

**EFFECT OF TECHNOLOGY ON THE SPELLING COMPETENCE OF
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF TAI SOLARIN UNIVERSITY OF
EDUCATION, IJEBU-ODE.**

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of technology to education has affected teaching and learning generally and language learning in particular both positively and negatively. On the positive side, it has enhanced teaching and learning through the provision of a platform not only for sourcing information but also, for unlimited and timeless interaction between the teachers and the students on the one hand, and among the students themselves. However, on the negative side, following the wide range of varieties of English on the internet characterized by lack of harmonization and uniformity, it has impacted the grammatical competence of students especially in the area of spelling. This has in no small measure contributed to the fallen standard of the English language spoken among undergraduates of universities. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of technology on the spelling competence of undergraduate students studying English at TASUED. Data will be collected through a 30_item questionnaire administered on 120 sample subjects selected through simple random sampling technique from 100 to 400 level students from the English Studies Department of the University. Analysis of data will be done using frequency counts and simple percentage.

Key Words: Technology, spelling competence, Internet English, teaching and learning.

Introduction

Language is a medium of communication. Human beings communicate their thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions etc by means of language either in writing or speech. The thoughts, feelings, ideas and emotions are encoded in speech sounds called phonemes or in orthographical symbols which constitute the letters of the alphabet used in writing (Egwuogu 2008:1). Whoever knows a language must know the sounds of the language in order to be able to structure them in their combinatorial possibilities into meaningful utterance. In the same way, communicating in writing in a language requires knowledge of orthographical symbols and the ability to structure them in permissible order into meaningful messages. For this reason, the teaching of language requires emphasis on the four basic language skills namely, speaking, listening, reading and writing. These constitute the core components of the grammar of a language on which a speaker's competence is based. Therefore a speaker of a language is expected to demonstrate a mastery of the mental organization of the sounds and their patterns in the language (Phonology), physical production and perception of the sounds (Phonetics), vocabulary inventory of the language (Lexis), identification and description of the units of meaning (Morphology) and the combination of words to form sentences (Syntax) and to understand the meaning interpretation of such sentences (Semantics). All these must come together to form the linguistic competence of the speaker of a language.

Language is a system and a system of systems. All the systems of a language are unique and different from the systems of any other language. Again all the systems are rule-governed. Any attempt to deviate from the rule leads to distortion and possible breakdown in communication. In recent times, the spelling system of the English Language has witnessed a lot of attack as a result of developments in technology.

The 21st century has witnessed an astronomical increase in technological inventions, innovations and use. This increase is most observable in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Tallvid (2015) has noted that all through history, inventions facilitating everyday life have been brought forward in the shape of tools and gadgets which enable communication to be carried out in more effective and efficient ways. These technological inventions, right from the printing revolution to the digital age feature televisions, radio,

telephone, telegram, computer, mobile phones, ipad and other tablets. They have tremendously influenced the human society.

With the existence of computers, cell phones, androids etc and their accompanying software packages, applications and social networks, communication has been made faster and better. Therefore, a large percentage of the world population especially the youths who are mostly undergraduates use laptops, ipads etc as part of the paraphernia of their daily lives. Through such media as Instant Messaging (IM), Short Message Services (SMS), electronic mail (email) and the numerous social networks like Facebook , Twitter, Myspace etc, they interact and share messages and pictures rather than using the conventional writing conventions. The messages shared are encoded in a new variety of language that is different from the standard form of any language. This new language is referred to as textese and the act of using textese is textism.

Textese has a number of characteristics that mark it out as different from the standard language. These characteristics have been elaborately discussed by Taiwo (2014). They include:

- Unique writing system in which abbreviations and use of only consonants feature. These break the conventional rules of writing. Words are shortened indiscriminately to save time and to conform to the 16-character limitation.
- Letter and number subversion: sometimes, letters are combined with number and phonemes and graphemes are used without punctuation marks.
- Use of signs, symbols and pictures or images called emoticons to represent feelings.
- idiosyncratic innovations that do not conform to conventional orthography. Everybody writes in their own way and this sometimes impedes understanding of messages passed across.
- Linguistic and stylistic novelty: This entails the creation of new forms that were not in existence before now to boost idiolectal and slangy expressions.

The essence of communication is to pass across a message and communication can only be effective when a message is received and understood. With deviations from conventional spelling of words and distortions of conventions of information communication especially in formal domains, the issue of intelligible communication is now drawing the attention of scholars. Taiwo (2010:5) points out that texters enjoy

breaking linguistic rules by altering grammatical words thereby breaking the norms of conventional spelling and punctuation marks.

