UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

THE IMPACT OF AGE AND GENDER ON LINGUISTIC AND

POLITENESS CHOICES IN SMS MESSAGING: A CASE OF

TRAINEE TEACHERS IN ADA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

ATTIYE JOHN KOBLA

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in the University of Cape Coast or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: ……………………… Date…………….....................

Name:

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature: …………………… Date: …………………

Name:

Co-Supervisor's Signature: ………………………….. Date: …………………

Name:

ABSTRACT

This thesis explored age and gender influence on linguistic features and politeness strategies in SMS messaging among trainee teachers in Ada College of Education using Crystal's (2008) and House & Kasper's (1981) analytical frameworks. The data were collected from 400 first and second-year trainee teachers via user diaries, and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. A total of 200 SMS messages were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The data revealed contractions and non-standard spellings as dominant linguistic features in the trainees' messaging. Again, it was established that there was marginal age difference within the age groups in relation to politeness strategies. Another aim of this study was to determine whether men and women were different with respect to the use of politeness strategies. The results showed no significant difference between the groups. Thus, the findings did not confirm the previous studies regarding age and gender-bound language. The study has both pedagogical and theoretical implications as the results have certain flair and authenticity to influence researchers who may wish to undertake similar study as well as undergraduate and postgraduate students who are taking formal courses in English language. For stakeholders in education, this research offers a means of not just reading and condemning students' writings, but heightens the awareness of the need to scrutinize SMS texts and educate students accordingly.

Keywords: Gender, Age, SMS Messaging, Linguistic Features, Politeness Strategies

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Mama Gatukpedzi II, Queen- mother of Ehi

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Introduction

This chapter presents general information regarding the background to the study. An issue that has been given eminence in the chapter is the problem that informed this research. The scope of the study is next to be given attention, followed by a set of research questions and hypothesis of the study. Also in focus are the significance of the study and the delimitation of the study. Further, an attempt will be made to provide a summary of how the entire research is organized.

Background to the Study

Man needs language to interact and transact business, but to do this, one needs to adapt linguistic behaviour or language use based on the factors that condition existing situation (Hård af Segerstad, 2002), and as Ling (2005) rightly puts it, 'modern science and technology constantly needs new words and expressions to cover its concepts and ideologies' (p.25). Ling suggests that language evolves and the evolution of a new language goes vis-à-vis with emerging technology at the time. One major example of such influence of technology development on language is the preferable use of Short Message Service (SMS) to that of the usual protracted phone call which seemingly results in hybridization of a language. The Short Message Service (SMS), a type of computer mediated communication (CMC), is a service that enables its users to send short text messages via one mobile phone to another or to internet. Research has established that the first SMS message was sent in United Kingdom in 1992 and since then SMS messaging has become a

<div align="center">1</div>

worldwide phenomenon attracting all manner of people (Deumert and Masinyana, 2008).

SMS messaging is used for person-to-person communication for a variety of purposes. Obviously, SMS messaging, though recent, is a very popular technology used globally by all categories of people in communicating with friends and keeping in touch with them, or even staying in contact with family (Thurlow and Brown, 2003). Studies have revealed that most messages are sent between friends who share almost the same background knowledge (Hård af Segerstad, 2002; Ling, 2003). Interestingly, Solis (2007) sees SMS as a technology of romancing gadget which allows users to create their own world, expressing emotions; thus, playing a major role in aiding romantic relationships among young people. SMS messaging is also seen as a technique people use for wooing ladies they admire but afraid to approach (ibid).

In fact, apart from the usual use of SMS messaging for person-to-person communication, it is also used to interact with automated system for buying of products or in the business sphere of banking services for notification of payments and withdrawals of cash. Again, in recent times, financial institutions, faith-based organizations, politicians, educational institutions and other institutions have equally seen the importance of SMS messaging and began to make good use of it. For instance, in Ghana today, people receive invitations to employment, congratulatory messages, examinations, interviews, admissions, warnings and announcements via text messaging. More so, faith-based greetings, especially, during Christmas, Easter, Islamic and traditional festivities as well as birthday wishes, wedding ceremonies and invitations to meetings are now done through SMS messaging rather than the medium of

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cards. Also, several programmes on electronic and print media in Ghana rely on SMS messaging to engage the public in participating in television contests, radio discussion, counseling and feedback. In essence, SMS messaging has come to stay since it is taken to be a dependable and affordable tool many people use to disseminate information or express thoughts among themselves (Eldridge and Grinter, 2001).

What is quite exciting to many people is how human beings develop imaginative means of making technology in the area of communication work better for them; thus, the creative ability of mankind in a contemporary society needs to be applauded. Research has even pointed it out that due to 'limitation in time and miniature space that comes along with SMS messaging, it becomes necessary for the users to devise an alternative means for sending their messages' (Chiluwa, 2008:96). General observation is that the development of technology in the area of communication has brought some influence on language use and with this development some elements of language are likely to die away as others become a model of excellence.

Interestingly, issues in the literature depicted how the emergence of SMS messaging with its assumed inherent hybridism has come to evoke criticism leading to a heated debate about the effects the language of SMS is likely to have on the grammar of English language. Thurlow and Brown (2003) notably bemoaned the way SMS messaging has affected standard varieties and conventional linguistic as well as communicative practices detrimentally. Researchers have also argued that SMS messaging thwarts students' ability to remember proper vocabulary, spelling, and writing; therefore, it must be abhorred (Huang, 2008; Sutherland, 2002). The critics' standpoint is that the

more students text, the more they are exposed to the risk of forgetting the syntactic rules and spelling, since texting pays little or no attention at all to the importance of mechanical accuracy. According to Bodom and Lee (2002), teachers continue to complain that examination papers are written with shortened words, improper capitalization, wrong punctuations and characters like *&*,*$*and @. However, few scholars have contended that SMS messaging cannot be a contributing factor to the falling standard of education in the area of grammar rather it may facilitate language learning (Crystal, 2008).

Unfortunately, a cross section of Ghanaians also views SMS messaging with divergent lenses, perceiving its language use to be of low standard or a complete deviation from the traditional English grammar. Indeed, the attitudes of some Ghanaians towards the users of SMS messaging have almost always been negative. Quite surprisingly, such unfortunate scolding mostly comes from teachers who perpetually blame SMS messaging for the incompetence of their students in Standard English writing. This view does not only create inferiority and hostility against the users of SMS but also raises some kind of phobia, provokes national spirit and rekindles jingoistic feelings for education in Ghana. Moreover, Kasesniemi (2003) believes that the wider the phenomenon of SMS messaging spreads, the more the discussion that is aroused in the media about its influence on the writing of teenagers.

Having realized the exigency of SMS communication in the contemporary society, sociolinguists and other researchers all over the world have tried to analyze a number of its kind but have not yet adequately addressed age, gender and politeness phenomenon in trainee teachers' SMS messaging. Meanwhile, differences in the way men and women, both young and old, use

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language have long been of great interest to scholars of sociolinguistics. In fact, the general perception of the society might be speculative, so for us to better place the language use in SMS messaging in its real domain depends on the outcomes of the present study.

Statement of the Problem

Language use in mobile SMS messaging is under-examined. In spite of the proliferation of studies, actual empirical studies are yet to agree on a consistent picture of age and gender positions in language use as regards SMS communication. More so, some studies have examined the linguistic properties of e-mail and other computer mediated communication but the influence of age and gender on such linguistic behaviour has not adequately received the same treatment or attention (Shortis, 2001; Thurlow & Brown, 2003; Crystal, 2008). Further, there is paucity of literature on SMS messaging among trainee teachers in colleges of education in Ghana, particularly, Ada College of Education where the culture of SMS messaging is assumedly predominant.

Meanwhile, differences in the way men and women, both young and old, use language have been of interest to sociolinguists. In fact, the corpus of SMS texts has a propensity to reveal the effect of language in contact with the society as well as the innovative ability of the trainee teachers who provided the texts. Thus, this research aimed at investigating the language use in SMS messaging with the view of determining the extent to which the language is shaped. In view of this, the current research seeks to explore linguistic features and politeness strategies in students' SMS messaging and the influence of

sociolinguistic variables such as age and gender on trainee teachers' texting behaviour.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the linguistic features of the language use in trainee teachers' SMS messaging?

2. How do age and gender influence the use of language in SMS messaging among trainee teachers?

3. How do age and gender influence the use of politeness strategies in SMS messaging among trainee teachers?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are used to authenticate the third research question:

H1: There is a significant age difference in terms of politeness strategies of trainee teachers' SMS messaging.

H2: There is a significant gender difference in politeness strategies in SMS messaging.

The Scope of the Study

This section of the present research considered two key parameters, that is, the kind of discipline involved and background of the participants in the study so as to ensure a manageable scope.

The first parameter has to do with the selection of texts for the study. The study focuses on the linguistic features and politeness strategies used by the trainee teachers in their SMS messaging taking cognizance of sociolinguistic

variables such as age and gender. To be precise, it is worth noting that there is a difference between 'SMS text messaging' and 'SMS txt Msgng' (Crystal, 2008). The former is the kind of SMS messaging associated with elderly or sporadic users of SMS messaging who, as a result of status, civility, formality and clarity, make use of traditional standard written English language in texting (ibid). The central concern of this thesis highly lies in the latter; thus, this research is not interested in the former at all in view of the fact that the latter makes use of certain linguistic features which inform the basis of the current study.

The second parameter involved trainee teachers of Ada College of Education (an institution where mobile phone usage is allowed but regulated). These students represent a group with distinctive SMS linguistic excellence, texting habit and with mixed gender within the expected age range appropriate for the present study. Within this group, the first and second-year trainee teachers have been selected on the basis of accessibility and their willingness to participate and provide the kind of information needed for the current research.

Significance of the study

The present study is of theoretical and pedagogical significance. Theoretically, exploration of language use in SMS messaging in a Ghanaian context is important and interesting taking inspiration from Crystal (2008: 117) as cited by Coker (2011) that 'as people become more aware of the communicative potential of texting, the range of specialized uses grows'. Besides, text messages represent an authentic source of data which reveal

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certain important aspects of language behaviour as well as the users' manipulation of language to achieve communication intent. I, therefore, consider this study a vital contribution to the scholarship of language studies since the findings of this research will considerably make available an unresolved issue of linguistic features between SMS language and that of the traditional English language.

Pedagogically, the study will enable researchers recognize and appreciate SMS language as a new variety of language that exhibits unique linguistic features which, I think, will subsequently serve as a motivational factor that may provoke further study. More so, the result of the study will provide answers to questions that cannot be obtained through surveys and observations. It is also helpful in exploring the dichotomy between male and female trainees in the use of politeness strategies to confirm or reject the stereotypical assumption that women are more polite than men in a social interaction. Finally, this research will equip the trainees with the insights into the SMS messaging in order to establish the fact about its effects on literacy, be it negative or positive, when on the field of work.

Delimitation

Since the introduction of Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) in Ghana, mobile phone communication has been considered one of the best medium for communicating. In Ghana, currently, there are six mobile service providers: MTN, Vodafone, Globacom, Tigo, AirTel and Espresso. However, these networks are not the focus of this study neither their voice call services, rather the messages sent and received via mobile phone's SMS. Again, in

Sociolinguistics, areas of research are countless, so I intend to narrow this study to how age and gender affect linguistic features and politeness strategies used in SMS messaging.

Finally, the study is limited to only two hundred text messages so one can readily recognize the fact that such a narrow sampling might not create the true picture of the study. Thus, the data for this study is limited to the confines of the trainees of Ada College of Education. This means that, to a large extent, the sampling is not extensive enough since SMS messaging is utilized all over Ghana. However, it is my hope that the results of the study will serve as a catalyst for further research in the area of SMS messaging and other computer mediated communications.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized under five chapters. The first chapter sought to address the introduction, the background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, hypotheses, significance of the study, delimitation, organization of the study and the chapter summary. In chapter 2, work done by other researchers is reviewed so as to ascertain the gap yet to be filled and subsequently give an overview of the theoretical framework of the current thesis. Chapter 3 is next, and it discusses the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis, findings and discussion of the study. Finally, chapter 5 ends with a summary of the findings, pedagogical implications and recommendations for further studies.

Chapter Summary

The discussion of this chapter focused on the background information regarding the research. So far in this chapter, an insight into the topic has been presented; the purpose, the problem, research questions, the hypotheses, the scope, the significance and the delimitation of the study. The background of the study depicts that language is a means by which people express their thoughts and feelings in a way that they can be understood by others. The background also emphasizes that human beings adapt language use through the help of technology. Thus, one major adaptation of language use is the use of SMS communication. A detailed discussion of empirical studies as well as the theoretical approach to the current study is discussed in the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the background of the study and other related issues. The current chapter discusses relevant studies conducted in the area of sociolinguistics, linguistics, SMS messaging in general as well as politeness strategies. To provide a clearer picture or more of the conceptual terrain, this chapter, therefore, focuses on the theoretical frameworks underpinning the current study. The aim is to present a detailed linguistic and pragmatic analysis of trainee teachers' SMS messaging which will answer the research questions and provide the results for the hypotheses of the present study.

Conceptual and Analytical Frameworks

The Analytic Models used in the current study are discussed in this section. Thus, two approaches are employed: a general discussion on SMS linguistic features, followed by a discussion on Crystal's (2008) Analytic Model of analyzing linguistic features on one hand, and theories of Politeness Strategies and House and Kaspers' (1981) Taxonomy of Politeness Strategies on the other.

In search for an appropriate analytical framework for analyzing language use in SMS messaging, I reviewed various studies in relation to SMS messaging. Shortis (2001) postulates six SMS linguistic features such as shortenings (missing end letters), contractions (missing middle letters) and g-clippings and other clippings (dropping final letter), acronyms and initialisms, letter/number homophones, misspellings and typos, non-conventional spellings, and accent

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stylizations. Bodomo and Lee (2002) examine linguistic features of SMS messaging in Hong Kong and revealed similar findings of Shortis' (2001) linguistic features which they confirmed are characteristic of language use in SMS messaging.

Schlobinski et al. (2001) carried out almost similar study and revealed that SMS messaging takes the form of unconventional ways of writing, such as writing sequentially in lower-case, but they failed to establish the specific features of SMS language. However, they believe that SMS messaging is full of syntactical reductions which are caused by the medium, and that abbreviations and short forms of words were not frequently used.

Similarly, Doring (2002) analyzed types, frequencies, and functions of short forms in SMS messaging using a corpus of N=1000 authentic text messages and questionnaire data. Like Schlobinski et al (2001), Doring found that the widespread claims about the linguistic exclusivity appear greatly exaggerated. Doring, therefore, found almost no SMS-specific short forms, which could manifest a collective identity. Doring rather believes that users of SMS are brief just because the text input is so cumbersome. Thus, Doring established syntactical reductions in SMS messaging which confirmed the findings of Androutsopoulos and Schmidt (2001) and Schlobinski et al. (2001) that the most common features of computer mediated communication were found to be:

- Deletion of subject (especially subject pronoun)
- Deletion of preposition, article and possessive pronoun
- Deletion of copula-, auxiliary- or modal verbs (+XP)

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- Deletion of Verb and Subject pronoun.

However, Kasesniemi et al. (2002) investigated linguistic features of SMS messaging and established 12 ways by which SMS language is reduced or shortened:

- Shortenings, contractions and G-clippings and other clippings

- Acronyms and initialisms

- Letter/number homophones

- 'Misspellings' and typos

- Non-conventional spellings

- Accent stylizations

- Omission of punctuation and word spacing

- Exclamation marks and question marks

- Emoticons (or smileys)

- Capitals or small letters only (whole messages)

- Inflectional endings reduced

- Substitute long words in native language with foreign shorter ones.

Thurlow and Brown's (2003) framework provides practical information concerning the forms and reasons for SMS messaging and postulates certain significant linguistic features. He claimed that texting is typified by three basic sociolinguistic maxims of Grice's (1975) brevity and speed to consist of the abbreviation of lexical items, the minimal use of capitalization and, standard and grammatical punctuations, a finding which was later supported by Coker, (2011). Thurlow and Brown (2003) concluded that text messages are used to accomplish functional and practical goals and that SMS messages fulfill a

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combination of phatic, friendship maintenance, and social functions associated with highly intimate and relational concerns.

Some other studies that relate to the sociolinguistic phenomenon of the SMS messaging and are of great significant to this study are that of Awonsi (2004) that investigates SMS messages as register and discourse in Nigeria; and Sala (2006) that studies the peculiarities of mobile phone usage in Cameroon. In fact, all these studies are relevant and could have been chosen for the current study; however, Crystal's (2008) Analytic Model is distinguished for its authenticity to analyze both linguistic and sociable variables of SMS messaging that form the basis of the present study.

Crystal's (2008) Analytic Model

Like, Thurlow, Crystal's (2008) Analytic Model is an adaption from the Grice's (1975) maxims of conversation that typifies three basic sociolinguistic maxims: brevity and speed, paralinguistic restitution, and phonological approximation. Crystal's (2008) research, 'Txtng. The Gr8 Db8', also established linguistic and sociable functions of SMS messaging by analyzing the 'who', 'what' and 'why' phenomenon in texting. The answer to the 'who' question is that 'anyone and everyone texts, but predominantly teenagers' (p, 117). The answers to the 'what' and 'why' are just interesting as Crystal explains the 'what' to mean informative uses of SMS messaging such as practical arrangements, company alerts and personal relationship such as flirtation, gossip and phatic communion. The meaning of 'why' depicts the primary purpose of the use of 'abbreviatory' characteristics of 'textese', that is, 'to save the sender's time and effort, but, like any other code, it becomes an

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empowering badge of identity, distinguishing those in the know from those not (in particular, teenagers from their parents and teachers)' (p.119).

Crystal emphasizes the linguistic function, which he describes as 'ludic dimension' of 'txtng', and further postulates the linguistic property of SMS messaging as, Initializations (acronyms & abbreviations); Reduction, shortenings, and omission of parts of speech; Pragmatics and context in interpretation of ambiguous shortenings; Reactive tokens; Pictograms and logograms (rebus abbreviation); Paralinguistic and prosodic features; Punctuation or lack of; Capitalizations; Asterisk emoting and emoticons, and Variations in spelling.

According to Crystal (2008), SMS language is yet to be accepted as a conventional and stable form of dialect or language; thus, he provides a dictionary-like glossary which deals with SMS language:

Words in full	Abbreviations
Straight up Hip Hop	S.U.H.H
As far as I remember	AFAIR
Love	LUV
Thanks	THNX
Today	2day
Before	B4
Have a nice day	HAND
See you	C U
So what's your problem?	SWYP

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At	@
Tears in my eyes	TIME
Sealed with a kiss	SWAK
Keep it simple, stupid	KISS
Such a laugh	SAL
At the moment	ATM
Parents are watching	PAW
Random act of kindness	RAK
Please reply	RSVP
Second	SEC
You're on your own	YOYO
As soon as possible	ASAP
Hugs and kisses	HAK or XOXO

(Cristal's mini SMS dictionary/glossary by Vodacom, 2008)

Crystal, (2008) further provides translation of language use in SMS messaging into Standard English language:

Single Letters can Replace Words

- be becomes b

- see or sea becomes c

- okay becomes k or kk

- are becomes r

- you becomes u

- why becomes y

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- oh becomes o

Single Digits can Replace Words

- won or one becomes 1

- to or too becomes 2

- for becomes 4

- ate becomes 8

A Single Letter or Digit can Replace a Syllable or Phoneme

- to or too becomes 2, **so:**

  - tomorrow becomes 2mro or 2moro

  - today becomes 2day

- for or fore becomes 4, **so:**

  - before becomes b4

  - forget becomes 4get

- ate becomes 8, **so:**

  - great becomes gr8

  - late becomes l8

  - mate becomes m8

  - wait becomes w8

  - skater becomes sk8r

- and becomes &, **so:**

  - b& becomes banned or band

- thank you becomes 10q, thnq, ty

Combinations of the above can shorten a Single or Multiple Words

- your and you're become ur

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- wonderful becomes 1drfl

- someone becomes sum1

- no one becomes no1

- any one become any1 or ne1

- see you becomes cu or cya

- for you becomes 4u

- easy becomes ez

- enjoy becomes njoy

According to Thurlow and Brown (2003), these linguistic features have likely detrimental effect on the English language, a publication which caught the attention of the populace and have generated heated argument. However, Crystal (2008) disagrees with the popular view that the use of abbreviations and slang, such as those in SMS messaging and other instant messaging will lead to low literacy and bad spelling among children. Crystal, therefore, puts forward the following points in support of his argument:

- Typically, less than 10% of the words are abbreviated in text messages.

- Abbreviating is not a new language; instead, it has been present for many decades.

- Children and adults both use SMS language, the latter being more likely to do so.

- Students do not habitually use abbreviations in their homework or examinations.

- Sending text messages is not a cause of bad spelling because people need to know how to spell before they can send a text message.

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- Sending text messages improves people's literacy, as it provides more opportunity for people to engage with the language through reading and writing. This is especially useful for school-age children.

