

INFLUENCE OF SMS IN THE DAILY CONVERSATION OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN THE MULTICULTURAL MALAYSIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines and investigates the effects of Short Message Service (SMS) text patterns in terms of sociolinguistic aspect in the daily conversation among the Malaysian higher education students. It also reveals how Malaysian culture is symbolized in the SMS text. This research consists of quantitative approach on undergraduate students of Berjaya University College. 60 messages will be taken randomly from 30 cell phones and the perceptions of 20 Malay, 20 Chinese and 20 Indians undergraduates will be analysed from the distributed questionnaires. This study will analyse the encoded categories of linguistic features of SMS which are the length of SMS texts, abbreviation, emotions and languages used in the daily use of the SMSes to accomplish the objective of the study.

Keywords: *SMS, sociolinguistic, daily conversation, higher education students.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Going back to history, the first cellular phone service that ventured into Malaysia, the NMT 450 was introduced in the country in 1984 (Lee 2002). However, the market has since then been liberalized with an increase in the advancement of technologies for mobile communication resulting to a subsequent increase in the growth of leaps and bounds in the industry. From the discovery made by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) (2010), it was made known that the number of subscribers for mobile phone services in the country totals to 33.1 million. Being a country that has population of 28.4 million, such a figure for subscription is an indication that the penetration of mobile phone in the country comes at a whopping 116.6%, indicating that some people in the country are in the possession of more than one mobile phone. With respect to the numerous applications that are available in mobile phones, SMS is the most popular and widely adopted application with a total of 25.1 million users as of 2010, making up 75.8% of the total subscription in the same year (Allison, Wei and Sue 2011).

With reference to the research conducted by Barkhuus (2005), most of the users of this application are young adults who favour SMS because messages delivered through this medium are concise, and the application is capable of overshadowing the shyness that users

can have with respect to face-to-face conversation, making it an appropriate tool for social behaviour. Mante and Pires (2002) also conducted another study to understand why the application is very popular and their finding reveals that it is because of the fixed cost charged per SMS and because the service is much cheaper than calls. From the study, other factors were discussed in the form of the application's directness, since messages can easily be sent silently and received directly by the intended recipient.

On the side of communication and linguistics, studies have shown that the increasing popularity of SMS has led to a new and distinctive form of communication with respect to what is obtainable in the traditionally written and spoken pattern (Allison, Wei and Sue 2011), even though it is similar with some of the computer mediated communications (CMC) such as instant messaging, social networking, e-mails, blogs and website. Ling (2005) continued the analysis by labelling SMS language as a "trans-linguistics drag queen" due to the fact that it is made up of features in the form of both spoken and written languages. There is no doubting the fact that the characteristics of SMS is very unique considering that the messages are typed on a small keypad in the form and limited to 160 characters per SMS bag (Sagerstad, 2005). On the same hand, communications are written in a number of times per character as a result of the keypad holding numerous letters and symbols. Also, communications are normally made by scrolling to the next screen of the phone in order to access the entire message as a result of the limited size of the screen.

On the account of the limitations in the form of space and production time, communicators are always forced to try their best in order to increase their level of expression with the minimum amount of word possible (Bodomo, 2009; Balakrishnan & Yeow, 2008; Segerstad, 2005). This meant that Bodomo make a new proposal that SMS languages, "words, phrases and sentences need to be coded with minimum amount of symbols possible without forgoing the comprehensibility of the actual meaning presented (Bodomo, 2009). Grinter and Eldridge (2003) also presented their own view of the situation by noting that communicators are forced to shorten their messages by removing some letters in the actual spelling of words, making use of symbols and numbers to communicate their message, and adopting the normal standards for ad-hoc acronyms. Further researches were conducted by Mphahlele and Mashamaite (2005) with suggestions that SMS language will not have the right conformity with the rules of grammar, syntax and spelling rules obtainable in Standard English language.

