2014

LOL MY THESIS: An Exploration of the Written and Oral Linguistic Effects of Text Messaging

Kristen Elizabeth Palasick

LOL MY THESIS: An Exploration of the Written and Oral Linguistic Effects of Text Messaging

By Kristen Elizabeth Palasick

A senior thesis and project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies

Advisors: Benjamin Smith and Thomas Porcello

Submitted April 29th, 2014

Table of Contents

Introduction: A Media Representation of Textese

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPPhPx6gcPc

[James Earl Jones and Malcolm McDowell dramatically re-enact Lizzy and Kim's phone call]
J: That last singer is a total Hottie McHotterson.
M: Obvi, he's amazeballs, he's like the hottest hottie that ever hottied.
J: And his smile is totes ADORBS!
M: Totes McGoats, it's cray-cray adorbs.
J: Totes. McGoats.

The YouTube video that you just watched is a commercial by cell phone company Sprint conceived as part of an ad campaign called "Sprint's Everything's Important". These commercials in this series show actors James Earl Jones and Malcolm McDowell dressed in tuxedos and performing dramatic stage readings of smartphone interactions. The purpose of the commercials is to show that people who use Sprint do not always have to use their cell phones for important conversations-- even an everyday commercial can become important when James Earl Jones and Malcolm McDowell read it.

Why is this commercial so funny? Or, if you didn't think it was funny, then why not? There has been a great deal of research done in communication theory on what makes us laugh and why. Obviously, it is beneficial to the advertiser, the company, and the audience to understand what is funny so that the audience can laugh. The causes of humor in this commercial are crucial to the central ideas of this thesis. There are many different theories about what is funny and why, but the focus of this project is the incongruity theory. This is the idea that what is funny is "what surprises [a person], is unexpected, or is odd in a nonthreatening way" (Meyer 311). This theory of humor

acknowledges our stereotypes about a certain subject and twists them just enough—"close enough to the norm to be non-
threatening, but different enough from the norm to be remarkable"—that it becomes funny (Meyer 311). The element of surprise is a factor in many types of humor, and this commercial is no exception. Every stereotype that we have about who uses cell phones in this way, how we feel about the cell phone as a medium, the formality of a conversation of this kind, and stereotypes we have about age and gender play into this commercial.

Even at first glance, the commercial mocks the informal and playful tone that Americans normally associate with texting by creating an intense and dark setting, much like the stage of a play. The two characters are dressed in tuxedos, again creating incongruity because we do not associate text messaging with standing onstage in a tuxedo, or, for that matter, formal communication in any way. It stands in stark contrast to the informal environment we picture when we think about texting. By having the characters on stage in tuxedos reading everyday text conversations, the advertisers make a simple text seem much more important than it is and is therefore funny (hence Sprint's "Everything is Important" campaign). Most text conversations are completely insignificant (consider this conversation, which is about a "Hottie McHotterson") and forgotten about almost immediately, so it is humorous to immortalize these conversations in such a formal way.

Even the actors chosen for this commercial, James Earl Jones and Malcolm McDowell, create humorous incongruity when reading Lizzy and Kim's phone call. Although this is a phone call, it exhibits many of the elements seen in text conversations. The actors are 83 and 70 years old, respectively, and aren't exactly the type that would

seem ‘tech-savvy.’ This commercial plays into stereotypes about gender, age, and race to flip our expectations about who texts. Since the commercial is titled “Lizzy and Kim’s phone call,” we might assume that the original callers are female, white, heterosexual, in their teens, or all of the above. With those expectations in mind, it is funny to see the call re-enacted by James Earl Jones and Malcolm McDowell, two people who are neither female nor teenagers. It is also humorous in an incongruous way for these men to be talking about a “hottie” when they are presumably straight and would not normally discuss such a topic, especially using the vocabulary that Lizzy and Kim use. This is another reason why the commercial might be considered humorous: this style of slang is not “standard” English in the traditional sense, and many consider it funny to mock this “fad” vocabulary.

Although we cannot hear Lizzy and Kim’s original conversation (it may have very well been concocted by advertising experts), we can predict that it was very different from the conversation with James Earl Jones and Malcolm McDowell. We can assume that a conversation with Lizzy and Kim would be lighthearted and informal, while the tone of the commercial was serious and formal. We could imagine the original conversation between Lizzy and Kim taking place in bedrooms while wearing pajamas, while the commercial takes place on a darkly lit stage with classical music playing in the background between men in tuxedos. Even the way the words are spoken would be different. It is clear that the men in the commercial are not comfortable with the new vocabulary and are somewhat deliberate and hesitant in their speech, while teenagers who use this “hip” vocabulary might be more peppy and well-versed in this style of slang. James Earl Jones was the voice of Darth Vader and has a distinctive deep voice that is

very different from that of a typical teenage girl. Thus, the original conversation becomes incongruous and therefore funny. Malcolm McDowell is British, while Lizzy and Kim are presumably American, which would create another incongruity. Even the way the conversation is presented is different from the original, which was over the phone. The commercial again flips our expectations by abandoning the cell phone and creating a dramatic new face-to-face conversation.

This commercial, although humorous, brings up several points that I would like to discuss further in the later chapters of this project. What is the purpose of the cell phone in Lizzy and Kim's call? What is the slang that they are using, and how is it related to phone conversations and text messages that we have? What are the stereotypes about new media, and are they accurate?

This essay is divided into four chapters to help analyze, understand, and answer these questions. I want to know how this new register of language called textese came to be what it is and why. In the first chapter, I take up the issue of the history of the cell phone. I explain the medium of the cell phone itself and how it has played a role in text messaging. I give a timeline beginning with the first text message and ending with the iPhone, and I discuss how each change in cell phone technology has affected text messages and textese. I also talk about the role of cell phone companies, cost, and the effect of commercial factors on textese as well.

Chapter two is about remediation and the effect of linguistic trends in older media that may also be used. I argue in this chapter that although viewing a text message written in textese may seem daunting, like being confronted with an entirely new language, if broken down into pieces, these linguistic elements are all rooted in older media. I discuss

previous linguistic trends from postcards, telegrams, letters, instant messages, and the effect of speech on text messaging linguistic trends. I begin to show a few of the many ways that written language can be used creatively through media.

Chapter three goes into the specifics about exactly what types of linguistic trends are occurring in text messaging according to linguists and what constitutes textese. I discuss a new idea that textese, rather than being a written language, may be a kind of vernacular literacy, as well as the various lexical shortenings that have been noted in textese. I discuss the many elements of orality in text messaging and how texters have been forced to be creative with language to substitute for elements that are lost in the absence of a face-to-face conversation. I also touch on the ideas of aesthetics in texting and possible problems with the data becoming outdated.

Chapter four consists of the results of a survey that I sent out to Vassar students to learn more about their texting habits. I asked them questions about textese, appropriateness, speech, and general cell phone data. I analyzed the results of the survey in comparison to the data from chapter three and found some surprising and interesting results. Vassar students are insightful about what they do with cell phones and texting and gave some great responses, which I graph and address.

Chapter One: The History of the Cell Phone

In this day and age, a person's cell phone is their lifeblood. We can hold our entire life in the palm of our hand with a smartphone: social media, email, weather, news, games, notes, and, most importantly, the ability to communicate with almost anyone from any place at any time. When smartphones constitute such a major part of our daily lives, we take them for granted. We forget that even just five years ago, cell phones were completely different from what they are now. Just twenty years ago, text messaging did not exist. Now, an entirely new language has formed as a result of this new media. Humans are good at adapting to the limitations that are given to them; therefore, as text messaging has evolved, linguistics have evolved to keep up. The way that texting language evolves is inherently and intricately tied to the medium itself.

When text messaging was first invented, nobody planned for it to become what it is today: a wildly popular form of communication available to almost everyone. It was originally developed for commercial reasons—to send messages via radio waves very cheaply. It was known as SMS (Short Messaging Service) because there were only a certain amount of characters that could fit in a message that could be passed over existing radio waves. A team of communications researchers including set the limit at 160 characters because it was the most that they could fit into one message, and many believed that that amount "provided enough space to communicate most thoughts" because "postcards often contained fewer than 150 characters" (Milian 2009).

The Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) then decided that text messaging could be useful for personal reasons, and development for making SMS

available through cellular phones began. Since the GSM regulates all mobile traffic and sets standards for all wireless companies, SMS became available on all networks at the same time. The first text message was sent in December 1992, and the first mass-produced cell phone with text messaging capabilities was released in 1993 (Crystal 2008B, Edwards 2009).

However, initial growth in the popularity of text messages was slow because users had to pay per text message and the billing was unorthodox. Texters who sent more messages than their plans allowed were charged massive fees. Initially, each message was priced at 20 to 25 cents each. Then plans that allotted 250, 500, and 1,000 texts per month appeared. There remained a problem, though—those whose activity exceeded the plans were still charged fees for every text sent over the limit, leaving many parents with massive cell phone bills. Nevertheless, as texting plans dropped in price and unlimited texting became available, the new medium of text messaging exploded (Crystal 2008A). In just one year, "world figures went from 17bn [texts] in 2000 to 250bn in 2001" (Crystal 2008A). Over a trillion text messages were sent in 2005, and one can only imagine how many are sent each day in the present.

As texting became increasingly popular, more and more texters complained about how cumbersome it was to send texts, and cell phone companies started to develop the technology of the cell phone. Progress was slow, but eventually cell phones that did not force users to spend large amounts of time sending texts appeared on the market. T9, a predictive texting invention, was the first step in this direction. In this system, the user still needed to push one button several times in order to type a specific letter, but T9

could predict the rest of a word based on a pattern of what popular words began with those first few letters.

If you typed in “aw” into your T9 cell phone, the letters “-esome” would probably pop up after the “aw,” hoping that you meant to say awesome when you started spelling out that word. This was meant to prevent the frustrating process of pushing 10 buttons to text one word. For the most part, it was successful, especially for longer words, which took large amounts of time to type. Unfortunately, it was not always correct at predicting what word someone intended to text. Sending a text message was still difficult, and many users still turned to the shortening of phrases and other linguistic techniques used before the invention of T9. Texters were still frustrated, and cell phone companies realized that T9 was not going to keep up in this whirlwind of text messaging popularity.

The first cell phone with a full QWERTY keyboard was released in 1997, but the popularity of these phones did not begin to rise until around 2002 (Edwards 2009). However, when they did finally catch on, keyboard cell phones exploded in popularity. Finally, there was no pushing the same button four times to create an “s.” Each letter had its own button, and the keyboard corresponded to the QWERTY keyboard with which so many people were already familiar. This innovation allowed texting to become much more accessible to many more people, especially those who were frustrated and confused by T9. Keyboard phones were also invented at a time when cell phone service providers were starting to become competitive over their texting plans. Text messaging was no longer extremely expensive, and cell phone plans that included larger numbers of text messages and even unlimited texting became available. Still, even with this easier keyboard phone, the 160-character limit existed. Texters were still forced to limit their

thoughts and use textese for issues of necessity. These changes to the technological medium made it possible to more efficiently use a broad range of orthographic practices (including, as we will see, both standard and non-standard forms of writing).