- In a typical text messaging, words are not abbreviated as frequently as widely thought.

- Abbreviating has been in use for a long time, and thus is not a novel phenomenon only found in SMS language. Furthermore, some words such as 'sonar' and 'laser' that are accepted as standard words in the dictionary are actually acronyms.

- Both children and adults use SMS language, so if adults do not display the errors seen in children's written work, they cannot be attributed to SMS language alone.

- Use of abbreviations in written work and examinations is not that prevalent among students

- A prerequisite to using SMS language is the knowledge of spelling, so the use of SMS language does not necessarily imply low literacy

Crystal emphasizes that SMS communication is by no means a cause for bad spelling but rather leads to an improvement in the literacy of the user (ibid). Thus, Crystal' work confirms Eco's (2002) finding that words used in SMS messaging are shortened and that we are living in an era where the diminutive, the brief and the simple are highly prioritized in communication so shortening of words in SMS messaging should be embraced.

Apart from linguistic features of SMS messaging, another variable that is given priority in this study is 'politeness strategies' since it is one of the main

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strategies for healthy communication. In fact, in any communication both the addresser and the addressee need to achieve satisfactory social interactions. Therefore, people select some communicative strategies to provide a balance between their faces and that of their interlocutors.

Theory of Politeness Strategies

Various theories are closely related to the politeness strategies. Grice's (1975) works were based on pragmatics which became very influential. Lakoff's (1975) reviewed Grice's (1975) works and postulated "generative semantics" approach. Simultaneously, Brown and Levinson's (1987) strategies are similar to Leech's work (1983) which is essential in analyzing politeness. Other contemporary approaches tend to choose any of these theories and develop them further, usually in the form of criticism.

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle serves as a starting point for the development of different theoretical approaches to the sociolinguistic and pragmatic study of politeness in language use. According to Grice's theory, people inherently seek to be as cooperative and informative as possible in verbal communication by adapting themselves to universal norms of conversation. Thus, Grice formulated the Conversational Maxims as follows:

1. Maxim of Quantity− (informative) the speaker should make his/her contribution only as informative as is required, i.e. the message should not be more informative as necessary.

2. Maxim of Quality (truthful) − the speaker should make his/her contribution one which is true and one which the speaker has adequate evidence for.

3. Maxim of Relation (relevance) − the utterances must be relevant to the topic.

4. Maxim of Manner (clear) − the speaker should be clear and intelligible, avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity, and be brief and orderly.

Lakoff thinks politeness should rather be universal in human, so he postulates the 'politeness rules', a study which received a lot of criticisms (Watts, 2003). Lakoff's study is connected with Grice's Conversational Maxims and combines the principles of human conversation with social issues such as the effect an utterance has on the relationship between the conversational partners. Lakoff further establishes additional Rules of Pragmatic Competence: 'Be clear' and 'Be polite'. However, Lakoff does not define the term 'politeness' in detail and fails to provide the reader with information of how the speaker or hearer can determine the required level of politeness and which of the rules to apply in a given speech situation.

Lakoff's rules of politeness continue to attract a lot of criticisms especially, as being contradictory since 'being clear' is not often synonymous to 'being polite' and can cause offense and impoliteness (Watts, 2003). In a sharp response to the criticisms, Lakoff introduces three additional sub-rules entitled, 'The Rules of Politeness'. The first principle 'Don't impose' is applied when social distance and formal or impersonal politeness is required, i.e. in conversations in which the illocutionary partners seek to keep formal distance and their freedom in order not to be too personal, especially when it comes to what Lakoff calls "non-free goods" which refer to highly intimate topics such as sex or incomes. The second principle 'Give options' is used in

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more informal conversations and is directed at leaving options open for the addressee to preserve his right to take decisions by himself. Finally, the third principle 'Make A feel good' is "the rule producing a sense of camaraderie between speaker and addressee".

Leech (1983) postulates that politeness is one of the pragmatic perspectives and establishes two pragmatic systems: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics includes the speakers' intentions and illocutionary acts. Leech's Politeness Principle postulates the interlocutors "minimize the expression of impolite beliefs and maximize the expression of polite beliefs." Leech, thus, demands the use of more expressions which are favourable to the hearer and can reduce the amount of expressions which are unfavourable to the addressee. Moreover, he provides a set of scales to assess the degree of Agreement needed in a given speech situation. Leech differentiates between a speaker's 'illocutionary goals' (what speech act the speaker intends to be conveying by the utterance) and a speaker's 'social goals' (what position the speaker is taking on being truthful, polite, ironic etc.).

Brown and Levinson (1987: 71-76) believe that 'in the same situation one would choose the same kind of strategy as any other simply because a rational agent is in some conditions able to estimate certain advantages or payoff as well as relevant circumstances after choosing any strategy'. One should take into consideration "the social distance", "the relative power" and "the absolute ranking of impositions" of interactants in many cultures which are of a Face Threatening Act (FTA). Brown and Levinson (1987) provide other strategies known as 'super-strategies' and are described as follows:

1. Don't do the FTA

This strategy is seen as the most polite one. Brown and Levinson (1987: 68) assert that a wise person tends to evade an FTA or at least do their best to minimize the threat.

2. Off record

The FTA requires a person to decide whether to go *on record* or *off record*. Going *off record* means not directly expressing the actor's intention so, that he/she evades responsibility for doing an FTA. On the other hand, an addressee may not discover the tidings and interpret the speaker's utterance differently to his/her intention. This strategy includes metaphor and irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies, hints done indirectly.

3. Without redressive action, baldly

Going *on record* refers to a clear expression of the actor's intention. Again, there is a choice of whether to act with redress or without redress. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that strategy *without redressive action* means "doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible". The speaker should not use this FTA strategy if there is a possibility of revenge from the hearer that might seriously be a threat to the speaker. Thus, it is recommended to act baldly in conditions that: a) interactants wordlessly agree that doing so is necessary or simply better for the sake of both; b) e.g. in *offers, requests, suggestions* where the speaker's sacrifices and threat to an addressee's face are not significant; c) the addressee is in any hierarchy enormously placed in a lower position.

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4. Positive politeness

On the contrary there are two strategies with *redressive action: positive politeness* and *negative politeness*. "Redressive action" is described as "action that gives face to the addressee" and the speaker shows that there is no intention to threaten the hearer's face and is also aware of the hearer's wants (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69-70). So, *positive politeness* appears in case that addressee demonstrates his/her positive face, "positive self-image". The speaker should let the hearer know that he/she treats him in a friendly way, as having "common ground", showing respect, assuring interest in fulfilling the hearer's wants, which minimizes possible face threat.

Brown and Levinson (1987) offer fifteen sub strategies: "1. Notice, attend to H (her/his interests, wants, needs, goods, etc), 2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H), 3. Intensify interest to the hearer in the speaker's contribution, 4. Use in-group identity markers in speech, 5. Seek agreement in safe topics, 6. Avoid disagreement, 7. Presuppose, raise, and assert common ground, 8. Joke to put the hearer at ease, 9. Assert or presuppose knowledge of and concern for hearer's wants, 10. Offer promise, 11. Be optimistic that the hearer wants what the speaker wants, i.e. that the FTA is slight, 12. Include both S and H in the activity, 13. Give or ask for reasons, 14. Assert reciprocal exchange or tit for tat, 15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation".

5. Negative politeness

Negative politeness which is in relation with the hearer's negative face is 'redress'. In Western cultures, the basis of negative politeness is the avoiding of the goal to show an addressee the speaker's respect, recognition and

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assurance that he/she is not the one who will infringe the addressee's negative face.

Also, "conventionalized indirectness" is used in order not to be defeated by "natural tension" to go *on record* or *off record*. Brown and Levinson (1987), therefore, provide a list with explanation and examples of ten sub-strategies against the hearer's negative face: "1. Be conventionally direct, 2. Question, hedge, 3. Be pessimistic, 4. Minimize the imposition, Rx, 5. Give deference, 6. Apologize, 7. Impersonalize S and H, 8. State the FTA as a general rule, 9. Nominalize, 10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H".

Brown & Levinson (1987) showed us the converging point between politeness and formality. According to them 'Formality' refers to a negative politeness strategy that uses conventionalized indirectness to display deference to the addressee; thus, minimize the effect of the speaker's imposition (p.70). Lexical and grammatical realizations of formality include hedges, impersonalization, nominalization, and other distancing mechanisms that redress face-threatening acts with linguistic deference. This is to say that formality as a negative politeness lies at the heart of respect behaviour, and acts to minimize a specific imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 129).

Obviously, certain linguistic expressions are connected with politeness which are so often used in language and are distancing devices. In fact, there are more politeness typologies which seemed so suitable to the present study; however, I would like to adopt House and Kasper's (1981) taxonomy for the fact that it consists of a wide range of politeness strategies that encompasses

all the approaches discussed in the review and are more relevant to the present study.

House and Kasper's (1981) taxonomy of Politeness Strategies

This section provides a discussion on House and Kasper's linguistic expressions, structural categories and examples followed by a brief description of each of the categories. The first of its kind is *Politeness markers* which refer to expressions that show the speaker's respect and the choice of further cooperation on an addressee. The second type is *Play-downs* which are said to be "syntactic devices" which "tone down the perlocutionary effect an utterance is likely to have on the addressee". They are divided into subcategories. Next is, *consultative devices* which are understood as structures that challenge the hearer for further cooperation. Another category of linguistic expression is 'hedges' which means do not inform about the exact amount or content but give the addressee choice to keep their own will. Lakoff (1975) postulates that 'hedges' lower the authority of a statement. By *understaters,* they refer to the usage of a phrase, that is, 'an adverbial modifier' or 'an adverb', instead of the utterance's propositional marker. *Downtoners* soften the utterance; thus, they have polite effect on the addressee. Moving to *committers*, their purpose is to make the degree of the speaker's commitment lower to the content of certain utterance. Another strategy is *forewarning* which is often implemented by many structures that should invoke a widely accepted principle that the speaker is about to belittle or pay a compliment to. Considering intonation and pauses, they are referred to as *hesitators*. Using *scope-staters* the speaker expresses his/her personal view about the matter that is discussed. The last one is *agent-avoiders*, which

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impersonalize or quell the agent in propositional utterances and consequently divert the hearer's criticism to a generalized agent, often realized by passive structures (Watts, 2003).

Empirical Review of Some Related Studies

Several sociolinguistic studies have been concerned with the social context embedding particular instances of language use as it occurs in the spoken channel. This chapter presents some of the most salient features that have been researched so as to form a basis for the argument that the language of SMS is highly variable, often shaped by social factors and social contexts. The first one has to do with gender responsiveness in SMS messaging, the second concept seeks to discuss the effect of age on SMS messaging and the third one discusses politeness strategies used in SMS messaging.

Studies on Gender and SMS Messaging

The experiential literature has been examined in detail and what follows currently is a summary of previous studies on how men and women use language in a social context, most especially, SMS messaging. There has been a growing body of research on the language of SMS messaging. One of the prominent findings documented in the literature is gender differences in language used in SMS messaging. Notably, studies have shown that SMS messaging is gender responsive and that women tend to send more text-messages than men, and women's messages are more likely to be longer and more complex (Ling 2004 and Rosen et al., 2010). The limited evidence as to whether girls and boys differ in their text-messaging behaviour is mixed: Plester et al. (2009) found that girls used a significantly higher proportion of SMS language of 38% when asked to generate their own text messages than

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boys (28%), whereas De Jonge and Kemp (2012) saw no significant gender differences in any of the texting behaviours of their samples of Australian teenagers.

Ling (2005) investigated SMS messaging of Norwegian children, aged between 16 and 19, and revealed that there are differences in the SMS language of females and males. The finding established that teenage girls tend to text more, employ more sophisticated syntax, and use less abbreviation, more salutation, more closing indicators, and more punctuation marks than that of their male counterparts. Ling concludes that males are less smart and less sophisticated users of text messages. The lexical, morphological and syntactic choices between males and females SMS users suggested to Ling that women are more 'adroit' and more 'literary' texters. Thus, Ling concluded that women and the younger users of SMS tend to use more shortened forms and emoticons than men and that whilst women observed conventional rules such as the use of correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization etc. more than men, the difference is marginal.

Rafi (2008) investigated the lexical and morpho-syntactic choices of male and female Pakistani students aged 13-15 and the results show that a "novice intelligible" language influencing media language has surfaced. Rafi further found significant gender differences between male and female students and concluded that text messages of females are more complex, long and lexically dense than those of males. With regard to emoticons, females used fewer signs in SMS texting to colleague females but more signs when texting to males. Likewise, males use fewer emoticons when texting to females, and more emoticons when texting to male friends.

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Baron (2004) unveils some significant gender discrepancies in relation to contracted forms and emoticons. He established that male users of SMS messaging make use of more contracted forms than their female counterparts, and that females employ more emoticons than males. Similarly, Igarashi et al (2005) discover that first-year undergraduate Japanese female students use their text messages more actively than males in social networks. They reveal that the content of female text messages is different from those of males, and that female teens send more and longer text messages, and get involved in discussions of text messages more than males do.

Exploration of gender differences in relation to the use of address-terms and code-switching in the SMS text messaging of some university students have also been examined. Coker (2011) examines the rhetorical structure of 500 text messages posted by lovers, using University of Cape Coast students, to express love to their partners on a radio show known as 'Love Reason'. The study reveals that men deployed more affectionate lover address forms than their female counterparts.

Similarly, Thomson and Murachiver's (2001) study of e-mail communication establishes that both men and women equally asked questions, offered compliments, apologies, and opinions as well as hurl insults at their net pals. However, other studies have reported significant differences in the opposite direction. In a comparison of 36 female and 50 male managers giving professional criticism in a role play, it was realized that men rather used more negations and asked more questions whilst women used more directives (Mulac et al. 2000). However, the study confirmed that men used more words on the whole, whereas women used longer sentences.

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In Norway, female teenagers send more messages, with more than 40% of young women texting daily (Ling, 2005). Compared with young Norwegian men, these young women also send a greater number of longer and more syntactically complex messages, with 52% containing complex sentence structures compared with 15% of boys' SMS messages. They also use capitalization and punctuation more prescriptively, are more adroit at innovating new forms, prefer to coordinate events in the immediate future (as opposed to the middle future as do boys), and are more likely to use texting for managing emotionally 'loaded' communication (Ling, 2005).

In Finland, Kasesniemi (2003) found that teenage girls are heavy texters, often placing greater emphasis on providing emotional exchanges, contemplating reasons behind interpersonal incidents, and discussing how incidents have affected them. It is shown that Finnish boys place greater emphasis on speed; their messages tend to be brief, informative, practical, often single-word or question-answer texts in a single sentence, and are about the facts of events. That gender differences emerge in young people's preferred communication styles is hardly surprising (Thurlow, 2006); these findings do however reiterate the variability that exists between texters and the messages they send. The greatest attention; for example, Hård af Segerstad (2002) found that, at 14.77 words per message, Swedish text messages are typically longer than German messages at 13 words per message (Doring, 2002). Ling and Baron (2007) have established that text messages in the US averaged only 7.7 words each, making them closer in length to those in Norway, which average 6.95 words per message for girls and even fewer, at 5.54 words per message, for boys (Ling, 2005). In a sharp comparison of English and German syntax in

texts, Bieswanger (2008) found that English texts contain an average of 91 characters per message while German texts contain 95.

Studies on syntactic features also establish message complexity, that is, SMS messages containing multiple clauses. It is revealed that Norwegian teenage girls' messages contain far greater complexity (52%) than their male counterparts (15%) (Ling, 2005). Similar results were found in Finland, where boys prefer to send one-sentence text messages while girls prefer longer and more complex messages (Kasesniemi, 2003). These findings are consistent in the US; Baron's finding that 60% of their female university students' text messages contained more than one sentence. Along these lines, the omission of auxiliary verbs, personal pronouns, and function words are common in Sweden where omission of the subject pronoun is also the most common syntactical reduction (Hård af Segerstad, 2002). In the UK, analyses of article use and texting language usage more generally are foci of Tagg's (2009) work.

Analysis of gender differences in relation to code switching in the SMS text messages of Jordanian University students also reveals that males tend to code-switch between English and Arabic less frequently than females do (Al Khateeb and Sabbah, 2008). Another study that documents this sociolinguistic relevance of gender differences in code-switching of SMS messaging is Ofulue (2004). She notes the growth in the use of indigenous languages for texting and submits that it gives sociolinguistic relevance to the local languages in the domain of text messaging in Nigeria, and that women code switch more than men in a social interaction.

Some studies on the way male and female employ code switching in SMS texting have also unveiled the use of English in combination with another language. In Kuwait, Haggan (2007) found that texters use a mixture of Arabic and English in their text messages, while Finnish teenagers mix Finnish with a medley of foreign language words and expressions, drawing suitable expressions from any language mastered by the writer (Kasesniemi, 2003), and South African texters blend English with isiXhosa by writing English nouns with isiXhosa prefixes (Deumert and Masinyana, 2008). Spilioti (2009) provides an account of graphemic representations in Greek texters' alphabet-choice and code-switches. These broad differences between male and female use of language in SMS messaging are supported by Androutsopoulos and Schmidt (2001) in Germany; Herring and Zelenkauslaite (2009) in Italy; and Deumert and Masinyana (2008) in South Africa.

Studies on Age and SMS Messaging

Joyce (2001) claims that teenagers are cherished users of SMS, describing them as 'the thumb tribe' or 'the thumb generation', and their culture, as the 'Thumb culture'. However, Herring (2001) contends that people of all age range cherish SMS messaging and that age is often revealed through preoccupations and life experiences communicated in the message content" (p.621). Whether or not these claims can be substantiated through qualitative research, Herring (2001) argues that the recent phenomenon of human-to-human communication via systems of computer mediated communication, raises issues for traditional variationist's methods, since reliable and, more importantly, clearly identifiable information about age, social class, gender and race are difficult to determine (Herring, 2001). Nevertheless, there is

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evidence that SMS users of all age groups make use of variable linguistic practices to compensate textually for missing gestural and auditory cues.

Eldridge and Grinter (2001) report that the reasons for teenagers preferring to text one another are that SMS texting is quicker, cheaper, easier and more convenient to use than other communicative methods. They found minimal use of predictive typing technologies. Eldridge and Grinter (2001) argue that texting allows teenagers to forego conversational conventions and makes the communication quicker by reducing the overall time spent on interaction. Indeed, as shown by Taylor and Harper (2003), teenagers can use the limitations of texting to express themselves in ways that sustain and invigorate their social networks. Kasesniemi (2003:206) agrees with Eldridge and Grinter as he affirms that teenagers have been slower than adults in adopting the predictive text input in that 'teenagers are not willing to write dictionary language'.

Crystal (2008) postulates that SMS language is generally thought by many people as a secret code of the youth. The understanding here is that the use of SMS language has been considered a common phenomenon associated with youthful exuberance in recent time. However, it is established that both the young and the old make use of SMS communication. Studies have also revealed that in the past decade SMS text messaging or texting, has become very popular among adolescents and young adults worldwide (Drouin & Davis, 2009), though females tend to send more numerous, lengthy and complex text messages than males (Ling, 2009; Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier & Cheever, 2010). Research has also shown that young people and older people use SMS messaging in different ways. Some studies have also shown

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that teenagers are the most avid texters (Kasesniemi, 2003; Ling, 2005). Again, studies on SMS messaging have been done in some countries in relation to age. In Norway, female teenagers send more messages, with more than 40% of young women texting daily (Ling, 2005). Young Norwegian women send a greater number of longer and more syntactically complex messages, with 52% containing complex sentence structures as compared to 15% of boys' SMS messages. They also use capitalization and punctuation more prescriptively, are more adroit at innovating new forms, prefer to coordinate events in the immediate future and are more likely to use texting for managing emotionally 'loaded' communication (Ling, 2005).

In the United Kingdom, about one-third of 8 to 11 year old children regularly uses a mobile phone and sends an average of 22 text messages a week (Ofcom, 2010). Crystal's (2008) study into SMS messaging in the United Kingdom affirms that 80% of children under age 25 prefer texting to calling. The extent at which SMS messaging is used seems to vary with age group and the nature of the SMS messaging. Teenagers have been estimated to use 5-20% of SMS language in their text-messages (De Jonge & Kemp, 2012; Ling & Baron, 2007; Thurlow & Brown, 2003). However, younger children seem to use SMS language more often, with estimates ranging from 50-58% when given messages to translate from traditional Standard English into SMS language (Plester, Wood, & Bell, 2008).

