of email. In some ways, an email is like a quick letter or memo, but it is also like a phone call, in that it is a blend of talking and writing. Ultimately, email is unique and like no other communication utilized by mankind before. Baron (2000:248) sees email as that which “lies at one end of the spectrum of computer-mediated communication, since it’s primarily used for one-on-one message exchange between people who know each other’s identity. Email is informal compared with traditional writing, helping to develop a level conversational playing field and encouraging personal disclosure, which can even become emotional”. The traditional letter has, in some ways, begun sharing some of its responsibilities with email, which are now used in much the same way as letters were. One can send a Curriculum Vitae or job application via email, important letter exchanges between employee and employer take place via email, even bills and other important notifications can be sent and received using email (Crystal 2001:126).

The 1990’s saw a significant development in the mobile phone industry with the introduction of SMS, also referred to as “text messaging” or “texting”. This allows for communication at a cost that is less than a phone call, offering more privacy and allowing users to communicate without being disturbed or disturbing those around them (Crystal

2001:229). A survey published in the United Kingdom in September 2000 showed that 81% of mobile phone users who used their phones to send SMS messages were between the ages of 15 and 24 (Crystal 2001:229). This figure would be much higher today and would include members from all age groups and walks of life.

Much has been written about the increased use of text message communication and the subsequent rise of so-called Textese or SMS speak. This way of using language has its origins in the language of Netspeak, using many of the features that are found in chatgroups. Text messages are typed using a small keypad and are displayed on small screens, with a limited space of 160 characters per SMS. This has motivated users to invent space-saving strategies to make SMSing quicker and more cost effective. These strategies include a significant amount of abbreviation and creative use of punctuation and symbols to convey messages.

In South Africa, young people are using mobile phone communication more and more with the use of an instant messaging system called MXit. This locally developed cellphone application can be downloaded off the MXit website onto any GPRS or 3G activated mobile phone for free, and allows for communication between other cellphone users with the same application on their phones.

MXit is, reportedly, used by more than 2 million users (Weimers 2008:2), which is not surprising, as the cost of sending a message on MXit is substantially lower than a regular SMS from a cellphone: sending a message on MXit costs 1 cent, compared to normal SMS rates which are charged at around 75 cents (Van Wyngaard in *The Stellenbosch/Franschhoek/Pniel Gazette*, 9 September 2008). Creator Herman Heunis

explains that users of MXit are charged according to the amount of data sent in a message. This means that sending a message with a simple *hello* will cost around 0.0008 cents. If the same message was sent via regular SMS, the cost would be the same as if a 160 character long message was sent (Bouzagloul in *The Mail and Guardian*, 14 September 2006). The main advantages of using this system include the fact that it is easy to use, it is very cost effective and it provides users with the opportunity to chat with many friends simultaneously, from the convenience of their cellphones. It is much the same as chatting to friends in an online chat room; however, participants do not have to own a computer or have access to a computer; they can send messages wherever they are, at any time of the day.

2.2 Popular culture and media reports on SMSing

The widespread use of SMS can be seen in many spheres of everyday life. One such sphere is entertainment, where interactive television shows allow viewers to send SMS messages to the presenters of the show in order to voice their opinion about the issue being discussed. In South Africa, there are a number of television channels, such as GO and MTV, that broadcast entire shows consisting of viewers' SMSes, which appear live on the television screen and, in some cases, showcase a live stream of SMSes between viewers and presenters. Even some of the movies seen at the cinema include characters or plot lines that involve SMSing or the use of cellphones. Music concerts for artists such as John Meyer have giant screens set up on the sides of the stage, giving audience members the opportunity to send their SMSes to be displayed on the screens, while the concert is in progress.

SMS has even infiltrated the South African political domain. During the trial of Jacob Zuma, ANC youth league members were encouraged to send SMSes to petition against the trial. Furthermore, the South African Police Service recently launched the Crime Stop Hotline service, which encourages members of communities to report any suspicious criminal activity to the Crime Stop number via SMS.

A number of businesses provide customers with a call-back option. Customers can SMS the company to let them know that they are interested in their services or products, and the company will call them back on their cellphones. In a similar manner, some companies send SMSes to their customers to inform them of special offers or sales. Consumers are also given opportunities to enter competitions via SMS for example by sending the digits on the barcode of a specific product.

Tertiary institutions, such as the University of Pretoria, have seen the benefit of using SMS to keep in touch with distance-learning students. Bizzelias (*Financial Mail*, 2 February 2007) reports that many of these students do not have access to Internet or email, but nearly all have cellphones. Students are able to receive reminders about assignments or examinations via SMS. Lecturers have even gone so far as to provide SMS-based quizzes and an open time for students to send questions via SMS and receive a personal reply.

From the above, the prevalence of SMSing in the daily lives of “ordinary people” becomes clear. In the next section, the potential role that this prevalence plays in language change is briefly considered.

2.3 Technological advancement as a catalyst for language change

The surge of communication taking place between millions of people all over the world has provided a platform for experimental and creative ways of using language. The Internet saw the emergence of Netspeak from the early stages of Internet communication, and this quickly became widespread in electronic communication such as email, chatrooms, SMSes and the like. Text messaging and SMS speak have taken this type of communication to the next level and into all spheres of life, echoing what Sommerville (1983, in Finnegan 1988:8-10) said, “Information technology will impinge on all areas of life ... It will radically change society just as technology development in the 19th century changed society from being predominantly agricultural to being predominantly industrial.”

The Internet and SMS have changed the way that people use language to communicate. This change began with the language used on the Internet, particularly in IRC. Werry (1996:52) gives a brief outline of the features found in the language of IRC. These features are used in order to make IRC communication speech-like, and include short responses that resemble turn-taking in face-to-face conversation. Since typing is much slower than speaking, the length of typed messages is kept short and space-saving strategies become imperative. The use of abbreviations is one way in which time and space can be saved in these online conversations, commonly involving acronyms and symbols, shortening of words and even the exclusion of pronouns (Werry 1996:54).

An important aspect of face-to-face communication is the use of paralinguistic cues which provide clues as to the tone of the message. In IRC communication, the lack of hand gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice is replaced by the use of creative adaptation

of spelling, punctuation and capitalization (Werry 1996:57). This creative use of spelling and punctuation and special use of symbols and spacing are used to convey meaning and emphasis. This can be seen in the way in which letters are repeated (as in *ooooops*) and in the repetition of punctuation marks (as in *hello!!!!*) (Crystal 2001:34). The language of CMC is like writing, because it is typed, but the exchanges between users are characterized by quick, informal language, much the same as spoken conversation. CMC also includes many unique features, such as special acronyms (for example *LOL* for “laughing out loud”) and emoticons, allowing users to develop their own communicative style (Herring 1996:3).

Emerging from the Netspeak trend came SMS speak. Incorporating some of the familiar features of Netspeak, SMS speak evolved further, as the need for space-saving and time saving strategies emerged. Thurlow et al. (2004:42) argue that, “It is not so much that technology brings about social changes as the application of technology”. In this way, we are able to recognize that application of technological advances has played a significant role in language change.

In Baron (2000:18), Sven Birkerts is said to have suggested that technology would be the source of a profound shift in the way that people communicate: a shift away from the traditional printed page toward electronic communication. Many linguists and scholars have voiced concerns about the effect that this technological revolution is having, and will have, on the way we use language. In particular, there are growing concerns that young people are losing the ability to spell and write “correctly” because of the Internet (Thurlow et al. 2004: 126). However, some might argue that this type of language change is merely the emergence of a new variety of language which does not necessarily mean an end for standard varieties of language. The issue of language variation, amongst others, is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3:

SMS Speak as a Language Variety used by English L1 and L2

Adolescents

3.1 Sociolinguistics and language variation

Sociolinguistics is “the study of the relationship between language and society” (Parker 1986:121). The present study falls within the field of sociolinguistics, with specific focus on the way in which language is used by a particular group of people in South African society, namely adolescents with cellphones. Features of one of the dialects or sociolects that they use on a daily basis, known as Netspeak or SMS speak, is of particular interest here, as is the effect that this language variety has on their written work at school.

Language variation is “the study of those features of a language that differ systematically as we compare different groups of speakers or the same speaker in different situations” (Parker 1986:113). These variations of the same language include social varieties (also referred to as standard or non-standard dialects) such as the difference between upper class and working class speech, as well as the stylistic variation that can be found in formal situations or in casual conversation. In this study, specific interest was paid to the stylistic variation of language used by adolescents in conversational communication via cellular telephone technology, namely SMS or MXit, and the use of formally approved written language in a setting such as examination rooms and classrooms.

Many different variations of a language are possible, and these can be observed in the study of dialects, sociolects and idiolects. A dialect is “a variety of a language associated

with a particular group of speakers and mutually intelligible with other varieties” (Wardhaugh 1977:221). Sociolects are varieties of a language spoken by members of different socioeconomic groups and entail characteristics of the dialects that they speak (Parker 1986:121). An idiolect is the specific linguistic system of a particular speaker (Parker 1986:114), or the unique language that an individual speaker would use.

Stylistic variation refers to the appropriate use of language according to the occasion and the participants involved in the exchange. Speech style can be observed in the way in which people are able to use informal and formal speech appropriately. In the same way, style shifting entails the ability to change from informal to formal speech or vice versa, depending on the situation (Yule 2007:208). Parker (1986:137) reports that “shifting styles is essentially automatic and unconscious, and is governed by the concept of appropriateness”. Most speakers of any language can switch between formal language and informal language without much effort; it is something that does not require conscious thought or decision-making. Native speakers of a language know when it is appropriate to use a certain variety of a language with one set of people, and another variety of the language with a different group of people. One would therefore expect that competent speakers of English know when it is appropriate to use SMS speak and when the standard variety of English is to be used, and that it will be effortless to switch between using SMS speak when communicating with friends, and using formally approved standards of high school English when completing homework assignments and tests or examinations.