Among undergraduates of universities, textism is rife with a lot of deviation from conventional spelling. In line with textism and e-communication, they no longer pay attention to the accurate spelling of words. In an attempt to maintain frugality and maximize space for economy as well as keep the speed and informality of e-communication, a lot of abbreviations, acronyms, blending, clipping etc is used. These are sometimes combined with figures and symbols in order to, according to Grinto and Eldridge (2003), conserve space and save time. The question that arises is 'does the constant use of unconventional symbols affect the spelling competence of students negatively? In addition to this, there is the availability of spell-checkers and predictive text input in electronic gadgets used by students. Are these hindering the acquisition of spelling skills by undergraduate students?

Objectivity of Study

The objective of this study is to find out if technology has any significant negative effects on the spelling skills of undergraduates of Tai Solarin University of Education, Nigeria. It will highlight the implication of this to language teaching and learning and proffer solution to the anomaly.

Statement of the Problem

As a mark of the digital age in which technology has become a game changer, undergraduates of universities have made technological gadgets part of the paraphernalia of their daily lives. The availability of e-communication via SMS, E-mail, IM and many social networks has given rise to the use of language in a different way that breaks the conventions of language usage. The use of abbreviations, acronyms, clippings as well as combining figures with symbols is rife. Again, most electronic gadgets used by students i.e. the smart phones, ipad, iphone, computer etc. have in built spell checkers as a software that enables users of the gadget to correct spelling and typographical errors without hazzles. This is done sometimes through predictive text input. The long use of these features might make one accustomed to them without any attempt at acquiring spelling skills. Again knowledge decay may set in as a result of long time of inaccurate spelling. This study therefore tends to investigate the effect

of the use of technological gadgets on the spelling competence of students so as to proffer solutions to redress any damages.

Research Questions

The following research questions are generated:

1. Do undergraduates of Tai Solarin University use textese in formal writing.
2. Is there any significant effect(s) of the use of technology on the spelling skills of undergraduates of Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED)
3. Do undergraduates of TASUED have high competence in spelling skills?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the fact that undergraduates of universities are so much involved in the use of technological gadgets for communication in which conventional use of words is neglected. With this gadgets, SMS written in unconventional language has gained prominence at the detriment of conventional language usage. This is capable of affecting communication in formal domains. There is therefore the need to address breaches in accurate spelling because this can impede understanding and constitute communication breakdown. It is also capable of watering down the standard of language usage. This study therefore seeks to emphasize the need to stem the tide and to pay more attention to spelling skill as part of the grammar of a language and the basic skills a speaker of a language is supposed to possess. The study contributes to the bulk of literature on technology and e-communication with special emphasis on spelling skills. It highlights the need for language teachers to pay attention to the acquisition of spelling skills by undergraduates of universities and to sensitize students on the need to keep the conventions of language usage in formal domains.

Theoretical Orientation and Review of related Literature

This study is anchored on Noam Chomsky's (1965) theory of linguistic competence and performance and Hymes (1964) concept of communicative competence. According to Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence refers to the native speaker's intuitive knowledge of his language which enables him to determine what is right or wrong usage in that language. Linguistic competence according to Wikipedia is the system of linguistic knowledge possessed by the speakers of a language. Competence is the innate linguistic ability to match

sounds and symbols with meaning. For Nordquist (2016:2), linguistic competence refers to the unconscious knowledge of grammar that allows a speaker to use and understand a language. It is also referred to as grammatical competence or I –language as opposed to E-language. Benjamins (1992) as quoted in Nordquist (2016) stated that the linguistic competence of a human being should be identified with that individual's internalized 'program' for production and recognition.

On the other hand, linguistic performance refers to the way language is used in actual performance. Competence is the ideal language system that enables speakers to produce and understand language infinitely. One's competence in a language is defined by his knowledge of the grammar of the language, that is, the set of rules that govern acceptable and unacceptable usage. The grammar of a language consists of the ability of a speaker to understand the sounds of the language (Phonology) the ability to use orthographical symbols and structure them into meaningful words, phrases and sentences (i.e syntax) (Egwuogu 2008) and ability to interpret messages encoded in that language (semantics). This knowledge is internalized and stored in one's dictionary, ready for use when the need arises. In relation to spelling skill, a speaker of a language must have internalized the orthographical symbols of that language to be able to put them together into meaningful words. This knowledge is stored and used constantly and so it remains with the speaker. But if the knowledge is not used, it fades away. It then follows that consistent use of textese will lead to internationalization of features of textese and these are bound to surface in usage even in formal domains. As such, it is capable of lowering competence of the speaker in conventional spelling skills.