Teenagers have been identified as the driving force behind the popularity of SMS and that their ability to explore and play about with the use of language makes texting very attractive to them (Thurlow, 2006). Yu et al (2002) ethnographic study reveals that American teenagers use the SMS technology

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to communicate with school mates, peers and family members. Thurlow (2006) has also claimed that teenagers are the most predominant users of SMS texting and that it is adversely affecting literacy. Joyce (2001) describes these teenagers who are skilled at the use of their thumbs to manipulate mobile phones and other computer keyboards as 'the thumb tribe' or 'the thumb generation.' She also describes their culture as the "Thumb culture." Grinter & Elridge (2001) describe how teenagers are able to retain their privacy in a parent-controlled life and that text messaging provides leisure and fun to these teenagers and some of them have excessively involved with it. Grinter and Eldridge (2001) ascertain that the pervasive use of SMS among teens is necessitated by its cost effectiveness, faster transmission, and it being more convenient than other telecommunication mediums.

Referring back to Ling's (2005) study, age and gender seemed to factor into: (a) which types of people are more frequent users of the medium; and (b) which users are more likely to use alternative spellings and orthographic conventions to represent speech in writing. With respect to which age groups exhibit a higher frequency of use of the medium, Ling (2005), found that 85% of teens (the two youngest age cohorts were divided into 13-15 and 16-19 year-olds) and young adults (those in the 20-24 age range) reported sending text messages daily; they "are more adroit users" of the medium (p. 348).

In order to establish the groups which are more likely to use linguistic practices that are believed to approximate speech, Ling (2005) examined the structural complexity in terms of length of the SMS message; the use of abbreviations; punctuation; and capitalization. Except for the 20-24 age group, which appeared to be the most prolific users of punctuation – keep in mind

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that the frequent use of punctuation marks were attempts to include emphasis in the messages, such as ellipses for dramatic pause (…), exclamation marks to indicate excitement or surprise, and multiple question marks to indicate "advanced confusion" (Ling, 2005: 343) – and capitalization, the two teenage groups outperformed all other groups on the remaining variables laid out by Ling (2005), and the frequency of use declined rapidly with an increase in age.

Obviously, the concept that language variation in communication is influenced by social variation is sometimes overlooked in SMS messaging research. Ling's (2005) analysis of the linguistic practices of 463 SMS users in a corpus of 867 text messages in Norway generated several implications about the users and their social evaluations of nonstandard linguistic variants. In terms of users, Ling discovered that females, teens and young adults were the most active users of the social medium. With specific reference to the greater use of abbreviations by younger females, Ling mentions that "the use of these forms of interaction also contributes to a sense of group…the use of various forms of abbreviation are seen as ways of identifying group membership" (p. 343). Ling, therefore, suggests that younger females' higher frequency of linguistic features used is viewed as a linguistic practice to index a more emotional and intimate side of mobile phone communication among young females.

In spite of the widespread theories, empirical studies have not yet revealed a complete coherent picture of gender differences in language use. A significant reason may be the lack of agreement over the best way to analyze language. While several studies have been conducted using basic school aged participants, there is a clear lack of research regarding higher education and effects of technology on literacy as well as students' inability to write

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formally. I am, therefore, motivated to conduct a study that relates to language use in SMS social network. This is based on the consideration that very little research has been done by Ghanaian scholars on the language of SMS messaging. Irrespective of both empirical and theoretical findings, the literature still epitomizes SMS messaging as a recent phenomenon, and that, from sociolinguistics perspective, only an infinitesimal number of studies have been conducted so far into it. I have also observed that SMS messaging is under-examined in Ghana; therefore, all the scholarly concerns need to be addressed; hence, my primary impetus to undertake this project.

Studies on SMS Messaging and Politeness Strategies

Although many studies have been conducted on politeness strategies in face-to-face interaction, studies on politeness strategies in SMS messaging have been neglected. Only few studies have attempted to address politeness strategies in computer-mediated communication (CMC), for that matter SMS messaging. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) encompasses all kinds of communication in a form of written text that takes place via email, chat, video conferencing, blogs, cell phone SMS (Crystal, 2001). CMC is a recent medium of communication so not much research has been done regarding the social aspect of.

Vinagre (2006) explored how utilizing politeness strategies by collaborative email partners could help them overcome the potential threat to each other's negative face. The findings revealed that contrary to the author's expectation, the participants rarely used negative politeness strategies, but instead used a considerable amount of positive strategies, especially, those relating to ''claiming common ground", 'assuming or asserting reciprocity' and

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'conveying cooperation', and the use of these strategies suggested that the partners seek solidarity, closeness and cohesion.

Nall (2004) investigated a collection of 12 emails sent by Chinese vendors to a U.S company. The study utilized Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness guideline to analyze the FTA strategies used by these Chinese vendors. The findings revealed that the Chinese vendors showed a different attitude toward FTA and maintaining business relationship which was not in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) model. This, indeed, provides a motivation to look for another model in analyzing politeness strategies.

Tanskanen (1998) also examined politeness strategies used in a mailing list discussion group and revealed that many spoken language strategies were also found in the discussion group, including the use of hedges, stance markers and third person pronouns. Hiltz & Turoff (1993) found that computer conferencing elicited a more homogeneous style of conversation than would be found in face-to-face communication. They also found that computer conferencing resulted in more arguments and insults, concluding that the concern for politeness was decreased in this type of communication; that participants in a computerized conference abandon the face-work that usually occurs in face-to- face conversations. Al-Shalawi (2001) found that Brown and Levinson's theory could not adequately account for politeness strategies used by Saudi ESL students in emails mitigating disagreements. Al-Shalawi concluded that the dichotomous concept of face as either positive or negative was not supported by the interpretation of most of the politeness strategies in the study.

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Of the few studies done on politeness in CMC, it appears none dealt with politeness strategies in cell phone SMS messaging. However, based on the framework of House and Kasper we can make predictions about how certain language features will be used so as to compare the results of the emails to the predictions made by House and Kasper to determine whether the framework is applicable to SMS communication in Ghana. Again, differences in the ways men and women use language have long been of interest in the study of sociolinguistics. However, from the review of the literature, the gap is obvious as most of the evidence from the previous studies spin around teenage girls or children aged between 11 and 25 with little attention on adult age groups. In the following lines, I intend to discuss some of the very few research models that have attempted to bridge this gap as established in previous sociolinguistics studies.

Key Concepts

In the previous section, the analytical framework of the present study was established, bringing out two concepts which are of more relevance and are the key terms in the title of the present thesis. Thus, the term "SMS messaging" and "Politeness Strategies" are discussed here in order to provide general orientation on the conceptual terrain of the present study.

SMS Messaging

SMS messaging is a means of engaging in conversation through the networked applications on mobile phones via SMS social network. The system of SMS messaging allows the sender to type less and communicate more quickly than one could manage without such shortcuts. The general perception is that the language use in SMS communication does not always obey or follow standard

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grammar, and the words used are also not usually found in dictionaries. Nevertheless, there are no standard rules for the creation and use of SMS language so words are shortened anyhow or combined with numbers to make them shorter using the numerals for its phonic quality (Shortis, 2001, Thurlow & Brown, 2003 and Crystal, 2008). As a result, recipients have to interpret the abbreviated words depending on the context in which they are used. Thus, co-textual references and contexts are important when decoding the messages.

Though various studies have described the transactional aspect of SMS messaging (Hård af Segerstad, 2002 and Tagg, 2009), some scholars claim that the most important feature of SMS messaging is its linguistic and sociable functions (Shortis, 2001; Thurlow, 2003; Crystal; 2008). A common approach to understanding language use in SMS communication is to determine which side of the "speaking and writing divide" the linguistic features mostly correspond to (Crystal, 2001: 28). Joyce (2001) reveals that users of SMS develop texting skill that enabled them to use the telephone keypad like that of a typist's master finger movements. Interestingly, one major contention in the literature is whether to consider the language of SMS messaging a written or spoken variety, or even both, which seems to be impossible as the two modes irrevocably take place in separate contexts. Obviously, the language of SMS is baffling as it often mixes elements of writing and speech; thus, calls for a suitable framework that will best establish its language use.

According to Crystal (2001), the most fundamental factors that differentiate speech from writing indicate that 'speech is typically face-to-face, time-bound, spontaneous, immediately revisable, loosely structured, oral/aural and socially interactive; whereas writing is typically space-bound, elaborately structured,

visual and repeatedly revisable' (p, 25-28). Other studies establish that whilst the SMS messages themselves are physically written and displayed some features of written language, they equally have some essential similarities to speech (Baron, 2008; Crystal, 2001). Tagliamonte et al. (2008) reveal that SMS messaging reflects the same changes occurring in English speech, but to a lesser extent, and that the consensus in the literature is that SMS messaging is a hybridized language.

Some researchers also claim that SMS messaging is communicated in written form but has elements that distinguish it from both speech and writing (Thurlow and Brown, 2003; Plester & Wood, 2009).Though SMS language is described as a hybrid of both spoken and written English, it is basically more of a phonological form of spelling that take the features of spoken language (Leung, 2007). Indeed, SMS language has features similar to both written and spoken English as its users have developed some kind of a written form of sounds through new written conventions that substitute the ability to hear spoken utterances (Doring, 2002).

Schlobinski et al. (2001) regard the language use in their corpus to be a hybridization of written and spoken language, judging from its use of colloquial expressions, reductions and assimilations. Scholars, such as Crystal (2008), Herring (2001), Thurlow and Brown (2003) and, Plester and Wood, (2009), among others, recognize that many of these linguistic practices have been adopted and continue to be used by SMS users as "a number of compensatory strategies to replace social cues normally conveyed by other channels in face-to-face interaction" (Herring, 2001: 623). The argument made by Herring (2001) implies that the norms and linguistic practices shared by

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SMS users' originate from features people acquire in non-virtual, off-line environments.

Politeness Strategies

To be polite one needs to observe certain manners and etiquettes prescribed by the society. People have established certain norms and values which measure social appropriateness of behaviour as well as specific conversational strategies which are generally considered to be 'polite' in a particular culture and context. According to Watts (2003), the terminology used to define expressions of politeness is not only as 'heterogeneous as the expressions themselves; it is also confusing and needs clarification' (p, 185). However, giving a definition of politeness may differ and as Yule (2006: 119) rightly puts it, "we can think of politeness in general terms of having to do with ideas like being tactful, modest and nice to other people". Thus, "politeness can be defined as showing awareness of and consideration for another person's face" (Yule 2006: 119).

Holmes (1987) classifies the linguistic expressions of politeness into hedges and boosters. Hedges comprise structures as downgraders according to House and Kasper. Hence, committers, downtoners, understaters and hedges are all hedges for Holmes. However, what Holmes calls 'boosters' is called 'intensifiers' by Quirk and Greenbaum (2000) and 'Strengtheners' by Brown and Levinson. House and Kasper also call 'boosters' upgraders. Watts (2003) argues that many of the upgraders cannot contribute to politeness in an interaction. Quirk et al. (1985) call them the 'downtoners'. Brown and Levinson (1987) call them 'Weakners' and Watts (2003) calls them 'softeners'. Watts (2003) states that politeness is not universal, but influenced and created

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by cultural values and that behaviour ranges on a spectrum of politeness which depends on the right application of the right politeness at the time. The scholarly debates over what really means by politeness continue; however, the divergence views of the previous scholars need to be justified by carrying out further studies in a different context and in different speech community.

Justification for the Present Study

The literature review established the emergence of a new form of language that motivates the current study and identifies some issues that are still questionable in the literature making it ultimate why I am interested in investigating the supposed problem. Thus, merging the two models of studies in sociolinguistics regarding SMS language, age and gender variables on the one hand and pragmatic intent regarding politeness strategies on the other, the present study is distinctive in many respects.

The present study is, therefore, purported to reflect Crystal's (2008) study which adapted Grice's (1975) maxims of conversation to analyze language use in SMS messaging. Inasmuch as the current study has some resemblance with Crystal's (2008), to some extent, the two studies also have some distinguished characteristics, especially in methodology. Whilst Crystal's (2008) study was undertaken in UK, the present study is limited to Ghana, for that matter, African. Thus, the present study is discrete in terms of the choice of participants and the extension of analytical framework to the pragmatic intent using House and Karsper's (1981) taxonomy of politeness strategies as a beef-up framework.

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To-date, research on age has been inconsistent and has generally focused on the early life-stages such as childhood and adolescence, ignoring middle age and fully grown adulthood as a stage worthy of research. The review points out that, even though gender was not given prominent attention in the previous scholarly work, age is by far the most underdeveloped of the sociolinguistic variables. My hope is that the current study will fill the gap of previous research in sociolinguistic study by bringing to light the influence of age and gender on the language use in SMS messaging.

The Relationship between Previous Studies and the Present Study

The review epitomizes how much scholarly writings focus on linguistic and sociolinguistic studies. The current study is, therefore, related to the previous ones via theoretical approach and approach to discussing their outcomes. Since Crystal's (2008) analytic model focuses on 'who', 'what' and 'why' of texting, the present study equally aimed at examining the language use and accounts for similar sociolinguistic variables regarding age and gender parameters. In view of this, the present study seeks to authenticate the proposed linguistic features and sociolinguistic variables in SMS messaging of trainee teachers of Ada College of Education according to earlier studies by Shortis (2001), Doring (2002), Thurlow and Brown (2003), Tagliamonte et al (2008), Crystal (2008), Plester & Wood (2009) and Coker (2011). In essence, the case for the present study is clearly established on the basis of the uniqueness of trainee teachers' SMS messaging, the analytical frameworks and methodology regarding the research site and the participants.

Summary

This chapter reviewed related studies on SMS messaging with regards to linguistic features, sociolinguistic variables and pragmatic intent regarding politeness strategies to help establish the significance of the present study within the existing literature. The chapter has, therefore, shed more light on the sociolinguistic variables that constitute the topic and the theories that form the framework of the study to establish the gap. Again, the chapter partly presents the underlying process of the research and partly the research paradigms of previous studies as adopted by the researcher in the current study. Thus, the study discusses and evaluates the issues that relate to the research approach including the use of theories that underpin the study. In the succeeding chapter, the details of the method employed in obtaining and analyzing the data for the current study are discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

McTaggart, (1996) believes that the choice of a particular method in research is necessitated by the nature of data derived from the social phenomena as well as the research problem to be explored. The current chapter aimed at describing the method employed in obtaining and analyzing the data collected from trainee teachers (college of education students) for the study. Thus, the method used encompasses research design, research site, data and the trainee teachers who provided the data, data and research instrument, population and sample size, sampling technique, data collection procedure, and data analysis procedure.

Research Design

A case study is used for this study because it helps researchers to have a holistic view of certain phenomena or series of events which can provide a round picture since many sources of evidence are used (Punch, 1988). I, therefore, thought of the case study most appropriate for conducting the current research. In this regard, I adopted the mixed method approach for this study considering it very significant when investigating a problem which concerns everyday occurrences. Whereas the qualitative design is employed in identifying the linguistic features and politeness strategies in the trainees' messages, the quantitative design is used to analyse age range and gender differences in the linguistic and the politeness choices.

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Research Site

This study is undertaken in Ada College of Education, a professional institution established in 1965 and statutorily affiliated to University of Cape Coast (UCC) to train teachers for the country's basic schools. Ada College of Education is the only Science, Mathematics and Technical professional teachers' training institution in Greater Accra Region, and has remained one among four of such colleges in Ghana since its inception. Besides, the college offers almost all the Ghanaian languages as core subjects and English as a medium of instruction and a taught subject from year one to two. The trainees in Ada College of Education come from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds in Ghana. In my encounter with these trainees as a tutor of the college, I realized that in spite of their differences in age, gender, ethno-linguistic backgrounds and marital status, these trainees live together with a demonstration of a high sense of humor, commonality, comradeship and informality. More so, many colleges of education, just like, Ada College of Education, pride themselves on being digital campuses.

Again, as teacher training institutions have been migrated to colleges of education, it requires the trainees to use the internet for most of the things they do, from admissions, financial aid, registration, day-to-day class work, assignments and research. As a result, student teachers today are pushed more and more into a fast-paced digital world through their use of e-mail, SMS messaging and, social media playing integral parts in their daily lives.

My choice of this college is primarily necessitated by the fact that I am a resident tutor; thus, I am very familiar with the staff, trainees and the college's norms. I am, therefore, very much aware that the culture of SMS texting is

found among the students of Ada College of Education since cell phone's usage on this campus is not prohibited but regulated. Unlike the basic and second cycle institutions where the usage of mobile phone is banned, the students of colleges of education are allowed to use cell phone at specified times.

Data and Trainee Teachers Who Provided Them

The privacy and prohibition on mobile phone usage in most schools make it difficult for researchers to collect SMS messages as natural data from participants. As a result, most researchers (e.g. Plester and Wood, 2009) have responded to this restriction by tasking the respondents to write down their text message translations on paper, or sometimes resorting to the SMS messages sent to radio stations (Coker, 2011) and other telecommunication media rather than collecting real text messages on students' phone. The fact of it is that collecting data, just as SMS messages, through any other means other than cell phones, poses questions about the authenticity, exactness and natural validity of the data (Holmes, 1990).

In view of this, the data for the current study are genuinely trainee teachers' SMS messages sent and received among themselves via their cell phones. These text messages were naturally data gathered from students who were currently pursuing a 3-year Diploma course in Basic Education (DBE) to become teachers after completion. This is to say that I collected as many as 2000 text messages, out of which 200 texts were conveniently sampled as the latter contained the exact linguistic features I needed for the present study. The data are, therefore, purely SMS messages sent and received among trainee

teachers of Ada College of Education. In all, 200 text messages (100 messages from males and 100 messages from females) with, at least, one shortened element in each SMS message were finally earmarked and shortlisted for the analysis (see Appendix B).

Population and Sample Size

The target population for this study is 600 trainee teachers comprising those in level 100, 200 and 300 of Ada College of Education. However, about 400 trainee teachers, 296 males and 104 females, in level 100 and 200 were the participants of the present study as their colleagues in level 300 were then undergoing a year teaching practice outside the campus. The age group of the participants ranged between 16 and 40 years.

Initially, this research was based largely on 2000 SMS text messages of trainee teachers. An effort was made to include an equal number of messages from male and female in the study. I also received a total of 304 messages (56 messages from males and 248 messages from females) through the user diaries via the researcher's phone inbox. This is evidenced from the reports by Baron (2004) and Igarashi et al (2005) that female teens send more and longer text messages, and get involved in discussions of text messages more than their male counterparts.

In effect, more than 1,300 messages were eliminated from the corpus for various ethical and technical reasons. One major reason for eliminating those texts is that some of them were too lengthy and could hardly be analyzed as single communicative units (Coker, 2011). Others were equally short messages but lack the linguistic features proposed by Crystal (2008) that I

anticipated. In the end 200 text messages were sampled, 100 messages were selected from the males' messages and 100 from that of the females'.

Also, to have an equal number of messages from the various age groups as well as both gender groups, only 300 messages were conveniently selected from those provided by the female trainees as they provided two times as many messages as males, even though the men are three times more than the ladies in the college. In fact, what accounted for this was that females were cooperating in the study more than their male counterparts. Despite this vast disparity, however, an equal number of messages were collected from male and female trainee teachers.

Sampling Techniques

Convenience and purposive sampling techniques were used to collect the data for the study. Convenience sampling is normally utilized when the participants for a study are simply selected because they are accessible or available (Punch, 1988). I, therefore, used convenience sampling method in selecting 400 students comprising 274 males and 126 females for the study. Data need to be purposively sampled in order to select texts that will best answer the research questions (ibid). Thus, in this study, purposive sampling was used to eliminate verbose, incomplete, serial and illogical messages from the corpus. With the purposive sampling technique, I sampled 200 text messages from the 2000 messages I gathered based on saturation so that I can give evidence-based recommendations regarding non-probabilistic sample size.

The participants were further categorized into five distinctive age groups. In view of this, participants were assigned to five discrete age ranges for three

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reasons: (1) there is, according to Ling (2005), an overall tendency for individuals below the age of 25 to show a higher frequency of use of linguistic variants whenever they interacted with others in SMS messaging; (2) it is a common practice in computer-mediated communication research to place an age cut-off point not higher than 25, since the assumption is that "regular users of SMS are typically members of younger generations" (Thurlow and Brown, 2003); and (3) it is necessary to keep the age range intervals consistent among the group of participants in the study. The participants were, thus, divided along the same four-year age range intervals (16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, and 36-40).

Although convenience sampling procedures were used in the recruitment process of the overall sample, the final selection of the participants was based on my personal individual judgment that they must all own cell phones and could provide the necessary information needed for the research, a procedure more comparable to that of a stratified random sampling. Another important basic qualification for a participant is that he or she must be accustomed to the culture of SMS messaging. This is to say that although participants were selected on a voluntary basis, the final selection of the participants relied primarily on gender and age specific criteria gathered from the completion of a preliminary demographic survey.

Data Collection Procedures

The corpus was generated by asking participants to provide authentic SMS data. In this respect, the participants were asked to submit messages they

transmitted over a two week period prior to the data gathering period rather than gathering the data over an observed time interval, as has been done.

To collect the data successfully, I first educated the participants about the project at hand and appealed to them to be allowed to copy the messages they sent and received among themselves, but not those messages they sent to or received from friends, relatives and other loved ones outside the campus. After the participants were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study, their consent was solicited to make them feel they were part of the study. They were further advised that the expected messages should be those they could forward and not the pre-typed messages so as to represent the true reflection of the data. Finally, I assured the participants that their responses would only be used for research purpose so they needed not entertain the fear that their contact numbers and names would appear somewhere in the study.