Yule (2007:206) explains that a social dialect, or a sociolect, is the language variety of a group of speakers in a society who are defined by their social class, and who use language differently to other social classes who speak the same language.

These groups are traditionally divided into speakers from the “middle class” and speakers from the “working class”. In a country like England, there are many examples of different pronunciations or uses of English. For example, the following sentence would be considered a “working class” utterance: *I ain't going home yet*. “Middle class” English speakers would probably not use the word *ain't* when producing the same utterance; they are more likely to say *I (a)m not going home yet*. Yule also makes a distinction between speech styles, the way in which speakers of a language pay careful attention to their use of language in a formal setting and less attention to how they speak in informal situations. When speakers change between these two styles, they are said to be style shifting (Yule 2007:208).

Wardhaugh (1977:219) investigates language variation in terms of age, occupation, and function. He refers to Chomsky's observation on language variation, which is based on the distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance. Briefly stated, linguistic competence is comprised of what speakers know about a language, whereas linguistic performance entails what speakers do with a language (Gass and Selinker 2001:330). According to Wardhaugh (1977:219), one of the ways in which language use varies is according to the age of a person; language is a process of learning and there are different stages of language development. Once a speaker has been through the developmental stages of language learning, changes still take place in the way they use language throughout their lives. These changes and different ways of using language are evident in the difference between the way older people speak and the way teenagers speak – a form of linguistic generation gap. In the same way, “accepted patterns exist for communicating between and within the generations” (Wardhaugh 1977:219) such as between parents and their children, grandparents and grandchildren and so on.

Another kind of language variation referred to by Wardhaugh (1977) is related to function. This can be recognized in the use of formal and informal ways of communicating, be it in speaking or in writing. Writing “tends to be more formal than speaking in the sense that more conscious manipulation of vocabulary and syntax takes place” (Wardhaugh 1977:220). One of the most informal uses of language can be seen in slang or colloquial speech, which is used by speakers who are outside of higher status groups, such as young people, and by groups of people with special interests. For example, the word *bucks* (instead of the more everyday word *money*) constitutes slang.

Slang is used by people who identify themselves with a certain group where they share ideas and attitudes which set them apart from those outside the group. “Like clothing or music, slang is an aspect of social life that is subject to fashion, especially among adolescents” (Yule 2007:211). This trend has spanned a number of generations, but slang words do grow old, and they tend to evolve as they pass down from one generation to the next. Yule (2007:211) gives the example of *groovy*, which was used to describe something as “really good” in the 1970s; today the word *dope* or *sweet* may be used instead. This indicates that age is a significant factor in language variation. The way that language is used can also vary to different degrees with regards to a speaker’s occupation; in many cases, it is likely to contain jargon or technical terms that relate to the occupation of the speaker.

In this study, the ability that the participants possess to shift effortlessly and appropriately between variations of English and between styles of writing is analysed and reported. Special attention is given to the style shifting, or the lack thereof, between formally approved high school English standards and the informal use of language as seen in SMS

speak. SMS speak is perceived as a (non-standard) language variety – a sociolect, to be more specific – used, amongst others by adolescents. In the next section, adolescents are discussed as a specific speech community.

3.2 High school learners and group identity

Adolescence is a significant phase of life that is characterised by the development of personal identity (Louw and Edwards 1997:516). Louw and Edwards (1997:518, 519) characterise this phase of development with increasing interest in, and involvement with, the peer group, and along with this an increase in conformity to the behaviour and values of that group of peers. In this way, peer group activities and interests, such as fashion, music, and language style, have a profound influence on adolescents, and daily contact with friends, and talking to friends, becomes increasingly important in forging and maintaining friendships (Newman and Newman 1987:337). These friendship groups tend to cultivate a way of speaking and communicating that is unique. Thurlow et al. (2004:120) discuss speech communities, which are formed when people organise themselves into communities according to the way they speak. Le Bodic (2005:xv) explains that SMS users have “forged their own dialect to cope with service limitations” and “composed their own communication groups.” This shared way of speaking promotes a sense of belonging, which fulfils the in-group needs and desires of adolescents.

The type of language used by adolescents can be described as a sociolect and is typified by the use of informal language such as slang and jargon. SMS speak can be seen as an evolution of this type of informal language, although it is represented in an innovative format: creative spelling, abbreviations and acronyms, shortening of words, and rebus

writing (e.g., *l8r* for *later*). This type of language use is unique to SMSing and online interactions, and because these domains are increasingly utilised by adolescents, the language that they use can be regarded as a sociolect. The features of adolescents' sociolect include the creative, innovative use of written language, which is highly expressive and completely informal. SMS speak and Netspeak can be seen as a diffusion of oral discourse features into written language, as both SMS speak and Netspeak contain features of spoken language presented in written format. The differences between spoken language and conventional written language are discussed in the next section.

3.3 Spoken language versus written language

Towards the end of the 20th century, linguists and sociologists became interested in the impact of computer mediated communication on language and society. In 1984, Baron (in *Visible Language*, 1984:139) stated that “computer mediated communication might affect the existing forms and functions of spoken and written language”. Today, there is an abundance of evidence that reveals the extent to which this has become a reality. Language is changing, and people are using language in different ways, be it on the Internet, on their cellphones or in their face-to-face conversations. We are, in a sense, “shaped by technology but also shape it ourselves” (Thurlow et al. 2004:43), and this is apparent in the way that written language and spoken language are used differently today than they were only a few decades ago.

David Crystal, in *Language and the Internet* (2001), presents a clear and concise description of the differences between speech and writing. One of the major differences between spoken language and written language is that speech is bound by time: it is

dynamic and temporary; it takes place between speakers who participate in an interaction in real time. Writing, on the other hand, is space-bound: it is static and permanent, and takes place between a writer and reader who are distant from each other. Speech involves intonation, rhythm, tempo, and tone of voice (Crystal 2001:26-27), whereas writing needs to make use of punctuation such as question marks and exclamation marks to bring across emphasis and emotion. Writing is unique in its appearance; there is structure in the form of pages and lines, and information is displayed in a simple and legible way. Finnegan (1988:17) states that writing gives verbal expression a degree of permanence which allow words to be passed on, over time and to countless people, in a fixed, unchanging form. This allows for records and laws to be kept, for history to be passed on from generation to generation, and for people's stories and cultures to be made available to anyone long after they have died. However, as Ross (2006:40) reports, nowadays it seems that "handwritten messages are almost a rarity, printed text faces great challenges, e-communication predominates, and (so it seems) we are moving rapidly into a 'paperless world'."

In spoken conversation, there is no time lag between exchanges; they take place instantly between speaker and hearer, leaving little room for planning exchanges in advance or for editing one's errors. Written exchanges occur at differing intervals between the writer and the reader. Consider, for instance, a book that was written by an author for a readership or a letter that was written between friends. This allows time for scrutiny and some amount of thought and organisation to take place before a response is made. Writing provides the opportunity for identifying errors and allows for changes and drafts to be made before completion of the exchange or interaction. Whereas instantaneous communication like speech does not allow for this, such instantaneous communication has its disadvantages: if a mistake is made, one can attempt to explain or apologise, but the utterance cannot be

taken back.

Due to the fact that verbal exchanges generally occur face-to-face, participants rely on facial expression, hand gestures, tone of voice and other non-linguistic cues to interpret an interaction. This is not possible with written exchanges; there is no immediate feedback that is present in face-to-face conversation, no non-linguistic cues to guide responses or provide some subtle information to the interlocutor. Crystal (2001:27) explains that speech is “suited to social or ‘phatic’ functions, such as passing the time of day, or any situation where casual and unplanned discourse is desirable”. By contrast, writing is more suited to “the recording of facts and the communication of ideas, and to tasks of memory and learning” (Crystal 2001:27).

The language of the Internet, referred to by Crystal as “Netspeak”, relies on characteristics of both speech and writing. When using “Netspeak” as a term, it is important to remember that it “involves writing as well as talking, and that any ‘speak’ suffix also has a receptive element, including ‘listening and reading’” (Crystal 2001:17-18). Netspeak shares the characteristics of writing in the way that it functions as a database system; it has archives and advertising (Crystal 2001:28). Many varieties of text can be found on the Internet: literary, scientific, religious, all of which can be found in printed or written form. The writers who post their work or thoughts on the Internet are similar to authors of books and other written texts: they do not know who their audience or readership will be. Netspeak does use features of speech, in so far as the manner in which language is used. This can be seen in chatgroups and interactive services, email, and virtual worlds on the Internet. These interactions are similar to speech, as there is the expectation of an immediate response to messages that have been sent. Like speech, these interactions are not permanent; they can

be replaced, deleted or lost. There are also characteristics of face-to-face interactions in the style of what is typed: very informal and conversational, making use of emoticons and creative punctuation to convey emotions and feelings.

While Netspeak may seem to resemble speech, Crystal (2001:30) argues that there is still a significant difference. Netspeak lacks immediate feedback, because responses need to be typed and sent to the recipient. This delay can be compared to letter writing and sending, making the rhythm of the interaction less like speech and more like writing. A typed response takes time, even if it is a few seconds, but in face-to-face conversation, there is instant reaction, even if only in an “uh-huh”. Netspeak also differs in the turn-taking aspect of conversational speech, as well as in the absence of paralinguistic cues which are found in speech (Crystal 2001:34).