Statement of Problem

Considering the increase in the popularity of SMS, researchers are amazed by how SMS languages can impact an individual's writing and communication skills (Bodomo, 2009; Freudenberg, 2009; Mphahlele & Mashamaite, 2005; Hamzah et al., 2009). Bodomo (2009) conduct a study based on the habits exhibited by SMS users, by putting into consideration the features of SMS language and how it impacts on a student's writing behaviour with settings in the Hong Kong based TelCU, the proposal made by the author for the analysis of Technology Conditioned Language and Literacy Change. On a similar ground, Freudenberg (2009) also conducted an analysis of the SMS behaviour of students with discovery that linked SMS to written works in the South African setting. Thurlow and Poff (2011) are not to be left out from this increase in interest and number of study geared towards understanding the influence of SMS in communication of students, as they laid down their own suggesting by stating that there cross-cultural differences amongst nations irrespective

of the features of SMS language with respect to written works such as abbreviation, homophones, and non-standard spelling and mode-mixings.

Studies in the Malaysian setting has shown that educators are now more concerned about the decline in the standard of written language as a result of students being more accustomed with colloquial English in their SMSs (Muniandy et al., 2010). With respect to the 2004 statement, the then Direct-General of Education in the country made attributes of the decline in performance for English paper in the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) to increase in popularity and adoption of SMS (Teh, 2004). It was found that numerous students' abbreviated words and phrases contained in their answers, and gave the back door for the normal English standards (Shafie et al, 2007). Identification was made by Hanzah et al. (2009) which show that SMS has impact on the written language in Putra University, Malaysia, through their study of how language is used in emails and how users have come to overcome the shortcomings of SMS as a means of communication. The indication made from their study is that languages are adapted creatively for the purpose of fulfilling the referenced needs in modern communication with the aim of reducing space, effort, cost and time on every communication tendered.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that this is a very serious issue as it is influencing not only the communication pattern of students negatively, but also their academic performance as they have become well accustomed with the SMS language and lost the understanding of standard English rules.

Purpose of Study

With respect to the research background and stated problems, the purpose of this research is to understand the influence yielded on communication by SMS in the Malaysian higher institutions and how these influenced differs with respect to ethnic diversity in the country. The inclusion of ethnic diversity is based on the revelation contained in the research background where it was noted that despite the common ground shared by SMS languages in terms of adopting shortened words, symbols and audio to communicate messages, there are differences amongst cultures. On that note, the objectives of this research are to:

1. Understand how SMS influences daily communication presented by students in Malaysian higher education.
2. Understand how these influences differ with respect to differences in ethnicity.
3. Measure these influence in terms of either negative or positive.

In order to achieve these research objectives, a number of questions will be asked in the form of:

1. Does SMS influences communication pattern of students in higher education in Malaysia?
2. Are there differences in terms of this influence with respect to ethnicity?
3. Are these influences positive or negative?

Motivation

From the discussion presented in the research problem, it was noted that the adoption of SMS is influence the academic performance of students with numerous cases of such discussed as to how the students have reverted to abbreviating their English grammar as is obtainable in SMS language, leading to poor English structure and as such increases chances of failure. This serves as the main motivation for this research, which is to understand the influence of SMS language in communication amongst students in higher institution and the best way to reduce such influence in order to create the right scene for increased performance in the academic setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understand the Influence of SMS on Communication amongst Students: A Background Analysis with Related Researches

The origin of SMS dates back to the 1980s when it was first implemented into the GSM standards for mobile phone as a replacement for pagers (Kopomaa, 2005). The main vision is that it would become an additional tool that businesses can make use of in order to send messages on rare occasions, which is similarity with the application of pages in a single phone number. The main reason for such is that messages are generally limited to 160 characters per message and mobile phone producers couldn't visualize anyone trying to type message with a twelve button keypad. In any case, their perceptions were proven wrong following the slow start of SMS transformation in the USA following an incredible subsidization of handsets, which basically made mobile phone affordable starting from the 1990s.