Hymes communicative competence deals with the acquisition of linguistic and communicative skills in order to use language effectively in an L2 situation. Linguistic skills deals with the knowledge of all the aspects of a language while communicative skills entail having the ability to understand and communicate appropriately in a given language situations, taking into account the norms and values of the socio-cultural environment. For an all round development in the basic language skills of the target language, Ogunisiji (2004) opines that both linguistic and communicative competences are very necessary.

Canale (2003) has identified four groups of communicative competence. These are discourse, sociolinguistic, grammatical and strategic groups. Our concern is with the grammatical competence which includes the ability to spell words accurately.

Spelling as a Grammatical Skill

Spelling is regarded as an integral part of learning a language. It is seen as the foundation of reading and the greatest ornament of language (Merriam Webster 1773). Good spelling is critical for literacy. It eases writing by giving the writer access to convey his messages through accurate structuring of sounds into words and sentences. However, accurate spelling and spelling skills have come under siege in recent times, following innovations in technology. According to Jones (2001), the importance of spelling as a language skill has been questioned in recent years as word processing programmes are equipped with spell checkers. With technology identified as a powerful tool for learning, it has been argued that with spell checkers in technological gadgets, there is no need to learn spelling skills. However it has been argued that though spell checkers are wonderful tools, they can interfere with the reading process (Anderson 2015). They can give an entirely different word in the process of correcting a mistake in a word. For example, the word ‘does’ can be given as ‘dose’ and if not corrected, this can distort the meaning of the expression. They are more useful in correcting small mistakes and typographical errors. Jones (2001) has pointed out that good spelling skills improve reading and writing, vocabulary development and comprehension. Spelling is the backbone of reading, and it helps in the mastery of basic language skills. Care must therefore be taken to spell accurately especially in advanced and formal writings. For Jones therefore, to read correctly, there is the need for proper connection between letter combinations and the sounds they represent.

Language has structure and texture, our students need to develop both; texture is the ornamentation that gives language colour, intensity, rhythm and beauty. Relying on spell checker can be deceitful. This is because they often do not give the right word even when they recognize wrong spelling. For e.g. the word definitely if misspelt can be suggested as ‘definatly’ or defiantly. This creates more confusion and thus calls for the need to emphasize spelling competence.

In their work on the effectiveness of word processor spell checker programs to produce target words for misspellings generated by students, Montgomery et al (2009) discovered that spell checkers were ineffective in producing target words first in the replacement list.

Spelling is important for reading success. While it was the means of teaching, reading in the 19th century, it has been neglected in the 21st century. Poor spelling causes frustration,

embarrassment and improper transmission of ideas (December 1997). According to experts, Students who spell poorly write fewer words and compositions of lower quality. These writers who struggle to remember spelling often limit themselves to words they can spell. Courtesy of communication demands accurate spelling. Poor spelling causes poor performance, good spellers are good readers as one can hardly read a word one cannot pronounce (Dixon and Kamunka 1997). Poor spelling is an evidence of poor understanding of word structure.

It has been argued that spell checkers do not eliminate the need to learn to spell accurately. Joshi (2009) noted that when a computer spell checker was used for the sentence ‘the bevers bild tunls to get to their loj’, the spell checker gave correct spellings for bevers (beavers) and bild (build) but not for tunls (tunnels) and loj for which it provided tuns, tins tense, twons and log, lox, look, lost, load, lock, etc. logs, low as replacement for tunls. Computer spell checkers are mainly for correcting typographical errors they cannot also be relied on for homophonic words like no and know, see and sea in sentences such as ‘I am glad to no’ instead of know; I went to sea instead of see.’.

According to Joshi et al (2009) spelling is a psychological, linguistic and conceptual process involving knowledge of the alphabet, syllables, word meaning and the history of words. It is therefore a window on what a person knows about words.