Given the above, Netspeak and SMS speak can be described as writing that looks like speech, or “talking in writing” (Collot and Belmore 1996:14). Netspeak and SMS speak are similar to writing, in that it is typed on a keyboard or a keypad, yet it is a quicker form of communication than letter writing, and the way that language is used is more informal, just as it is in speech. In other words, participants “must use language as if they were having a conversation, yet their message must be written.” (Collot and Belmore 1996:14). This means that SMS speak and Netspeak rely on creative typology, using whatever the keyboard or keypad can produce, and many of the traditional rules of grammar and style are ignored (Thurlow et al. 2004:124). There are a number of features associated with Netspeak (which have now been adopted into SMS speak), namely (i) the use of word compounds and blends (*weblish* for *web English*), (ii) the use of abbreviations and acronyms (*ROFL* for *rolling on the floor laughing*), (iii) minimal use of punctuation and

capitalisation, (iv) deliberate spelling errors, and (v) fewer uses of traditional openings and closures such as *Hello* or *Dear X*. Other features of Netspeak include the use of emoticons or smileys, the use of capitalisation for emphasis, and multiple use of punctuation and rebus writing (Thurlow et al. 2004:125).

3.4 The influence of the first language on the second language

The participants of this study were chosen according to, among other criteria, their English language status, i.e., according to whether they were L1 or L2 speakers of English. For this reason, the influence that one's L1 can have on one's L2 is briefly discussed.

The role that the L1 has in L2 acquisition is generally referred to as “language transfer”. The term “transfer” is used in the field of behaviorism in Psychology to refer to the process whereby “prior learning is carried over into a new learning situation” (Gass and Selinker 2001:66). There are many theories that either accept or reject the concept of language transfer, but it has generally been accepted that learners of a L2 rely heavily on their mother tongue when acquiring a L2, especially in the initial stages of L2 acquisition. Gass and Selinker (2001:65) quote Lado (1957), saying that “individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture”. Transfer, or crosslinguistic influence, involves the use of “sounds, expressions or structures from the L1 when performing in the L2” (Yule 2007:167). This can be seen when Afrikaans L1 speakers, when using English as an L2, say, for example, *I is not hungry*, which might stem from the Afrikaans formation *Ek is nie honger nie*. Conversely, an English L1 speaker, when using Afrikaans as an L2, might say, *Ek is nie honger*, which does not include the double negative and stems from the English equivalent which contains only one negative element.

Although positive transfer can occur – where certain elements which are the same in the two languages are transferred from the L1 to the L2 – the focus is mostly on the negative influence that a person’s L1 has on his/her L2. According to Ellis (1985: 19), on such a view (i.e., the view that the L1 influences the L2 negatively), L2 acquisition is mostly about overcoming the effects of the L1 so that the L1 interferes less with utterances produced in the L2. This means, according to Ellis (1985:19), that L2 acquisition is concerned with the process of “slowly replacing the features of the L1 that intrude into the L2 with those of the target language and so of approximating ever closer to the native-speaker speech”.

In the next chapter, the method by which data were gathered from the English L1 and English L2 adolescent participants is described. As will be seen in Chapter 5, the written work of the English L2 speakers was not only analysed for features of SMS speak, but also for L1 transfer, and in some cases it was difficult to distinguish between the two.

Chapter Four:

Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In order to assess the impact that SMS speak has on high school learners' written language, it was deemed necessary to investigate (i) the frequency of SMSing (ii) the amount of time spent SMSing, and (iii) which features of SMS speak the learners could identify in their SMSes. This information would then be used to test the general hypothesis that the frequent use of SMS speak would correlate with a significant presence of SMS features in high school learners' written work.

4.2 General procedure

The Headmaster of an English-Afrikaans dual-medium high school in a middle-class area of Somerset West in the Western Cape was contacted, and the purpose of the study was presented to him. Once he had given his consent, the Western Cape Department of Education was contacted in order to obtain permission to enter the school and collect data from a particular group of learners. This consent was given, on condition that the data was collected before the end of the third semester, so as not to interfere with end of year examinations.

Once permission had been granted, a questionnaire was devised relating to SMS behaviour (see section 4.5 and Appendix A). Then a meeting with the Headmaster was held, during which he identified four classes that would be made available for the data collection

process. These classes included two grade 8 classes and two grade 11 classes, one class in each grade of L1 English learners and the other of L2 English learners.

The learners in these four classes were given approximately 30 minutes to complete the one-page questionnaire, and they were asked not to consult with one another during the process. Prior to handing out the questionnaires, the purpose of the study was explained to all the participants, and they were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that the information they provided would remain anonymous. All learners in these four classes completed the questionnaire in full, and were given a letter to take home to their parents which provided information about the study and which gave them an opportunity to inform the school if they objected to their child's participation; however, none did so.

The learners were then asked to leave a sample of their English written work in a marked folder at the school office. However, this did not prove to be a successful way of obtaining samples of written work. Therefore, a class list of the participating classes was obtained, and the English teachers of these classes were asked for assistance. This ensured that only the written work of learners who had completed the questionnaires would be analysed. The teachers made the participants' English portfolios available, and the class lists were then used to identify which sample of written work belonged to which participant. One-page samples of written work were then photocopied and later analysed for features of SMS speak. These samples consisted of a page of an examination essay answer or a creative writing classroom assignment for the subject of English.

A questionnaire for the teaching staff of the school was also devised and given to all the

teachers (see Appendix B). This questionnaire served to ascertain whether the teachers were aware of the use of SMS speak in their learner's written work and to discover what measures were being taken to prevent the presence of non-standard features of English.

4.3 Participant selection

The Headmaster of the school was asked to make available four classes for participation in the study: one grade 8 L1 English, one grade 8 L2 English, one grade 11 L1 English, and one grade 11 L2 English. Two grade 8 and two grade 11 classes were requested in the hope that this would provide a balanced sample of high school learners: the grade 11s would have been exposed to the standards of high school English for longer than the grade 8s, thus their English writing skills would be expected to be better than those of the grade 8s. However, the grade 11s would have had more exposure to and experience with SMSing which might prove to have had a greater influence on their written work.

A total of 100 learners from these four classes were available on the day that the questionnaires were given out; all 100 questionnaires were completed and handed in on the same day. Teachers provided samples of written work for 88 of the learners who had completed the questionnaire. The questionnaires of those 12 learners for whom no written sample could be obtained were discarded, and the 88 learners for whom written samples were available acted as participants in this study.

Regarding the questionnaire for the teachers, all the teachers were treated as possible participants, regardless of subject matter taught, and therefore all of them received the questionnaire. Of the 70 members of staff, seven completed and returned the questionnaire;

these seven then acted as teacher participants.

4.4 Characteristics of the participants

As stated in section 4.3, the participants in this study were chosen according to their English language status (English L1 or English L2) and according to their grade. In total, 27 English L1 grade 8s, 16 English L2 grade 8s, 24 English L1 grade 11s, and 27 English L2 grade 11s participated in the study.

These participants were all bilingual in English and Afrikaans to varying degrees, some being more fluent than others in their L2, be it Afrikaans or English. All have learnt about, and learnt aspects of, their L2, and all have acquired it to some extent. Yule (2007) defines language acquisition as “the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situations with others who know the language” (Yule 2007:163). Yule goes on to explain that learning refers to “a more conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the features, such as vocabulary and grammar, of a language, typically in an institutional setting” (Yule 2007:163). It is difficult to assess, in this study, whether the participants had acquired their L2 or whether they had learnt it. In some cases, the Afrikaans participants may have very limited exposure to English outside of the school setting, and the use of their L2 English could simply be a conscious process applied in an institutional setting. This may account for some of the non-standard uses and features of English that were found in the Afrikaans L1 learners’ written work, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The seven members of the teaching staff who participated in the study taught different subjects at the school. Three were language teachers – one English teacher and two Afrikaans teachers. The remaining four teachers taught the following subjects; Design, Visual Arts and Technology; Accounting and Business Studies; Mathematics; and Natural Sciences and Life Science, respectively.

4.5 The questionnaires

The questionnaire given to the learners comprised five questions (see Appendix A). The first two questions asked learners how often they SMSed or used MXit, and also how much time per day was spent SMSing or on MXit when they use these cellphone services. In the questionnaire, learners were also asked to give three reasons for their use of SMS. This was done to ascertain whether SMSing is used because it is necessary for communication and the transfer of important information, or whether it was a form of entertainment and was seen as something to alleviate boredom. This would provide a general idea of the motivation behind the use of SMS or MXit, which could explain the frequency (or lack) of cellphone use.

The questionnaire furthermore asked learners whether they felt that SMSing and MXit had an effect on their written work in school. They were asked to elaborate if they answered “yes”. This question was asked in order to investigate learner’s perceptions of the influence (if any) of SMSing and/or MXit on their written English.

The final question in the questionnaire asked learners to identify features of SMS speak that could be found in their SMSes. These features included spelling errors, lack of

punctuation, over-punctuation, lack of function words, use of abbreviations or acronyms, use of emoticons, and the use of rebus writing. Each of these options was clearly explained and examples were given of each in order to avoid confusion or misunderstanding.

The questionnaire given to the teachers asked them to specify the number of years that they had been in the teaching profession, the subject/s that they taught, and the number of learners that they taught at the school. They were also asked to give their opinion about the prevalence of cellphone ownership and use amongst their learners.

The teachers were then asked whether they had noticed any changes in the written language of their learners since the increased use of cellphone and SMS technology, and they were asked to identify non-standard features of language that could be found in the written work of their learners. The last two questions asked teachers whether they believed that SMS and/or MXit have had an effect on the written language of their learners, and they were asked to give specific information about the methods employed to combat the presence of SMS speak features in the learners' written work (see Appendix B).