On a view from Finland, it was noted that SMS was even offered in the earlier stages on a cost free bases as a result of high competition amongst telephone providers in 1997 (Kopomaa, 2005). Somewhat similar cases were experienced in numerous countries as well in the sense that SMS where made available at a very low price compared with making calls, which meant that users quickly switched their attention towards the adoption of SMS and it enhanced the penetration of the application. Researchers have also presented argument in numerous cases that SMS is the main reason why teenager adopted mobile phones as opposed to voice calling (Ling, 2004). Other studies have also looked to understand why mobile phones (Ling, 2004) and text messaging easily penetrated the market (Grinter and Eldridge, 2001; Ito and Okabe, 2005).

On past account, studies related to SMS have often been given a broader scope to cover the use of mobile telephone, with these sties viewing SMS as a form of alternative to voice communication, instead of seeing it to be able to stand on its own. In any case, there are studies in the present time that have been well focused on understanding the use of "text-messaging." The book 'The Inside Text' (Harper et al., 2005) contains a vast study of SMS usage and design with respect to issues related to digital text communication on a broader sense. Most of these studies have concentrated their observation on teenagers. This makes this research significant because it broadens the scope by looking deeper into the field with focus on students in higher education (adolescents and adults), and as such increasing the study scope to an area that has received few attention in literatures.

No matter the age variation, there is a common finding in the literature which is that text messaging increases “ad-hoc” coordination (Brown, 2002; Jenson, 2005; Ling, 2004). Ling refers to this as a micro-coordination and views it to be how message are usually replied with respect to the situation that coordinates social life, not only for teenagers but for all users of the service (Ling, 2004). Another finding that has received high attention is that text messaging is used as a tool to eliminate being under surveillance or control over people’s affairs in the daily business and world settings (Elwood-Clayton, 2005; Grinter and Eldridge, 2001; Ito and Okabe, 2005). Considering the fact that the participants in this research are not subjected to any form of control, this issue becomes of no significance. In any case, there are findings those expectations from other people with respect to an issue influences the way people explore and response to such expectations.

With respect to the communication media, SMS is a “lean medium” in the sense that the messages are short and meant to deliver convey detailed information with abbreviated words and symbols. On that account, there is a need for uniform understanding to exist between users with respect to what the abbreviated words mean and results in the abbreviated words being primarily done by removing certain alphabets from a word or phrase but keeping the actual meaning of the word or phrase. For instance, “and” can be replaced with “nd” which is much understandable. Phrase like “see you” can be really shortened down to “c u,” providing the much needed space for the user to pass through a vast volume of information with few words.

Elwood-Clayton (2005) made known that while this is beneficial in the sense that large information can be transferred through a small medium in the form of shortened words and symbols. The disadvantage comes in the form of negative influence it yields on the users. As the users begin to internalize the process, they are bound to adopt it in their non SMS communications and it becomes very confusing as well as complicated to understand for the non-SMS users. On the academic ground, it is lacking in standard with respect to what is obtainable in language structure as discussed earlier and the implication is that the user is pushed into failing the course because the lecturer will mark it based on the low standard presented.

On that account, this paper looks to understand how the adoption SMS influence the communication pattern obtainable amongst Malaysian students in higher institutions with respect to the differences in the influence as a result of differences in ethnical background and spoken or written language in a multicultural Malaysian society.

RESEARCH METHOD

The strategy for this research will be an exploratory research method which is conducted in the form of an in-depth study with the responders. Exploratory research is a form of research which is designed to explore different aspects of the topic being studies. The word “exploratory” implies that it doesn’t focus on any general objective as to meeting some specified points, but instead it is diverse in its approach to review by offering the opportunity for researchers to understand different aspects of the study section and explore other areas that might have a direct influence on finding from the research.

For this research, the adopted strategy is an intercept-based study. The implication is that the students are intercepted during their class period and provided with the

questionnaire for them to usher in the best of their view in relation to questions asked. The basic criterion for making the response list is that respondents must be student and have experiences with SMS language as is obtainable in his or her own culture and language structures.