Many studies have been done on the effects of electronic communication on students’ linguistic skills and academic achievements. Most of the works paid attention to the effects of Small Message Services (SMS) on students’ reading and writing skills but not specifically on their spelling skills. Some of these works have accused technology of being responsible for the decline in students’ linguistic competence. Anderson (2015) looked at the effects of computer mediated communication on standard linguistic skills. From his findings, he concluded that there were both positive and negative effects of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) on students’ linguistic skills but it depended on age and context. Reid and Reid (2004) investigated socio psychological effects of the text messages on senders and recipients. They discovered that texting provided a peculiar communicative bonding that is different from voice calls. They therefore concluded that texting helps to fulfill social and psychological functions. On the other hand, Thurlow (2003) in his own contribution raised an alarm on the dangers posed by text messages on students’ linguistic competence. He

described text messages as marks for dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness. Consequently, Thurlow (2006) argued that technology affects the spelling competence of students negatively. However, Crystal (2004) disagreed with that. For him, texting did not lead to ‘low literacy levels’ and bad spelling because people must know how to spell before they can text; and texting helps to improve literacy since it grants the opportunity for exercising reading and writing skills.

In Nigeria, some studies have been done on text messages and e-communication. Awonusi (2004) explored the implication of text messages on English language, the use of register as style and the discourse structures of texts. Taiwo (2010) paid attention to the emerging paradigms in digital discourse in which he carried out a stylistic analysis of short messaging systems in Nigeria. According to him ‘The growing popularity of SMS messaging, combined with the need to keep messages short in order to keep costs down has resulted in a seemingly new variety of language which consists of abbreviations as well as replacing letters with symbols or even creating entirely new words. Aremu (2014) examined the use of electronic media in ELT large classes in South Western Nigeria Colleges of Education. He concluded that this would be a welcome development that would ease congestion and enhance teaching and learning in Colleges of Education. The present study examines the effect of technology on the spelling competence of undergraduate students of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode. The use of technology was informed by the fact that it is the availability of technological gadgets and devices in form of hard and softwares that make the use of SMS possible. The study is therefore poised to investigate whether the use of these gadgets have exerted any significant effect on the linguistic skill of undergraduate students of TASUED especially in the area of spelling.

Methodology

This is a survey. Data were gathered through two sources. The first was a writing task in which the subjects were asked to write on the topic ‘My experiences in the Campus last semester’; the second source was a dictation of 20 words. Each word was pronounced twice and the subjects were expected to listen and write what they heard. These tests were administered to 150 students of Tai Solarin University of Education Ijebu-Ode selected randomly from the four Colleges of the University. The tests were done under classroom condition which is a formal setting. The data were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative statistics.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The first question asked if undergraduates of TASUED use textese in formal domains. To answer this question, the subjects were given an essay topic titled ‘My Experiences in the Campus Last Semester’ to write on. Analysis of the essays revealed the use of many textese in form of abbreviations, combinations of letters with figures, acronyms, etc. Below are few examples as shown from extracts from the essays. Their translations are also given.

S/No	Extracts	Translations
1	<u>Lst semster</u> was stressful.	Last semester was stressful.
2	We did <u>grp wrk</u> ,up and down.	We did group work, up and down.
3	It has <u>bn</u> a long way thing in the <u>depatment</u> .	It has been a long way thing in the department.
4	My experience last semester was so <u>gr8</u> 'cos it gave me a lot of avenue to read & <u>exploir</u> .	My experience last semester was so great because it gave me a lot of avenue to read and explore
5	The lecturer made <u>evri</u> one <u>buckl</u> up	The lecturer made everyone to buckle up
6	The lecturers are <u>deligt</u> in <u>dia</u> work	The lecturers are diligent in their work
7	<u>Ist</u> semester was one of my best <u>bcos</u> I purpose to secure A's I <u>stil</u> got some.	First semester was one of my best because I purposed to get As and I got some.
8	The exp was so badly <u>dat</u> I feel like leaving <u>schl</u>	The experience was so bad that I felt like leaving school.
9	I lost my money <u>durin</u> rehearsals in theatre and drama in education	I lost my money during rehearsal in Theatre and Drama in Education..
10	Am <u>hopin</u> and praying for sucess	I am hoping and praying for success
11	Lack of <u>pwr</u> supply sometimes hinder our studies	Lack of power supply sometimes hindered our studies.
12	In the class we all <u>xpresed</u> ourselves	In the class we all expressed ourselves
13	The semester began wt my heart filled with <u>grt</u> hope	The semester began with my heart filled with great hope.
14	I try to achieve better success <u>dan</u> b/4	I tried to achieve better success than before
15	I worked hard in meeting d <u>dedlines</u> for my assignment	I worked hard to meet the deadlines for my assignments.
16	The <u>skul</u> need to work hard on exam <u>t/table</u>	The school needs to work hard on exam time-table
17	From my experience last <u>sem</u> , I must say something good <u>doz</u> not come easy	From my experience last semester, I must say something good does not come easy.
18	I was able to scale thru	I was able to scale through
19	Being in d <u>univ</u> can be a <u>dauntin</u> task	Being in the university can be a daunting task.
20	My experience has <u>tot</u> me to stretch up <u>mysef</u>	My experience has taught me to stretch up (sic) myself.