4.6 Data analysis

All the answers to each question in the learners' questionnaires were tallied in Excel spreadsheets according to class, grade and language group. Graphs and tables were drawn up using the data in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the results. These graphs reveal the frequency of SMS or MXit use and the number of hours spent SMSing per day, as well as the reasons for SMSing and the features of SMS speak that the learners

admit to using in their text messages. The graphs and tables also show the number of learners who believe that SMSing or MXit has an effect on their written work, and the number of learners who do not find that SMSing or MXit has any effect on their written work.

The samples of written work were analysed for actual features of SMS speak, and this was contrasted with the self-reported features (i.e., with the learners' perceptions of how SMSing and MXit influenced their written English). The list of features tallied in the written samples were the same features that learners were asked to identify in their SMSes when completing the questionnaire, namely spelling errors, lack of punctuation, over-punctuation, lack of functional words, and use of abbreviations or acronyms, emoticons and rebus writing. However, the analysis of the samples of written work produced a further three non-standard features of English, namely shortening of words, slang, and colloquialisms. These SMS speak features (including the three just mentioned) were tallied according to the frequency with which they occurred in the samples from all four of the classes, but were also kept separate according to grade and language group.

Responses from the teacher's questionnaires were tallied and analysed, and the data was presented in tables. Information contained in these tables includes detail on how long the teachers had been teaching, what subject/s they taught to how many learners, and which grades they taught. The features of SMS speak that the teachers had identified in the written work of their learners were also tallied and discussed. The methods used to combat SMS speak in learners' written work were examined qualitatively and discussed.

Chapter Five:

Results and Discussion

5.1 Analysis and discussion of the learner's responses

5.1.1 Frequency of using SMS and/or MXit

In order to test Hypothesis 1 – which proposed that all high school learners use SMS or MXit on a daily basis for a significant period of time – participants were asked to specify the frequency of SMS/MXit use, as well as the volume of usage. All 88 participants reported regular use of SMS or MXit for varying amounts of time; none of the participants went without SMSing or using MXit. All the participants are therefore exposed to the features of SMS speak, whether in the messages that they send or in those that they receive.

As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of the participants in both grade 8 and grade 11 make use of SMS and MXit on a daily basis for up to one hour. The table also shows that more members of the grade 11 group use SMS or MXit daily than members of the grade 8 group. The participants who reported that they use SMS or MXit for more than four hours a day were in the minority: six of the 45 grade 11s and four of the 43 grade 8s. The fact that the grade 11 participants use SMS or MXit more than the grade 8 participants could be due to the age of the grade 11s: they have had more exposure to cellphone technology and they might have a more active or established social life. Alternatively, their allowances might be larger than those of the grade 8s; this would mean that it is financially possible for them to SMS or use MXit more and for longer than the grade 8s.

Table 1: Frequency and volume of SMS or MXit usage

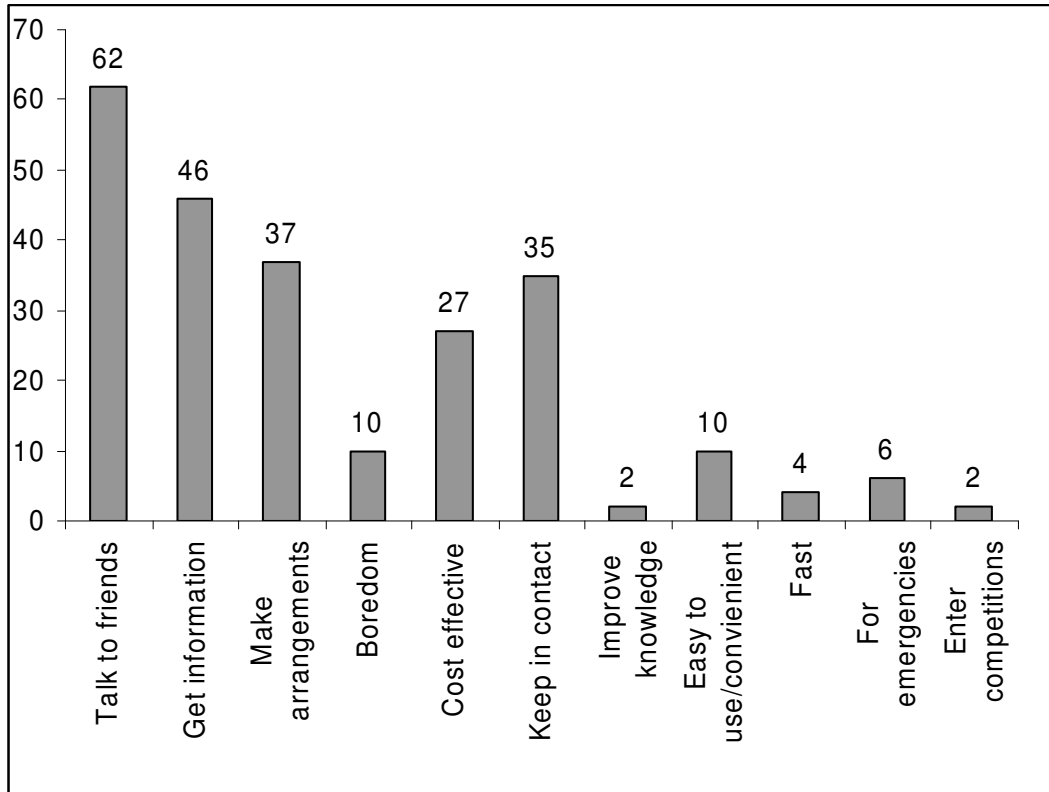
Volume	Number (percentage) of Grade 8s			Number (percentage) of Grade 11s		
	L1 learners	L2 learners	All	L1 learners	L2 learners	All
Frequency						
Daily	14 (52%)*	10 (62%)	24 (54%)	17 (71%)	16 (76%)	33 (73%)
A few times a week	9 (33%)	3 (19%)	13 (30%)	6 (25%)	5 (24%)	11 (25%)
Hardly ever	4 (15%)	3 (19%)	7 (16%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Never	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	27 (100%)	16 (100%)	43 (100%)	24 (100%)	21 (100%)	45 (100%)
Number of hours per day						
0-1 hour	17 (63%)	8 (50%)	25 (58%)	15 (63%)	8 (39%)	23 (52%)
0-2 hours	8 (30%)	2 (12.5%)	10 (23%)	7 (29%)	2 (9%)	9 (20%)
0-3 hours	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (5%)	1 (4%)	5 (24%)	6 (13%)
0-4 hours	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	1 (2%)
More than 4 hours	2 (7%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (9%)	1 (4%)	5 (24%)	6 (13%)
TOTAL	27 (100%)	16 (100%)	43 (100%)	24 (100%)	21 (100%)	45 (100%)

*Note. The percentages in parentheses are the percentage of learners in that grade who reported using SMS or MXit for that interval or length of time. In this case then, 52% of all grade 8s said that they use SMS or MXit daily.

Furthermore, the results in Table 1 indicate that the L1 English learners use SMS or MXit more often and for longer periods of time than L2 English learners. However, there were seven L2 English learners who claimed to use SMSing or MXit for more than four hours a day, and only three L1 learners. One reason why the L1 learners use SMS or MXit more often than L2 learners could pertain to the language of MXit, which is predominantly English and may prove to exclude those who are not especially proficient in English. However, Weimers (2008:16) found that Afrikaans speaking adolescents were not rigid when it came to language preference for SMSing; they reported that they preferred to SMS in the language of the person they were contacting.

5.1.2 Learners' reasons for using SMS or MXit

The data in Graph 1 indicates the reasons participants gave for using SMS or MXit. Most participants in both grade groups and both language groups (62 of the total 88) indicated that talking to their friends was their major motivation for SMSing or using MXit. The need to obtain information was the second most cited reason (by 46 participants), which, in most cases, involved obtaining information about homework requirements. Other information that was sought included details about sporting activities and transportation related needs. Making arrangements, such as planning social or weekend activities and arranging transportation with parents, as well as keeping in contact with friends and family, were also frequently cited as reasons for using SMS or MXit. Furthermore, a significant number of participants (27 of the total 88) reported that they use SMSes or MXit because it is cost effective; it is cheaper than a phone call.



Graph 1: Reasons for using SMS/MXit for all participants

As stated above, the participants of this study indicated that talking to friends was their primary reason for using SMS or MXit. Adolescent social behaviour is characterised by “increasing interest in, and involvement with, the peer group” (Louw & Edwards 1997:518). Therefore, friendships and friend groups are of utmost importance to them; they want to be connected to what is happening around them, they want to know where their friends are, what they are doing and they want to be involved in social events. MXit and SMSing help fulfil this fundamental need for constant contact, because it is cost effective, easy to use and readily available across all age groups and language groups. These reasons can explain the frequency of SMS or MXit use amongst the participants of this study.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the reasons given for the frequent use of SMS or MXit will indicate that learners are highly motivated to use SMS/MXit on a regular basis. The data presented in Graph 1 supports this hypothesis, as the reasons cited by participants for their frequent use of SMS or MXit are substantial and warrant necessary and daily utilization of SMS speak.

In Table 2, the two grade groups are compared in terms of their self-reported reasons for using SMS or MXit. As can be seen from this table, both grade 8 and grade 11 participants were primarily concerned with using SMSes or MXit to talk to their friends (74% and 68%, respectively). Getting information and making arrangements were also rated highly amongst both age groups (of the grade 8 group, 64% and 43%, respectively, cited this reason, and 42% of the grade 11 group), and keeping in touch with family and friends proved to be a priority (for 61% of the grade 8s and 42% of the grade 11s). A considerable number of grade 8 participants and grade 11 participants reported that they use SMS or MXit because it is cost effective, with more grade 11s citing this as a reason (26% vs.

