

Is texting bad for language?

Communication via the use of language involves the transfer and understanding of meaning. With the enormous advancements in communication technology, particularly with hand-held cellphones, much of our traditional handwritten messages are now replaced with text messages or online reading.

A question of perhaps more relevance is whether texting using a cell phone is getting the message across with the sender's intention clearly stated; it is, after all, a two-way process. One of the detractors of this process is the existence of "noise", which can be just that (sound interference - someone close by with a bullhorn for a mouth), or it can be, for instance, physiological (slow reader/sender), semantic or cultural (when expectations, etiquette or values differ). The use of texting may or may not improve this latter concern. However, it has been suggested that body language accounts for about 65% of body language, which could conflict with any verbal or written statements made by text. Articulation of language is often part of texting system design by correcting spelling and grammar. Still, even this doesn't necessarily convey the correct message, often because of its speed of correction and the haste of the sender. When handwriting, for instance, the slower process can give deliberation to these issues, but then again, spell checking could be helpful to many, who, no doubt, are eternally grapefruit. But as a less humorous example, I have read many electronic letters that mix up words such as their, there, and they're.

But even with my abhorrence of this, I have to ask myself, "Is this that bad?". After all, phonetically, I get the message, fair or foul. And whereas 30 years ago, these errors may indicate illiteracy, today, they are more likely to show the common practice of using a different form of communication that has developed due to a more technological society.

So, does texting ruin our language? If measured against technological progress and normalisation in some societies, not so much. However, it may be a good idea to reflect on examples such as a pilot's instrumentation failure and reliance on dead-reckoning to keep en route and not wander off track and crash or how to write a correctly directed and unambiguous message with pencil and paper using "old-school" methods before considering technological innovation as the only way forward with our language.

In short, with greater access to communication through advancing technology and the often integrated textual, grammatical and visual applications available (including a wide range of very widely used emojis to represent mood or attitude), texting is probably far better for the use of language than not. I certainly do not think it has changed how I talk and write, but I have recognised that some of those close to me are now fluent in "textology"!