The evolution of texting saw a major leap with the invention of the iPhone in 2007. The QWERTY keyboard that was so popular was integrated into a touch screen design so that the keyboard did not add any extra bulk. The introduction of autocorrect (where the iPhone automatically changes a text to repair spelling and grammar mistakes) finally alleviated some of the frustration that came with typing many letters on a tiny cell phone. In a manner similar to T9, autocorrect detects when a word is spelled incorrectly and repairs it based on the idea that you might have tapped a wrong button or two that was in the same area as the letter you meant to push. It corrects grammar issues such as changing 'im' to 'I'm' and adding the apostrophe, and it nullifies the problem of larger fingers pressing two neighboring keys, turning 'in on mt wau' to 'I'm on my way" intuitively. Unfortunately, autocorrect sometimes changes a misspelled word to a completely different one that was not originally intended. This leads to some funny and sometime embarrassing word changes, hence the web site damnyouautocorrect.com. In addition, the iPhone dictionary is not updated on the latest slang or newest text speech, so if a user tries to type a word that is not in the iPhone dictionary, the iPhone tries to change the word you were actually trying to say into another, unrelated word. This technological innovation of autocorrect imposed standard orthographic writing practices onto its users, bringing an abrupt end to the moment in which the medium had afforded the creation of non-standard forms of writing. Those who enjoyed the new textese might have considered this a negative innovation, because many of the words used (lol, gr8,

ttyl) are not in the iPhone dictionary and were therefore "corrected." Linguistic freedom was unleashed in a certain respect with the introduction of autocorrect.

However, other aspects of the iPhone added to linguistic creativity. The introduction of a Japanese app called emoji allowed texters to add tiny pictures and faces to their texts. The 160-character limit no longer existed, and unlimited texting plans were common. iPhone users could even send free messages to other iPhones via the use of iMessage. A savvy iPhone user could program their iPhone not to use autocorrect at all, or they could force the iPhone dictionary to recognize certain abbreviated, shortened, or other textese words as legitimate words that would not be changed while sending a text.

While the digital age in the United States has introduced many different types of new media and technology, text messaging and the cell phone are one of the more salient ones to observe. So many people use their cell phones every day without fully understanding the linguistic impact of using (or not using) textese. It is a medium that is very rapidly changing with the amount of new cell phones introduced every year. I believe that the cell phone is important to study because it consolidates so many different forms of media into one device: a camera, maps, telephone, text messaging, email, video recorder, and mp3 player. The cell phone is a form of untethered communication, the first media that allows people to perform all of these tasks from anywhere with cell reception.

Chapter Two: Similar Linguistic Trends in Past Media

Although the evolution of the cell phone had a decisive impact on the linguistic aspect of texting, this "new" language that formed due to the introduction of the cell phone is not new at all. None of these techniques were invented because of text messaging. Textese is simply a medley of linguistic techniques used in the past that were revived due to their brevity. Conditions for the development of textese were perfect when text messaging emerged because these new linguistic techniques were already being used in established media such as chat rooms, instant messaging, emails, and blogs. Text messaging enhanced these ideas by allowing users with cell phones and texting plans to communicate with anyone in the country easily and cheaply. Conversations could now occur without face-to-face interaction from any location, and the mediums of postcards, letters, and photo calls became radically reconfigured.

Using new media as informal modes of communication using non-standard English has been occurring for hundreds of years. In fact, there are very few linguistic features of texting that are truly distinct from any other media, because "most of the features that give rise to critical comments today can also be found in other previous media and in earlier informal discourse" (Bergs 65). There has been backlash about text messaging from older adults, educators, and even news outlets about how texting is "destroying" the English language or keeping students from learning how to read and write in standard English (see Maltais, Humphrys, Irvine). The same complaints have been raised for many other new forms of media. There are usually two types of complaints that people raise regarding new media and language, the first and most common being that the new language patterns that are emerging are not correct because

they do not correspond to current rules of standard English. Some complain that language changes create "'wrong' use[s] of certain phonological, orthographic, grammatical, or lexical items" (Bergs 64). The other type of complaint is a moral one, that new registers or languages (such as textese) are morally wrong because they are not how one is "supposed" to treat language, and "usually deal with clarity of expression and ambiguous or misleading use of language" (Bergs 64). While Bergs points out these two main types of criticism, there has been a variety of criticism that fits into neither category regarding both text messaging and previous media.

Another type of criticism towards new media can be traced all the way back to the Middle Ages, when "silent reading" became popular. In a mostly oral culture where not everyone could read or write, it was expected that everything written down would be read aloud. As silent reading, or reading to oneself instead of out loud, gained popularity, many people became outraged. Instead of just complaints, there was a legitimate fear that silent reading "allowed for day-dreaming, for the danger of *accidie* – the sin of 'idleness' or the 19th century death sentence for the personal letter" (Bergs 64). Although these complaints are much more harsh than those against text messaging, it nevertheless shows that those opposing changes in new media have always existed, and that it is not a new phenomenon.

The Middle Ages may have also provided an ideological basis for texting in other ways, one of the most interesting being the orality of written text. Many have said that although text messaging is a written medium, it exhibits many characteristics of oral, or spoken, language (TED Talk by John McWhorter). We will go into detail about this in a later chapter, but it is interesting to note that reading in the Middle Ages was also a form

of orality in written text. When a text that is written down is meant to be read aloud, the writing style and linguistic features will be different than for a text that is meant to be "silently read." Although text messages are not necessarily meant to be read aloud, they exhibit many spoken characteristics, similar to in the Middle Ages, where "high levels of oral characteristics exhibited in a text seem to reflect the transformation of the written text into the acoustic sphere" (Soffer 1093-1094). When a work is written with the objective of later being spoken, it is crafted differently than one that is written to be read silently.

Other previous media may also have served as precedents for the "new" register of texting, which is not really new at all. In the early days of cell phones, texts were limited to 160 characters, and each text was fairly expensive. These short, expensive texts are very similar to other early media, such as postcards and telegrams. Telegrams were similar to early texts in that both were economically limiting. Early texters needed to choose between shortening their texts down to 160 characters and paying to write out a second text; those who wrote telegrams had to pay by the word and therefore also needed to be efficient with their language. We can study both telegrams and text messages to figure out the most essential parts of the English language. Bergs explains that telegrams, "in contrast to short messages, are principally not limited in the number of characters, but impose constraints on their use as their price depends on the number of words used. Therefore, we do not necessarily find misspellings and short forms, but rather modified syntactic structures" (Bergs 66). In other words, we find that "implied" parts of the English language that are not absolutely imperative to the conversation are discarded to save money. These non-essential linguistic features "mostly affects articles, personal and

possessive pronouns (mostly 'I'), auxiliaries and copula verbs, and prepositions…these are the same elements omitted in short message communication [aka text messaging]. The two media, although technically unrelated and used for different purposes…exhibit very similar linguistic structures and uses" (Bergs 66). No matter the medium being used, expert English speakers will shorten certain words and omit others, but will for the most part leave essential information. It is interesting to note that even though text messages now are no longer limited to 160 characters, these linguistic patterns of deletion still occur.

Telegrams and text messaging have a number of other linguistic features in common. A primary example of this is alphabetisms. This is a linguistic feature where a common word or phrase is shortened by taking the first letter of each word in the phrase and then turning those letters into a word. These "complex and opaque acronyms and alphabetisms…are by no means new and innovative as such. In fact, they have always been available to language users, even in formal writing: <etc.>, <NATO>, <RSVP>, <UAWG>…." (Bergs 65). The initial "invention"' of words such as LOL, BRB, LMAO, etc. may seem new and different to certain people, but in fact are nothing new at all. Even emoticons or ideograms, where a picture or visual aspect is used to represent a word or idea, are not a new invention. An expression as familiar as "xoxo" can be considered an ideogram, because the "x" looks like arms crossing to give a hug, and the "o" looks like a mouth before it gives a kiss. This "'x' representing a kiss or hug can be traced back to at least the 17th century" (Bergs 65). This concept is simply exaggerated in current day text messages. Emoticons and emojis like "☺," although they may seem new and different, are just variations on trends that been occurring in previous media.

Postcards also contain these sorts of ideograms, which add flair and personality. Many postcards, both from the past and from today, "often also contain small hand-drawn pictures or emoticons, such as hearts, smileys, and so on" (Bergs 67). Text messaging adopted this concept of ideograms with its use of emoticons. Therefore, postcards can be examined as another medium that may have influenced text messaging. The two are similar especially in their limits of space, which "impose sever restrictions on their users," forcing them to be more creative with language and choosing what is absolutely essential (Bergs 67). Whereas text messages were once limited to 160 characters, postcards are limited to a 4x6 inch area. Both media involve monetary parameters—users must contain their thoughts and words to the limitations given or face paying for another text message or a more expensive letter (the United States Postal Service has a specific "postcard price" set that is cheaper than mailing a letter). These media are also similar in that they are meant to convey an informal tone rather than a more formal tone such as an email or written letter in an envelope. Both seem to exhibit the characteristics of being "rather inexpensive and useful for brief, informal messages, such as birthday cards or holiday greetings" (Bergs 67). Because the two media are so similar, both display what researchers refer to as "proximity-related language use," which includes "contractions, short forms, nonstandard spelling, nonstandard linguistic structures and vocabulary (dialectal, sociolectal)" (Bergs 67). Text messages, postcards and early informal letters, all once exhibited "frequent orthographic 'errors,' jumbled syntax, and nonstandard morphology" (Bergs 67). While some criticize text messaging's "errors," these errors are not specific to texting and have occurred in past media.

Most theories about textese assume that these informal registers arising from media developed solely for reasons of convenience. However, there are also theories that a new register for text messaging may remain after the 160 character limit was eliminated and cell phone keyboards became easier to use. One theory postulates that this register may be used to create a secret code of sorts for teenagers to hide their conversations with friends from their parents. The linguistic trends and patterns may have also developed to create a kind of linguistic identity that allows a teenager to become enmeshed with a certain social group. Language can be used as a device to appear more culturally aware and "in the know." Yet again, this is not a new phenomenon that only occurs with text messaging. Registers such as Pig Latin "support a linguistic group identity and allow for private, 'secret' messages" just as textese does (Bergs 65). At the time when Pig Latin was popular, it was both a secret language and an identity marker for young adults, just as texting is today.

Although these previous media of telegrams, postcards, letters, and Pig Latin can explain many of the linguistic trends found in the text messaging register, the most significant influence on textese may have been a shift in society from analog to digital communication. The explosion in popularity of email, Internet and instant messaging gave rise to a new sense of connectedness that was only exaggerated with the invention of SMS. The practice of having a cell phone on one's person at all times has only expanded this digital society, and thus email and instant messaging have had an enormous influence on texting, both linguistically and culturally. IM (instant messaging) through a medium like AOL or MSN have been around longer than text messaging, and this is one of the first times that we see linguistic trends move from

traditional/physical/analog media such as telegrams and letters to the digital realm. Researchers agree that digital media such as Instant Messaging do use what are called "lexical shortenings (abbreviations, acronyms, and contractions)" in their registers, but that "this phenomenon is not new or exclusive to IM" (Quan Haase 37). Some of these shortenings, such as the ideograms and acronyms, were taken directly from older analog media and implemented in digital media. However, many of the "new" lexical shortenings used in instant messaging and other CMC (computer-mediated communication) came about because CMC used analog media as a *template* to create new, different, and innovative linguistic trends. Text messaging took the same idea by using CMC as a template for creating its own register and lexical shortenings. Now, both CMC and text messaging have created a "diversity of abbreviations used and innovativeness with which new types of abbreviations have been introduced" (Quan Haase 37).