I further convinced the trainees to give out their messages to me directly or forward the messages through my phone inbox to enable me establish the kind of linguistic features they used as well as their frequencies of occurrence in the messages. They were, therefore, asked to disclose their age and gender but exclude their names when giving out the messages or alternatively, forward, at least, five SMS messages each from their phones' inboxes to the researcher's cell phone. The corpus was collected within October, 2011 and February, 2012 (5 months), and was thoroughly analyzed for over a period of 9 months (October, 2011 to June, 2013). In all, two types of data were gathered from the participants–SMS text messages and specific demographic information comprising gender and age of the participants. Thus, I considered the semi-structured interview very appropriate for gathering demographic information

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about the participants and conducted such interview immediately after collecting the data from each respondent. By this, the following techniques were used in documenting the data for the study:

1. Interacting directly with each participant to collect real text messages on their cell phones.

2. Collecting messages from the users' diaries via the inbox of the researcher's cell phone.

3. Eliciting and confirming demographic and other relevant information about the participants in relation to age and gender during the data collection period via a two minute unstructured interview.

Data and Research Instruments

The data were collected directly from the trainee teachers through documentations and interviews. Since the messages were written texts on trainees' cell phones, they became their personal documents; hence, the appropriate instruments, particularly documentations and interviews were used in the collection. The kind of interview performed in this study was semi-structured. The choice of the semi-structured rather than the structured interview was motivated by its assumed predisposition to offer sufficient flexibility to approach different respondents differently while still covering the same areas of data collection.

Further, a preliminary survey was used just to gather additional demographic information from the participants (see Appendix A). In this survey, the participants were asked to complete a survey prior to their submission of the data. Three items were included in the survey. The participants were asked to identify their age, gender as well as confirm that they had a mobile phone. The

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survey's primary purpose was to gather a set of gender and age specific demographic data that could be measured against the linguistic features and politeness strategies found in the corpus.

Data Analysis Procedure and Analytical Framework

This section delves into the previous studies of SMS messaging bringing out the Analytical Framework inspired by Grice's (1975) maxims of conversation which typify three basic sociolinguistic maxims: brevity and speed, paralinguistic restitution, and phonological approximation. The subject of analysis was purely trainee teachers' SMS messages which were analyzed on the basis of language features and sociolinguistic variables. Drawing on previous studies that dealt with the frequency of use of SMS linguistic features, the current study follows a similar framework for the selection and classification of the sociolinguistic dependent variables; thus, SMS linguistic features proposed by Crystal (2008) and the taxonomy of politeness strategies by House and Kasper (1981).

The previous investigations of the language of SMS messaging suggests that SMS users used certain linguistic features or shorten words to represent features of speech and writing, as well as lengthened words, represented laughter, used capital letters and repeated punctuation marks to add emphasis (Baron, 2008; Crystal, 2008; Herring, 2001). All instances of these linguistic varieties were classified as linguistic features; thus, the elements studied include contractions, punctuations, clippings, emoticons, capitalizations and non-standard spellings as coded and illustrated with examples in Table 1.

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The first analytical approach of this research is centered on linguistic features. I carried out the content analysis by manually identifying and analyzing the occurrences of the linguistic features. In view of this, data analysis was carried out qualitatively vis-à-vis quantitatively as figures and percentages were utilized to show the frequent occurrences of each linguistic feature in the shortlisted SMS messaging. Thus, the analysis was done through description, manual counting, interpretation and explanation of the data. According to Spratt (2000), statistical techniques can be classified into two types, namely descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Raw counts of instances where an SMS user produced the expected linguistic features were counted and separated into the three dependent variable classifications outlined above. Frequency of occurrences of the nine linguistic features used was tallied and their raw counts were used to test the effect of the sociolinguistic independent variables: gender and age. In this case, I employed frequency distribution tables as statistical tools to ensure equity in the data distributions and used descriptive statistics in presenting the data. This was accompanied by contrastive analysis via inferential statistics to determine the variation between the sociolinguistic variables.

Apart from investigating the linguistic features, another aim was to establish politeness strategies as used by the trainee teachers in their SMS messaging. This examination of politeness in SMS messaging was done in line with the taxonomy of politeness structures proposed by House and Kasper (1981) which postulates eleven categories. I further subjected the strategies to quantitative analysis on the basis that the messages of men were as polite as that of women's across all age groups.

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Table 1: Linguistic Features in SMS Messaging

Linguistic features	Description	Example	Translation
Contractions	Omission of **vowels** from words	tmrw,	tomorrow
Clipping	Omission of *g* from -*ing* and other clippings	flyin/wil	flying/will
Punctuation & lack of	Wrong or overuse of end-markers, comma and apostrophe	dont/Narteys	don't/Nartey's
Capitalisation	Use of capital letters wrongly or lower case letters for capitals	Accra/ i	Accra/ I
Initialisms(acronyms & abbreviations)	Phrase / word represented by initial letter of each word or morpheme	btw/bf	by the way/ boyfriend
Emoticons and Symbols	Graphemes/symbols used for words, actions or emotions	:)/ xx/ @/&	Happy, kiss/ at, and
Letter/number homophone	Number/letter or combined to represent words/phonemes	2/y/w8/ sum1	To/why/wait/ someone
Nonstandard spelling	Irregular/ phonetic spelling	Neva/ fone	Never/ phone

Crystal's (2008) Linguistic Features

This taxonomy was used as an additional framework for analyzing politeness strategies employed in the trainees' SMS messaging.

The taxonomy of politeness structure

1. ***Politeness markers*** mean expressions added to the utterance to 'show deference to the addressee and to bid for cooperative behavior'. The most obvious example of a politeness marker in English is *please*, but there are others, e.g., *if you wouldn't/don't mind*, tag questions with the modal verb *will/would* following an imperative structure (*Close the door, will you/would you?*), etc.

2. ***Play-downs*** meaning syntactic devices which 'tone down the perlocutionary effect an utterance is likely to have on the addressee'. These are then subdivided into five subcategories which, in fact, boil down to the following four: use of the past tense (*I wondered if . . . , I thought you might . . .*), progressive aspect together with past tense (*I was wondering whether . . . , I was thinking you might . . .*), an interrogative containing a modal verb (*would it be a good idea . . . , could we . . .*), a negative interrogative containing a modal verb (*wouldn't it be a good idea if . . . , couldn't you . . .*).

3. ***Consultative devices*** are understood as structures which seek to involve the addressee and bid for her/his cooperation, e.g., *Would you mind . . . , Could you . . .*

4. ***Hedges*** are referred to as the avoidance of giving a precise propositional content and leaving an option open to the addressee to impose her/his own intent, e.g., *kind of*, *sort of*, *somehow*, *more or less*, *rather*, *and what have you.*

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5. *Understaters* are used as a means of under-representing the propositional content of the utterance by a phrase functioning as an adverbial modifier or also by an adverb itself, e.g., *a bit*, *a little bit*, *a second*, *a moment*, *briefly*.

6. *Downtoners* are used to 'modulate the impact' of the speaker's utterance, e.g., *just*, *simply*, *possibly*, *perhaps*, *really*.

7. *Committers* are used to lower the degree to which the speaker commits her/himself to the propositional content of the utterance, e.g., *I think*, *I believe*, *I guess*, *in my opinion*.

8. *Forewarning* is a strategy that could be realized by a wide range of different structures in which the speaker makes some kind of metacomment on an FTA (e.g., pays a compliment) or invokes a generally accepted principle which s/he is about to flout, etc. (e.g., *far be it from me to criticize, but . . .* , *you may find this a bit boring, but . . .* , *you're good at solving computer problems*).

9. *Hesitators* are pauses filled with non-lexical phonetic material, e.g., *er*, *uhh*, *ah*, or are instances of stuttering.

10. *Scope-staters* express a subjective opinion about the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, e.g., *I'm afraid you're in my seat*, *I'm disappointed that you couldn't . . .* , *it was a shame you didn't . . .*

11. *Agent avoiders* refer to propositional utterances in which the agent is suppressed or impersonalized, thereby deflecting the criticism from the addressee to some generalized agent, e.g., passive structures or utterances such as *people don't do X*.

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The frequency analysis was further used to investigate the number of politeness features. The aim is to present a pattern of politeness structures in SMS messaging as used by the trainee teachers. To achieve this aim, all the messages were further categorized into gender and discrete age groups. Thus, the messages were classified into two categories: messages written by male trainees and messages written by female trainees. The messages were marked *F1, F2, F3, etc.* for the female messages and *M1, M2, M3, etc.* for the male messages. I counted and classified the number of politeness markers under each category after which I tabulated them accordingly. The 200 messages selected were further transcribed and then reviewed to identify politeness strategies used. What was immediately apparent is that there was a large number of markers used to depict politeness overall. Moreover, the messages of men were as polite as that of the women's.

Furthermore, I used another frequency counts and Chi-square statistical procedures. Frequency counts were used to show the frequency of linguistic features found in the text messages of both male and female trainees as well as those utilized by the various age groups. Further, I counted politeness indicators in the messages, then used percentages and figures to show their distribution between gender, and finally, used Chi-square to find out whether or not the differences were meaningful or insignificant. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were employed to analyze the data on research questions one to three. The data on hypotheses were analyzed using Chi square test (χ^2).

Ethics and Reliability

Where ethical problems were sensed in the messages, pseudonyms were used as names of participants because pseudonyms do not refer to specific persons (Coker 2011). Besides, any other information that triggered the spotlight of participants' identity was detached, most especially, their contact numbers because text messages are often confidential and illicit, so dissociating them from their respective owners are deemed necessary (Herring, 1996; Ling, 1998; and Kaseseniemi et al, 2002). Cohen et al (2000: 56) as cited in Coker (2011), these steps were crucial in a research since "whatever the specific nature of their work, researchers must take into consideration the effects of the research on participants, and act in such a way to preserve their dignity as human beings". In an attempt to easily decipher or better understand the nature of the messages and their respective contents, the complicated texts were sent back to the participants exactly as they wrote them for detailed explanation.

For reliability, a second coder was given 10% of the corpus to examine, resulting in an inter-coder agreement of 96.8%. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significant levels to establish the differences, if any to assess the degree to which the quantitative variables were linearly related. The analysis is limited in size and does not allow for extended illustration of all categories, and thus a selection of them will be presented and exemplified in the succeeding chapter.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three has dealt with methodological issues of both qualitative and quantitative research designs employed in the current study. The mixed method was considered suitable because of the nature of the study; thus, the

search for linguistic features in SMS messaging, age and gender roles in SMS messaging as well as the pragmatic intent of politeness strategies in SMS messaging.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the method used in this study. Chapter four provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the data. The analysis is done in four parts. The first part has to do with identification and discussion of linguistic features in the trainee teachers' SMS messaging. The second part presents gender and age influences on the usage of such linguistic features in the data. The third part deals with identification of politeness strategies used in the trainees' SMS language. Gender influence on trainee teachers' usage of politeness strategies followed whilst the last part is used to make comparison within groups in relation to employment of politeness markers in their text messages. Following this, the analysis will address the three research questions and the hypothesis.

Linguistic Features in the Trainee Teachers' SMS Messaging

This section addresses Research Question1 partly: What are the linguistic features of the language use in trainee teachers' SMS messaging?

Most sociolinguistic research has been concerned with the social and cultural context embedding particular instances of language use as it occurs in the spoken channel. Yet, variations in a language do not project possible changes to speech alone. What is affected is a language, so it is essential to view language as a system. Obviously, the users of this system of language have a tendency to establish markers of normative linguistic behavior originating from shared sets of knowledge, values and expectations about the system (Herring, 2001). In this chapter, I will present some unique linguistic features,

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so as to form a basis for the argument that the language of SMS is ever changing, often shaped by social factors and social contexts.

Following the kind of linguistic features put forward by Crystal's (2008) model, the data gathered from the trainee teachers of Ada College of Education were linguistically exemplified as contractions, g-clippings and other clippings, acronyms and initialisms, letter/number homophones, misspellings, and non-conventional spellings.

Contractions

From the data, one major linguistic feature found in the trainee teachers' SMS messaging is 'contractions'. Contractions are the short forms of words such as 'don't' instead of 'do not' in Standard English language**.** In fact, contractions in the context of this study refer to the short forms of words the trainee teachers used in their messaging, most especially, words whose vowels were omitted, as established by Crystal (2008). In the corpus analyzed, vowels were mostly deleted, depending on the length of the word; thus, making the contracted words clearer to decipher. Some examples are depicted in the messages below.

> **Example 1**.
>
> ***txt m*** *wht u **wnt** 2 se ur lyn **s nt** gud* (**M46**)
>
> (Text me what you want to say your line is not good.)
>
> **Example 2**.
>
> **hv swt drms** nd gudnyt (**F75**)
>
> (Have sweet dreams and goodnight)

Furthermore, the critical examination of the corpus revealed that in the contraction of some of the words, only one vowel was deleted. Some typical examples were found in the following words of the trainees' messages, e.g. *discharg* for discharge*, trffic* for traffic, and *progrm* for program as depicted in messages F12 and F164 below.

Example 3.

u lwys knw hw 2 spoil ma **progrms** (F12)

(You always know how to spoil my programs)

Example 4.

didnt **discharg** cos u r d **sugr** in ma koko (F164)

(I didn't discharge because you are the sugar in my koko)

In the case of words that have no common abbreviation, the trainee teachers usually removed all the vowels from such words and retained the consonants, so the recipient had to interpret a string of consonants by re-adding the vowels. For example, principal becomes *prncpl*, assignment becomes *asgnmnt* and dictionary becomes *dctnry* as can be seen in the following examples.

Example 5.

pls chck frm th **prncpls** offc (F50)

(Please, check from the principal's office)

 Example 6.

thnx 4 **yestrdy** c me 4 2dys **asgnmnt** (M155)

(Thanks for yesterday see me for today's assignment)

The investigation further discovered that trainees shortened their words by cutting off the ending, the beginning, or the middle part. Most of the

contracted words manifested in the data are auxiliary verbs such as (*must, will, have*), the coordinators (*but*, *and*) and also such popular words as *forward* and *morning*. Other words most frequently contracted in the messages are site vocabulary words, otherwise called monosyllabic words such as*, just, me, back, down, extra, from, good*, *how, write*. This finding on contractions is in line with that of Plester, Wood & Joshi (2009) which revealed that contractions are significant features of SMS messaging. They gave examples as 'txt' for 'text', 'asgnmt' for assignment, and 'hmwk' for homework.

From the analysis, the trainees' SMS messaging seems to have endorsed omission of vowels as its key feature. In fact, in Standard English language writing, one can hardly form a word without making use of any of these vowels (a, e, i, o, u) but in SMS messaging of the trainee teachers, one could find quite a number of words without vowels. It appears the trainees are aware of the high communicative value of consonants over vowels thus, tried to exploit this phenomenon by omitting vowels in quite a number of ways while sending their messages. The phenomenon is noticeable from the popular examples taken from their messages e.g. *bt* [but], *cnt* (cannot), *xclnt* (excellent), *fwd* (forward), *gd* (good), *msg* (message), *txt* (text) and *pls* (please).

Also, the data revealed that not only vowels which are mostly affected by the strategy of omission, but middle double consonant letters are sometimes reduced by the trainees and as a result rendered the lexical features a complete deviation from the existing norm of spelling.

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Example 7.

pls c thm *imedtly* **(**M41**)**

(Please see them immediately)

Example 8.

just **litl** rmain (F67)

(Just little remain)

It might be that the limitation of space in SMS service or the bid to respond quickly has prompted the trainees to utilize different techniques of reduction of words that seem to violate many rules of Standard English. However, Crystal (2008) strongly believes that the contraction of words without vowels is not something new and that it is easy to decipher a message built out of consonants only since they are the main message carriers, whereas it is impossible to do so if we remove all the consonants and retain only vowels. Again, Crystal intimates that the contracted form of a word normally results in the formation of new words giving the example that the contracted form of the full word 'representative' 'rep' is a new word from a full one which is different in meaning when it comes to formality, and that contracted form of a word can result in such phenomena as clipping and abbreviations. In support of Crystal (2008), sometimes shortened form of words are used for reasons other than space constraints

Clippings

The present investigation established that clipping is one of the dominant linguistic features. According to Yule (2006), clipping is a word formation process which consists in the reduction of words to one of its parts. It is known as 'truncations' and 'shortening', terms which are self-explanatory (ibid). In

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the process of clipping, parts of words are cut off or clipped or truncated and when this happens, what remains is shorter than the original word. Clippings, as revealed in this study, comprise 'g-clippings' and 'other clippings'. The former refer to 'ing' words for which the final 'g' is omitted, for example, 'comin' instead of 'coming' as can be seen in example 9. The latter, on the other hand, represents final letter omissions, typically final consonants, for example, '**wil'** for 'will', and such soundless vowels as '**hav'** for have as shown in example 11.

> **Example 9**.
>
> ***comin*** *jx nw* ***bro*** *meet m @ d g8* ***promis*** (F31)
>
> (Coming just now brother meet me at the gate I promise.)
>
> **Example 10**.
>
> **wed** mt me @ d g8 4 **smthng spcl** (F187)
>
> (Wednesday meet me at the gate for something special)

The analysis further revealed that clipping occurred in the shortening of names of days of the week and names of months of the year in the trainee teachers' messages. For example, 'sun' for Sunday, 'wed' for Wednesday, 'jan' for January and 'feb' for February. The examples of days and months given above appear to be the usual words used in the English language so their short forms do not, in any way, cause difficulties in their interpretation. Also, the shortening of words like *bro,* and *sis* are popular address forms used by the trainee teachers to show endearment. Some popular words such as 'laboratory', 'library' and 'president' are also clipped for shortening, as shown in the messages below.

Example 11.

pls wil lyk 2 meet u & ur frnds @ de **lab** (F176)

(Please, will like to meet you and your friends at the laboratory.)

Example 12.

mst frst tlk 2 d prez (M57)

(Must first talk to the president)

Thus, the frilling of the syllables shortens the words thereby saving the sender from the problem of possible mistakes with words whose spellings appear somehow difficult. This finding supports Yule's (2006) that reveals that this type of linguistic feature occurs when a word of more than one syllable is reduced to a shorter form, often in casual speech. It involves the subtraction of one or more syllables from a word (ibid). The finding also confirmed the earlier research that 'clipping occurs at the beginning, the end or at both ends of a word' (Quirk & Greenbaum, 2000:448).

Punctuations

The most distinctive feature of the trainees' SMS messaging is the omission of punctuation marks. Standard English treats any text without punctuation marks or inappropriate use of punctuation marks as error but trainees are hardly seen to abide by this rule of punctuation accuracy. This phenomenon is revealed in messages M25, M32 and F33 below.

Example 13.

av realy mis U can i c U l8r in th evnin (M25)

(I have really missed you. Can I see you later in the evening?)

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Example 14.

kudos wsh u th bst of luck (M32)

(Kudos! I wish you the best of luck.)

Example 15.

Swty luv u mor than my hat (F33)

(Sweetie, I love you more than my heart.)

Throughout the analysis, it is realized that there is total omission of commas in the messages, as demonstrated in M33 below. Other punctuations were slightly used but even, in messages that the trainee teachers deemed necessary to apply the punctuation marks, they used non-standard forms rather to depict paralinguistic signs as used in face-to-face communication. The kind of punctuation marks that were revealed in the data includes 'end markers' and 'apostrophe'. The punctuation marks identified to have been applied but wrongly in the messages were the end markers whose original function in grammar is to depict where sentences end. Such end markers manifested in the data are the full stop (.), the question mark (?) and the exclamation mark (!).

In the study, the trainee teachers violated the standard use of exclamation and question marks when texting. Instead, these trainees used multiple end markers to depict a strong feeling of non-verbal cues, such as facial expression, gestures, body language and other contextual cues we normally use in day to day conversations. The use of non-standard punctuation marks as linguistic feature in the messages suggests that SMS messaging is more of a speech than writing. Again, the trainees' use of this multiple exclamation marks (!!) is to emphasize the main idea they intended conveying to their recipient.

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These trainees also used both exclamation marks and question marks concurrently in order to express their emotions and the tone of their messages. In fact, the traditional standard use of the exclamation mark (!) is to express emotions, feelings and surprise; however, in the trainees' messages, it was accompanied by question marks (?). The study also revealed that the deliberate use of these seemingly grammatical awkward punctuation marks **(!!??!!)** as depicted in the data helps intensify the tone of the messages but not for the purpose of punctuation. Examples 16 and 17 give an illustration of such a case.

Example 16.

 uv bn oflyn since 2pm whr r u!!??!! (F100)

(You have been offline since 2.00 PM where are you!!??!!)

Example 17.

tofiakoa ovr ma deadbdy!!!!! (F101)

('Tofiakoa' over my dead body!)