Survey

The survey consist 20 questions which are measured using a 5-point Likert's rating scale. The idea is to expand the question to cover numerous wings in the field of study and allow for a more detailed analysis of the finding to be gained from the study. Additionally, the 5-point rating (in the region of totally disagree (1) to totally agree (5)) will allow for a more precise response as compared with the "Yes" or "No" platform that tends to force respondents into accepting a specific response.

Data Collection

A total of 50 responses were gathered for the questionnaire and the respondents will be students in higher institutions as stated earlier. The reason for choosing students is to ensure that the respondents fall within the category of people that have been designed for this study as they are the only people capable of reflecting the research topic in the to the understanding of how SMS languages influences the communication pattern of students in Malaysia higher institutions. The data were gathered during break sessions following peak class hours in order to allow room for gathering the needed amount of data from the research process.

Data Analysis

All the gathered data were analysed using SPSS statistical analysis tool. This is the most commonly adopted tool for analysis in primary research and it has been proven to be reliable and effective in terms of analysing data gathered from a research. This main focus will be on understanding the descriptive variables as a mean of measuring the level of influence these variables yield.

Ethical consideration

In this form of research, a number of ethical issues can arise as the research can easily be influenced by the research in numerous ways. Some of these issues and how it was handled are as discussed below.

Persuasive Response

The research can easily persuade the respondents to present response in such a way that it influences the research outcome positively. In the case of this research, this is not the case as the researcher maintained a gap between the respondents' opinions and suggestions. The

researcher was only close to the respondents for the purpose of helping them understand the research and never influenced their response in any way.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Factors

In this section, the focus will be to understand the demographic features of the respondents

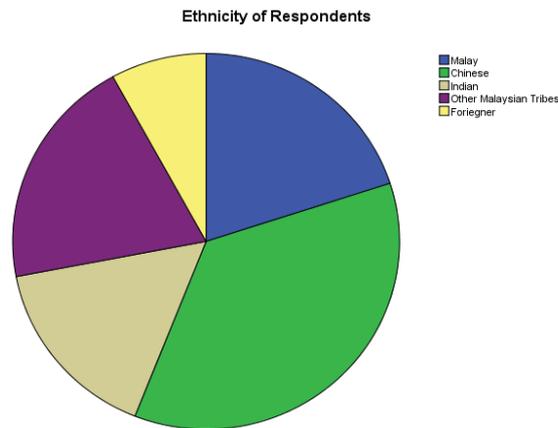


Figure 1: Ethnicity of Respondents

From the figure above, most of the respondents are Chinese, followed by Malays and other races in Malaysia, with Indian coming in as the fourth largest race of respondents and the foreigners ranking in as the least of respondents in terms of race.

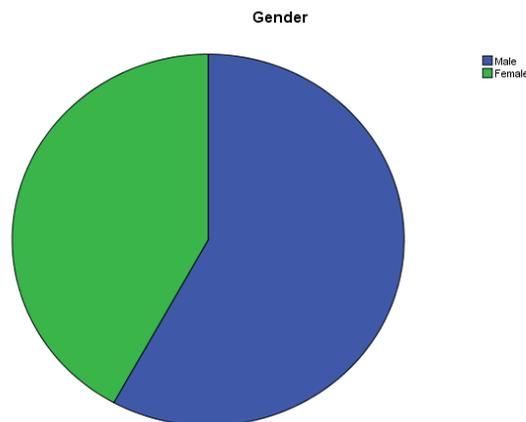


Figure 2: Gender of respondents

The second variable loaded in the research in terms of demographics of the respondents is their age and it can be seen from the above figure that male respondents make up the most of the response with female respondents falling in behind them.