Instant messaging can be seen as one of the most recent events in the timeline of the history of communication. It began with the written letter and postcards, which took days to send. Then came the telegram, which was faster, but still not instant. The next step in the path towards instant communication was the email, which could be written one second and delivered the next. However, it was still not expected that the email recipient would respond immediately or be at their computer at all times. Only with the start of instant messaging did true instant communication become popular; in contrast to email, instant messaging's "primary focus is the immediate delivery of messages" (Quan Haase 35). Two parties were expected to be sitting at their computer, responding immediately to each other. A person could set their instant messaging status to "online,"

meaning that they were currently at their computer and ready to engage in a conversation with another person. Features such as "away messages" on AIM (AOL Instant Messenger) allowed others to see when a person had stepped away from their computer and were therefore not offended when someone did not respond immediately. This is the first digital medium we see where communication is truly instant, as immediate and present as a face-to-face conversation. Even so, IM users were not expected to be at their computer every second of the day and could not instant message while away from their homes, libraries, offices, or anywhere else a computer may have been located. The laptop increased the ability to email and instant message anywhere, but it was still not the most convenient.

Only with the rise of smart phones and mobile internet did communication become as instantaneous and straightforward as a face-to-face conversation. Now, two people can use written language to communicate from opposite ends of the earth with ease. Texting can happen on the beach, at a concert, on a roller coaster, at church, in school, or anywhere else one could possibly imagine. Instant messaging is somewhat more limited than text messaging. Whereas instant messaging "is not equivalent to turn-taking in verbal communication, because thoughts 'in progress' are not visible to the other conversant," text messaging has changed that idea by introducing a "typing…" or ellipsis in a text messaging window on smartphones when the other conversant is crafting a new message (Quan Haase 43). This is yet another innovation in an exciting new digital medium that is as true to face-to-face conversation as possible, aside from the lack of physical presence.

Although text messaging may be more advanced than instant messaging in some regards, the two media are still extremely similar. Because they are both new and digital media, they share linguistic and technological similarities, suffer from the same criticisms, and excel in the same areas. Just like text messaging and the analog media that came before it, instant messaging "stresses speed, efficiency, and brevity….[and] simplifies written language, reducing complex ideas to their bare-bones skeletal structure" (Quan Haase 44). Using a specific register for instant messaging and text messaging other than for reasons of convenience also aligns with the earlier mentions of Pig Latin where the register might allow for users to seem 'hip' or 'cool' and integrate themselves into a certain group. Quan Haase explains that just as a genre of language like Pig Latin, "using non-standard English has meaning for IM users because it signals to others that the producer understands the particulars of the linguistic characteristics of IM, and therefore understands the IM culture" (Quan Haase 37). Whether this occurrence in text messaging was influenced by instant messaging or an earlier medium is difficult to determine, but it is interesting to note that language has been used for all kinds of reasons throughout history and these reasons have never been limited to convenience.

Instant messaging can be seen as a precursor to text messaging because of its unique potential to transform a lengthy, paragraph-style email into short bursts of text, or "message bubbles." Text messaging adopted this idea. Consequently, most text messages today are short, one-line messages lacking punctuation—a separate message is sent where a period might fall. Instant messaging was the first to implement this type of broken-up conversation, which "differentiates it from other forms of writing, such as essays and reports, where the text is usually long and there are no breaks in the statements" (Quan

Haase 47). This idea of two people turn-taking in a conversation, such as in text messaging and instant messaging, is called synchronous communication, which can occur in instant and text messaging because of this style of message sending. This "expect[ation] to consistently switch turns," another new idea that developed in instant messaging, may have influenced the same process in text messaging (Quan Haase 47). Because the conversant can respond to one idea at a time rather than to an entire long message, instant messages and texts are much more similar to face to face conversations than an older media like emails or letters.

However, IMs and texts are not face-to-face conversation, and because they are so similar to one another, they experience the same drawbacks. For example, in the course of both, you cannot see the other conversant physically, which leads to a number drawbacks. The lack of access to body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions are problems that every instant and text messenger must figure out how to address. Many aspects of face-to-face conversations are simply "no longer applicable because of the lack of physical presence" (Quan Haase 43). However, these conversation partners have become creative in using written language to make up for the lack of physical interaction. For example, in a face-to face conversation, one conversant knows to stop talking when the other is talking simultaneously. Conversations are not just two people shouting at each other without listening. But in a text or instant message, how can you know if another person is typing a response to your comment or changing the subject entirely? Even the ellipses that show that a conversant is typing in a smartphone texting app cannot show you exactly what words the person is typing.

In an attempt to remedy this issue, conversants make use of backchannel support in both instant messages and text message. This "adding [of] short reactions – 'yeah' and 'right' – to the conversation as it unfolds" serve the double purpose of allowing the conversant to continue with their story and reassuring the storyteller that the other is reading their messages, understanding, and participating in the conversation (Quan Haase 43). This is just one of the ways that both IMs and texts make up for "a lack of voice and nonverbal cues" and how conversation partners "use other techniques in IM exchanges to 'hold the floor'" (Quan Haase 43). Another issue with these newer media that do not usually occur with face-to-face conversations is undivided attention. When two people are conversing in person, they look at each other, and each focuses on what the other is saying. While on a computer, a person might be doing many different things while chatting with another person. With the rise of the cell phone as a multi-tool gadget, a texter might have several apps open while they are texting someone. A participant in an instant message or texting conversation may also be checking emails, playing a game, reading an article, petting their cat, listening to music, or watching a YouTube video while having a conversation, so the conversation participants constantly need to remind and reassure the other that they are reading and listening. Backchannel support is again useful in this regard because it helps to "sustain the attention of their interlocutors during an IM [or text] exchange" (Quan Haase 43).

The primary purpose of this chapter was to show that the backlash against the register of text messaging is not grounded in research, and to prove that "few, if any, of the features in SMS communication are genuinely new and that most of them can also be found in other, earlier and well-established means of communication" (Bergs 69).

Almost every linguistic pattern/trend/characteristic of the register of text messaging that has been criticized as "ruining" language is another iteration of a previous linguistic pattern that occurred in past media and has been remediated. This repetition of trends demonstrates both the importance of remediation and that however creative language may be, it probably existed in the past in some form and therefore should not worry anyone. If the standard version of English has been ruptured over and over in the past, this cyclical pattern with texting will not ruin the language either.

Chapter Three: The Linguistic Effects of Text Messaging

As we have seen in the previous chapter, this new genre, or register, of text messaging language (sometimes called 'textese') did not arise solely from the medium of the cell phone itself. It developed with respect to a combination of influences from various previous media in remediated forms; out of another new register created from the rise of internet culture, CMC (computer-mediated communication); and "Netspeak." Text messaging, however, is unique in its own right by virtue of its massive and sudden rise in popularity as well as how it has changed many aspects of communication and culture in the United States. The rise of texting has created medium-specific linguistic structures and vocabulary, a new register of speaking and writing mainly for young teenagers with age-specific vocabulary, and a reawakening in texters about how language can be used uniquely and creatively. We've talked about a few of these ways to make language more creative, especially with regard to lexical shortenings, but what, exactly, are lexical shortenings? What are the different types of lexical shortenings that exist? What are the exact linguistic trends that researchers believe are emerging in text messages? What is textese, and why does it exist?

Before I begin to describe the linguistic patterns that exist, I must mention a few caveats about the information presented. Much of the available data on linguistic trends in text messaging represent a limited demographic, usually English-speaking people in the United States. These patterns and trends should not be taken to represent worldwide linguistic patterns or to show that all groups of people text in the same way (see McIntosh). Due to the cost of cell phones and availability of cell towers, research regarding texting is automatically limited to those places where people have cell phones

and text frequently. One other caveat is that since the medium of the cell phone is still relatively new and technology is changing extremely rapidly, some of the data is outdated. As books and articles take significant time to be published, most of this research is from 2008/9. It doesn't seem like a long time, but in the lifetime of the cell phone, much has changed.

While older media, especially media such as telegrams and postcards, which were also limited by character limit/space issues and monetary issues, did in fact influence the way that we use text messaging today, many of the linguistic patterns developed in text messages were influenced by the medium of the cell phone itself. This new texting genre possibly may have been influenced by this initial limit on text messages of 160 characters, and cumbersome cell phones that were not optimized for texting quick but long messages. The first keyboard cell phone was not released until 1997, and the first cell phone designed for fans of text messaging (The T-Mobile Sidekick) was not available until 2002 (Edwards 2009). On phones that predated cell phones with keyboards, each button on the phone corresponded to several letters. Number 2 on the cell phone pad represented letters A, B, and C. Every time that a texter wanted to type a letter "C," they needed to press the button three times instead of just once with a cell phone that included a QWERTY keyboard. Typing one four-letter-word could take as many as sixteen button presses, and writing a complete thought was a "painstaking task" (Milian 2009). Phrases and words were shortened out of convenience and in order to keep under this 160-character count.

To cram as many words as possible into a 160-character text message using as few characters as necessary, texters were forced to make certain "more wide-ranging and

innovative" linguistic choices to retain the intelligibility of the message (Crystal 2008B). The shortness of the message lent itself to the new textese language, and longer, more thoughtful or complex messages were more likely to have a higher "amount of standard orthography" (Crystal 2008A). Some words lend themselves particularly well to becoming abbreviated, like the very commonly used words "you" and "be." "I need to give u this" and "I'll b late" can be easily understood without any prior knowledge of the texting language because they are simply changing the spelling of the words into the way that they are pronounced (a phenomenon called orality). In fact, none of the techniques used in text messages today are, as Crystal argues, "linguistically novel," as detailed in the previous chapter (Crystal 2008B). For example, the use of "b" and "u" as well as other uses of "single letters, numerals, and symbols to represent words or parts of words" are called rebuses, which have been used for hundreds of years (Crystal 2008A).

Quan Haase helpfully categorizes some of these linguistic trends into five types of abbreviations, including "homophonic spellings" (e.g. "u" for "you"), "truncated homophonic spellings" (e.g. "k" for "okay"), "borrowed shorthand" (e.g. "w" for "with"), "reduced spellings needing a gloss" (e.g. "ft" for "faint"), and "simplified but recognizable spellings" (e.g. "nite" for "night") (Quan Haase 38). Bergs also outlines some of these linguistic trends in a similar fashion when he observes that

> "in informal SMS communication, forms of phonetic spelling, morphosyntactic contractions typical of informal spoken discourse, representations of nonstandard varieties, and the written representation of proximity related forms like interjections can be found. Semi-phonetic spellings and eye dialect: *enuf* ('enough'), *nite* ('night'), *u* ('you'), *no* ('know'), *l8r* ('later'). Morphosyntactic contractions representing spoken informal language: *isn't* 'is not', *cant* 'can not', *gonna* 'going to', *wanna* 'want to'. Written representations of nonstandard forms (e.g.,

> dialectal or sociolectal variants). Interjections and discourse markers that are usually common in written representations of spoken language: <oh> <ah> <yikes> <hehehe> <yeah> <boo> <boah> <yippie> <ey> <mmm>" (Bergs 60).