Furthermore, the trainee teachers overused these punctuations to exaggerate emotions or excessive repetition of a particular punctuation mark for emphasis as shown in the examples above. Multiple punctuations are also used in their messages, for instance '!!' or '??' for emphasis and '….' to express contemplation as in the example below.

Example 18.

*hi y d silence any srios prblm **!!!???…**Slp tght n gudnyt.*

*(*F22)

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(Hi! Why the silence any serious problem!!??....Sleep tight and good night.)

Example 19.

gud!!!! bein in ur ams mks me feel lyk bein in hevn ☹ (M11)

(Good! being in your arms makes me feel lyk being in heaven (happy face)

In traditional Standard English writing, an apostrophe (') is used to indicate possession, form contraction and plurals of letters but this is not the case when it comes to the trainees' SMS messaging. The study shows that most of the trainees do not pay attention to the use of apostrophe in their messaging. In the data, it is shown that the trainees do not observe the use of apostrophe in their messaging, perhaps, with the intention to respond quickly to the messages received. Below is a message with words bolded to indicate the contracted words in which the use of an apostrophe has been violated.

Example 20.

*tt said u **havnt** rturnd hs **sistrs** mony as promis* (F30)

(TT said, 'You haven't returned his sister's money as promised.')

Comparatively, there are, of course, many cases in English where leaving out the apostrophe in syntactic constructions causes misunderstanding of the message. For example, 'we're' without the apostrophe could be misread 'were'. Even so, these are mostly understood correctly despite being ambiguous, as readers can rely on context cues such as parts of sentences to decide what the word should be. Since it is not crucial that users use apostrophes to ensure that their messages are understood accurately, this

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phenomenon may be attributed to trainee teachers trying to maintain clarity so that the message can be more easily understood by the recipients in a shorter time.

The data also show that the standard use of quotation marks was violated. In traditional Standard English, quotation marks indicate quoted speech and are placed at the beginning and the end of a direct speech. However, the data revealed that quotation marks were excluded where they were supposed to exist. Some instances of quotation marks violation are shown in messages F30 and M71 below.

> **Example 21**.
>
> *tt said u **havnt** rturnd hs **sistrs** mony as promis* (F30)
>
> (TT said, 'You haven't returned his sister's money as promised.')
>
> **Example 22** .
>
> *sh jst shtd is paini me* (M71)
>
> (She just shouted, 'It is paining me.')

In fact, the indiscriminate use of punctuation marks in the data revealed the actual structure and organization of the trainee teachers' SMS messaging, as well as the representation of intonation and pauses that are observed in standard written English language. It is worth noting that the use of non-standard punctuation in the trainee teachers' messages authenticate the sociolinguistic maxim of paralinguistic restitution which seeks to address the absence of prosodic features, such as stress and intonation in verbal communication (Thurlow and Brown, 2003). This violation of punctuation marks makes SMS messaging more informal or more of a speech than written

communication. The trainees, when typing the messages, give no importance to the rules of punctuation marks. These trainees developed strategies to make up for the loss of paralinguistic cues that are used during face-to-face communication.

Capitalizations

Capitalization is used for the first word in every sentence, direct quotation, proper nouns, and initials that stand for names of persons. However, the data revealed that these trainee teachers violated the use of capitalization to create the presence of paralinguistic signs. For instance, the trainees capitalized the words "U", "SRIOSLY" and "Y" for emphasis and also for the sake of expressing a rising tone which is typical of interrogative sentences.

> **Example 23**.

> *U cz 4rm givin m mony* **SRSLY** *Y gud9t* (F13)

> (YOU ceased from giving me money, SERIOUSLY, WHY? Good night.)

Most of the trainees' SMS messages did not contain capitalization. Obviously, the use of capitalization here on the first word of the message F13 above might, in fact, not be intentional, and it might likely be due to the default capitalization setting of devices. Ungrammatical use of capitalization in the text messaging may encode prosodic elements, whilst its overuse may signify the textual equivalent of raised voice so as to indicate heightened emotion. The finding confirmed Thurlow and Brown's (2003) that text messages portray minimal use of capitalization in the genre of text messaging. Again,

this finding confirmed the finding of Schlobinski et al. (2001) that unconventional ways of writing in SMS messaging, most especially, writing consequently in lower-case makes it more of a speech than written.

Initialisms (Acronyms and Abbreviations)

According to Crystal (2008), acronyms are not unique to SMS messaging. Acronyms are letters pronounced as one word UTAG, GRASAG whilst abbreviations are words pronounced letter by letter, for example 'TV', 'BBC', 'iou/ I owe you', 'iowan2bwu/ I only want to be with you' (which contains a full word, initialism, clipping, number and a letter homophone). In general, acronyms and initialisms involve shortening of words to their initial letters. Acronyms are sometimes considered formal shortenings of words such as GNAT, whilst initialisms are of more informal, for example, 'iou/I owe you', 'omg/oh my God', 'gf/ girlfriend', 'IMHO/ in my humble opinion", and 'ttyl/talk to you later. Most of these acronyms and initialisms featured in the data gathered from the trainees as can be seen in the examples below.

> **Example 24**.
>
> F2*T2M?* (F2)
>
> (Are you free to talk to me?)
>
> **Example 25** .
>
> ***IOU ok** bt hv u hrd of **GNAT** n **GNAGRAT** strke* (M9)
>
> (I owe you but have you heard of GNAT and NAGRAT strike)

Though Standard English uses acronyms and abbreviations as process for the formation of words, trainees SMS messaging has distinctive abbreviations and

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initialisms for key bindings and phrases. The most common abbreviations used by the trainees include *GM* (good morning), *GN* (good night), 2*CU@A3* (to see you A3= at any time, any place, anywhere).

Example 26.

F2*T2M?* (F2)

(Are you free to talk to me?)

Example 27.

evr rdy 2CU@A3 (F36)

(Ever ready see you A3= at any time, any place, anywhere).

Example 28.

GM hw r u (F43)

(Good morning how are you?),

Example 29.

GN swt dreamz (M71)

(Good night sweet dreams),

Sometimes, to deduce the meaning of these contracted words, recipients have to interpret the abbreviated words depending on the context in which they are used. For instance, a trainee used *ttyl* and *lol* to mean *take time you lie* and *lots of love* respectively as opposed to *talk to you later or laugh out loud*. In another instance, some trainees used *omg* and *lol* which might perhaps mean *oh my god, laugh out loud* as opposed to *oh my god, lots of love*. These types of initialisms mostly create ambiguity; therefore, co-textual references and context are crucial when interpreting them. Some examples are given below:

Example 30.

ttyl (F40)

(Talk to you later/ Take time you lier)

Example 31.

lol (M66)

 (lots of love/ laugh out loud)

 Example 32.

 omg *4giv me* (F74)

(Oh my god forgive me)

It is apparent that the unique abbreviations and acronyms, most especially *ttyl, omg, lol, 2CU@A3* and *F2T2M* are trainees' own inventions which elicit a sense of group identity as users must be familiar with the lingo of their group to be able to grasp the meaning of SMS language used within the group. In fact, the ability to use and understand these language short forms which are unique to each group indicates that an individual is part of the group, forging a group identity that excludes outsiders. Some other acronyms appeared across the dataset which are standard acronyms (e.g. GNAT, GNAGRAT) rather than initialisms and are, therefore, not considered to be nonstandard spellings.

Emoticons and Symbols

Emoticons refer to a type of pictogram or picture used to express emotions or convey the meaning of facial expressions by the sender of the message. Emoticons and typographic symbols are mostly used to express or add semantic value to the message. The trainee teachers used emoticons to create a written representation of their mood.   They also use emoticons to depict body language, which is unusual in non face-to-face communication. These

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emoticons changed the meaning of their messages just like how body language changes the meaning of verbal communication. The data revealed different logograms used by the trainees to signify words such as *x* (kiss), *&* (and), @ (at). But the most deviant of all is the use of smiley and emoticons such as [:- ( ], [:-)] and [; -)], as used to create a written representation of what the trainees were physically doing as they texted to convey the meaning that body language conveys in spoken discourse. Other examples in the data include **:-)** depicting smile, **:-(** angry, and <**3** a heart for love demonstrating visual signs in face-to-face conversation.

 Some trainees also used typographic symbols to refer to single or multiple letters to represent whole words. A popular example is one or several 'x's' used to symbolize a kiss, or 'zzzz's' to suggest sleep, tiredness or boredom, or repetition of the message sender's first name's initials such as 'jj' showing John or Jennifer. Thurlow & Brown (2003) revealed that the main typographic symbol used in SMS texts is an **'x'** to signal affection, a convention which is also found in traditional English writing.

> **Example 33**.
>
> wil leav th clas @ 10 if pemitd by th tr (F6)
>
> (Will leave the class at 10 if permited by the teacher.)
>
> **Example 34** .
>
> pls wil lyk 2 meet u **&** ur frnds @ de lab (F176)
>
> (Please, will like to meet you and your friends at the laboratory.)

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Example 35 .

 lets do it @ govt hsptl is safr **&** chper dan d pryvt1 trst me☹

(F8)

(Let's do it at government hospital is safer and cheaper than the

private one)

Example 36.

GN swt dreamz (M71)

(Goodnight sweet dreams)

Prosodic features in SMS language aimed at providing added semantic and

syntactic information and context from which recipients can deduce a more

contextually-relevant and accurate interpretation (Thurlow, 2003). These types

of linguistic features conveyed the textual equivalent of verbal prosodic

features such as facial expression and tone of voice as depicted here in M11,

M13, F30 and F51   below.

Example 37.

gud!!!! in ur ams mks me feel lyk bein in hevn☹ (M11)

(Good! in your arms makes me feel lyk being in heaven (happy

face)

Example 38

.u wil excel, ur futur is brght☹ (M13)

 (You will excel, your future is bright (happy face)

Example 39.

whr hv u bn i tryd 2 c u bt cudnt y☹ (F30)

(Where have you been I tried to see you but couldn't why (sad

face)

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Example 40.

aaa y r u doin ths 2 me is that hw u r **!!!???**☹(F51)

(Ah! Why are you doing this to me, is that how you are? (Sad face)

Also, certain linguistic features of the trainees' SMS language can be considered a 'rebus' as pictures and single letters or numbers are used to represent whole words.

Example 41.

i<3u ma bebe (M3)

(I love you my bebe)

Example 42.

miss **UUU** sooo much!!!! (M1)

(Miss you so much)

The use of 'less than' symbol and the letter '3' for pictogram of a heart for the word 'love', and the letter '**u'** to replace the word 'you'. Obviously, the creation of emoticons, by using different punctuation marks, appears to be a violation of English orthography but it exhibits the creative instinct of trainees to convey different moods. For the trainees, capitalization, spacing and punctuations have become expressive devices and not just the symbols to be used according to typographic norms.

Logogram or Letter/ number homophones

These types of linguistic features comprise word and number substitution (Logogram or phonetic reductions), word and letter substitution and, letter and number combination. Letter and number homophones are written numerals and letters which sound identical to some words. Letter and number

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homophones use a letter or number to represent a word or part of it. It is the pronunciation of the individual letters or numbers which is significant, as against the overall appearance of a homophone. Eg. *sum1* for 'someone' and *2* for "to" or "two". The commonest letter and number homophones that appear in the data are *4u* instead of "for you", *2* for "to", "too" or "two", and "*c"* for "see". Letter and number combinations are used purposely to represent some words which sound like them. "*d8"* for "date", "*ru"* for "are you". "*f8"* for "fate", "*4giv"* for "forgive", "*sum1"* for "someone"; "**2gthr"**, for "together", "*9s"* for "nice", **gud9t** for **'good night'** and "**10q"** for 'thank you'.

The most frequently used example of logogram, which seems to be an acknowledged marker of the SMS code among the trainees, is the second person pronoun *u*. Indeed, almost everyone uses it, so some consistencies are displayed, as depicted here in messages F2, F15 and F36.

> **Example 43**.
>
> F2*T2M?* (F2)
>
> {(Are you) free to talk to me?)}
>
> **Example 44**.
>
> *evr rdy 2CU@A3* (F36)
>
> (Ever ready see you A3= at any time, any place, anywhere)
>
> **Example 45.**
>
> *is stil prfrbl 4u 2 com 2 X on d 15th but up2u whn u wsh* (F15)
>
> (Is still preferable for you to come to us on the 15th but up to you when you wish)

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It appears most of the trainees have accepted the pronoun *u* so much that they concurrently used it, even in forming the possessive *u'r* and the contracted future form *u'll,* as depicted here.

> **Example 46**.
>
> *pls **u'r** rmnded d@ **b4** u by giv m d prys* (M20)
>
> (Please, you're reminded that before you buy give me the price.)

Another most widely used homophones of the SMS message code in the data is the sequence of word-letter substitutions. Such words are *c* for 'see', *b* 'be', *m* 'am', *d* 'the'. The use of *d* for 'the', although not matching the exact sound of the word in English, it could be considered an example of a regional pronunciation of the sound, here illustrating the Ghanaian pronunciation of the word 'the' /de/ instead of /ðe/. Trainees use numerical homophones and alphanumeric homophones to represent word(s) as in *4* [for], *L8r* [later]*, B4* [before], *devi8* [deviate])*,* and the distinctive use of capital letters such as (*C U*) to represent the word (*see you*),

A similar feature found in the data is that of substituting a whole word with a single numeral. The examples show clearly that the number of options here is limited. The most frequently used figures are *2* for the word *to* or the number *two* itself or the adverb *too*, and *4* for the preposition *for* or *fore*.

Non-standard Spelling

Non-conventional or non-standard spellings follow legitimate letter-sound association in a language but are not the conventional spellings for the

traditional English language of particular words represented. Herrings' (2001) proposals are more inclined to view the language of SMS messaging in its own terms; whatever formal similarities it may bear with other types of Computer-Mediated Communication, the linguistic and communicative practices of text-messaging emerge from a particular combination of technological affordances, contextual variables and interpersonal priorities. Some examples found in the data are 'gudnyt/goodnight', 'sum1/someone', 'thnx/thanks', 'neva/never', ryt\write', 'skul/ school', and 'nys/nice' as shown in the sample messages below.

> **Example 47**.
>
> **alryt** same plce same **tym** ok luv uu!!?? (F7)
>
> (Alright same place same time ok love you)
>
> **Example 48**.
>
> ***wud lyk*** *2 mt u* ***afta klas ds aftnu thnx*** (F17)
>
> (Would like to meet you after class this afternoon)
>
> **Example 49**.
>
> pls **neva** 4g8 abt ma thng **gudnyt** (M200)
>
> (Please, never forget about my thing good night)

The non-standard features identified can be classified into a group with simplification of vowels and a group with simplification of consonants. Among the most frequent words manifesting changes of vowels in the trainees' messages are *would* (wud)*, good* (**gud**)*, some* (**sum**) and *love* (**luv**). Such forms appear to be more of inventions than modifications of the consonantal type which involved only a consonant deletion, as in *will, tell,*

call, sorry and happy. They are sometimes more complex and use a substitute of two or three letters by one with an equivalent sound.

>**Example 50**.
>
>m **kuul** nd u (F31)
>
>(I'm cool and you?)

Research has shown that English language has a long tradition of spelling simplification so if a person spells a word in a different way to make the word shorter and simple, it does not mean the person is not well educated (Crystal 2008). The current study revealed that the trainee teachers' SMS messaging has unique linguistic features of non-conventional or non-standard spellings different from the traditional English language. This finding has confirmed the earlier findings of researchers (Shortis, 2001; Thurlow and Brown, 2003; Crystal, 2008; Plester, Wood and Joshi, 2009) that the linguistic features of SMS texting include contractions, clippings, punctuations and lack of, capitalizations, initialisms (acronyms & abbreviations), non-standard spellings, logograms or letter/number homophones, and emoticons. The findings also support the scholarly work of Chiluwa (2008), Plester et al. (2009), and Varnhagen et al. (2009). Some other researches that the current findings have confirmed are Bodomo and Lee (2004) which revealed similar linguistic features of SMS messaging in Hong Kong; Awonsi (2004) in Nigeria; and Sala (2006) in Cameroon.

The adept use of these personalized language short forms is an indicator of group affiliation and a component of group identity. The general observation here is that the language use by the trainee teachers in SMS messaging bears

more resemblance to code of group identity than usage of Standard English language. This observation seems to support Kasesniemi et al (2002:183) that 'A text filled with code language expressions is not necessarily accessible to an outsider' and that the unique writing style provides opportunities for creativity. According to Crystal (2008), the primary purpose of the SMS texting code is to save the senders' time and effort, but, like any other code, it becomes an empowering badge of identity, distinguishing those having the shared knowledge from those outside the social network (in particular, teenagers from their parents and teachers). Doring (2002) also believes that abbreviations and acronyms fulfill a collective identity function which requires a special shared knowledge to be able to understand the language and consequently be able to use it. Some of such distinguished features are shown in the following messages.

> **Example 51**.
>
> lets do it @ govt hsptl it wl b safr & chper **dan** d pryvt1 trst me (F8)
>
> (Lets do it at government hospital it be safer and cheaper than the private one)
>
> **Example52**.
>
> *GN* swt **dreamz** (M71)
>
> (Good night sweet dreams)

This study is in line with Doring's (2002) study that found that language which is specific to SMS messaging does not always conform to Standard English language; thus, the mass media describes this type of communication as the secret code of the youth. Cameron (1995) seems to support this kind of

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language use as she contends that the notion of 'standardness' in written language is itself a convention and always an abstraction from spoken language, and that like the fridge-door note and the phonetic transcriptions of expert linguists, many of the typographic practices of text-messaging offer more 'correct', more 'authentic' representations of speech.

Eco (2002) notes that we are living in an era where the diminutive, the brief and the simple are highly prioritized in communication so, shortening of words in SMS messaging should be embraced. In fact, this analysis confirmed several other studies which suggest that SMS users tend to use certain linguistic features or shorten words to represent features of speech and writing, as well as lengthen words, represent laughter and use capitals (e.g. *VERY*, *GREAT*, etc.) and repeat punctuation marks (e.g. *why???*, *well…*, *no!!!*, etc.) to add emphasis (Baron, 2008; Crystal, 2008; Herring, 2001; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008). Returning to the variability of SMS language, Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) also attempted to show how the linguistic practices of teenagers participating in Instant Messaging conversations can demonstrate a gradual change in progress. Others include the use of single letters (*b* for *be*), numerals (*4* for *for*), typographic symbols (@ for *at*), as well as abbreviations, acronyms, and blends (e.g. *omg, lol*, and so on) (Barnes, 2003; Baron, 2008; Crystal, 2005; Crystal, 2008; Fouser et al., 2000; Herring, 2001). However, the present study disconfirmed Döring (2002) that found almost no existence of SMS-specific short forms which could manifest a collective identity but rather the most common linguistic features of computer mediated communication are Syntactic Reductions.

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Syntactic Reductions

Further analysis of the data revealed that, apart from the lexical reductions of words (linguistic features), the trainee teachers also eliminated certain syntactic features in their messaging. The first syntactic feature that has manifested in the language of trainees' SMS messaging is the non-use of subjects in most of the sentences they constructed. Mostly, the trainee teachers omitted the subjects of their sentences to save space or due to their desire to reply their addressees immediately (Androutsopoulos and Schmidt, 2001; Schlobinski, Fortmann et al., 2001; Doring, 2002); Kasesniemi, 2003; Bodomo and Lee, 2002; Thurlow and Brown, 2003).Trainee teachers also ignored both noun and verb phrases in their SMS messaging, features which if missing in a sentence render the sentence incomplete and unacceptable.

Example 53

is stil prfrbl 4u 2 com on d 15th but up2u whn u wsh (F15)

(**It** is still preferable for you to come on the 15th but up to you when you wish)

Example 54.

kudos wsh u th bst of luck (M32)

(Kudos! **I** wish you the best of luck.)

Mostly, the trainee teachers omitted the subject of their sentences to save space or due to their desire to reply immediately. These trainee teachers also ignored both noun and verb phrases which make up a complete sentence in their SMS messaging. The phenomenons are displayed in the examples below.

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Example 55.

trvlng 2mrow 2 accra (M30)

(**I will be** travelling tomorrow to Accra*).*

Example 56.

in dom nw. jst arrivd frm clss, (F42)

(**I'm** in dom now. **I have** just arrived from class),

Example 57.

callin her bt nt answrn (M53)

(**I have been** calling her but she is not answering.)

The sentences below reveal that the trainees would need more space to say 'I am not in the mood for lectures today' than to just type 'nt in d mood 4 lectrs 2day'. The messages also indicate that it is faster to just say 'in xul now?' than to use all the words; hence, the trainees omitted words so as to save time and space.

Example 58.

nt in d mood 4 lectrs 2day (F17)

(**I am** not in the mood for lectures today)

Example 59.

in d ***xul*** nw? (F29)

(**Are you** in the school now?)

Example 60 .

comin jx nw bro meet m @ d g8 promis (F31)

(**I will be** coming just now brother meet me at the gate **I** promise.)