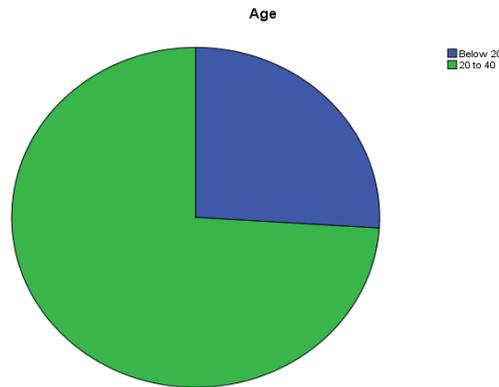


Figure 3: Age of respondents

Age is the third and final variable loaded in the study and it can be seen that most of the respondents are aged 20 years and above. The implication is that they are better positioned to understand the variables loaded in the research and as such influence the research outcome positively with their subsequent responses.

Frequency Analysis

Table 1: Do you frequently use SMS application?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	41	82.0	82.0	82.0
	NO	9	18.0	18.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

82% of the respondents agree that they frequently make use of SMS applications and this is very significant because the over variables that will be discussed below are based on the application, which means that the respondents are better positioned to contribute positively to the research.

Table 2: To whom do you normally use it to contact?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Friends	15	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Colleagues	8	16.0	16.0	46.0
	All of the above	27	54.0	54.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Most of the respondents (54%) agree that they use the SMS application to contact both their friends and colleagues, while the others agree to make use of the application for contacting only their friends (30%) and colleagues (8%) respectively.

Table 3: Are you aware of SMS slangs and shortcuts in your local dialects?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	47	94.0	94.0	94.0
	NO	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The understanding of SMS slang is another variable that was loaded in the research and the finding shows that 94% of the respondents are aware of SMS slangs in their local dialect, thus it influences the research positively because these respondents are better positioned to link SMS slangs to their daily conversation.

Table 4: What are the shortcuts normally made up with?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	abbreviated texts	18	36.0	36.0	36.0
	symbols	16	32.0	32.0	68.0
	images	4	8.0	8.0	76.0
	all of the above	12	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The indication here is that shortcuts can come in the form of abbreviated texts, symbols, images or a combination of all of the three or any of the three.

Table 5: The language pattern for SMS is different from the language pattern of my dialect

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	strongly agree	47	94.0	94.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

All the respondents agree that the language pattern of SMS is different from that of their dialects. The indication now becomes that the influence of SMS in their daily conversations can easily be detected as a result of differences in language pattern.

Table 6: There are differences in the SMS language pattern of my dialect compared with that of my friends from other ethnic groups

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	neutral	4	8.0	8.0	12.0
	agree	6	12.0	12.0	24.0
	strongly agree	38	76.0	76.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

88% of the respondents acknowledge that differences exist between the SMS language pattern of their dialect when compared with that of their friends' dialect, another 8% stated that they are not aware of these differences while the outstanding 4% disagrees with differences existing in the SMS pattern of their language and that of other people. The implication in that Malaysia has differences in terms of SMS language pattern when it comes to comparing different ethnicity in the multi-racial country.

Table 7: I can easily understand the SMS language of my friends even if they are from different ethnic groups

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	8	16.0	16.0	22.0
	agree	6	12.0	12.0	34.0
	strongly agree	33	66.0	66.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

78% of the respondents stated that they can easily understand the SMS language of their friends even when these friends come from different ethnic group. The understanding in this case is that irrespective of the differences in ethnic groups, there is a central language of communication (likely to be either Malay or English) in SMS.

Table 8: It is easier to understand the SMS language of people from my ethnic group than those from different ethnic group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	neutral	3	6.0	6.0	10.0
	agree	12	24.0	24.0	34.0
	strongly agree	33	66.0	66.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Irrespective of the indication from the table 7 above, the finding in table 8 shows that the respondents (90%) finding it easier to understand the SMS language of people from their

ethnic group than those from different ethnic group. This is understandable as there are differences in terms of language and communication pattern between people from different ethnic groups.