These shortenings or linguistic features occur for many reasons, such as speed, familiarity, or convenience. They are influenced both by speech and by lexical shortenings from previous media. It is up to each texter to decide which linguistic trends, if any, they would like to employ. The beauty of textese is that each texter can use language uniquely, thus allowing for a form of linguistic creativity and playfulness where "the signifier becomes a product of an individual choice. Thus, users can shorten the signifier, replacing or adding to its phonetic sounds with a single letter or digits. Works can also be replaced with imitations of sounds or initials " (Soffer 1098). These lexical shortenings allow for a medium of instant communication to become even more instant, because an expert textese user can spend less time writing out full words in standard English.

Carrington refers to this concept of creating the shortest/most convenient version as "squeeze-text," where

> "words may be shortened to the minimum syllable length, often by removing vowels. Articles and conjunctions may be omitted, and numbers or letters may be substituted for graphemic units e.g., gr8 for 'great,' 4 for 'for,' 2 for 'to,' c for 'see,' or sum1 for 'someone.' Common phrases may be represented by acronyms (e.g. LOL, 'laugh out loud'). Capital letters might be omitted or used for emphasis. End-message punctuation may be absent. Various other abbreviations and nonstandard forms have been noted" (Lyddy 545).

There are such a wide variety of lexical shortenings that it is difficult to name and describe all of them. It is especially difficult because some types are more popular or common than others, and others are dying out. This is an issue of the technology progressing and the register changing more quickly than published studies can keep up

with. Lyddy acknowledges in her 2013 article that some of the research that had been conducted on linguistic trends in text messaging in 2007/8 has already become obsolete in 2013/2014. Lyddy et al. conducted their own survey on the linguistic patterns of university students in 2013 and found that trends previously seen as popular or common, such as "'letter/number homophones (e.g. l8r for "later," or w8 for "wait"), contractions, and emoticons are less frequently recorded in analyses of naturalistic text messages than media representations of text language would suggest" (Lyddy 547).

However, Lyddy also noted that certain trends are used *more* frequently than 2008/9 research would suggest, showing that existing data should be taken with a grain of salt. Many have commented on the fact that data reflecting linguistic trends is somewhat inconsistent, such as Thurlow and Brown's data which "show a low frequency of emoticons (:-)), typographic symbols (xxx), and letter/number homophones (gr8/great) in comparison to nonconventional spellings (nite/night), accent stylizations (ello/hello), and onomatopoeic spellings (yay!, haha)." When these specific trends are noted more often, it may show that speech has more of an effect on the orality of text messaging, but other data may disprove this by showing that other trends are more popular. I will conduct my own data to show my own trends; however, the data will never be perfect considering the variety of textese.

While many of these trends originally developed to create rapid and convenient language, there exist other reasons why textese developed beyond convenience. As factors controlling the medium change, such as cell phone companies no longer limiting text messages to 160 characters, linguistic trends such as lexical shortenings persist. This may show that textese, while partially influenced by the medium of the cell phone,

continues to exist for other reasons. Some of these include creating a secret code, initiation into a youth culture, using language creatively for fun, and to create orality within a written medium. Many researchers have picked up on this idea that while these lexical shortenings and other linguistic techniques may have originally arisen for necessity or for convenience purposes, they are perpetuated for reasons beyond just necessity:

> "Language is used creatively…norms, either from written or spoken language conventions, are not always followed. What is interesting is that producers of messages often make use of these deviations purposefully. To what extent they follow certain conventions depends on the social context of the interaction. The writing style, therefore, becomes another linguistic variable with which the message is given meaning" (Quan Haase 46)

As Marshall McLuhan so eloquently stated in 1964, "the medium *is* the message." In text messaging, as with many other media, it is not the content of the message that is important, but rather the medium itself. No matter what the actual words of the text message are, using this new texting register with a cell phone alerts another person to a very specific type of message. So, to alter McLuhan's idea, textese becomes the message.

One creative use of language through text messaging is to avoid what David Crystal explains as "unwelcome surveillance" (Crystal 2008B: 80). For many teenagers, cell phones are a lifeline, "ubiquitous accessories of adolescence," the only way that they can communicate with their peers without their parents finding out (Jones and Schieffelin 2009: 1051). They can "chat" in class without their teachers finding out and talk to their boyfriend or girlfriend knowing that their parent cannot listen with their ear to the door. But since texts aren't always immediately deleted and are not always password protected, they can easily be read by anyone who takes their phone or even glances over to look at the screen. Because cell phones are mostly used in public, there is always a fear that they

are being watched or "read." Therefore, teenagers may be choosing to use more cryptic abbreviations or uncommon slang so that readers of their texts do not understand the full meaning. This "concomitant youth specific and age-graded language use (e.g. "secret code")" allow teenagers to text discreetly if the unwanted reader does not regularly use the texting register (Bergs 56). In other words, the ambiguity and complex lexical shortenings that exist in textese are not accidental.

A register of texting may also persist as textese turns into a type of slang, to allow for group inclusion and as a marker to show that one understands the digital culture. As important as convenience is to people living in 2014, Quan Haase explains that "the motivation behind young people's use of lexical shortenings is as much about speed, convenience and familiarity as it is about following established norms around Netspeak. By following these norms, young people signal to others that they are a member of the IM culture and understand the unique practices of IM communication" (Quan Haase 47). Proper texting etiquette can serve as an initiation into a group, especially a group of teenagers or young adults, to show that one is "savvy." Text messaging "becomes not only a matter of prestige but also of developing group identity among younger members of society" (Bergs 69). On the other hand, lack of knowledge about the rules of texting can potentially isolate someone from a group. This is just one of the reasons why the Sprint commercial that I used in the introduction is funny: the readers of the conversation are clearly not well-versed in the register of texting, and therefore become isolated from the rest of the group (the audience). The "tech-savvy" texting audience thus feels superior to the conversant and laughs. As textese becomes more widespread, it becomes almost expected in American culture that texters will be familiar with the etiquette of texting.

Therefore, studying the linguistic effects of texting has become much more than just grammatical patterns and technological conventions. It is "the social function of language, the interactional accomplishment of meaning, the significance of communicator intent, and the relevance of social/cultural context" (Thurlow 8).

One of the most interesting characteristics of the linguistic patterns of texting is that although it is a written medium, it exhibits many of the linguistic characteristics of an oral one. This concept is called orality, and texting is a very unique register because of this idea that "linguistic characteristics [of texting] reveal conventions that stem from written discourse and others that stem from spoken discourse" (Quan Haase 48). John McWhorter's TED talk also explores this idea of orality, where texting is really just "fingered speech" (McWhorter). Texting has allowed speakers and writers to differentiate between formal and casual speech, with texting falling into the latter category. Many of the linguistic trends, such as the lack of regard for punctuation and capitalization, short messages, that are often criticized because they are not the same as "standard" English, are really just mimicking spoken language with written words. In spoken conversation, phrases like "um…," lack of regard for certain grammatical conventions, no mention of dashes, semicolons or parentheses, and extremely quick turn-taking are common, so they exist in text messaging as well. Soffer observes that "in this type of digital oral writing (textese), the phonetic sound that characterizes a letter (or combination of letters) or digit replaces the word (or part of a word), for example b =be, c =see, 8=ate, 4=for. The phonetic sound of a letter plus a digit can replace syllables: b4=before, f2f=face to face, gr8=great" (Soffer 1100). In fact, using the same language with which one would write a formal letter in an informal conversation may even confuse or annoy people. Whether we

realize it or not, the way we talk and the way we write are different, but the way we text and the way we speak are similar.

This idea of orality is one of the components that lead many researchers to believe that text speech, or textese, might be its own register. No other medium uses oral speech in written form the way that texting does, which disorients some people. Texters creatively use verbal phonetic sounds in their written texts, which "therefore function as a condensed version of the original signifiers, while to a certain extent preserving the phonetic sound that allows recognition of the original signifier" (Soffer 1100). All of the linguistic elements mentioned earlier combined into one text message would seem almost unintelligible to someone acquainted only with standard written English. Moreover, while it is true that text messages show a unique and creative type of written language, they are really indicative of an oral writing system, or as Soffer describes, "a hybrid nature of digital discourse, which is composed simultaneously of elements of writing and speech" (Soffer 1093). Another linguist, John McWhorter, explains that text messaging "involves the brute mechanics of writing, but in its economy, spontaneity and even vulgarity, texting is actually a new kind of talking. There is a virtual cult of concision and little interest in capitalization or punctuation" (McWhorter). A particularly obvious way that text messages exhibit oral elements is through its use of onomatopoeic words, like "haha," "ugh," "ahhh," "hmmm," "yay!," "zzzz," etc. which are simply written versions of popular spoken terms. Many "textisms," or written features of text messages, rely on these written versions of sounds, such as what Soffer describes as the "replacement of letters with numbers that have a similar sound, imitations of sounds, and so on" (Soffer 1093). Textisms like "gr8," "b4," and "sum1" are "onomatopoetic signs [which] imitate

the voices that relate the signified idea" and rely on an understanding of a spoken sound that a number represents rather than the number itself (Soffer 1101).

Although text messages do exhibit some features of an oral medium, it is still a written medium in reality, and with that comes many drawbacks. Texting will never be the same as a face-to-face conversation, but texters are very creative in their conception of remedies for some of the elements that are lost within the medium. I am reminded again of Marshall McLuhan's idea that the medium is the message. When sending a text, one cannot take the same approach as that of a face-to-face conversation, a phone conversation, or even writing an email. The texter must understand the medium and use the specific trends tied to that medium in order to have a successful conversation with another texter. They must become creative with language and learn to create their own texting "voice."

Soffer, too, understands the importance of the medium as the message: "As this digital discourse replaces FtF conversation, users want it to be seen as one that preserves their authentic, personal voice. This achieved through a performance of linguistic anarchism that does not preserve the conventional and uniform orthography and the writing aesthetic that is tolerated by the education system" (Soffer 1106). Quan Haase also acknowledges these drawbacks and appreciates the creativity surrounding text messaging: "Because the digital, text-based nature of the medium lacks nonverbal cues, such as tone of voice and gestures, it forces users to employ available written resources to express emotions, seriousness of the conversation, and the formality of the message" (Quan Haase 49).