35%). It could be that the grade 11 participants – despite possibly receiving a greater allowance than the grade 8s— are more concerned about the cost of SMSing or using MXit because they may carry greater financial responsibilities for payment of cellphone costs than the grade 8s who might be more financially dependent on their parents. Table 1 showed that grade 11s use SMS and MXit more than grade 8s do, but Table 2 shows that the two grade groups have very similar motivations for using SMS and MXit.

Table 2: Reasons for using SMS/MXit, per grade group

Number of participants reporting the reason	Talk to friends	Get information	Make arrangements	Boredom	Cost effective	Keep in touch	Improve knowledge	Easy to use	Fast	Emergencies	Enter competitions
Grade 8	31* (74%)	27 (64%)	18 (43%)	5 (12%)	11 (26%)	16 (61%)	0 (0%)	5 (12%)	4 (9%)	6 (14%)	0 (0%)
Grade 11	31 (68%)	19 (42%)	19 (42%)	5 (11%)	16 (35%)	19 (42%)	2 (4%)	5 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)

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

Very few participants stated that they use MXit or SMS for emergencies, to enter competitions, to improve their knowledge of technology or because it was a quicker means of communicating. Those who did cite the aforementioned reasons were mostly grade 8 participants. There were six of the 43 grade 8 participants who claimed to use SMSes or MXit in the case of emergency, whereas none of the grade 11 participants included this in their reasons for using SMS or MXit.

In Table 3, the two language groups are compared in terms of their reported reasons for using SMS or MXit. The results shown in this table clearly indicate that talking to friends was the reason most cited by the participants for both L1 and L2 learners (62% and 81%,

respectively). This table and Table 2 show that there is not a significant difference in motivation for using SMS or MXit between the two grade groups and language groups. The only noteworthy difference can be seen in the fact that there were no L2 participants who said that they use SMS or MXit because it is easy to use or because it is a fast means of communication, nor were there any who cited emergencies and entering competitions as reasons for using SMS or MXit.

Table 3: Reasons for using SMS/MXit, per language group

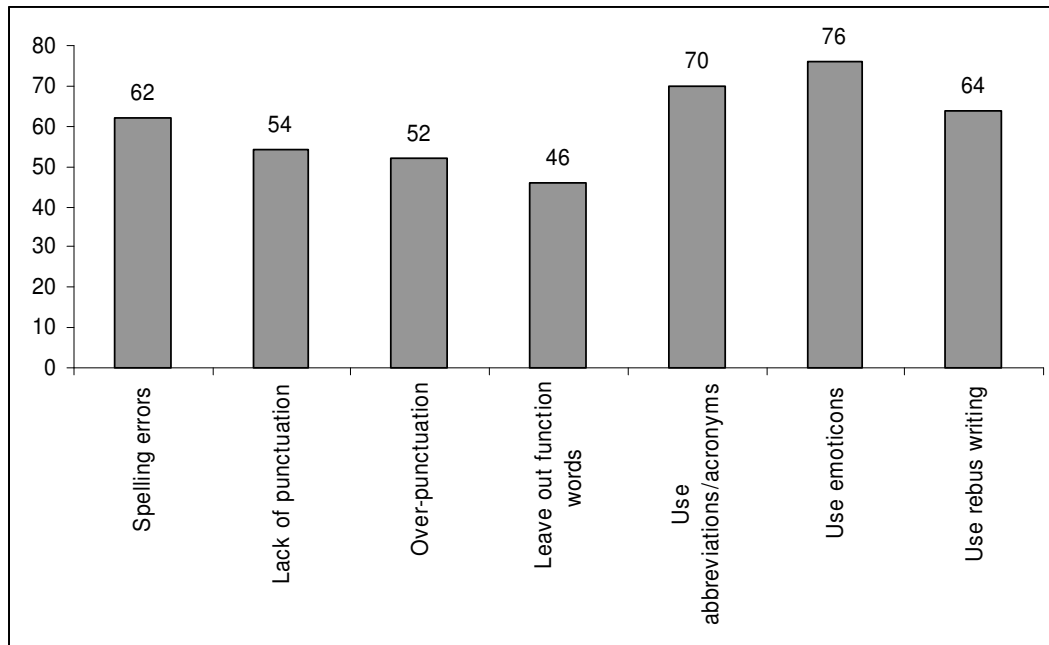
Number of participants reporting the reason	Talk to friends	Get information	Make arrangements	Boredom	Cost effective	Keep in touch	Improve knowledge	Easy to use	Fast	Emergencies	Enter competitions
L1	32* (62%)	26 (50%)	24 (47%)	4 (7%)	17 (33%)	23 (45%)	1 (2%)	8 (15%)	4 (7%)	6 (11%)	2 (4%)
L2	30 (81%)	30 (81%)	13 (35%)	6 (16%)	10 (27%)	12 (32%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

5.1.3 Features of SMS speak reportedly used in SMS and MXit messages

In order to test the first prediction of Hypothesis 3, participants were given a list of features of SMS speak and asked to indicate which features they made use of when on MXit or when they sent SMSes. As can be seen in Graph 2, emoticons were found to be the most used feature in SMSes and on MXit; 76 of the 88 participants reported using this feature. It could be that these emoticons are used repeatedly because teenagers are expressive and want to convey emotions and facial features, not just typed letters, when communicating. Emoticons are a convenient way to express feelings, emotions and tone that are lost in the presence of text-only communication. They also take up less space in an SMS than a description of one's emotions would. If one were to attempt to explain an emotion like

sadness, it would take up more time and space than the emoticon ☹, which also takes less time to type than *I feel sad*.



Graph 2: Self-reported features of SMS speak used in SMSes of all participants

As can also be seen from Graph 2, most of the participants (70 of the 88) reported that they use abbreviations and acronyms in their SMSes or when on MXit, allowing them more typing space to convey their message. The fourth most commonly used feature of SMS speak, after the use of rebus writing, was (deliberate) incorrect spelling, reported by 64 participants. This can be linked to the fact that SMSes have space for only a limited number of characters, therefore SMS users will deliberately misspell a word if the incorrect spelling renders a shorter, but still comprehensible, version of the correctly spelled word. These self-reported features of SMS speak serve to prove the first prediction of Hypothesis 3 to be accurate: the participants of this study use most, if not all, of the identified features of SMS speak. Further analysis of the data collected will reveal whether these regularly used features can, as a consequence, also be found in the samples of written

work that the participants have produced, i.e., whether the second prediction of Hypothesis 3 is also accurate.

In Table 4, the two grade groups are compared in terms of their self-reported use of features of SMS speak. The results in this table indicate that the most commonly used feature of SMS speak in grade 8 participants' SMSes is also the most commonly used feature in grade 11 participants', namely emoticons. The grade 8s reported using rebus writing, emoticons, abbreviations and acronyms, and incorrect spelling more than the grade 11s. A possible reason for this could be that the grade 11s are more established in the way in which they use SMS speak and, therefore, make less effort to find creative ways of using emoticons and rebus writing than do the grade 8s.

Table 4: Self-reported features of SMS speak, per grade group

Number of participants reporting the feature	Spelling errors	Lack of punctuation	Over-punctuation	Leave out function words	Use abbreviations or acronyms	Emoticons	Rebus writing
Grade 8	34* (79%)	29 (67%)	25 (58%)	23 (53%)	37 (86%)	37 (86%)	33 (76%)
Grade 11	28 (62%)	25 (55%)	27 (60%)	23 (51%)	33 (73%)	39 (86%)	31 (68%)

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

The results support Hypothesis 4, namely that grade 11 learners use fewer features of SMS speak in their SMSes than do grade 8 learners. Table 5 compares the two language groups in terms of their self-reported use of SMS features.

Table 5: Self-reported features of SMS, per language group

Number of participants reporting the feature	Spelling errors	Lack of punctuation	Over-punctuation	Leave out function words	Use abbreviations or acronyms	Emoticons	Rebus writing
L1	35* (68%)	31 (60%)	29 (56%)	20 (39%)	42 (82%)	46 (90%)	39 (76%)
L2	27 (72%)	23 (62%)	23 (62%)	26 (70%)	28 (75%)	30 (81%)	25 (67%)

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

As indicated in this table, the L1 speakers of English are more inclined to make use of certain SMS speak features than the L2 speakers are, and vice versa. The use of deliberate spelling errors, lack of punctuation and over-punctuations were used to a comparable extent by the two language groups; more L2 participants omitted function words; and more L1 participants made use of abbreviations and acronyms, emoticons and rebus writing.

In a recent study by Weimers (2008:21), it was suggested that Afrikaans-speaking users of SMS were not able to make use of the same features of SMS speak as English speakers; in particular, the Afrikaans-speaking users were less likely to use rebus writing, as very few letter/number words in Afrikaans have a similar phonetic sound. For instance, in English, the pronunciation of *four* is the same as that of *for*, and therefore the number 4 can be used to replace the word *for* when trying to save space in a SMS. However, in Afrikaans, the pronunciation of *vier* differs significantly from that of *vir* (“for”), and therefore the number 4 cannot be used instead of the Afrikaans word for *for*.