The finding supports Awonusi (2004) that apart from the peculiar phonetic representations and orthographic representations of words, text messages have both orthographic and grammatical peculiarities, such as non-use of internal punctuation (comma, colon, semicolon), the mixture of upper and lower case characters, shortening of auxiliary and modal verbs as often done in informal writing and the deletion of nouns, and groups functioning as nouns). This finding also supports Doring's (2002) findings of syntactic reductions in SMS messaging, a study which confirmed the findings of Androutsopoulos et al. (2001) and that of Schlobinski et al. (2001), that the most common feature of SMS language is deletion of subject. However, Schlobinski et al. (2001) argued that syntactical reductions in SMS messaging are caused by its medium, and that lexical reduction, especially, abbreviations and short forms of words were more frequently used.

In fact, there is intentional omission of letters, words and contracting phrases in SMS communication as it is a brief interpersonal communication between people who know each other and share common background knowledge (Grinter and Eldridge, 2001; Hård af Segerstad, 2002). Thus, the omission of pronouns and contractions of phrases do not affect the communication process or make decoding of meaning difficult. The reason is that most messages are sent between friends who share a considerable amount of background information.

Code-mixing

Another significant feature that cropped up in the data is 'code-mixing'. According to Owusu-Ansah (1992) as cited by Afful (2005), the form of contact between English and Ghanaian languages in Ghana results in

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bilingualism which, in effect, brings about code-mixing and code-switching. This linguistic phenomenon is attested in the examples below.

Example 61.

abaa neke i cant do tht 2u (M21)

(Aba neke I can't do that to you)

Example 62.

tofiakoa ovr ma deadbdy!!!!! (F101)

('Tofiakoa' over my dead body!)

Example 63.

yoo i go fnsh **mawuli godo** (F143)

(Yoo I go finish Mawuli godo)

Example 64.

nyame bekyre daben lwys prblms **aden** (M187)

(Nyame bekyre daben always problems aden!)

The words 'abaa neke', 'mawuli godo', 'nyame bekyre' 'daben' and 'aden' as used in the examples above are words from various Ghanaian languages which trainees combined with the English language in SMS messaging. This finding confirmed Owusu-Ansah (1992) and Afful's (2005) reports that code-mixing is a widespread linguistic behaviour among educated Ghanaians, and that the contact between one or two indigenous languages regarding the use of English language in multilingual Ghanaian society, bilingualism is a resultant feature. The word 'tofiakoa' is a popular local language borrowed from the Ibo language of Nigeria.

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Interestingly, this finding supports studies done elsewhere over 10 years ago. For instance, in Nigeria, Awonusi (2004) revealed that there are features of text multilingualism known as code-switching and code-mixing in SMS messaging. In a similar study in Nigeria, Ofulue (2004) revealed the growth in the use of indigenous languages for SMS messaging and submitted that code-switching and code-mixing give sociolinguistic relevance to the local languages in the domain of text messaging. Likewise, this finding has also confirmed earlier studies on code-mixing which have unveiled the use of English in contact with other languages in SMS messaging. In Kuwait, Haggan (2007) found that texters use a mixture of Arabic and English in their text messages, while Finnish teenagers mix Finnish with a medley of foreign language words and expressions, drawing suitable expressions from any language mastered by the writer (Kasesniemi 2003), and South African texters blend English with isiXhosa by writing English nouns with isiXhosa prefixes (Deumert and Masinyana, 2008). Wardhaugh (2006: 101) has indicated that it is "unusual" for a person "to have command of, or use, only one code or system". To him "People select a particular code whenever they choose to speak; thus, shift from one code to another or to mix codes even within sometimes very short utterances and thereby create a new code in a process known as code-switching" (Wardhaugh, 2006: 101).

Crystals (2008) believes that contracted forms of words even in everyday conversations are used rather than their full word counterparts and that it is only in formal conversations and writings that contraction of words are not realized. Since SMS messaging is one guide way of sharing information, resorting to writing words in full will only affects the senders' time. It is much

easier and faster to write the short forms of words as these constructions do not affect meaning in any way. Since texting has become the norm among teenagers, it is natural for them to find ways in making it easier and enjoyable for them. It is also clear from the table that the older an individual, the less he or she resorts to contracted words in SMS messaging. It is possible these linguistic features coupled with code-switching make people view SMS messaging as more of a spoken than written.

Thurlow and Brown (2003) believe that heavily abbreviated language is, of course, a generic feature of interactive computer mediated communication niches so I am not surprised to see that 82% of the trainee teachers' SMS messages displayed abbreviations. However, in considering the SMS messages of these trainee teachers, 1401 examples of abbreviations were found which means that abbreviations, in fact, accounted for less than 20% of the overall message content. This initial finding appears to run counter to popular ideas about the unintelligible, highly abbreviated code of young people's SMS messaging (Doring, 2002). In the same vein, only 509 typographic (as opposed to alphabetic) symbols were found throughout the entire corpus; almost all of which were simply kisses and exclamation marks usually in multiple sets (e.g. xxxxxx and !!!!!). There again, only 39 instances of emoticons (e.g. :-) were found. Here, the finding supports Eldridge and Grinter (2001) that texting allows conversational conventions and makes the communication quicker by reducing the overall time spent on interaction. The finding also supports Doring (2002), who believes that one may be brief in speech without fear of being perceived as short-spoken.

Gender and SMS Linguistic Features

This section explores gender and SMS linguistic features, which seeks to partly answer research question 2.

2. How do gender and age influence linguistic features of the language use in SMS messaging among trainee teachers?

Table 2: **Gender and SMS Linguistic Features**

Linguistic Features	Males		Females	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Contractions	130	41%	187	59%
Clipping	99	42%	138	58%
Punctuation	11	21%	42	79%
Capitalisation	09	27%	24	73%
Initialisms	08	53%	07	47%
Emoticons & Symbols	11	46%	13	54%
Letter/number-homophone	142	43%	187	57%
Nonstandard spelling	108	31%	243	69%
Total	**511**		**841**	

Table of Gender and SMS Linguistic Features

In fact, who makes use of SMS messaging (young or old, male or female) has become an issue of interest in the study of language (Crystal, 2008). Throughout the analysis of the linguistic features in the trainees' SMS messaging, the above patterns of use have been established. The analysis of the data demonstrated that more than 95% of the trainees' SMS messaging employed the target linguistic features. The results as shown in Table 2

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suggest that the trainee teachers, both male and female, considered SMS linguistic features in communication among themselves. When examined the distribution of the type of linguistic features used according to gender in the messages, the results established that there is a uniform rise in the frequency counts of the patterns used by the trainee teachers. The results of each category are discussed below.

The data revealed a slight difference of gender in the use of contractions. As 41% representing 130 contractions appeared in the messages of male trainees, 59% representing 187 contractions appeared in that of the female trainees' messages. Although there is a slight difference here, the difference is insignificant. Thus, the finding supports Plester et al. (2009) that girls used a significantly higher proportion of contractions, but rejects De Jonge and Kemp (2012) who see no significant gender difference in any of the texting behaviours of their samples of Australian teenagers.

Again, from the data, 237 clipped words were found, out of which 99 categories representing 42% were utilized by the male participants and 138 categories representing 58% of the female counterparts. Closely linked to contraction, the finding revealed that when it comes to the use of a linguistic feature like clipping, female trainees are far ahead. In this case, the difference is obvious. Thus, the current finding supports Plester et al. (2009) who found that girls used a significantly higher proportion of SMS language of 38% than boys (28%), and that clipping of words is a common phenomenon in female messages.

The next feature is punctuation and, as manifested in the data, its use is either

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by inclusion or exclusion. The data depicted gender difference in the use of punctuations. From the table above, whilst 11 punctuation marks were found in the male trainees' messages which represents 21%, 42 punctuation marks representing 79% were found in the messages of the female trainees. This finding supports that of Ling's (2005) which revealed that there are differences in the SMS language of female and male participants, and that teenage girls tend to text more, employ more closing indicators and more punctuation marks than that of their male counterparts. The most frequently used punctuation in the messages is the question mark whilst the least of all is the exclamation marks.

The data also show gender difference in the use of capitalizations. From the analysis, the use of capitalizations consists of 9 categories representing 27% of male trainees' messages and 24 categories representing 73% of female trainees' messages making the difference very significant. This finding rightly confirms the earlier findings of Ling (2005) that women observed conventional rules such as the use of correct spellings, punctuation and capitalization more than men. Furthermore, among 511 linguistic features the male trainees articulated, only 8 initialisms were found, and out of 841 articulated by female trainees, 7 were found to be initialisms. In fact, whilst the linguistic feature with the highest score goes to non-standard spellings with a total number of 351, the lowest pertains to the initialisms with 15 scores indicating that initialisms as a linguistic feature in SMS messaging is not a preferred choice among both male and female trainee teachers of Ada College of Education.

Again, the data revealed emoticons as a preferred choice among female trainees, whilst typographic symbols are mostly utilized by their male counterparts. Here again, there is a slight difference within gender, as 46% representing 11 emoticons appeared in the messages of male trainees and 54% representing 13 appeared in that of the messages of the female counterparts. This finding seemingly contradicts that of Ling et al (2007) that women users of SMS texting use more shortened forms and emoticons than men per se. The data also depicts that the most frequently used emoticon is the *happy face* followed by the *sad face.* In the same vein, 14 typographic symbols were found throughout the entire corpus - almost all of which were simply 'kisses' **xxxx**, the coordinating conjunctions **&** for 'and', the typographical @ for 'at' and exclamation marks usually in multiple sets with '**x'** (e.g. xxxx!!!!). Also, there were only 10 instances of emoticons in the data.

There are comparatively more examples of language play using letter-number homophones which, in popular representations have become the most ultimate feature of text-messaging. The manual count revealed that the Letter/number homophone comes second with 329 in the order of frequency as depicted on the statistical table above. Also, results from the table indicate that when it comes to the use of letters or numbers to represent words in text messages, 142 features representing 43% of the male's linguistic features are letter or number homophone as against 57% representing 187 categories of the female counterparts.

Another linguistic feature that has been realized in the data is non-standard spelling which represents two features, and this comprises non-standard spellings and phonetic spellings. The category is represented by 351 examples in all. Of the 511 linguistic features, the male trainees articulated, 108 were non-standard spellings, and out of 841 articulated by female trainees, 243 were non-standard spellings. The linguistic feature with the highest score goes to the non-standard spellings with a total number of 351 linguistic features. This is to say that non-standard spelling is among the preferred choices of linguistic features used by the trainees. The differences revealed in this study confirmed that of Rosen et al. (2010) that women and the younger users of SMS messaging tend to use more shortened forms and emoticons than men and that women observed conventional rules such as the adherence to correct spellings, punctuations and capitalization more than men.

Age and Linguistic Features used in SMS Messaging

This section presents analyses of age and SMS messaging to provide an answer to the second part of the research question two (2). In order to establish how age affects the linguistic choice of the trainee teachers in SMS messaging, raw counts were utilized to determine the distribution of features used across the proposed age groups as shown in Table3.

Table 3 shows the distributions of SMS linguistic features with their frequency of use by trainee teachers according to age range of 16-40. Since SMS messaging is a way of communication and the fact that English itself is full of contractions, there is no way this would not manifest in SMS messaging; thus, the data unsurprisingly revealed that uttered forms of words were relied upon

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heavily in the trainees' SMS messaging. Analysis of the data indicates that, at least, trainees within 16-40 age range used SMS linguistic features to some extent. The highest users of contracted words were found to be among the teenage group of 16 and 20 years, which accounts for 287 representing 34% of the entire contractions used among all the age groups.

Table 3: **Distribution of SMS Linguistic Features across Age Groups**

	AGE GROUPS									
Linguistic Features	16-20	%	21-25	%	26-30	%	31-35	%	36-40	%
Contraction	97	31	79	25	46	15	49	16	46	15
Clipping	29	12	48	20	57	24	60	25	43	18
Punctuation	03	06	12	23	06	11	06	11	26	49
Capitalization	00	00	06	18	02	06	04	12	21	64
Initialism	09	60	0 6	40	00	00	00	00	00	00
Emoticons	11	46	06	25	07	29	00	00	00	00
Letter/No. Homophone	68	21	71	22	71	22	61	19	58	18
Non-Standard Spelling	70	20	69	20	72	21	67	19	73	21

Table of SMS Linguistic Features across Age Groups

The trend seems to follow a descending order as the older the age of the participant, the less use of contractions except for the age group between the range of 31 and 35. The implication is that communicating via the use of linguistic features is not merely a teenager practice. A similar claim might be made in terms of the frequency of use.

Since contracted forms of words usually appear in informal conversations, it is not surprising that the age ranged 16-20 had resorted to the use of contracted words in their SMS messaging more than others. No wonder, Thurlow and Brown (2003) found that teenagers prefer SMS messaging to telephone calls. To some extent, the current finding agrees with the finding of Sutherland (2002: 6) that considers the indiscriminate use of linguistic features by teenagers as 'generation text', 'generation grunt', 'net generation' and 'bleak, bald, sad shorthand'. Probably, this might be the reason for many scholars like Thurlow and Brown (2003) and Chiluwa (2008) to have argued that the excessive use of SMS by teenagers has a negative toll on the standard of writing. Joyce (2001) also describes these teenagers who are skilled at the use of their thumbs to manipulate mobile phones and other computer keyboards as 'the thumb tribe' or 'the thumb generation' and their culture as the "thumb culture." It is clear and not surprising to see how this observation is manifested in the present study.

Another commonest linguistic feature that was influenced by age factor is clipping. From the table 3, the result in the use of clippings is baffling but interesting as the range of use differs greatly. While younger users preferred contractions to full forms, the case of clippings was different as the older user's preference for clippings was greater. Trainees aged between 16 and 20 had only 12% of the use of the clippings in their SMS messaging; the next age group, 21-25 had 20%; 26-30 had 24 % and 31-35, had 25 %. There is first a slight change in the last age groups, 36-40 accounting for 18%, and yet bigger than the 12% of the 16-20 age group.

The analysis also revealed that teenagers between the age of 16 and 20 had 21% representing the use of 68 letter & number homophones in their SMS messaging. The next age group, 21-25, also had 22% of 71 letter & number homophones. The age group ranged between 26-30, had 22% of 71 letter & number homophones similar to age group of 21 to 25, whilst age group 31-35 had 19% of 62 letter & number homophones. Here again, there is first a slight change in the last age groups, 36-40 which accounts for 58 categories representing 18% of letter and number homophones utilized by the age groups.

According to the data, it is clear that the younger the participant, the more likely he/she would use SMS linguistic features. It can, therefore, be reasoned from this point of view that as a participant grows and acquires more vocabulary and expressions, he or she acquires more clipped words; hence, their use in their SMS messaging. In view of this, there is no denying the fact that age plays a significant role in the use of SMS messaging among trainee teachers. This finding seemingly confirmed the previous studies that teenagers have been estimated to use 20% of SMS language in their text-messaging and that younger children use SMS language more often, with estimates ranging from 58% (Plester & Bell, 2008 and De Jonge & Kemp, 2012). The current finding also supports the previous finding that teenagers are the driving force behind the popularity of SMS messaging and that their ability to explore and play about with the use of language makes SMS messaging very attractive to them (Lenhart, 2010 and Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002). It is, therefore, not surprising for Joyce (2001) to consider teenagers as cherished users of SMS and even describe them as 'the thumb tribe' or 'the thumb generation', and their culture as the 'thumb culture'.

Indeed, the present analysis established that the extent to which the linguistic features are used in SMS messaging varies according to the age of a participant and the nature of the SMS messaging. It is quite understandable as the younger trainees prefer contractions but not clippings to full words. This is simply so because if that age group, in the case of using SMS linguistic features, recorded the lowest percentage, there must be some reasons that would account for that. No wonder, Grinter and Eldridge (2001) postulate that the pervasive use of SMS among teens is highly necessitated by its cost effectiveness, faster transmission, and its being more convenient than other telecommunication mediums.

Obviously, this conclusion may be valid to a certain degree in the case of younger trainees' preference for contractions to clippings. It is only natural that anyone who prefers to use contractions to save time and every user of SMS would equally prefer clipped words to full ones. Therefore, there is the probability that these young users between 16 and 20 year range have very limited vocabulary though they are in a tertiary institution. This is because a word-formation process such as clippings produces new words (Yule, 2006). Perhaps, members of this age group are not conversant with many clipped words; however, it does not seem to be any significant trends since there is no consistency within the age groups as regards the employment of the linguistic features.

These results have brought to light that SMS messaging is used by all age groups but teenagers are typically the most avid users (Kasesniemi, 2003, Thurlow and Brown, 2003 and Spagnolli and Gamberini, 2007), which is not to say that it is exclusive to, or has relevance only for, young people or a

particular gender. Referring back to Ling's (2005) study, age and gender seemed to factor into: (a) which types of people are more frequent users of the SMS medium; and (b) which users are more likely to use alternative spellings and orthographic conventions to represent English words. With respect to which age groups exhibit a higher frequency of use of the medium, Ling established that 85% of teens (the two youngest age cohorts were divided into 13-15 and 16-19 year-olds) and young adults (those in the 20-24 age range) reported sending text messages daily; they "are more adroit users" of the medium (p. 348).

To analyze which groups are more likely to use linguistic practices, Ling (2005) examined the following variables: the lack of structural complexity in terms of length of the message; the use of abbreviations; punctuation; and capitalization. Except for the 20-24 age groups, which appeared to be the most prolific users of punctuation, that is, frequent use of punctuation marks were attempts to include emphasis in the messages, such as ellipses for dramatic pause (…), exclamation marks to indicate excitement or surprise, and multiple question marks to indicate "advanced confusion" (Ling, 2005: 343) and capitalization. The two teenage groups were ahead of all other groups in the remaining variables laid out by Ling (2005), and the frequency of use declined rapidly with an increase in age. Based on these, Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) isolated three highly frequent forms (*lol, haha,* and *hehe*), and noticed that frequency of use of the acronym *lol* (for *laugh out loud*) and *hehe* was increasing among younger teenagers in the 15-16 age range, whereas older teenagers in the 19-20 age range retained a clear preference for *haha*.

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Politeness Strategies in Trainee Teachers' SMS Messaging

This section seeks to examine the politeness strategies as the communicative strategies in the SMS messaging of trainee teachers by dwelling on House and Kasper's (1981) taxonomy of politeness structures to provide answers for research question 3: *'How do age and gender influence politeness strategies in SMS messaging among trainee teachers?'*

The following structures were earmarked for analysis: Politeness Markers, Play-downs, Consultative Devices, Hedges, Understaters, Down-Toners, Committers, Forewarnings, Hesitators, Scope-Staters and Agent Avoiders. What is evident is that about 50 politeness indicators were identified in the data based on the 11 structures proposed by House and Kasper (1981).

Politeness Markers

According to House and Kasper (1981) politeness markers refer to expressions which are added to the utterance to show deference to the addressee and bid for cooperative behavior.

> **Example 65**.
>
> *yes wl use it 2mrw **if u dnt mnd*** (M15)
>
> (Yes, I will use it tomorrow if you don't mind.)
>
> **Example 66**.
>
> ***pls*** *no problem m alryt ok.* (F37)
>
> (Please, no problem I'm alright ok.)

In example 65, the expression 'if you don't mind' shows that the addresser expresses his deference to the addressee's earlier offer, rather than rejects it which might result in some kind of disrespectfulness. Again, the use of "if you

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don't mind', softens the imposition of the utterance and civilly asks for cooperative behaviour. 'Please' as used in example 66, is an important feature of politeness markers which add civility to the utterance. The use of '***please'*** in this context is an indirect way of preventing the addressee's further utterances; hence, a mark of politeness. In this case, the omission of 'please' could render the entire construction completely impolite which might have otherwise demonstrated that the addresser takes offence. House and Kasper (1981), believes that the most obvious example of politeness markers in English is 'please'. The present analysis equally revealed that the trainee teachers adopted politeness marker 'please' mostly in their messaging.

Play-down

The data revealed the second politeness category 'play-down' which House and Kasper (1981) refer to as syntactic devices used to tone down the perlocutionary effect of an utterance on the addressee. The following examples attest to such phenomenon.

> **Example 67.**
>
> *wll, **jst wondring if** u'r stl intrestd in me* (M32)
>
> *(Well, 'I was' just **wondering if** you're still interested in me)*
>
> **Example 68**.
>
> *Gm dear **cud we** pospnd d meeting 2 anothr tym?* (F71)
>
> (Good morning dear could we postpone the meeting to another time?)

In example 67, the addresser used one of the four subcategories of play-downs, that is, progressive aspect ***'jst wondring if'*** together with past tense '***you were'*** in order to mitigate the effect the addresser's utterance might have

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on the addressee. In example 68, the addresser who seemed to have arranged a meeting with the addressee but realized later that she could not turn up, used the strategy '*cud we*' to tone down her utterance so as to register her regret about the inconvenience that her rearrangement might cause the addressee and indirectly suggesting the change of appointed date. The use of this kind of structure mark politeness and makes the language of the addresser highly formal.

