

No lol matter: Tween texting may lead to poor grammar skills

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(Phys.org) -- Text messaging may offer tweens a quick way to send notes to friends and family, but it could lead to declining language and grammar skills, according to researchers.

Tweens who frequently use language [adaptations](#) -- techspeak -- when they text performed poorly on a grammar test, said Drew Cingel, a former undergraduate student in communications, Penn State, and currently a [doctoral candidate](#) in media, technology and society, Northwestern University.

When tweens write in techspeak, they often use shortcuts, such as homophones, omissions of non-essential letters and initials, to quickly and efficiently compose a [text message](#).

"They may use a homophone, such as gr8 for great, or an initial, like, LOL for laugh out loud," said Cingel. "An example of an omission that tweens use when texting is spelling the word would, w-u-d."

Cingel, who worked with S. Shyam Sundar, Distinguished Professor of Communications and co-director of the Penn State's Media Effects Research Laboratory, said the use of these shortcuts may hinder a tween's ability to switch between techspeak and the normal rules of grammar.

Cingel gave [middle school students](#) in a central Pennsylvania school district a grammar assessment test. The researchers reviewed the test,

which was based on a ninth-grade grammar review, to ensure that all the students in the study had been taught the concepts.

The researchers, who report their findings in the current issue of *New Media & Society*, then passed out a survey that asked students to detail their texting habits, such as how many texts they send and receive, as well as their opinion on the importance of texting. The researchers also asked participants to note the number of adaptations in their last three sent and received text messages. Of the 542 surveys distributed, students completed and returned 228, or 42.1 percent.

"Overall, there is evidence of a decline in grammar scores based on the number of adaptations in sent text messages, controlling for age and grade," Cingel said.

Not only did frequent texting negatively predict the test results, but both sending and receiving text adaptations were associated with how poorly they performed on the test, according to Sundar.

"In other words, if you send your kid a lot of texts with word adaptations, then he or she will probably imitate it," Sundar said. "These adaptations could affect their off-line language skills that are important to language development and grammar skills, as well."

Typical punctuation and sentence structure shortcuts that tweens use during texting, such as avoiding capital letters and not using periods at the end of sentences, did not seem to affect their ability to use correct capitalization and punctuation on the tests, according to Sundar.

The researchers suggested that the tweens' natural desire to imitate friends and family, as well as their inability to switch back to proper grammar, may combine to influence the poor grammar choices they make in more formal writing.

Sundar said that the technology itself influences the use of language short cuts. Tweens typically compose their messages on mobile devices, like phones, that have small screens and keyboards.

"There is no question that technology is allowing more self-expression, as well as different forms of expression," said Sundar. "Cultures built around new technology can also lead to compromises of expression and these restrictions can become the norm."

Cingel, who started the study as a student in the Shreyer Honors College at Penn State, said the idea to investigate the effect of texting on grammar skills began after receiving texts from his young nieces.

"I received text messages from my two younger nieces that, for me, were incomprehensible," Cingel said. "I had to call them and ask them, 'what are you trying to tell me.' "

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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