To a certain extent, the results of this study support this explanation given by Weimers (2008:21), as the English L2 participants made less use of rebus writing than the English

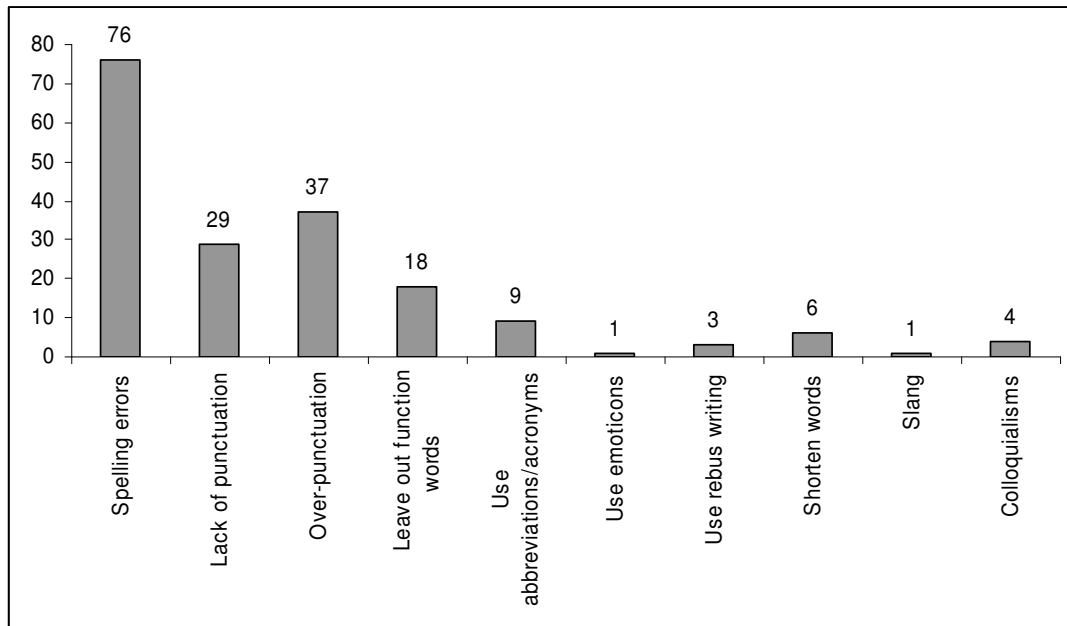
L1 participants. However, in general, the first prediction of Hypothesis 5 – that the L1 English learners will use more features of SMS speak in their SMSes than the L2 English learners – is at least partially supported by the data.

5.1.4 Learners' perceptions regarding the presence of SMS features in their formal writing

The majority of the participants (51 of the total 88) did not believe that SMSing and MXit affected the language used in their written work. Those participants who believed that SMSing had an effect on their written work were asked to give specific examples. Participants admitted that they struggled with correct spelling, made use of abbreviations and acronyms, as well as shortened words. In the next section, the results of the analysis of the participants' written work will be discussed, indicating that these (and other) features did indeed occur in the formal written English of the participants.

5.2 Analysis and discussion of the learner's written work

Graph 3 indicates the non-standard features of English that were identified in the samples of written work of the participants, and the number of samples in which each of these features were identified. The samples of written work were analysed for the previously identified features of SMS speak; however, during this analysis, there was a significant presence of extra features of SMS speak that were not previously specified in the questionnaire (or reported in the literature). Graph 3, therefore, includes three additional features, namely slang, colloquialisms and shortening of words.



Graph 3: Features of SMS speak identified in the samples of written work for all participants

The most common feature of non-standard English was incorrect spelling: both grade groups and both language groups (76 of the 88 participants) produced many examples of spelling errors, including *grabed* (for *grabbed*), *wether* (for *whether*), *alot* (for *a lot*), *begginer* (for *beginner*) and *priveledged* (for *privileged*). The first three examples of incorrect spelling presented here might represent one of the additional features of SMS speak, namely shortening of words. The last two examples are more than likely spelling errors unrelated to SMS speak.

The excessive use of punctuation was the second most prevalent feature of SMS speak in the samples of written work, with 37 of the 88 samples including, for example, *!!!* as in *Boof!!!*, or ... as in *Then, I realised that it was ... dark!* Many examples of incorrect use or lack of punctuation were found (in 29 of the participants' written work), especially the lack of apostrophes. The following serve as examples of words that lack apostrophes:

thats where the problem started, it wont be much fun and up and over Sir Lowrys Pass.

The examples of lack of punctuation, such as question marks, full stops and commas include *What is it about., keep a fire extinguisher at hand* and *When like we're used to the lights went out!*. Apart from being omitted, commas were also frequently used incorrectly, as shown in the following example: *I went outside just to check but, I couldn't see them.*

There were very few examples of emoticons or rebus writing found in the samples of written work. One participant made use of emoticons, for example drawing a smiley face at the end of a section of written work, and another participant used the number 2 instead of the word *to* in a sentence: *Character reacting 2 others.*

In addition, there were a significant number of examples of shortening of words, although this feature was used by only 6 of the 88 participants. For example, one participant wrote *I need ur advice* and another wrote *cause her dad rides too fast for me* and *It felt like a earthquake.* Other participants provided examples of slang and colloquialisms (used by 1 and 4 of the 88 participants, respectively), as seen in the following examples: *we had the munchies* (where the standard English version would be *we were very hungry*) and *I also have two bunnies* (where the standard English version would be *I have two rabbits*).

The results found in Table 6 show a distinct difference in the analysis of written work between the grade 8 participants and the grade 11 participants. The written work of significantly more grade 8s than grade 11s contained features of non-standard English, as predicted by Hypothesis 4.

Table 6: Features of SMS speak found in samples of written work, per grade group

	Spelling errors	Lack of punctuation	Over punctuation	Leave out function words	Use abbreviations or acronyms	Emoticons	Rebus writing	Shorten words	Slang	Colloquialisms
Grade 8s										
No. of samples containing the error	39* (91%)	29 (67%)	36 (83%)	18 (41%)	9 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (13%)	1 (2%)	4 (9%)
Total number of errors	135	27	35	5	7	0	0	14	1	4
Grade 11s										
No. of samples containing the error	37 (82%)	15 (33%)	11 (24%)	14 (31%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Total number of errors	140	34	18	29	4	1	1	2	2	0

*Note. Multiple features of SMS speak could occur in the sample of written work of any one participant, therefore the frequency counts and percentages given in each cell in this table are independent of those in other cells.

As can be seen from Table 6, each of the features of SMS speak that were identified, were used by more grade 8 participants than grade 11 participants in their written work, with the exceptions of emoticons and rebus writing which were used more by grade 11s. Three times more grade 8s than grade 11s used abbreviations and acronyms, and the written work of the grade 8s showed a far larger collection of over-punctuation and lack of punctuation than that of the grade 11s. Also, more grade 8 participants than grade 11 participants produced spelling errors. These results found in Table 6 are supported by those on self-

reported use of SMS features in SMS or MXit messages: collectively these two sets of results showed that the grade 8 participants report using more features of SMS speak in their SMSes and that there are more features of SMS speak found in their written work. Hypothesis 4 – which predicted that grade 11 learners will use fewer features of SMS speak than the grade 8 learners in their SMSes and, therefore, also in their written work – was thus fully borne out by the data.

This might be due to the amount of time spent in the school system: grade 11 learners have had more exposure to the standards of high school English than the grade 8 learners and are therefore possibly more accomplished in their ability to switch between the formal language of school work and the language of SMS. However, it is significant to note that the grade 11 learners reported more frequency of SMS usage than the grade 8 participants, as discussed in the results of Table 1. This could be explained in terms of fluency or adaptability in style-shifting techniques: the grade 11 participants have had more exposure to SMSing but also more exposure to the school system than the grade 8 participants. The fact that the grade 11 participants' written work showed fewer examples of SMS features than that of the grade 8 participants means that the grade 11s are more competent than the grade 8s in switching between the formally approved English of the education system and the SMS speak used in SMSes and on MXit; the grade 11s, more so than the grade 8s, have learnt when it is appropriate to use these different variations of English.

Comparing the two language groups, more L1 participants than L2 participants made use of non-standard features of English in their written work, as can be seen in Table 7. This general result supports Hypothesis 5.

Table 7: Features of SMS speak found in samples of written work, per language group

Number of learners making the error	Spelling errors	Lack of punctuation	Over punctuation	Leave out function words	Use abbreviations or acronyms	Emoticons	Rebus writing	Shorten words	Slang	Colloquialisms
L1 English										
No. of samples containing the error	44* (86%)	17 (33%)	24 (47%)	16 (31%)	7 (13%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)	3 (5%)
Total number of errors	121	33	30	29	8	1	0	13	2	3
L2 English										
No. of samples containing the error	32 (86%)	12 (32%)	13 (35%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Total number of errors	138	28	23	5	3	0	1	2	1	1

*Note. Multiple features of SMS speak could occur in the sample of written work of any one participant, therefore the frequency counts and percentages given in each cell in this table are independent of those in other cells.

Only in the case of word shortening and rebus writing did more L2 participants than L1 participants use the SMS features. The result concerning rebus writing is unexpected, given (i) that Weimers (2008:21) stated that Afrikaans lends itself less to rebus writing than does English (and therefore the L2 participants may have less experience with this SMS feature) and (ii) that the L2 participants reported less rebus writing in their SMSes than did the L1 participants. In terms of spelling errors, lack of punctuation, and use of

emoticons, slang and colloquialisms, the two language groups had comparable results. However, over-punctuation, lack of function words, and use of abbreviations and acronyms occurred in more of the L1 speakers' samples than L2 speakers' samples. This might be because the L2 participants find writing in their L2 more laborious than do the L1 participants. The L2 participants could therefore be paying more careful attention to what they are trying to convey and to how they are formulating it, whereas writing in English is more "automatic" for the L1 participants and therefore SMS features "slip" into their language more easily than into that of the L2 participants'. Furthermore, as shown in Table 5, the L2 participants reported using fewer features of SMS speak in their SMSes than did the L1 participants. If the L2 participants do not use as many features of SMS speak when they use MXit or SMSes, then it is reasonable to expect that they would be less likely to produce these features of SMS speak in their written work.