Consultative Devices

The third politeness structure is consultative devices which are found in the trainees' SMS messaging.

> **Example 69.**
>
> *Cud u jst* gv m sum dtl abt ma guy (F5)
>
> (Could you just give me some detail about my guy?)
>
> **Example 70.**
>
> dear *wud u mnd if* i spnd all (F23)
>
> (Dear, would you mind if I spend all?)

In message F5 above, the addresser used the indicator '*could you jst*' in order to politely engage the addressee and ask him to provide her more information about her guy. The second message, F23, demonstrated that the addresser employed the strategy '*dear wud u mnd if*' to mitigate the face of the addressee to spend an amount of money without offending the addressee in any way.

Hedges

The data revealed 'hedges' as one of the most frequent politeness strategies used by the trainee teachers to mitigate the negative face in their messaging.

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According to the data, structures such as '*is lyk', 'sort of'* and *'kind of'* are some of the strategies used by the trainee teachers to soften the force of their messages. Lakoff (1975) believes that *hedges* lower the authority of a statement.

> **Example 71**.
>
> ***kind of*** *plan b bt sork of some **sort of** say lazinss* (M9)
>
> (I've some kind of plan but because of some sort of say laziness)
>
> **Example 72**.
>
> ***pls*** *cudnt c ur msg **is lyk** i dletd mstaknly can i cum nw* (M170)
>
> (Please, I couldn't see your message is like I deleted it mistakenly can I come now?)

In the above examples the addressers tried to avoid saying the precise thing and leave options for their interlocutors to express their own ideas and by using these hedges they tend to reduce the potential undesirable effects of their messages. For Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness expressed by indirect speech can be regulated by the compounding of hedges, indirectness and particles such as 'please' and 'is like' which increase the negative politeness of the utterance. Apparently, hedges resolve the dilemma created by the speaker's desire to go on record and to give the hearer an 'out' by being indirect (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Here, in example 72, the addresser used what Brown and Levinson, (1987) refer to as 'formality' to go on record with negative politeness, paying respect and deference to the addressee's position vis-à-vis maintaining social distance, thereby making it clear that he did not intend to ignore his call. Again, in example 71, the addressers' message is seen

as formal, cordial and polite; thus, emphasizing their coequal status and dispelling any suggestion that there was deliberate disappointment.

Understaters

Understaters which mean under-representing the propositional content of the utterance using a phrase which functions as an adverbial modifier or an adverb itself, e.g., ***a bit***, *a **little bit***, *a **second***, *a **moment***, ***briefly*** are revealed in the data. In the data understaters were found in messages F47 and M68.

> **Example 73** .
>
> *wait 4 **a mo** wl send thm 2 u rght awy* (F47)
>
> (Wait for a moment I will send them to you right away)
>
> **Example 74**.
>
> *jst **a little bit of** it ope it may nt affct u* (M68)
>
> (Just a little bit of it hope it may not affect you)

As shown in the above examples, understaters such as **'a mo'** and '**a little bit of'** were used to tone down the propositional content of the trainees' messages.

Down-Toners

Down-toners are markers used to modulate the impact of the addresser's utterance, e.g., ***just***, ***simply***, ***possibly***, ***perhaps*** and ***really***. The data revealed 'down-toners' as one of the indicators employed by the trainees as politeness strategies to mitigate the negative face of their addressees in SMS messaging.

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Example 75.

jst *wondrin if thts **smply** wht u mean* (M3)

(I'm just wondering if that's simply what you mean)

Example 76.

thnx rlly *wnt 2 knw who told u.* (F40)

(Thanks, I really want to know who told you)

According to the above examples, the addressers tried to adjust and modify the impact of their utterances on the addressees by using the above examples of words depicting down-toners. In fact, the omission of these markers might cause these sentences to be categorized as bald imperatives which are not appropriate in these contexts.

Committers

The data revealed that committers were used to lower the degree to which the addresser commits her/ himself to the propositional content of the utterance, e.g., *I think*, *I believe*, *I guess*, *in my opinion*.

Example 77.

thnking it wl not affect u sorry (M71)

(I was thinking it will not affect.)

Example 78.

i guess *u wl b thr wf me.* (F51)

(I guess you will be there with me)

Example 79.

I thnk *w abrtng it wl b b8r.* (M 84)

(I think we aborting it will be better)

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In these two examples, it is clear that the addressers deliberately turned down the degree of the commitment so as to lower the possible effect of the content of their messages.

Forewarnings

Another politeness structure found in the data is forewarnings which are used to redress the potential face threatening acts performed by interlocutors by complimenting or invoking a generally accepted rule which they want to violate.

Example 80.

I knw is nt don bt padn me 4 2dy (F29)

(I know it's not done but pardon me for today.)

Example 81

*swthrt abt d rmors ignr it @ **our levl w mst knw betr*** (F82)

(Sweetheart, about the romours ignore it at our level we must know better.)

In message F29 above, the addresser tried to redress the effect of her message by starting with a compliment in which she is first of all trying to accept the fact that what she was about to do was not appropriate or generally accepted. Again, in message F82, the addresser who is an intimate friend and a colleague of the addressee, in an attempt to convince the addressee to debunk a rumour about her, recognizes his 'level of intelligence' and 'educational level, to mitigate the face-threatening nature of her utterance. Here, the addresser urged the existence of cooperation by referring to the existence of reciprocal obligations that she had ever forgiven the addresser so must he also

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return it by forgiving her this time. The present analysis established that the trainees used compliments as forewarnings in their messaging.

Hesitators

As House and Kasper (1981) put forward, hesitators are pauses that are filled with non-lexical phonetic materials. These types of strategies are shown in sample messages below.

> **Example 82:**
>
> ***hmmm*** *not as such bro*☺(M.66)
>
> (Hmm, not as such brother (sad face)
>
> **Example 83:**
>
> ***eeh*** *i dnt thnk i can say tht!!!* (F78)
>
> (Eeh, I don't think I can say that.)

In messaging M66 and F78 above, the trainees used ***'hmmm' and 'eeh'*** as politeness strategies to express their uncertainty of the effect of their messages to mitigate FTA.

Scope-Staters

Scope-staters employ negative force of the utterance to express a subjective opinion about the state of affairs referred to in the proposition.

> **Example 84 .**
>
> ***m afrd*** *bro av already started* (M1)
>
> **(I' m afraid** brother I've already started.)

Message M1 above illustrates the presence of 'Scope-staters' used as a politeness strategy. Here, the addresser used '***m afrd'*** rather than the direct confrontation with the intention of lowering the potential negative effect of his

message. This was marked by the expression '*m afrd'* or some variation in the data.

Agent Avoiders

The last politeness strategy which is agent avoiders was also revealed in the data. According to House and Kasper (1981) agent avoiders refer to propositional utterances in which the agent is suppressed or impersonalized, thereby deflecting the criticism from the addressee to some generalized agent, e.g., passive structures or utterances such as *people don't do X*.

> **Example 85**.
>
> guyz dnt gossip ope u knw (F11)
>
> (Guys don't gossip, I hope you know?)

The example above rightly depicted the occurrence of agent avoiders. In the message F11, the addressee, specifically, a female trainee in a bid not to directly attack the wrongs of a male colleague whom she realized was fond of gossiping about people indirectly criticized the bad acts of the personality concerned by generalising.

The first and highest politeness structures found in the messaging are politeness markers which were used 9 times and represent 18% in the 200 messages. The second most frequent politeness structures in the data are under-staters with category of 8 samples representing 16% of the entire messages found, whilst the third highest politeness structure established is Play-down which is found in 6 out of the 200 messages analyzed. Play-down recorded 6 structures representing 12%. Consultative devices and Hedges registered the same number of occurrences, that is, 5 categories representing 10% each. Two indicators of Down-toners representing 4% were found. The

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politeness structure 'Committers' were represented by 4 samples which represent 4%. Hesitators have 5 indicators representing 10%. 4 indicators of Scope-staters representing 8% were established. Forewarnings and Agent avoiders were the least represented as only one example each was found in the entire data. The summation of all the structures was further subjected to age and gender analysis to confirm the differences.

Table 4: Distribution of Politeness Structures in the Trainee Teachers'
SMS Messaging

Politeness structure	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Politeness markers,	9	18
Play-downs	6	12
Consultative devices	5	10
Hedges	5	10
Under-staters	8	16
Down-toners	2	04
Committers	4	08
Forewarnings	1	02
Hesitators	5	10
Scope-staters	4	8%
Agent Avoiders	1	2%
Total	50	100

Table of Distribution of Politeness Structures

Age and Politeness Strategies in Trainee Teachers' SMS Messaging

H1:   *There is age influence on Politeness Strategies in Trainees' SMS messaging.*

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Hypothesis 1 of the study sought to find out whether there was any difference in age of participants in relation to employment of Politeness Strategies in trainee teachers' SMS messaging. The first hypothesis proposed that the trainee teachers used a variety of politeness strategies in their SMS messaging but the extent to which these variants were used would vary according to the age of the participant. Specifically, I expected to see a higher frequency of use of politeness variants among younger age groups, and that the frequency would decline as the age categories of the participants increase. Chi-square test was, therefore, conducted to find out the difference, if any, within the age groups of participants and the Politeness Strategies in trainees' use of SMS messaging. The chi-square was used based on the assumption that data collected on the type of SMS messaging and the age of the participants were in the frequency counts. The detail results of the chi-square are presented in the Table 5.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test on Age influence on Linguistic Features of SMS Messaging

| | | | Type of text messages | | |
			Polite	Not polite	Total
Age Group	16-20	Count	9	31	40
		% within age group	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%
		% within type of text messages	18.0%	20.7%	20.0%
		% of Total	4.5%	15.5%	20.0%
	21-25	Count	12	28	40
		% within age group	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%
		% within type of text messages	24.0%	18.7%	20.0%
		% of Total	6.0%	14.0%	20.0%
	26-30	Count	7	33	40
		% within age group	17.5%	82.5%	100.0%
		% within type of text messages	14.0%	22.0%	20.0%
		% of Total	3.5%	16.5%	20.0%
	31 -35	Count	9	31	40
		% within age group	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%

	% within type of text messages		18.0%	20.7%	20.0%
	% of Total		4.5%	15.5%	20.0%
36-40	Count		13	27	40
	% within age group		32.5%	67.5%	100.0%
	% within type of text messages		26.0%	18.0%	20.0%
	% of Total		6.5%	13.5%	20.0%
Total	Count		50	150	200
	% within age group		25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
	% within type of text messages		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total		25.0%	75.0%	100.0%

Table of Chi-Square Test on Age

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Results from Table 5, in terms of age and the features used as polite or not polite, indicate that participants of ages between 16 and 20 used 9 polite indicators representing 22.5%. SMS messages of participants with ages ranged 21-25 of 12 categories representing 30.0% revealed that the trainees used polite texts whilst 28 (70.0%) indicates non-polite texts. Again, it was revealed that the participants of ages between 26 and 30 years employed 7 polite indicators representing 17.5% whilst 33 (82.5%) depict non-polite type of text messages. This means that a greater percentage of politeness indicators used fall within the participants with ages between 26 and 30. Nine of (22.5%) polite indicators are within ages 31-35 whilst 31 of (77.5%) non-polite messages were utilized by the participants involved in the study. It is also clear from the table that 13 (32.5%) politeness strategies used by participants are within the ages of 36-40.

Thus, in terms of age of the participants and politeness strategies used, it is evidenced from the results of the study that age of a participant and the type of text message used differ from one age group to another. The data revealed that the first hypothesis was only partially supported. Raw counts indicated that as the age of the participant increases, the politeness features used to indicate politeness strategies also increases.

However, the results from the chi-square tests show that there is no significant difference between the ages of the participants. A two way contingency table was used to find out whether there was a significant difference within the age groups of participants according to the politeness strategies identified. From the chi-square tests table it is evidenced there is no statistically significant differences as X^2 (df =4, N=200, p=0.525). Since 0.525 is greater than the

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alpha value of .05, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. We can, therefore, conclude that there is no significant difference in the employment of Politeness Strategies within the various age groups of the trainee teachers. Differences were calculated to determine the distribution of features across age groups. In terms of age differentiation, the results show a weak inverse relationship between the frequencies of use. A weak positive relationship was found for frequency of use of politeness strategies and an increase in age.

Gender Differences in Politeness Strategies in Trainees' SMS Messaging

H1:   *There is significant gender influence on politeness strategies in SMS messaging.*

Hypothesis 2 of the study was formulated to examine whether there was any statistical significant difference in gender according to politeness strategies employed in SMS messaging. The second hypothesis proposed the trainees used a variety of politeness strategies in their SMS messaging but the extent to which these variants are used will vary according to the gender of the participant. Here again, I anticipated a higher frequency of use of politeness variants among female users. Chi-square test was used to find out the differences if any, between the two groups of gender based participants. The use of this test is established upon the fact that data collected on the politeness strategies are in the form of frequency counts and also the nominal data fall into two categories, namely male and female trainee teachers. The results are presented in Table 6.

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Table 6: Chi-Square Test on Gender and Politeness in SMS Messaging

			Type of text messages		
			Polite	not polite	Total
Gender respondent	Male	Count	26	74	100
		% within gender _respondent	26.0%	74.0%	100.0%
		% within type of text messages	52.0%	49.3%	50.0%
		% of Total	13.0%	37.0%	50.0%
	Female	Count	24	76	100
		% within gender _respondent	24.0%	76.0%	100.0%
		% within type of text messages	48.0%	50.7%	50.0%
		% of Total	12.0%	38.0%	50.0%
Total		Count	50	150	200
		% within gender _respondent	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
		% within type of text messages	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%

Table of Chi-Square Test on Gender

A two-way contingency table and chi-square analysis was used to examine whether there was a significant difference between the number of male and female trainee teachers in their politeness strategies used in the SMS

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messaging. Results from the Table 6 show that 26 (26.0%) and 74 (74.0%) politeness and non-politeness strategies respectively are found in male trainee teachers' SMS messaging, whilst 24 (24.0%) politeness strategies are found in female trainee teachers' SMS messaging and 76, representing 76.0% non-politeness strategies are found. This slight difference according to the results of the chi-square test table was not statistically significant since X^2 (df =1, N=200, p=0.870). Again, since the value of 0.870 is greater than 0.05, it means the result is not significant; therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Although there seems to be gender difference in the politeness strategies as indicated, the difference is insignificant or absolutely marginal.

The study rather disconfirms the findings of Herring et al (2008) that women write large, polite messages, and use more emoticons and abbreviation as compared to their male counterparts. However, in recent time, sociolinguistic research on language and gender has attributed differences in speech patterns of men and women to men's 'dominance' over women or to the theory that men and women inhabit separate sociolinguistic subcultures (Maltz and Borker, 1998). Proponents of both views have argued that women in general are more attentive to others' feelings and thus more 'polite' than men (Brown, 1998; Holmes, 1998; Pilkington, 1998; Tannen, 1994). The current study has, therefore, contradicted the findings that women are more polite than men in social interaction.

Summary of the Findings

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to examine linguistic features and sociolinguistic variables. As evidenced in the analysis, teacher trainees were quite proficient at inventing certain linguistic features in their SMS

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communication. Thus, trainee teachers demonstrated in their messages contractions, g-clippings and other clippings, acronyms and initialisms, letter/number homophones, misspellings, and non-conventional spellings. These linguistic features, as revealed in the data, did not pose any comprehension quandary as this kind of cutback of words or expressions relied purely on context cue for meaning and comprehension. Features such as syntactic reductions of subject and object pronouns, deletion of verb phrases and employment of code-mixing and code switching in the messages also relied on context cues for meaning and comprehension.

Whilst it had been made understandable that SMS messaging recognizes Crystal's linguistic features, it was also established that SMS messaging is influenced by sociolinguistic variables such as age and gender. In essence, the data revealed that the extent to which the linguistic features were used varied according to the age and gender of the participants. Thus, in the distribution of the type of linguistic features used in the data, it was evidenced that there was a uniform rise in the frequency counts of the patterns used by the trainee teachers according to gender and age. Again, the analysis revealed that the trainee teachers employed politeness strategies in SMS messaging. Thus, the data documented a prime example of politeness structures such as Politeness Markers, Play-down, Consultative Device, Hedges, Under-staters, Down-Toners, Committers, Forewarnings, Hesitators, Scope-Staters and Agent Avoiders (House and Kasper 1981).

Further, the results from the chi-square tests on the politeness strategies received excellent ratings as compared to the raw counts. A two way contingency table was used to find out whether there was a significant

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difference within gender and within the respective age groups. Upon closer investigation it was clear that the ages of participants according to politeness strategies in the descriptive analysis differ from one age group to another. However, the results from the chi-square tests show that there was no significant difference among the age groups in terms of politeness strategies. The results established that participants aged 16-20 used 9 politeness strategies representing (22.5%) and 31 (77.5%) non-polite type. Politeness strategies of age range 21-25, representing 12 (30.0%) were registered in the trainee teachers' SMS messaging whilst 28 (70.0%) politeness strategies of the same age group indicated in the affirmation. The age range between 26 and 30 of participants used 7 politeness strategies in SMS messaging representing 17.5% whilst 33 (82.5%) were found to be non-polite. This means that the greater percentages of participants which fall within the age range of 26-30 did not use politeness strategies. Further, 9 (22.5%) of polite strategies were within the participants of age range of 31-36 whilst 31 (77.5%) of participants SMS messages were non-polite. It is also clear that 13 (32.5%) of participant's polite strategies were within the age of 36 and 40 and those non-polite types of text messages used by the same participants represent 67.5%.

Using a two-way contingency table and chi-square analysis to examine whether there is a statistcal significant difference between male and female trainee teachers in the politeness strategies used in their SMS messaging, the results revealed that 26 (26.0%) and 74 (74.0%) of male trainee teachers' messages used politeness and non-politeness strategies respectively, whilst 24 (24.0%) are politeness strategies used in the female trainee teachers' messages and 76, representing 76.0% are those non-politeness strategies used by female

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trainee teachers. This slight difference according to the results of the chi-square test was not statistically significant as X^2 (df =1, N=200, p=0.870). Since the value of 0.870 is greater than 0.05, it means the result is not significant, therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Although there seems to be gender difference in the use of politeness strategies as indicated, the result was statistically insignificant. The difference may be due to the selection of words by both sexes. This explains the discrepancy between the analysis and the messages received. In fact, it is not easy to determine which factors of interactants are more polite in social interaction because each individual is a complete set or separate entity of certain characteristics and background. In the next chapter, attention will be turned to summary, implications and conclusion of the study. In addition, the recommendation for further study will be presented in some detail.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of a sociolinguistic analysis of SMS messaging among trainee teachers in a college of education in Ghana. The chapter consists of five sections of which the first section presents the summary of the entire study. The second section provides summary of the key findings. The third section presents the pedagogical implications of the study, whilst the fourth section presents the limitations of the study. Finally, the 5th section gives recommendations for further research.

Summary

The current research is a case study which sought to examine the linguistic features of trainee teachers' SMS messaging, using Crystal's (2008) analytic model and House and Kasper's (1981) taxonomy on politeness strategies. In order to ascertain accurate results, the quantitative design was used to complement the qualitative design in analysing differences within age range and between gender parameters in the employment of politeness strategies as established in the SMS messages. In all, 400 trainee teachers comprising 296 males and 106 females from Ada College of Education were selected to take part in the study. About 2000 SMS messages were gathered from the trainee teachers, out of which 200 messages were selected for the analysis. Convenience and purposive sampling method were used to select the 200 messages for the study. Data was collected directly from the trainee teachers through documentation and semi-structured interviews which corpus was further analyzed in two ways. Thus, descriptive statistics (frequency counts

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and percentages) was used in analyzing the data so as to provide answers to the research questions. Chi-square test (χ^2) was further used for research hypotheses at a significant level of 0.05 to test for the differences in politeness strategies used between gender, and within age groups.

Key findings of the Study

With respect to the first research question 1, the results revealed that the teacher trainees' mode of communication through the SMS messaging is characterized by such linguistic features as Contractions, Clippings, Punctuations, Capitalizations, Emoticons & Symbols and Nonstandard-Spellings. The two most dominant linguistic features found from the results of the analysis were nonstandard spellings and contractions whereas the least were initialisms and acronyms. This means that nonstandard spellings and contractions were the more preferred linguistic features employed in the SMS messaging by trainee teachers as compared to the rest of the linguistic features. The implication is that the teacher trainees deliberately shortened their words by cutting off the beginning, the middle or the ending part of the words in their messages.

Approximately, 80% of the messages have no capitalization, 12% had only first letter capitalization and the remaining 8% had complex capitalization used but for different purpose rather than grammar. Again, some pronouns were frequently used such as you for '**u'** we for '**w'** and me for '**m'**. Conjunctions such as '**n'** for 'and' and '**bt'** for 'but' were also commonly shortened. The trainee teachers meaningfully reduced certain words such as "**intro**" for introduction, "**bro**" for brother, and '**sist'** for sister. These results

upheld the findings of many previous studies in the area of SMS messaging (Shortis, 2001; Thurlow, 2003 and Crystal, 2008).