Table 9: I have internalized SMS language patterns and i can create new patterns by myself when the need arises

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	2	4.0	4.0	10.0
	Agree	8	16.0	16.0	26.0
	strongly agree	37	74.0	74.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

90% of the respondents agree to having internalized SMS language patterns and capable of creating new patterns themselves. Thus, it is expected that the pattern will continue to grow with new shortcuts coming in.

Table 10: The main reason why i use SMS languages is because it presents complex and long information in a very easy to understand and short form

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	2	4.0	4.0	10.0
	Agree	9	18.0	18.0	28.0
	strongly agree	36	72.0	72.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The above variable was loaded to understand the reason why people use SMS languages and the finding is that 90% of the respondents agree that they make use of the language because it enables them to rewrite complex messages and information in an easy to understand way.

Table 11: I do make use of the SMS language pattern in jotting down notes during class sections

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	1	2.0	2.0	8.0
	Agree	13	26.0	26.0	34.0
	strongly agree	33	66.0	66.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The influence of SMS on the academic performance of students was highlighted earlier on, and this influence is loaded in the primary research. The finding from this table shows that 88% of the students make use of SMS shortcuts in jotting down lecture notes.

Table 12: I do make the mistake of using SMS language pattern during my test and exams

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	12	24.0	24.0	24.0
	Agree	22	44.0	44.0	68.0
	strongly agree	16	32.0	32.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

76% of the respondents agree that they have made the mistake of using SMS language in their test or exams at some point in their academic life, with the outstanding 24% stating that they have not done such. The indication here is that the chances of SMS language influences academic performance negatively are high because people are likely to make use of it in exams and tests.

Table 13: Mistake of using SMS language pattern during tests of exams is done unconsciously

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Agree	24	48.0	48.0	54.0
	strongly agree	23	46.0	46.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

94% of the respondents agree that the mistake made by students in using SMS language in their exams is not done consciously as they would not like to intentionally influence their academic performance negatively.

Table 14: I understand the consequences of poor grammar in my test and exams

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	10.0
	neutral	4	8.0	8.0	18.0
	Agree	13	26.0	26.0	44.0
	strongly agree	28	56.0	56.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The table supports earlier indication that SMS use in exams and test are not done consciously with the indication made by 82% of the respondents acknowledging that they understand the consequences of making use of SMS language in their academic tests and exams.

Table 15: I have performed badly in my test and exams in some cases as a result of adoption SMS language in my test and exams

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	10	20.0	20.0	20.0
	disagree	4	8.0	8.0	28.0
	neutral	4	8.0	8.0	36.0
	Agree	9	18.0	18.0	54.0
	strongly agree	23	46.0	46.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The respondents also agree with earlier statement that SMS language influences the academic performance of students negatively as 64% of the respondents agree that their performance academically have been influenced to some extent by their adoption of SMS language for test and exams.

Table 16: It is not easy for SMS language to be eliminated in my daily communication and conversation with people in the digital platform

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	neutral	10	20.0	20.0	22.0
	Agree	8	16.0	16.0	38.0
	strongly agree	31	62.0	62.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

This variable was loaded to understand how SMS language pattern can be changed amongst the respondents and the response is not encouraging as 78% of the respondents agree that it will not be easy to eliminate the use of SMS language pattern in their daily conversation within the digital platform.

CONCLUSION

In the introductory stage of this paper, the purpose of the research was defined to be to gain an understanding of the influences of SMS language on the daily conversation of students in Malaysian higher institutions. The focus on higher institution was to determine if the influences has any impact on their academic performance and the form of impact it has.

Basically, it must be understood and emphasized at this stage that the research has been successful in the sense that the designed research objectives have been achieved. From

the primary research, it was found that SMS language communication is very common amongst students. From the finding, it was indicated that the respondents agree that SMS language influences their academic performance negatively. This is because the language pattern of SMS is different from what is obtainable in normal language settings. The respondents also proved that they are not conscious with their adoption of SMS language for communication and academic related purposes as they would not be doing so if they were actually conscious of their environment. On that account, it can be concluded that SMS language influences academic performance negatively and students are advised to reverse from such practices.

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