It should furthermore be noted that the samples of written work produced by the L2 participants in this study may have been influenced by factors pertaining to transfer and/or interlanguage. The latter is defined by Ellis (1985:42) as "the systematic knowledge of language which is independent of both the learner's L1 and the L2 system he is trying to learn". The written work of the L2 participants revealed evidence of their L1 (Afrikaans) influencing their English. For instance, one L2 participant wrote *we were busy watching this really nice movie*, in which the direct translation of the Afrikaans phrase *was besig om* occurs. Some incorrect uses of English in the written work of the L2 participants share similar features to SMS speak, such as certain spelling errors (e.g., *welcom*), shortening of words (e.g., *opend* or *ur*), and omission of function words (as in *When you healthy you feel great*). Therefore, it may be that some of the non-standard features of English found in the L2 learners' written work could be attributed to either language transfer or the influence of SMS speak.

5.3 Analysis and discussion of the Teacher's Questionnaires

Table 8 provides an overview of the responses of the seven teachers who completed the questionnaire devised for the teachers of the learners who participated in this study. The table provides information on the number of years of teaching experience, the subject that each teacher is responsible for teaching, as well as the number of learners and the grades of these learners.

Table 8: The Questionnaires for Teachers

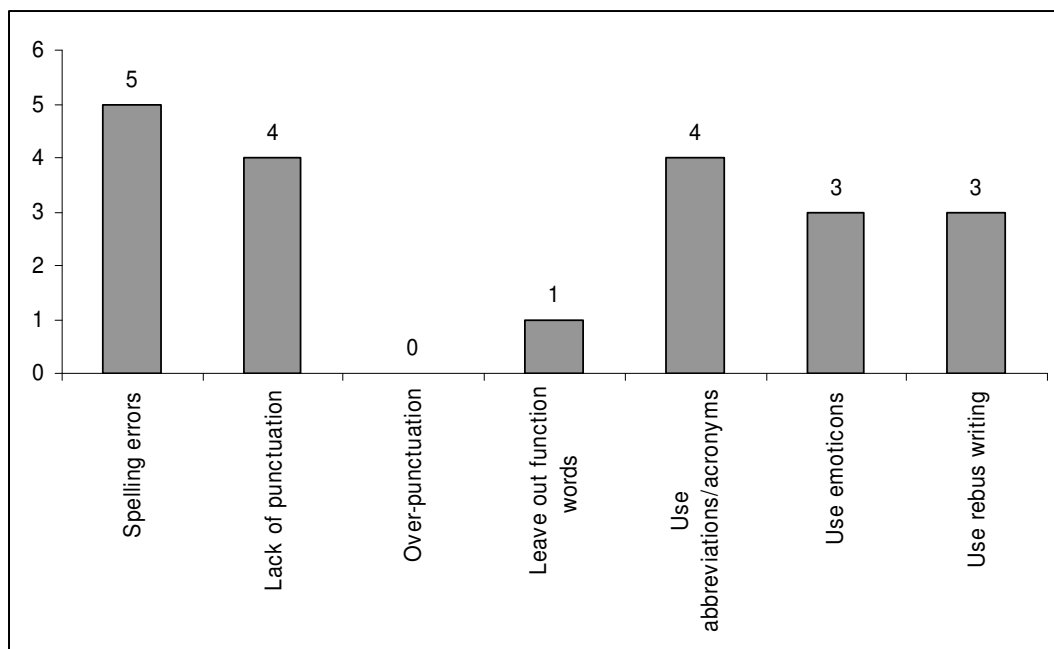
Teacher	Ms P	Ms. S	Ms. M	Mr. V	Ms. R	Ms. P	Mr. K
Years of experience	35	33	22	20	26	20	20
Teaching subject/s	English	Afrikaans	Afrikaans	Design and Visual Arts and Technology	EMS, Accounting and Business Studies	Mathematics	Natural Science and Life Science
Number of learners	159	150	95	208	159	150	126
Grades	8-12	8-12	9, 11 and 12	8-12	8-12	9-12	9-12

All of these teachers have careers that span more than two decades, which means that they had been teaching since the initial stages of the so-called technological revolution and from before the age of cellphone technology. All seven teachers have classes with grade 11 learners, and four of the seven have contact with grade 8 classes.

The majority (five) of the teachers reported that they have observed significant changes in the written work of learners since the increased ownership and use of cellphones. Two of the three language teachers acknowledged such a change in the language used by learners, and three of the four teachers that teach subjects other than a language.

Graph 4 indicates which features of SMS speak have been noticed by the teachers in the

written work of their learners. This correlates with the learners' self-reported features of SMS speak and with the features of SMS speak found in the written work of the learners: spelling errors are the dominant feature of SMS speak, with lack of punctuation and the use of abbreviations and acronyms slightly less prevalent. According to the teachers, rebus writing and emoticons were notable features of the written work of learners, even though these had a low incidence in the written samples analysed for the purposes of this study. None of the teachers cited over-punctuation, as a feature of SMS speak, being present in the written work of their learners, even though this feature occurred in the written work of both grade groups and both language groups. So it was likely a problem before SMS speak.



Graph 4: Reported features of SMS speak found by teachers in written work

The final question for the teachers asked for examples of explicit measures undertaken to combat the use of SMS speak in the written work of learners. The English language teacher said, "Learners are penalised for using inappropriate register", but did not specify how, or how severely, learners are penalised. Both Afrikaans language teachers said that

they did not carry out any specific action against the use of SMS speak; one of them said that she merely corrects the errors. The Design and Visual Arts teacher stated, “I don’t mark work presented in that manner”, and the other three teachers said that they do not use any approach when dealing with SMS speak in their written work; one commented, “It does not really apply to my subject”.

It would appear that some teachers prefer to leave any type of language “policing” to the language teachers. Three of the four teachers who did not teach a language subject did not take any explicit measures to combat SMS speak in the written work of their learners. Of the language teachers, only the English language teacher had a strong inclination to take measures against the presence of SMS speak in her learners’ written work. The Afrikaans language teachers said that their learners use features of SMS speak in their written work, but they either did not believe in penalising learners for non-standard features of language, or they did not want to concern themselves with this problem. The Afrikaans language teacher, who reported that she corrects all the mistakes, failed to report whether she deducts marks or penalises the learners in any other way.

The analysis of the samples of written work showed several examples of features of SMS speak, as also reported by the majority of the teacher participants. However, the majority of the teachers involved in this study also admitted that they were not involved with or interested in correcting the learners when language was used improperly. One of the reasons for this lack of action on the part of the teachers could be that many of these examples, such as spelling errors and incorrect use of punctuation, could merely be (or could possibly be perceived to be by the teachers) the result of poor use of written language, in general, and thus not necessarily because of the influence of SMS speak.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that high school learners are avid users of SMS and/or MXit, for a number of reasons which provide significant motivation for the frequent use of these cellphone based communication systems. All the participants reported to using features of SMS speak in their SMSes, and many reported using SMS speak in their written school work.

It was surprising to find that, given the amount of exposure to SMS speak and the amount of time compiling SMS or MXit messages, the samples of written work did not contain a far greater number of incidences of SMS speak features. It seems that the general lack of SMS speak in the written work of these learners is a result of being able to assess when it is and is not appropriate to use a certain variety of language. These learners are proficient in SMS speak and use it when chatting to friends on MXit, but they can produce written work that adheres to the formally approved standards of written high school English.

However, a number of SMS speak features were discovered in their formal written work which indicated that SMS speak indeed had some impact on the written work of the learners, which could in turn be attributed to the high frequency of SMS usage. However, not all of the non-standard features of English could necessarily be attributed to the influence of SMS speak; many of these features could merely be evidence of problems applying formally-taught rules of English usage which have always been noted among high school learners.

One of the shortcomings of this study was discovered after the data had been collected: the Afrikaans-speaking learners had not been asked to specify the language used to SMS or MXit. The results showed that L2 learners used fewer features of SMS speak in their written work. This could be because the L2 learners SMS in Afrikaans, and therefore use fewer of the features of SMS speak than L1 learners when writing in English. In order to establish whether this is indeed the case, future studies with bilingual SMS users should ask specific questions about the languages used during SMSing as well as about the patterns of use of these languages. This would also indicate whether different language groups of SMS or MXit users have strong language preferences: do people mostly SMS in their mother tongue or in their L2, do they use a mixture of both, or does the language choice depend on the situation or on which language has the shortest word for a particular concept?

To conclude: Judging by the results of this study, there is little need for concern about the future of standard written English. As Thurlow et al. (2004:124) explain, “Standard English may be the agreed norm for writing a college essay or a business letter, it’s by no means the norm when speaking on the street – no one really speaks like they write! The internet is just one of many factors influencing the way language is changing.” Language change will continue to take place; it always has. Yet, with every major advancement in communication technology, there are those who bemoan the effect on language use. As Crystal (2004:81) observes, the present day concerns surrounding SMS speak are not new: “The apparent lack of respect for the traditional rules of the written language has horrified some observers, who see in the development an ominous sign of deterioration in standards. Text-messaging is often cited as a particular problem. Children in the future will no longer be able to spell, it is said. However, the fact that youngsters abbreviate words in text-

messaging using rebus techniques (*b4*, *CUI8er*), initialisms (*afaik* ‘as far as I know’, *imho* ‘in my humble opinion’) or respelling (*thx* ‘thanks’) is hardly new or fundamental. People have been using initialisms for generations (*ttfn*, *asap*, *fyi*) and rebus games have long been found in word-puzzle books.”