The data have further revealed that the trainee teachers eliminated certain syntactic features in their messages. Thus, the first syntactic feature omitted is the sentence subjects, especially the first person pronoun 'I'. The trainee teachers also ignored the use of both noun and verb phrases in their messaging. For instance, '**am'** or '**m'** for 'I am' was most recurrently used. Code-mixing was also revealed as features used in the trainees' SMS messaging. Code-mixing such as the popular Ibo language of Nigeria '**tofiako'** which means 'God forbid', Akan language '**aden'** meaning 'why' and the word '**Mawuli'** taken from the Ewe language which means 'God exists', are captured in the data.

Further, the messages proliferate in conversational maxims; thus, revealing the effects of language on society and other aspects of trainee teachers' lives as a people (Grice, 1975). Just as Thurlow and Brown (2003) and Crystal (2008) contend that SMS messaging abound in sociolinguistics maxims, the current investigation also ascertained that trainee teachers implemented the three maxims of sociolinguistics; thus, brevity and speed, paralinguistic restitution and phonological approximation as propounded by Grice (1975). In this regard, unconventional and abbreviations of lexical items based on shortenings, acronyms and initialisms, misspellings, minimal use of capitalization and standard grammar punctuation were used to realize the maxims of brevity and speed. Also, creative and innovative use of multiple punctuation marks, emoticons and abbreviations acted as paralinguistic restitutions. Numbers, non-standard spellings and symbols as well as lexical

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and syntactic reductions were used to economize space and time in typing the texts which adds more credence to the phonological approximation. Next is the outcome of the second research question.

In fact, female used more SMS linguistic features than their male counterparts. Examining gender-based patterns of sociolinguistic usage, several aspects of communication in which male and female patterns differed came to light. The SMS messages analyzed in this study exemplified that female teacher trainees seemed to be the main driving force behind all the creation of new lexical and syntactic structures because eighty percent of the messages that had omissions and contractions were from female trainees. With regard to linguistic features, females used more contracted forms than their male counterparts, and again, females used emoticons more than males. Thus, in the lexical domain, the finding that females used more emoticons than their male counterparts exemplified the earlier work of Herring (2003) that women were three times as likely to use representations of smileys or laughter than males in one-to-many synchronous communication. The finding that females used fewer contracted forms than did males suggests that females have a greater tendency towards treating SMS as a written medium. This supports Ling (2005) and Plester et al. (2009) but rejects De Jonge and Kemp (2012). Analysis of punctuation and capitalization in the current study suggests that females were more formal in writing than males in that female trainee teachers employed more standard punctuation and capitalization than did their male counterparts. In fact, the number of initialisms and acronyms in the corpus was too small to draw any gender-based distinctions.

The present study suggests that it is useful to compare the SMS gender findings with those reported earlier in the literature review. In the earlier review of the sociolinguistic literature, there is no ground for arguing that in dyadic face-to-face communication, women speeches are different from that of men. Indeed, in their study of informal essay-writing, Mulac and Lundell (1994) reported that females used more standard language than did males. However, the current finding is a little bit contradictory but conforms to Tannen, (1990) that the context in which a language is used may influence the direction of the gender differences. Thus, it is possible that the current findings reflect a female writing style rather than a female speech style.

As part of the second research question, the study established that there is marginal age difference in the use of linguistic features of SMS messaging. While younger trainee teachers preferred contractions to other linguistic features, the case of clippings was different as older trainees' preference for clippings was comparatively greater. The results epitomized that the younger the participant, the more likely he/she used SMS linguistic features. It can be justified from this angle that as participants grow and acquire more vocabulary and expressions, they acquire more clipped words, hence their preference of usage in the SMS messaging.

The results also showed that younger female trainee teachers used punctuations in their messaging more than their male counterparts but not in its standard usage, a finding which confirmed Ling's (2002) report on Norwegians short messaging that female teenagers and young adults used more standard punctuation and capitalization in their text messaging than that of male students. Again, the study revealed that trainee teachers between the

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ages of 21 and 25 years mostly used capitalization in any form, thus ignoring first letter capitalization in their sentence constructions.

Indeed, the messages of trainee teachers of Ada College of Education have dropped a tip-off about the social lives and linguistic characteristic of students in confine. Thus, the general finding exemplified that age, gender, and language of trainee teachers have expression of interplay in communication. The current study also established that language use in SMS messaging is woven around creative linguistic features in the form of unconventional abbreviations as well as sociolinguistic factors influenced by both age and gender parameters. Also, syntactic reductions by omitting subject pronouns or even whole verb phrases were common in the trainees' messaging.

The results indicated that as the use of linguistic features increased so the age of the participants decreased, though without any statistical significance. Simply, in the raw data, members of the youngest age group used SMS linguistic features more frequently, especially in the case of initialisms and simileys. Not only did members of the youngest age group produce more linguistic features in the entire corpus, but it was only among this group of participants that the initialisms and simileys, alongside other emoticons, frequently occurred. Although the participants within 16-20 year age range in the present investigation display some considerable variation of language use across all age groups, there is evidence that the practice to represent formal English with SMS linguistic features is not necessarily a teenager phenomenon.

Analysis of variants linguistic features in the current corpus of SMS language suggests that not all the linguistic features can be associated with age, a

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finding which can best be understood in the real-time hypothesis of language variation and change. Comparison of results found in this study with those found in previous sociolinguistic research examining language use in SMS messaging (Baron, 2004; Ling, 2005; Palfreyman, & Al Khalil, 2007) indicates that members of the oldest age group in the current study have likely retained certain linguistic features which were found to show a relationship significantly with members of corresponding age groups approximately ten years earlier.

The study suggests that the younger the participant, the more he/she used SMS linguistic features. The current study rather supports Sutherland (2002), Kasesniemi (2003), Thurlow, (2003) and Spagnolli and Gamberini (2007) which is not to say that it is exclusive to, or has relevance only for, younger people (Crystal, 2008). In a nutshell, the lack of statistical significance based on the marginal differences, suggests that these features are not necessarily associated with the age of the participants. Thus, age and gender of an individual have no significant influence on the linguistic features of SMS messaging. However, it would be interesting to see if future research can confirm whether these linguistic features remain to be a marker of group membership by older SMS users as teenage users will also grow old.

 The third research question and the hypotheses aimed at exploring politeness strategies inherent in the messages selected. The results from the data exemplified the fact that human beings exhibit politeness strategies irrespective of gender, age and the mode of communication. The results suggested that the trainee teachers, both male and female, employed politeness

strategies in their SMS messaging. Thus, the findings indicated that the majority of the trainee teachers made use of politeness strategies in SMS messaging triggered according to House and Kasper (1981). Politeness Markers, Play-down, Consultative Device, Hedges, Understaters, Down-Toners, Committers, Forewarnings, Hesitators, Scope-Staters and Agent Avoiders were structures found which supported House and Kasper's (1981) taxonomy.

Again, the study suggests there is gender difference in politeness strategies but such difference is statistically insignificant. The difference was absolutely marginal; thus, the value 0.870 is greater than 0.05, the result was not significant. In fact, Holmes, (1982); Tannen, (1994); Brown, (1998); and Pilkington, (1998) might be right as they mentioned some years back that females unlike males were more polite than males in social interactions. However, this study disconfirmed their views. In spite of the prevalent theories, concrete empirical studies have not yet revealed a coherent picture of gender differences in language use in SMS communication. However, it could be argued that trainee teacher's gender has no significant influence on politeness strategies.

The additional comparisons between lower age groups and upper groups of male and female trainee teachers confirmed the second hypothesis of the general perception that the younger trainee teachers are considerably more polite than the older trainees. According to the chi-square tests, there is no significant difference within the age categories as 0.525 is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. We can, therefore, conclude that there was no significant difference in the employment of Politeness Strategies within the various age

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groups. However, whereas within the older age groups one half is less polite than their younger age groups counterparts, the difference was marginal suggesting that the tendency to prefer a certain category of polite expressions remains the same.

Summarily, contractions, clippings, punctuations, capitalization, letter-number homophone, emoticons and symbols, and nonstandard spellings are dominant features in the trainee teachers' SMS messaging. The data revealed a new flanged language that has emerged in SMS messaging with its own linguistic features and as Crystal (2008) rightly puts it, the creativity of a person to move a language to a level of easy transmission, understanding and accessibility must be considered advancement in communication and that 'the latest manifestation of the human ability to be linguistically creative and adopt language to suit the demands of diverse setting' (p3). Indeed, trainee teachers have demonstrated creativity of the expressive possibilities of language use. In essence, it must be understood that the emergence of another language from a traditional one needs not be seen as a deviation or violation. This has made me to conclude that the "results corroborate earlier Computer Mediated communication research in demonstrating that language use in SMS messaging is part of a much broader trend toward more informal language generally," because formal variants are seemingly undesirable in teenage text-based conversations (Tagliamonte & Denis 2008, p. 27).

It must also be worth noting that language and society are symbiotic and as much as human beings continue to exist, language will also continue to survive until the last person dies. Thus, when language reproduces a new one just as human beings reproduce offspring, the phenomenon must not be seen

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as a death of language but a paradigm-shift in language use. Considering the ensuing deliberations, one can, therefore, conclude that age and gender play marginal significant roles in the use of SMS messaging among trainee teachers. However, it is also important to note that the present analyses merely identify *who* uses SMS language more and *how* men and women use SMS language differently, without addressing the issue of *why* these differences exist (Crystal, 2008).

Implications for Further Research

From the review of the previous studies, it has been established that SMS messaging is commonly used by both male and female in all spheres of professional, academic, and personal lives, and both the benefits and issues related to its usage extend far past what the populace perceived about its intrinsic negative impact on English language**.** As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I am convinced that SMS language on the whole and, most especially, the social aspect of it deserves a little more scholarly attention from Ghanaians than it has received so far. Apparently, findings in the current studies raised some interesting issues and some potential implications for writing pedagogy, and stressed some problems inherent in the SMS messaging of trainee teachers which teachers in other similar settings may wish to mull over. It is for this reason that the study of SMS messaging warrants continued research interest from sociolinguistic analysts and other language and communication scholars.

Pedagogically, the current research has done well by focusing on analyses that addressed assumption about the use of language in SMS messaging across the lifespan of trainee teachers by paying attention to age, gender, linguistic

features and politeness strategies. This study will, therefore, be of great interest to undergraduate and postgraduate students who are taking formal courses in English language, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics as well as stakeholders of education, teachers and trainee teachers. Again, this research is of high potential to inspire students and researchers to use any of the social media in undertaking studies in the area of sociolinguistics.

Obviously, the study has added to the existing scholarship on SMS messaging, and since many studies on the SMS messaging are assumedly not well-known in this part of our African continent, specifically Ghana, this study will serve as a roadmap for others to follow. In lieu of this, the current study serves as a very useful source of reference for researchers in Ghana and other parts of Africa who may venture into the study of SMS messaging. This study also establishes the ground for lexicographers to design universal orthography for SMS messaging. More so, the study provides a useful reference material for researchers who are interested in probing issues on academic discourse particularly, in the field of sociolinguistic study of SMS messaging. In a nutshell, the present study provides an insight into SMS linguistic features which can sufficiently alert trainees and their tutors.

Limitations of the Study

This study encountered a number of limitations during the gathering and distribution of the data, a situation accounting for its likelihood of being different from the previous studies. Some of the most evident challenges were centered on methodological issues such as data gathering procedures and unequal distribution of data. First, the participants in the study were engaged

on a voluntary basis but just for only few participants whose involvement was based upon tantalizing for a token because of their unwillingness. Thus, the SMS messages used in the compilation of the corpus were only gathered from participants who were willing to share their messages, thereby limiting the generalization of the findings. Secondly, in most cases it was only possible to gather messages that the participants had sent themselves. For the majority of the participants, the researcher was not able to gather messages the participants had received for both ethical and methodological reasons. Ethically, it was not possible to request messages that a trainee had received, since doing so would have included data from people who had not given consent. Third, the messages I gathered were only those which the participants felt comfortable contributing to the studies. Therefore, it is likely that the data may or may not represent the types of language practiced and shared in the SMS messaging by the teacher trainees I wanted.

A further weakness of the data gathering techniques in the present study is that the messages were often taken out of context. Although the messages were transmitted for particular purposes in a series of interactional contexts, the influence that another person had on the linguistic behaviors of the participants was impossible to control. No wonder, Ling (2005) also struggled with this same methodological limitation and concluded that "it is difficult to estimate the degree to which this issue is given the stricture against examining incoming messages" (p.337).

Another limitation was the unequal distribution of messages to the corpus by the participants. Larger samples was easy to collect but since not every participant contributed the same number of messages nor did contribute an

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equal amount of polite SMS message data, the data selection was not uniform. In order to have equal number of messages from the various age groups as well as both sex groups, only 100 messages were selected from the numerous messages provided by the female trainees as they cooperated in the study more than their male counterparts and, as a result, provided two times as many messages as the males. A related limitation is that coding schemes are not always consistent so the need to code SMS linguistic features reduced the number of texts that can be analyzed in a single study which consequently might affect the categories earmarked for potential politeness strategies. Thus, a strategy that allowed for the efficient analysis of large samples of text could help to create a more complete picture of age and gender differences in politeness strategies.

Recommendation for Further Research

The present study was able to tackle the controversial issues relating to language-based gender differences and perceived age role on a firmer empirical ground. Thus, the data support and clarify, rather than contradict previous research, suggesting my methodology was viable as anticipated. For reasons based on the current findings, it is essential to encourage further research on SMS messaging from a variety of perspectives and methodologies. More so, SMS data need to be collected from a wider range of cohorts such as trainee teachers from other sister colleges of education all over Ghana, teenage students from other academic settings and adults, both in higher institutions and in the work force. Even though the size and diversity of the dataset suggest that a more extensive sample would not have altered the overall findings, I presumed a more detailed study involving a broader group of

participants and more SMS samples spanning a larger time frame could reveal further useful data. This would yield valuable information on the types of intended linguistic features, politeness strategies and sociolinguistic variables. Again, there is the need to collect data solely on the nature of politeness behaviour in SMS messaging to look for possible gender distinctions since somewhat sketchy evidence postulates that females are more polite than males.

Data purposefully on politeness in SMS messaging will provide an honest understanding that may lead to a better judgment of the extent to which SMS should be thought of as a form of synchronous conversation. Although the premise of prejudice that females are more polite than their male counterparts is supported by numerous studies including the present study, more studies are recommended to contest this view. Study should also be extended to Whatsapp communication since it has currently found its way into the social media. Notwithstanding, this study is of great relevance and its fundamental findings will be useful to researchers who may wish to undertake similar study.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Information Survey

Thank you for volunteering to take part in the study. This is a preliminary survey form that you need to complete **before** you send your SMS messages. Please fill out the form completely and let me have it back for analysis.

Please, complete the following survey.

1. What do you hear about this study?

2. Please, indicate your level of programme_____

a. 100

b. 200

3. Please, indicate your sex_____

a. Male

b. Female

4. Please, indicate your age_____

5. Do you have a mobile?

Thank you for your participation in the research study.

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APPENDIX B

SAMPLE SMS MESSAGES

M1. miss **UUU** sooo much!!!!

*M1. **m afrd** bro av already started*

M2. not stil fnsh my eng asgnmt

so sory cant mk it nw

M3. **i<3u** ma bebe

*M3.   **jst** wondrin if thts **smply** wht*

u mean

M9. **IOU ok** bt hv u hrd of **GNAT**

n

GNAGRAT *strke*

*M9. **kind of** plan b bt sork of some*

***sort of** say lazinss*

M11.*gud**!!!!** bein in ur ams mks*

me

feel lyk bein in hevn☹

M13.u wil excel, ur futur is brght☹

*M15.   yes wl use it 2mrw **if u dnt***

mnd

M20. *pls **u'r** rmnded d@ b4 u by*

giv m d prys

M21. **abaa neke** i cant do tht 2u

M25. av realy mis U can i c U l8r

in th evnin

M26. gud9t n hop 2 c u agn ok drm

wl **xxx**

M30. *trvlng 2mrow 2 accra*

*M32. wll, **jst wondring if** u'r stl*

intrestd in me

 F2 F2*T2M*?

F4. ope evrythn s wel wt u tanx

F5. Cud u *jst gv m sum dtl abt ma*

guy

F6. wil leav th clas @ 10 if pemitd

by th tr

F7. **alryt** same plce same **tym** ok

luv uu!!??

F8. lets do it @ govt hsptl is safr **&**

chper dan d pryvt1 trst me

F8. lets do it @ govt hsptl it wl b

safr & chper **dan** d pryvt1 trst me

F10. *uv bn oflyn since 2pm whr r*

u!!??!! F11. guyz dnt gossip ba u

y

F11.bin in ur arms mks me feel lyk

bin in hevn **LOL**☺

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F12.u lwys knw hw 2 spoil ma

progrms

F13. *U cz 4rm givin m mony SRSLY Y gud9t*

F15 .*is stil prfrbl 4u 2 com 2 X on d 15th but up2u whn u wsh*

F15 .*is stil prfrbl 4u 2 com on d 15th but up2u whn u wsh*

F17. *wud lyk 2 mt u afta klas ds aftnu thnx* **F17.** nt in d mood 4 lectrs 2day

M32. kudos wsh u th bst of luck

M35. *in dom or clss*

M41. pls c thm *imedtly*

M46. *txt m wht u wnt 2 se ur lyn s nt gud*

M53. callin her bt nt answrn

M57. *mst frst tlk 2 d prez*

M66. *lol*

M.66. hmmm not as such bro☺

M68. jst a little bit of it ope it may nt affct u

M70. *ths is de c o ur man i wsh 2 rmyd d*

 chplaincy that thrs grndwrk 2day

M71. *GN swt dreamz*

M71. *sh jst shtd is paini me*

M 84. I thnk *w abrtng it wl b b8r*

M101. *comin 2 clss 2day or nt*

M43. *m toto rpera u aza ngl if god dcler*

no judgmnt wat sin wil u comit mst

M155. thnx 4 **yestrdy** c me 4 2dys

asgnmnt

M170. *cudnt c ur msg is lyk i dletd mstaknly can i cum nw*

M170. *pls cudnt c ur msg is lyk i dletd*

mstaknly can i cum nw

M187. **nyame bekyre daben** lwys prblms   **aden**

M200. **neva** 4g8 abt ma thng

gudnyt

M200. pls **neva** 4g8 abt ma thng

gudnyt

F22.*hi y d silence any srios prblm !!!???...Slp tght n gudnyt.*

F23. *dear wud u mind if i spnd all*

F26. *soo sory 4 evrtin pls leav thm 4giv & 4g8 acept ma apologs*

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F29. *I knw is nt don bt padn me 4 2dy*

F29. in d *xul* nw?

F30. *tt said u **havnt** rturnd hs **sistrs** mony as promis*

F30.whr hv u bn i tryd 2 c u bt cudnt y☹

F31. m **kuul** nd u

F31. *comin jx nw bro meet m @ d g8 promis*

F33. Swty luv u mor than my hat

F36. *evr rdy 2CU@A3*

F36. *evr rdy 2CU@A3*

F37. **pls** *no problem m alryt ok.*

F40. *ttyl*

F40. thnx rlly *wnt 2 knw who told u.*

F42 *in dom nw. jst arrivd frm clss,*

F43. *GM hw r u*

F47. *wait **a mo** wl send thm 2 u rght awy*

F50. **pls** chck frm th **prncpls** offc

F51. **aaa** y r u doin ths 2 me is that hw u r **!!!???**☹

F51. i guess *u wl b thr wf me.*

F67. just **litl** rmain

*F71. Gm dear **cud we** pospnd d meeting 2 anothr tym?*

F74. omg *4giv me*

F75. **hv swt drms** nd gudnyt

*F78. **eeh** i dnt thnk i can say tht!!!*

F82. ***swthrt* abt d rmors ignr it @ our levl w mst knw betr**

F101.   tofiakoa   ovr   ma deadbdy!!!!!

F164. didnt **discharg** cos   u r d **sugr** in ma koko

F143. yoo i go fnsh **mawuli godo**

F154**.** *in dom or clss?*

F176. pls wil lyk 2 meet u **&** ur frnds @ de lab

F187.**wed** mt me @ d g8t 4 smthng spcl

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APPENDIX C

Chi-Square Tests on Age Group and Type of Text Messages

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	0.200[a]	4	0.525
Likelihood Ratio	0.214	4	0.523
N of Valid Cases	200		

Chi-Square Tests for Gender and Politeness in SMS messaging

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.107[a]	1	.744		
Continuity Correlation	.027	1	.870		
Likelihood Ratio	.107	1	.744		
Fisher's Exact Test				.870	.435
N of Valid Cases	200				

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