To compensate for lack of face-to-face content, both emoticons and phrases such as “lol” at the end of an utterance can allow the receiver to understand the reaction of the texter without hints such as body language that obviously cannot be used via text message. Language becomes performative in that the words themselves need to suggest action, since the medium of the text message is not conducive to showing body language or facial expressions. Verbs in italics or framed by asterisks help to represent physical reactions to messages, to relay some sort of physical action that cannot be seen through the cell phone. Bergs calls these elements “metalinguistic ‘stage directions’ or pragmatic contextualization cues (e.g. *smile*) where the asterisks underline the performative, meta-communicative nature of this element” (Bergs 59). These emoticons and meta-linguistic elements can also add a stylized element to text messages, to make them aesthetically pleasing. Changes in capitalization of letters, symmetry and spacing sometimes even become more important than the content itself .

Thurlow says that ”orthographic play often privileges the visual-aesthetic form of language—the look of the words—over its communicative function” (Thurlow 21). Expert text messagers may incorporate characters such as the tilde (~) and asterisk (*) to make their texts symmetrical or “pretty,” or just to play with the language. Language can be fun, says Crystal, and with texting “children quickly learn that one of the most enjoyable things you can do with language is to play with its sounds, words, grammar - and spelling” (Crystal 2008A). Jones and Schieffelin (2009) explain that these types of linguistic choices and style are “also a form of speech play that creatively exploits the expressive and ludic potential of verbal codes, and an expressive symbol of peer-group affiliation” (Jones 1051). So, although text conversations have certain limitations when

comparing them to a face-to-face conversation, conversants use creative practices and performative language to compensate.

Text messaging is a medium that demonstrates very explicitly how language can be used creatively. While originally developed for reasons of convenience, it is obvious that this new genre of language seen in texting has evolved to represent many different concepts and ideas. This once-titled "squeeze text" has now come to signify group inclusion, caused a media frenzy, created a secret code, and created what Bergs is calling a "third kind" of language that is technically written but uses so many elements of orality that it is creating a new and original written/oral language hybrid. Textese is extremely complex as well in that it combines the textisms outlined earlier with common standard English.

Language is always extremely influential and impacts our lives every day. It has the power to influence culture and cultural norms, and as Thurlow says, "language is instrumental for establishing categories of difference [and] relations of inequality" (Thurlow 12). It is clear that text messaging and textese also have this power to influence culture and society and are changing communication in America as we know it.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Vassar Survey Data

I initially decided to present my senior project on this topic when I read several news articles with backlash regarding text messaging (see Irvine, Thomas, Maltais, Humphrys). These news outlets claim that text messaging and its lexical shortenings are not only destroying the English language but also having a negative effect on communication as a whole. While researching the linguistic effects of texting, I was disheartened by how little recent academic research I could find on the linguistic trends of texting. Most existing research was done when text messaging first became popular, in the early 2000s. The latest data that exists is from around 2008 and 2009, and very little that I could find dealt with actual surveys and examination of real text messages.

I decided to create this survey, which examines the text messaging habits of Vassar students, for two reasons: to add to the very small pool of academic data about self-reported linguistic trends, and to compare previous data with that ascertained from the texting habits of Vassar students. I was curious to know whether the previous data was still accurate, and whether linguistic trends of text messaging have changed in any way. I would like to note the differences and similarities of what I found between the research of others and the survey that I crafted. I also want to note whether Vassar students are doing something different with language that has not been noted in previous research. I also would like to note if certain linguistic trends or ideas are *not* being used and speculate as to why that might be occurring.

The methodology involved crafting a survey via kwiksurveys.com. The survey was sent out only to Vassar College students, aged 18-23 years old. I created questions based on general texting habits, demographic information, and claims regarding linguistic

trends in existing research, having the respondents craft example texts using various lexical shortenings. I then consulted David Davis-Van Atta, the statistician at Vassar, who sent this anonymous survey to a randomly selected group of Vassar students. The survey was sent to 800 Vassar students, of all class years, majors, genders, races, etc. David Davis-Van Atta was sure that the survey was sent out to a wide range of people and would be a good representation of the Vassar community as a whole. He said that in order for the answers to be officially regarded as a "trend," I would need at least 250 people to respond. In total, I received 260 responses to this survey. The questions asked were as follows, with the possible answers in parentheses:

1. Do you text? (yes/no/I do not have a cell phone)
2. If yes, approximately how many texts do you send per day? (1-10/11-50/51-100/101-499/500+)
3. How many different people do you text in an average day? (1-3/4-10/11-25/26+)
4. What is your relationship to the top three people that you text? (open-ended)
5. How appropriate do you feel that the following are to do via text?
   —making plans, saying "I love you" for the first time, breaking up, sex/sexting, discussing death, asking someone on a romantic date, the letter "k" alone, gossiping with someone next to you, and ALL CAPS (multiple choice with possible responses very appropriate, appropriate, depends, inappropriate, and very inappropriate)
6. If you answered "inappropriate" or "very inappropriate" to any of the previous questions, can you explain why? (open-ended)
7. Do you use T9, autocorrect, or any other language-correcting software? (yes/no)
8. How often do you use the following in your text messages? If not familiar with the term, select "not familiar."
   —LOL, BRB, Gr8, OMG, LMAO, SMDH, WTF, ttyl, ;), k., tbh (multiple choice with possible responses very frequently, often, sometimes, rarely, not at all, or not familiar)
9. Which of the previous abbreviations do you use in your texts, if any? Please create an example of a text message in which you would use one of these abbreviations. (open-ended)
10. Which of the above abbreviations do you use in your speech, if any? Please create an example of an utterance in which you would use one of these abbreviations.
11. With whom do you feel the most comfortable using the following abbreviations? If you do not use the abbreviation, select 'Do not use'.

—LOL, BRB, Gr8, OMG, LMAO, SMDH, WTF, TTYL, ;), k., tbh, thx (multiple choice with possible responses friend/peer, parent, sibling, grandparent, a middle or high schooler, or do not use)

12. Who do you think would use the following words/symbols?
—smdh, ROFL, OMG, :D (open-ended)
13. By which medium would you feel most comfortable communicating with each of the following people?
—With a parent, with a sibling, with a friend (multiple choice with possible responses talking on the phone, face-to-face, email or texting)
14. What's your class year?
15. What's your major?
16. What's your gender?

I chose a survey as my means of collecting data for multiple reasons. It was easy for both the students to report the data and me to collect the data, because kwiksurveys.com had question templates and the students could do the survey in 10 minutes from their computers. It was also inexpensive (I paid $9.99 for full access to the kwiksurveys template) and far less time-consuming than interviewing 260 individual students. It allowed for all of the data to be collected in one place and kept together accurately. It also assured anonymity, which I could not have accomplished with interviews.

There are several disadvantages of self-reported study, however, of which the reader should be aware before I present the data. Most surveys need to be tested before they are given to actual respondents in order to ensure that everyone who answers the survey will understand the questions and how they are worded. They are also usually checked to make sure that the question is valid and that the answers given will prove some kind of point. As with any questionnaire, I want to make sure that the survey will actually produce conclusive data or interesting research.

This is especially difficult in linguistic and anthropological research, when respondents may not even know themselves why they are using language in the way that

they do. It is always somewhat complicated to make generalizations about this type of data when those doing the survey may not even understand. Although I ran my survey by my advisors before sending it out and made some changes in wording as per their suggestions, I did not test it on a specific group of people to be tested for accuracy and understanding. There are some other obstacles that exist for self-reported data that should be taken into account before reading my results. Self-reported questionnaires not only assume that the participants understand the questions, but will also answer the questions honestly. This is more of an issue with sensitive topics, which, thankfully, I do not believe that my survey directly addresses, but there still might be some variation in results if participants estimated on certain questions.

Some of the rating scales used, such as the scale from very appropriate to very inappropriate, may have different definitions depending on the participant. All participants also knew that this survey would be a part of my senior thesis, and may have skewed their answers in a certain way knowing that I am trying to collect data about the linguistic trends of texting for a media studies project. Also, although the survey was only sent out to Vassar students' emails, there is always a slight possibility considering the anonymity of the survey that someone from outside of Vassar may have completed it and therefore skewed my Vassar-specific data. Furthermore, in the open-ended questions in the survey, I asked students to craft an example text using one or more of the lexical shortenings that I supplied. While these example texts may show uses of lexical shortenings, they are not necessarily real texts that have been sent. They allow us to understand definitions of these lexical shortenings, but might not necessarily reflect who would use them and in what context, or how often textisms are used in everyday text

messages. All data has its flaws, and it is important to take this data about the texting habits of Vassar students with a grain of salt.

I chose to study texting in the Vassar student community, which allows me to address some of the central linguistic and cultural questions about textese. However, the results of this data should not be taken to represent all of Poughkeepsie, all of New York, all Americans, or all college students. It is simply a small sample that I used to help determine the specific linguistic patterns that occur at Vassar. Also, as I said in previous chapters, data and research surrounding texting quickly becomes outdated with the rapid evolution of both the cell phone and the texting register. Even work from 2008 and 2009 seems outdated in 2014. This is another reasons why I chose to create my own survey and record my own data: to compare with the older data and determine whether it was still accurate and true today, and to create a survey that was as recent as possible. I analyze this data and compare it to research from the previous chapters of this project. If a trend that was not noted in my research surfaces, I speculate as to possible causes of the trend.

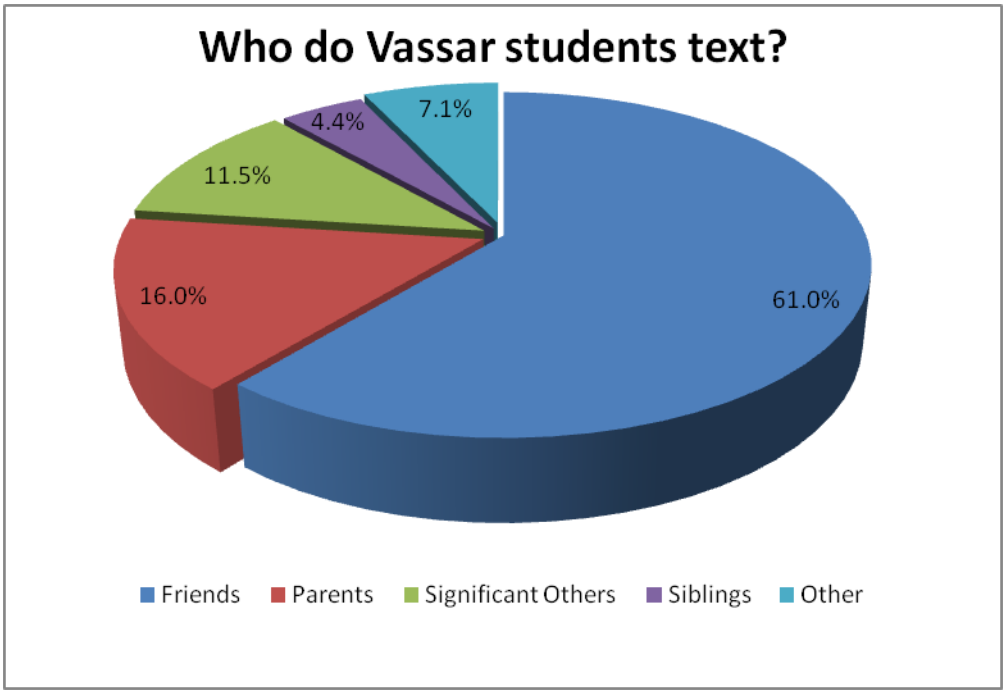
RESULTS

I. Basic Data on Cell Phone Usage

In contrast to the Lyddy et al. article, which noted that 72% of teenagers used text messaging in 2010, every person who completed my survey owns a cell phone, and 98.5% (256 out of 260 responses) use text messaging (Lyddy 546). Again, this may not be representative of Vassar as a whole. Although this number may seem high, Lyddy also noted that only 51% of teenagers in the United States used text messaging in 2006, so a jump from 72% to 98.5% within a span of four years could be plausible. More likely, however, is the fact that Vassar has a higher population of texters than the rest of the

country. Lyddy's survey also only measured people aged 11-18, and most Vassar students are aged 18-23.