As can be seen from these extracts from the students' essays, undergraduates of Tai Solarin University use textese in formal writing. This is obviously done unconsciously out of the exposure and internationalization of the orthography of textese. This is in line with Dixon and Kamunskas (1997) assertion that people who are exposed to misspellings tend to misspell words while those who are exposed to good spelling have their spelling skills improved. It

also confirms the theory of reactive interference and decay which posits that more recently learned information intrudes on the previous knowledge as it fades away due to constant use of the new information. Undergraduates of universities are constantly using textese, hence their knowledge of good grammar and spelling accuracy is fading away and giving way to interference by features of textese.

Question two sought to find out if there were significant effects **of** the use of technology on the spelling skills of students. To answer this question, the extracts from the essays written by the subjects were analysed. The results show that the use of technology has greatly affected the spelling skills of the subjects. The results revealed the use of a lot of abbreviations, contracted forms, informal usages, misspelt words etc. Some of these are listed below:

- | | | | |
|------|---------|---|----------|
| (1) | dat | - | that |
| (2) | grp | - | group |
| (3) | wrk | - | work |
| (4) | bn | - | been |
| (5) | pwr | - | power |
| (6) | d | - | the |
| (7) | gr8 | - | great |
| (8) | dedline | - | deadline |
| (9) | durin | - | during |
| (10) | doz | - | does |
| (11) | thru | - | through |
| (12) | sem | - | semester |
| (13) | tot | - | taught |
| (14) | dan | - | than |
| (15) | skul | - | school |

It is pertinent to point out here that some of these forms were spelt according to their pronunciation. That is to say, the formation of short forms sometimes depends on accent and intonation. Thus, only the constituent sound segment constitutes the spelling. Furthermore, the researcher took out time to look at some of the text messages in the students' mobile phones. The following were discovered:

Textese	Translation
1) Pple aren't goin 2 atend	People aren't going to attend
2) wariz appenin	What is happening?
3) Wil c u tomao	Will see you tomorrow
4) Btw d 2 of dem	Between the two of them
5) Am siq	Am sick
6) Com 2 mai ouse	Come to my house

Question three asked whether undergraduates of TASUED have high competence in spelling skills. To answer this question, the data collected from the spelling test were analysed and the results are presented in the table below:

S/N	Word	Correct Spelling		Wrong Spelling	
		f	%	F	%
1	Accommodation	120	80	30	20
2	Gigantic	142	94	08	06
3	Pugnacious	145	97	05	03
4	Nefarious	146	97	04	03
5	Mundane	148	98	02	02
6	Miscellaneous	138	92	12	08
7	Sermon	150	100	-	0
8	Unanimous	130	87	20	13
9	Immersion	140	93	10	07
10	Infallible	145	97	05	03
11	Mediocrity	134	89	06	11
12	Paucity	142	94	08	06
13	Vicious	148	98	02	02
14	Lugubrious	146	97	04	03
15	Immersion	145	97	05	03
16	Celebrity	148	98	02	02
17	Contumacious	130	87	20	13
18	Effeminate	140	93	10	03
19	Taciturn	128	85	22	15
20	Decadense	120	80	30	20

The table shows the results of the spelling test done by the subjects. As can be seen from the table the subjects spelt most of the words correctly. However, 20% could not spell the words ‘accommodation’ and ‘decadense’. This is attributable to the variation between British and American English spellings. That most of the words were correctly spelt shows that undergraduate students of Tai Solarin University of Education have high competence in spelling skills.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of technology on the spelling skills of undergraduate students of TASUED. The findings of the study showed that undergraduates of TASUED use textese even in formal domains. With the availability of technological gadgets, they are engrossed in e-communication which is characterized by limited space, speed and use of unconventional symbols. Through constant use of SMS, they have internalized the language of textese and this unconsciously intrude into their formal writing. However, they still maintain a high level of competence in spelling skills. It is therefore recommended that in teaching the basic language skills, spelling skills should be still be given attention irrespective of availability of spell checkers etc. But more importantly, students should be sensitized to be conscious of proper spelling conventions and to maintain that in formal communication.

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