Crystal (2004:81) furthermore states that it is the responsibility of educators to impart knowledge and a sense of responsibility to their students, with regards to appropriate use of language. This seems to be the crux of the matter: SMS speak is informal and deviates from the standardised system that is formally taught in schools; however, adolescents, although very proficient in SMS speak, have during their time in the school system acquired a sensitivity towards different varieties of the languages which they speak, and appear able to gauge the appropriate use of language in formal situations.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire for Learners

Name

Grade

What is your home language?

Do you own a cellphone?

Do you have MIXIT on your phone?

How often do you SMS or use MIXIT?

- Daily
- A few times a week
- Hardly ever
- Never

How much time do you spend SMSing or on MIXIT a day?

- 0-1 hours a day
- 0-2 hours a day
- 0-3 hours a day
- 0-4 hours a day
- more than 4 hours a day

Give three reasons why you SMS:

1.
2.
3.

Do you think that SMSing or using MIXIT affects the way you write at school?

- Yes
- No

If you answered yes, in what way does it affect your written work?

.....

.....

Which of the following do you use when SMSing or on MIXIT:

- Don't worry about spelling (e.g. make spelling mistakes)
- Don't worry about punctuation (e.g. leave full stops and commas out)
- Use more punctuation than is necessary (e.g. use lots of exclamation marks)
- Leave out functional words (e.g.: the, a/an)
- Use (lots of) abbreviations and acronyms
(e.g. "LOL" for "laugh out loud"; "thx" instead of "thanks")
- Use smileys (e.g. :) or ☺
- Use letters or numbers to express the way a word or letter sounds (e.g.: "cu"; or "l8er")

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Teachers

Name:

How long have you been teaching?

Which grade/s do you teach?

Which subject/s do you teach?

How many learners do you teach?

How many of your students, would you say, have and use cellphones on a regular basis?

- All of them
- More than half the class
- Less than half the class
- None of them
- I have no idea

Have you noticed any change in the written language of learners since the increased use of cellphone and SMS technology?

- yes
- no

Which of the following features of written language have you noticed a change in?

- Spelling errors
- Lack of punctuation
- Over punctuation
- Lack of function words
- Abbreviations and Acronyms
- Rebus writing
- (using numbers to express the way a letter sounds (e.g.: l8er = later)
- Smileys (e.g. :) or ☺

In your opinion, does the use of SMS and MXIT have an effect on the written language of your learners? If so, how? If not, why not?

.....
.....

Do you take explicit measures to combat SMS language in your learner's written work? Please be specific.

.....
.....

Appendix C-1a: Sample of written work of an English L1 grade 8

Appendix C-1a: Sample of written work of an English L1 grade 8 participant (1)

6 Van Gogh Street
Macassar
7130
31 January 2008

Dear Mrs Renaar

My name is ^{AKA Nankie}. I'm currently in Grade 8 and attend Parel Valley High School. For the past 5 years, I attend a private school, "Infant Jesus" and transferred to Somerset West Primary to complete my Primary school career.

I'm extremely hard working and a perfectionist, down to the last hair on my body. I'm friendly and know to be very loyal. I have a great passion for dance, drama and music. I also entered a lot of dance competitions and came first every time. Strangely enough, I never took a dance lesson in my life, I just copy what I see and think is cool. I love to go out with friends and to have a good time. I never go anywhere without my cell phone.

What most people don't know is I'm very passionate and love deeply. I don't trust easily but when I gain yours, mine's automatically yours. I enjoy the outdoors especially camping, cycling and hiking.

I hope I can make my dreams a possibility at P.V

Yours sincerely

Sincere and expressive!

Appendix C-1b: Sample of written work of an English L1 grade 8 participant (2)

CHAPTER One

14
20 Mum 14/3

"POSTS HERE, Sue!" Mum called as she walked past my room.
 I looked out ^{of} my window and only caught the back of the post van zooming away. It was a lovely clear morning and the ^{water-painted} view from my bedroom was absolutely ² breath-taking. ~~It looks as though someone water paint it.~~

Although I ^{have} been living at home for a week now, I still ^{could not} get over this ^{amazing} views in the morning as I drew my curtains back. It was a great change from my old boarding school back in London.

"Be right down!" I called back, then went into my bathroom just to do some touch-ups before I left the room. I wasn't I any rush to go down stairs for all it was a week away before our tour and I wasn't at all too happy. ^{because} Two words; Kate Lee! Everyone ^{THINKS} thinks she's so amazing because he parents are extremely rich, and she thinks she owns the school and all the people in it!

I slicked some lip gloss on, fixed my hair and made a dash for down stairs. To my surprise, my older brother, Tristan was ^{gazing blankly} sitting there with a blank expression on his face "Mor...nin....!" he said is slow motion. I did the same and grabbed a seat, and planted myself next to him. "What-up?" I ask him. "Girls", he replied. "I giggled and said "Aij, Glory, what know, to much to handle?" "No! to little!" he said. I giggled at him and continued to eat my breakfast.

After that I excused myself from the table, and went to get my bus.

Appendix C-2a: Sample of written work of an English L1 grade 11 participant (1)

4. Farewell speech - neat

Goodmorning girls and boys. Today is a very sad day for me because ~~regrettedly~~ I have to leave this beautiful place and wonderful school to return home.

My six months here has been an amazing experience! This was my first trip out of my home land, South Africa and it has been remarkable.

To experience the French culture here has been enriching and everybody ~~here~~ has been so friendly and kind, ~~and~~ I've ^{made} friends with so many ~~of~~ ~~you~~ special people.

I would like to say thanks for your warm hospitality and to this school for making my time here as easy and enjoyable as possible. You as students should feel priviledged to attend this school.

I will definitely be returning and ~~I~~ would like to say thanks again. This has been a trip of a lifetime and I'll be taking many wonderful memories home with me. (147)

Appendix C-2b: Sample of written work of an English L1 grade 11 participant (2)

Yr: 11 & 1

English Home Language

7/7

12 May 2008

13
20

Instructions

Skateboarding is a fascinating hobby. Here are some instructions for easy skating:

- Buy a beginner/intermediate ~~skat~~ deck from a sports or skating store. Ensure that wheels, axles and grip tape are included.
- Apply safety guards before you skate. These include knee pads, elbow pads and a skateboarding/bicycle helmet.
- Ensure that you wear the applicable shoes when skating. (They must be able to withstand the rough grip tape.)
- Before you begin learning moves, jump on your skateboard and land on your feet. The position in which you land will be your usual starting position when you skate.
- Always keep your front foot on the board when pushing yourself.
- Whilst in motion you must keep your front foot firmly on the front screws, and your back foot at the edge of ~~your~~ ^{the} skateboard's tail. Apply equal weight on each leg and bend your knees.
- Master your own style of pushing and moving on your skateboard.

Appendix C-3a: Sample of written work of an English L2 grade 8 participant (1)

Narrative writing

Gr. 8a2.

1. And then the lights when out

5. The group had never seen anything like this before.

2. February 2003.

233 words...



~~It was~~

It's that time of the year again! Time for Friday, and every class must have a routine, and had to be practise!

When (like we're used to) the lights went out! Luckily we were walking to the front office.

luckily we were only walking to

When we walked past the 300 corridor, there was a white light. Like all nosy gr. 8 pupils, we just had to know what it was! It turned out to be the PV ghosts! It was a man with red eyes, white clothes and short hair. Next to him stood a woman with yellow eyes, a white dress and a bouquet.

Our group had never seen anything like it before! Then, suddenly the lights went off again, and when it went on the ghosts were gone! It was then that Stephan screamed terrified, "Let's get out of this place!" We ran outside. When we got there, we looked at the 300 corridor. There they stood, in one of the classrooms looking at us.

We all decided to call our parents. Just when we started to punch the numbers in our cellphones, the lights went off, then on again. This carried on for a good few minutes. The lights then stopped and switched on. At that time the ghosts were standing in the front office, staring at us!

We were so scared that we ran to the front gate and waited for our parents! I think neither of us slept that night!

none

Appendix C-3b: Sample of written work of an English L2 grade 8 participant (2)

Every morning, after I had ^{have} changed into my school uniform, I always pak my suitcase for school.

One morning, I had a good feeling about school. I got dressed and packed my suitcase. While I was packing in all my books that I ~~would~~ ^{will} need for the day, I looked at the time and I saw that I'm late.

I then started to hurry, and ~~that's~~ ^{was} where the problem started. I forgot to pak in my Afrikaans book.

When I got to school, I felt so positive for the day. In all the classes it went well (with me). The teachers were all very friendly and even my friend ^{was} as well.

But then it ^{happened} came, it was now time for the (afrikaans) period. I came into the class (still feeling very positive) went to my desk and sat down. Little did I know that in only a few seconds, I would be in great trouble.

My problem (now) started when the teacher asked us to take out our books. I opened my suitcase and started to search for my book. I could not find anything, but I

Appendix C-4b: Sample of written work of an English L2 grade 11 participant (2)

1142

Section B
Dialogue

4
~~3~~ gaps

Ruan Hi there Hans.

Hans Hello Ruan.

Ruan I need ur ^{your} advice.

Hans What is it about? ?

Ruan My mother.

Hans Ruan you can tell me.

Ruan My mother is always working so hard at home. she gets injured a lot.

Hans My friend, I hope you help your mother. What does she do at home? ?

Ruan Clean the house, wash dises ^{sl}, wash the clot ^{is} and iron it.

Hans That is clot of hard work for a lady.

Ruan I know and I am too clim lazy to help her. she is getting very old now. Her hands are hard and so dry.