I speculate that because Vassar College is a private institution, which carries with it the socioeconomically rooted expectation that students own a cell phone, that a higher percentage of Vassar students text than is the case for the majority of the country. Survey data also showed that the majority of students (49.2%) sent 11-50 text messages per day, showing that texting is at least somewhat common and often utilized by Vassar students. 98.1% of Vassar students text between 1-10 different people per day, and no participant said that they text more than 25 different people per day. The survey does not require participants to specify what their relationship is to every person they text, so this data is somewhat ambiguous. These questions were primarily meant to make sure that those who are answering the later, more detailed questions about linguistics in texting have some sort of experience with texting as a medium.



The open-ended question of "What is your relationship to the top three people you text?" yielded surprisingly similar responses and similar relationships. I purposefully left this question open-ended so that people could be as vague or specific about their relationships as possible. I also did not want to force any participant to classify their relationship into a category determined by me, since I wanted to keep the number of categories low and not have a large amount of answers in an "other" category. Relationships are complicated (which was proven with answers such as "ex(ish)-boyfriend," "hook-up," "fling," "guy I'm sleeping with," "business partner," and "crush") and I knew that I would receive a variety of interesting answers by leaving this question open ended. That said, however, most of the answers fell into what I have classified as five distinct categories. Many people simply listed "friend" three times as their relationship to the top three people they text, and "friend," "best friend," or "good friend" were written 478 times as an answer to this question (out of ~780 answers), showing that the majority, or about 61%, of the people that Vassar students text are friends. This may show that text messaging is a medium reserved for relationships that are more than acquaintances, since there was little mention of answers such as "peer" or "classmate," and "friend" is a more significant relationship than "acquaintance."

The second largest category, and the second most popular person that Vassar students text, is parents. A combination of the words "mother" (33 responses), "mom" (22 responses), "dad" (4 responses), "father" (3 responses), "parent" (21 responses), "child" (3 responses), "daughter" (9 responses), and "son" (3 responses) combined yielded 125 responses, or 16 percent of responses. The answers "child," "daughter," and "son" were included with the parent relationship because some participants may have

taken the question to mean that their relationship with their mother or father is that they are the child, son, or daughter of that person. 11 responses contained a nondescript "family" answer. I was unsure where to place those ambiguous answers, so they were lumped in with "parents."

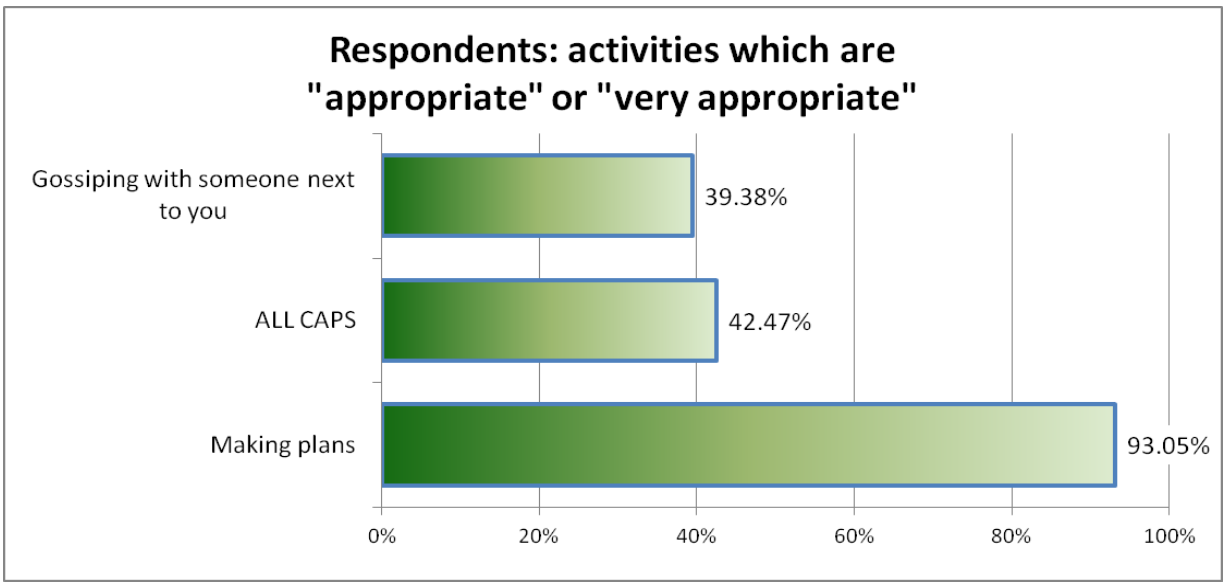
The third most popular category is significant others and love interests. A combination of the responses of "boyfriend" (47 responses), "girlfriend" (17 responses), "significant other" (13 responses), and "partner" (13 responses) yielded a total of 90 responses, or 11.5%. This data in particular should be taken with a grain of salt because not every Vassar student has a romantic partner or love interest, and some participants may have chosen to label what may really be a romantic interest as a "friend" in the survey. The terminology here is somewhat ambiguous, and this may be why the survey shows that more Vassar students text their parents than their romantic interests.

The fourth category includes siblings. "Sister" (27 responses), "brother" (6 responses), and "sibling" (2 responses) yielded a combined 35 responses, or 4.4% of responses. The last and final category was acquaintances, which included the terms "classmate," "housemate," and "roommate" a total of 24 times, or 3.0% of the responses. This is a gray area because many Vassar students are friends with their classmates and roommates and may not have made the distinction in their response. This data also shows that Vassar students text the people close to them, not strangers, which is consistent with other research. It would be interesting to examine the relationships between Vassar students and the people they call or email versus the people they text.

II. Ideologies of Appropriateness in Texting

The next question in my survey lists various topics for text messages and whether they are appropriate. I chose to ask Vassar students this question because the concept of appropriateness in text messaging was not fully fleshed out in any of the academic research that I have found, but I have heard it mentioned amongst Vassar students and have read about text "etiquette" in the media (see Benjamin, Bilton, and a YouTube music video by user LiamKyleSullivan entitled 'Text Message Breakup"). I wanted to see if there were some topics that would be considered inappropriate for texting that would be appropriate in other media. This topic is known as medium specificity, where the medium itself has an influence on the message or content that is being broadcasted.

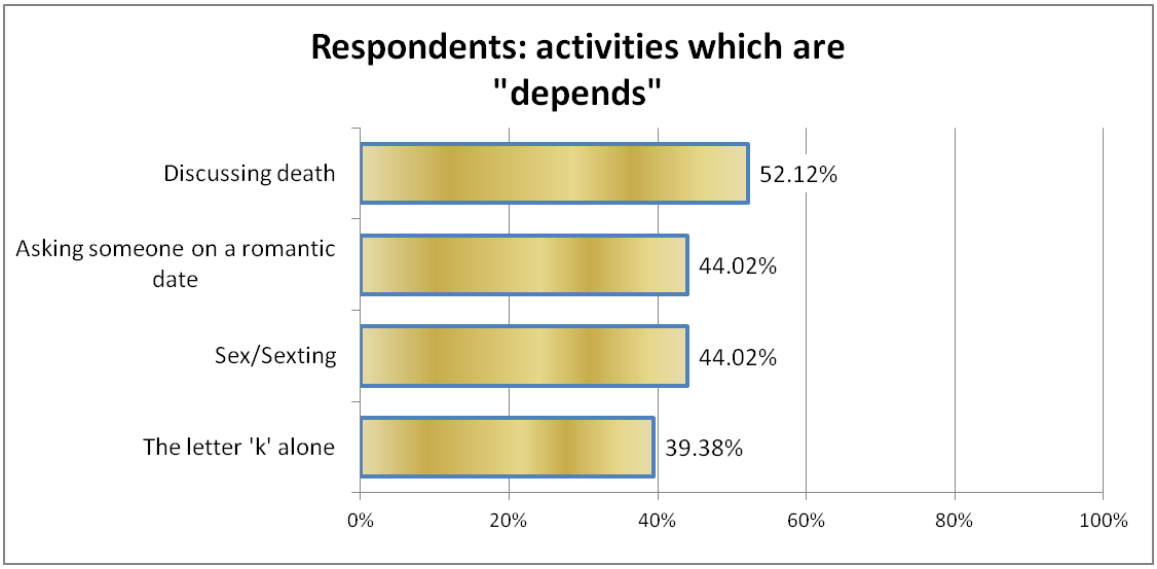
I had survey participants rate topics that I chose, such as "saying I love you for the first time" and "breaking up" on a scale from very inappropriate to very appropriate. The next question was then an open-ended question asking if the participant had marked any of the topics as "inappropriate" or "very inappropriate" and whether they could explain why. All of the participants must have marked at least one topic as inappropriate to discuss via text message, as all open-ended responses to this question explained that not all topics are appropriate for text messaging. I have divided the results into three categories and graphed them to show which topics that Vassar students have deemed as "appropriate," "inappropriate," and "depends."



"Making plans" was used as a control category to make sure that the majority of people saw making plans via text message as an innocuous activity. I did not want the results to show that every conversation topic discussed in text messaging was a loaded one. The idea of choosing "making plans" as a category came from the Lyddy et al. survey, which had university students classify their texts into different categories. The data shows that most text messages fell into nine categories: "seek information," "reply," "arrangement," "share information," "multiple," "greetings," "humor," "thanks," and "other." (Lyddy 555) . I chose to reword the "arrangements" category since it seemed to be the most straightforward topic.

I included the "ALL CAPS" category because of a quote from an article by Bergs that explained, "capitalization (<I SAID NO!>) is often interpreted as shouting and therefore generally considered to be rude" (Bergs 60). Although 42% of responses placed this into the "appropriate" category, the open-ended responses described using all capital letters in a text as "annoying," "unnecessary," "aggressive," and "obnoxious," similar to what Bergs describes. Even when used for emphasis or enthusiasm, Vassar students

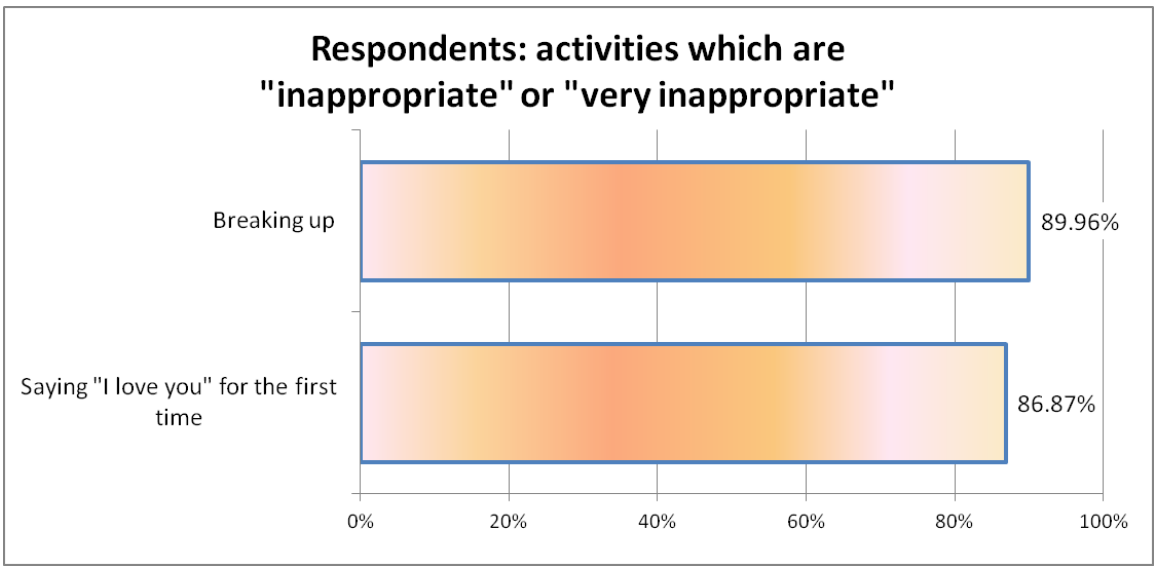
believe that all caps consistently signal anger or yelling. One student explained that all capital letters is "super annoying and hard to read when 99.9% of the time we do not read sentences in all caps." I was also surprised at the high percentage of students who thought that using texts for gossiping was appropriate, because many wrote that they were "appalled" at the thought of texting about someone while they were in the same room. Maybe the wording was unclear in this question; I am referring to three people in the same room, and two people are texting each other gossip about the third person, similar to students "passing notes" in high school. The cell phone makes this especially easy because if the gossipers are stealthy, the third person never realizes it, unlike passing notes. One student described this gossiping as "malicious and [it] can isolate others in the room."



The "depends" category of appropriateness was the most popular answer across the board, possibly because the topics chosen were so ambiguous. I did not have a particular hypothesis in mind when choosing some of these topics and received a wide variety of answers. Even though many people chose "depends" for certain topics,

especially for death, there were also many Vassar students who in their open-ended responses discussed the inappropriateness of discussing death or sex in text messages. Students said that these conversations "should be reserved for a phone conversation at least." Many discussed how "sensitive" the nature of the topics was, and how "impersonal" and "casual" the medium of text messaging seems.

The ideas of "respect," "intimacy," and "courage" came up specifically regarding the topics of asking someone on a date and discussing death. The general consensus of Vassar students, at least what I gleaned through these answers, was that the medium of text messaging is one that should be reserved mostly for informal and non-serious topics. Vassar students see the person who asks someone on a date via text as "shallow," "ruining the romantic intent," and having a "lack of courage." They see texting as a way to hide behind the cell phone, "creating barriers with the technology so they do not have to confront topics that they may not be completely comfortable with," and many claim that discussing these topics on the phone or in person would be much more appropriate. Vassar students see the cell phone as taking the easy way out, because sending a text is "less nerve-wracking" and "speaks of a personal fear." In contrast, a phone call or face-to-face conversation requires courage, at least according to this survey.



The fact that almost 90% of participants saw breaking up and saying “I love you” for the first time as either inappropriate or very inappropriate to discuss via text message is very striking. It shows that rules about texting definitely do exist, at least in the Vassar community. McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” idea is illuminated with comments such as “these emotionally charged sentiments should be communicated face-to-face or via Skype or phone call because texting can’t convey those emotions accurately or fully,” “there is such a high chance for miscommunication over text,” or the many references to “at least a phone call” being more appropriate than texting. Vassar students really do feel very strongly that although text messaging is a medium with many elements of orality, it simply does not compare to a phone call, video call, or face-to-face conversation. Without me even asking about it directly, these open-ended responses created a hierarchy of media that simply is not discussed in academic research. Of course, these results may vary if done with different subjects, but these 18-23 year olds are using texting in a very complex way.

They value certain topics as more or less sacred and commend those who do not resort to texting as "considerate" and "honorable." The "lack of visual, physical, vocal and auditory cues" makes text messaging an inappropriate medium when making important romantic decisions, according to Vassar students. Students remarked that breaking up via text message is the "lowest form" of communication, "trivializes serious topics," and is a medium that does not allow for such topics to be "fully explored." For a medium that is so popular among Vassar students, I thought there would be more variation with regard to appropriateness, but it seems that the etiquette ideologies are fairly set in stone, and Vassar students are not yet willing to accept text messaging as a catch-all medium for every topic.

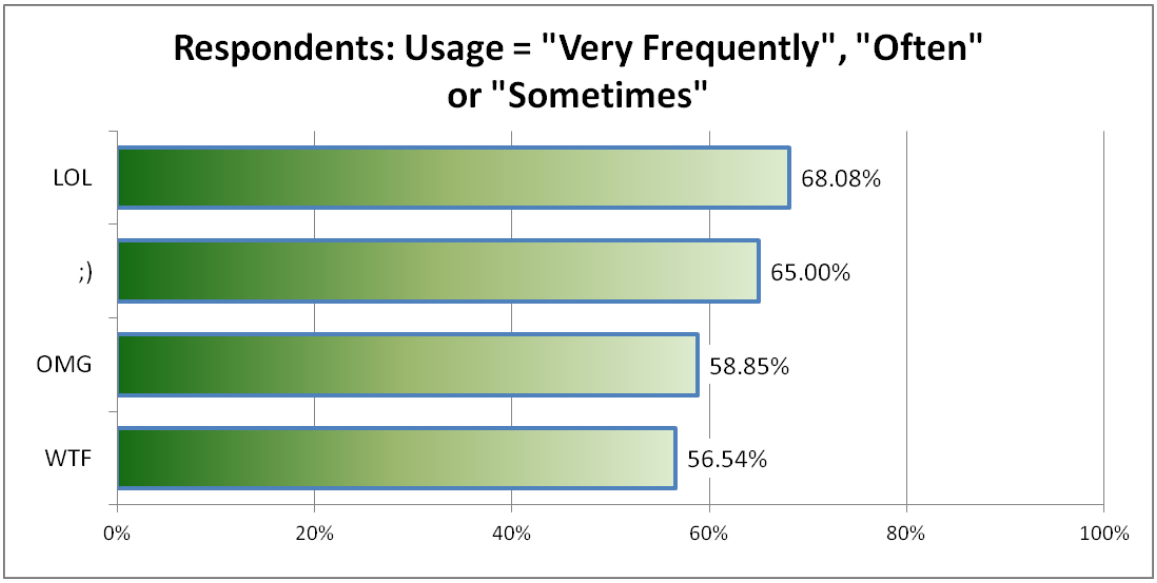
While there may not be any academic data about what topics are appropriate or not to discuss via text, this question on my survey was partially inspired by research done on the relationship between the amount of lexical shortenings in a text message relative to the topic of the message. Similar to how Vassar students felt that certain topics were not appropriate due to the informal nature of the medium of the text message, Quan Haase argues that it is really textese that gives text messaging its informal tone. He says that without these lexical shortenings, people would be more comfortable discussing serious topics via text. In fact, participants in his research "made very few spelling mistakes when they were conversing about a serious topic. By contrast, when they engaged in casual exchanges, communicating quickly often was more relevant than employing correct spelling" (Quan Haase 45). Although I did not directly ask about this in the survey, it might be possible that some participants automatically link text messaging with textese and see using textese as inappropriate for these topics, but not the medium of the

cell phone itself. Quan Haase believes that "a formal writing style signals the importance and seriousness of a message, whereas an informal writing style signals a casual exchange," so it is possible that Vassar students would be more willing to discuss serious topics via text messaging using standard English.

III. Textese at Vassar

The next question in the survey was engineered to find out what percentage of Vassar students use autocorrect and other texting correcting software on their cell phones. I wanted to ask this question because I have not seen any academic research that mentions autocorrect at all, much less its effect on textese. Autocorrect tries to "correct" for spelling errors by changing a typed word to a different word if the word in question is not spelled correctly according to a dictionary. It uses predictive software to guess the correctly spelled word using the letters surrounding the ones you pressed, assuming that your finger accidentally pressed the wrong key or wrote the letters in the wrong order. But if the word you are trying to type is not listed in their dictionary, the iPhone and other smartphones will try to correct it (such as "lol," "gr8," "ttyl," etc.), making it frustrating for texters to use both autocorrecting software and textisms. I believe autocorrect has the potential to curb, and may have already had some effect on, the number of textisms used in text messages. This software is an untapped gem of linguistic research and may already be changing how textese is used. This is especially significant when the results of the survey show that 72.7% of Vassar students who participated in this survey use autocorrect.

With this majority of Vassar students being autocorrect users, the next question in the survey about which textisms are used by Vassar students is especially informative. For this question I listed several common textisms noted in previous chapters and had students note how often they used each one. The options for use were "very frequently," "often," "sometimes," "rarely," "not at all," and "not familiar." Neither "very frequently" nor "often" was *ever* the most popular answer for the textisms I chose. One factor to consider is that "very frequently" and "often" are somewhat ambiguous terms and may mean different things to different people. Some students may not want to admit that they use a certain textism frequently for some reason or another. An alternate interpretation is that textese is being used less and less in 2014, at least by students at a small liberal arts college in New York. Many of the textisms chosen were described as common and popular by researchers such as Crystal, Bergs, and Thurlow. I specifically tried to choose a range that fit all of the categories described by the aforementioned researchers, but it turns out that Vassar students use very few of them at all, much less all the time.



This table shows the textisms that were used at least sometimes by Vassar students. As you can see, there are very few. The most widely used textism, at least according to this survey, is "lol," which stands for "laughing out loud." I asked them to craft an example message using one of these textisms if they used any of them, and many created example messages using "lol," allowing me to see how it might be used. My favorite is a very vague "(something funny) lol" to show that "lol" is indeed used in joking text conversations. One student also explained that "I use 'lol' after something that is not enjoyable, like 'I failed a test lol'" which again shows how this lexical shortening can be used to signify sarcasm. Many other students explained that they also use "lol" "when something isn't actually funny," "in an ironic way to express shame and embarrassment," "as an asterisk saying that my text is not to be taken seriously or meant to be insulting," or "for something sardonic or self deprecating."

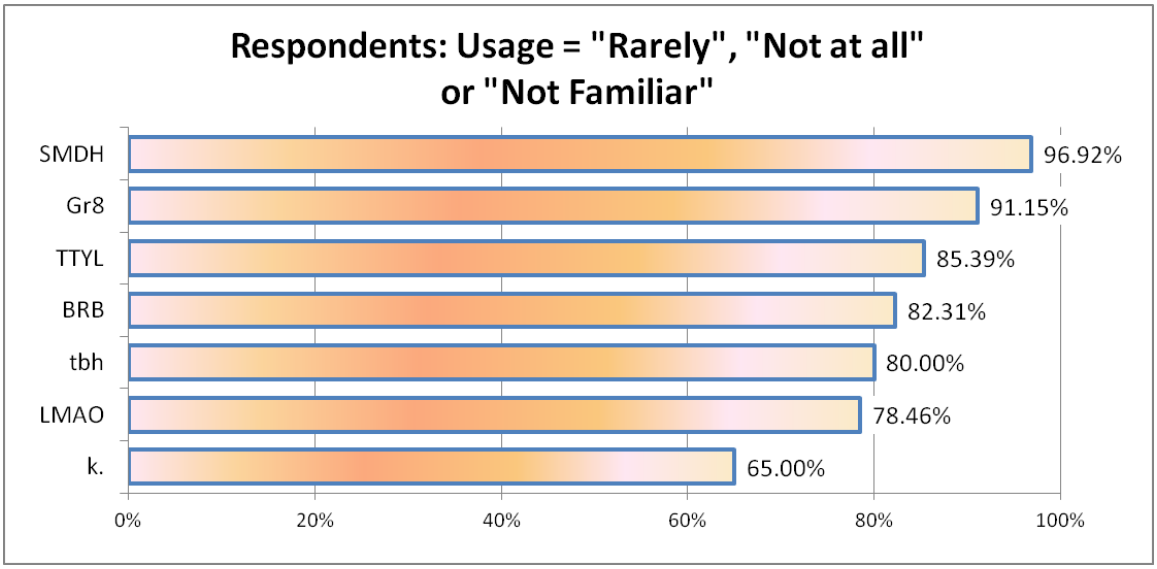
"Lol" is a very complex and useful textism, because it no longer means that the conversant is actually laughing out loud. It has become much more than that, a textism with several meanings and useful in all kinds of conversation. As I mentioned earlier, text messagers use language creatively when faced with the limitations of the medium of the cell phone. Reading a written conversation as a spoken one is especially difficult without tone of voice and facial expression. Sarcasm and jokes may not always come across, and that is where "lol" comes in. These three little letters can be added to a text message to avoid awkwardly misreading a sarcastic text message as truth, or to generally add a more lighthearted tone to a message. It is understood as the textese version of someone nodding and smiling. Vassar students also generally agree with this usage of "lol."

Using “lol” is a three-step and somewhat complicated process, and it shows linguistic prowess to use it in the right way. First, one needs to understand what “lol” stands for, which is ambiguous in itself—I’ve heard of many people who think it means “lots of love” (although no Vassar students mentioned this in the survey). Then, the texter needs to understand the joking significance, as in not actually “laughing out loud” but giving a little chuckle to a funny text. Only then can the expert texter understand the sarcastic and cultural significance, which according to this survey, many Vassar students do understand. Similar phenomena have occurred with other laughing textisms, such as “lmao (laughing my ass off) and “rofl” (rolling on the floor laughing), but these do not have the same popularity as “lol.”

The other popular textism used by Vassar students according to this survey is the winking smiley face, part of a series of faces made of punctuation called emoticons. Initially, these symbols were icons and may have been meant as substitutes for facial expressions in a text conversations. Even now, many Vassar students said that they would use the ;) face in situations where someone might actually wink at another person in a face-to-face interaction, such as in a flirtatious conversation or to signal an inside joke. But again, like “lol,” these emoticons are beginning to develop a pragmatic meaning. I chose the ;) face as especially salient because I have seen it used in personal experience as a way to give a flirtatious tone to a text message, and since there is very little academic research on the topic of emoticons, I figured this choice was innovative.

Vassar students also noted using this emoticon in their own texts for purposes of flirting. Some mentioned that they use it ironically in a similar way to “lol,” or at the end of an inside joke. Many example texts crafted in the survey with the ;) used a flirtatious

tone, such as “OMG Cappy is such a fox ;)”. There was also mention in the survey that a winking emoticon could add a “creepy” or “sexual” tone to an otherwise innocuous statement. One student noted this with an example text of “So I was thinking that you should come over later to study ;)” and here, the implied meaning of the sentence with the emoticon is that no studying will be done.



The results of the survey show that Vassar students rarely use many of the textisms deemed important by linguistics. “SMDH” (Shaking my damn head) was a textism I’ve seen on social media but seemed especially unknown to the Vassar students. “Gr8” was rarely or never used by over 91% of Vassar students, which is especially striking since the number replacement of a syllable was discussed at length by Bergs, Thurlow, and the other authors mentioned in the previous chapter. In the example texts written by survey participants, “gr8” was used ironically or sarcastically every time, with examples such as “I just had to write an entire essay today, it was gr8” and “that is some gr8 news my friend.” The other textisms listed were also deemed important by the authors but did not seem to be important to Vassar students.

I also asked if Vassar students used any textisms in their speech, and again, this idea of irony was brought up, an idea that I have never seen in research about texting. It seems that Vassar students may see textese as silly or uncool, which is the opposite of what the research notes, since textese can be used to show acceptance into a new digital culture. The most prevalent textism that participants described was "lol," but pronounced as "lawl" in their speech. Many said that they did not use this seriously, however, but rather to "make fun of people who *do* use these in their real life conversations." Many also said that they do not use any textisms in their speech at all, saying that it is "ridiculous," "stupid when you've learned how to speak properly since day one," "I would never utter these abbreviations," and "I don't use these because I'm not a dork." It seems as though most Vassar students feel very strongly about not using textisms in their speech, or even being associated with stereotypes about people who may do such a thing.

DISCUSSION

Surprisingly, very little of the data I collected in this survey regarding the texting community at Vassar lined up with the research that I collected from other linguists. I am left scratching my head and speculating, "Why?" I am also very impressed with the responses from Vassar students. The texting community at Vassar is very insightful about why they do what they do regarding texting, and students were articulate in telling me how and why they use or do not use textisms in their speech.

I am especially curious about the appropriateness of certain topics in texting and why most students were so vehemently against certain topics as appropriate for texting. I wonder if the telephone experienced the same phenomenon when it first became popular,

since it, too, was not equal to a face-to-face conversation. Will texts about sensitive topics also eventually become more acceptable? Or will text messaging a breakup always be considered rude and cowardly?

I'm also curious as to why so many of the textisms that I chose were not used by Vassar students. Are they using different textisms in their messages that I did not ask about? Or is textese just decreasing in general for Vassar students? It's possible that Vassar students use textese less than research suggests. This might be a combination of timing, the medium of the cell phone, and general attitudes at Vassar. 18-23 year old are right at the cusp of the generation that grew up with cell phones. The increase in popularity of the cell phone may have just passed this generation. It's possible that younger teenagers would exhibit more textese in their writing.

I previously mentioned that autocorrect may be having an effect on textese as well. Autocorrect, when forcing texters to use standard English, may decrease levels of textese on its own. Because a large portion of Vassar students use autocorrect or other correcting software, it shows that many Vassar students own smartphones. These smartphones have full touchscreen keyboards that are much easier to text on than a phone from 2008 with no QWERTY keyboard. Texting plans now almost always include unlimited texting, so "squeeze text" is no longer necessary.

Moreover, many survey responses implied that textese may be associated with a type of person who may not be a college student. They may spend so much time using standard English for homework, assignments, and essays that they may not want to deviate from standard language conventions. They may prefer to use standard English all

the time instead of constantly switching between formal and informal code, or textese and standard language.

I wonder what the future of texting will look like. Will certain topics still be inappropriate? Will textese still exist? Will new lexical shortenings form or will the current ones endure? What will the cell phones of the future look like?

WORKS CITED

Benjamin, Jennifer. “Like, OMG! I Can’t Stop E-Talking Like a Preteen.” Huffington Post. 29 January 2014: < http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-benjamin/like-omg-i-cant-stop-etalking-preteen_b_4609763.html>

Bergs, Alexander. “Just the Same Old Story? The Linguistics of Text Messaging and Its Cultural Repercussions.” Language and New Media: Linguistic, Cultural, and Technological Evolutions. Ed. Charley Rowe and Eva L. Wyss. Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2009. Print.

Bilton, Nick. “Disruptions: Digital Era Redefining Etiquette.” The New York Times Blog. 10 March 2013: <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/etiquette-redefined-in-the-digital-age/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0>

Crystal, David (A). "2b or not 2b." Guardian. 04 July 2008: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jul/05/saturdayreviewsfeatres.guardianreview>.

Crystal, David (B). "Text Messages: Texting." ELT Journal. 62.1 (2008): 77-83. <http://www.davidcrystal.com/DC_articles/Internet12.pdf>.

Crystal, David (C). *Txtng: the Gr8 Db8*. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Edwards, Benj. "Evolution of the Cell Phone." PCWorld. N.p., 04 Oct 2009. <http://www.pcworld.com/article/173033/evolution_of_the_cell_phone.html>.

Humphrys, John. "I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language." Daily Mail UK. 04 July 2008: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-483511/I-h8-txt-msgs-How-texting-wrecking-language.html>.

Irvine, Martha. “Text Messaging: Is Texting Ruining The Art Of Conversation?.” Huffington Post. 03 June 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/03/text-messaging-texting-conversation_n_1566408.html>

Jones, Graham and Bambi Schieffelin. 2009. Talking Text and Talking Back: “My BFF Jill” from Boob Tube to You Tube. Journal of Computer Mediated Communication 14(4):1050-1079.

Lyddy, Fiona; Farina, Francesca; Hanney, James; Farrell, Lynn; and O’Neill, Niamh Kelly. An Analysis of Language in University Students’ Text Messages (2013). *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* 19 (3), pp. 546-561.

Maltais, Michelle. “OMG! Texting may ruin grammar skills, study says.” The Seattle Times. 06 August 2012. <http://seattletimes.com/html/homegarden/2018863278_textinggrammerparent06.html>

McIntosh, J. 2010. Mobile Phones and Mipoho's Prophecy: The Powers and Dangers of Flying Language. American Ethnologist 37(2):337-353.

Meyer, John C. Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication. Communication Theory 10(3): 310-331.

Milian, Mark. "Why text messages are limited to 160 characters." The LA Times. 03 May 2009. < http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2009/05/invented-text-messaging.html>

Quan-Haase, Anabel. "Text-Based Conversations Over Instant Messaging: Linguistic Changes and Young People's Sociability." Language and New Media: Linguistic, Cultural, and Technological Evolutions. Ed. Charley Rowe and Eva L. Wyss. Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2009. Print.

Soffer, O. Liquid language? On the personalization of discourse in the digital era (2012). *New Media and Society*, 14 (7), pp. 1092-1110.

TED Talk by John McWhorter: Txtng is killing language. JK!!! (http://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_killing_language_jk.html)

Thurlow, Crispin, and Kristine R. Mroczek. *Digital discourse : language in the new media*. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.