

## **A STUDY ON THE USAGE OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS FROM WHATSAPP LANGUAGE ON FORMAL ENGLISH WRITING AMONG DIPLOMA TESL STUDENTS.**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Whatsapp is a well known application in smart phones among users. It has enabled users to communicate and share information with each other faster and cheaper. The popularity of Whatsapp among users of different ages is due to its inconveniences and being user friendly. Teenagers especially find Whatsapp nifty and useful in carrying out daily routines. However, even though Whatsapp has proven to be practical and convenient, there might be an aftertaste of the application. This purpose of this study is to identify Whatsapp text features especially the use of Acronyms and Abbreviations into formal writing in English. The study looks at these features by analyzing the chats and essays. This study also attempted to relate the habit of using Whatsapp feature texts by collecting information from the respondents and analyzing their answers. Due to heaps of time spent using Whatsapp, it is possible that the habit of using such features to be shifted unintentionally into formal writing without the students realizing it. If Whatsapp continues to be an impulsion among users, it needs to be dealt and managed properly because it could turn out to become a point at issue in the future education.

***Keywords:*** Whatsapp, acronyms, abbreviations, formal writing in English

### **1. Background of Study**

The first presence of mobile phone service was first acknowledged in Malaysia by 1984 (Ping, 2011). She later explained that the increase of technological advancement in the local market has made the cellular telecommunication industry to grow and expand drastically. According to The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (2012), a total of 33.1 million telephone subscriptions were recorded. The survey also discovered that in terms of educational attainment, 34.1 % of the users were among high educational and tertiary level students.

The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission also conducted a survey on the distribution of smart phone users between the years of 2010 until 2012. The results show that the increase in percentage is by 12% (14% 2010 & 26% 2012). The amount doubled in two years after the smart phones came into the local market. The data also illustrated that 32.5 % of smart phone users were students in Malaysia. The figures presented in the survey displays concern regarding the usage of hand phones among students. According to Ping (2011), young adults tend to favour texting due to fact that it disregards shyness and using it becomes a proper social behavior among users.

However, due to the amount of space and time spent among user in using text (Whatsapp), words and expressions are constructed with minimal words (Balakrishnan, 2008). They also elaborated that words, sentences and phrases could be simplified by the use of symbols without disregarding comprehensibility. Even Grinter and Eldridge (2003) concluded that users tend to reduce their messages by eliminating a single letter, utilizing letters, symbols or even numbers to express meaning; and using standard acronyms. The act or behavior of shortening messages due to limitation of space, if used constantly; would be an interesting insight to be looked into. With the increasing popularity of SMS, researchers are intrigued to discover the impacts of the language on users writing skills (Freudenberg, 2009).

In Malaysia, educators are showing concern in the development of students' English writing due to the declining standards of written language because of the usage of colloquial English in their texting (Muniandy, 2010). The problem of disorganized language among school students presented by Muniandy gives us a picture of how texting has already intervened the writing process among school students. In relation to this situation, tertiary level students in Malaysia might probably undergo the same manner. One of the objectives of this paper is to discover the forms of Whatsapp language and how it affects students writing performance.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The study attempts to examine the use of Whatsapp Messenger amongst students at a tertiary Institution. The researcher attempted to understand the level of usage of social Whatsapp Messenger among the students by looking at the intensity of its usage and how it affects the learners writing performance.

1. To identify the forms of English Whatsapp language used by under graduates.
2. Is the habit of frequently using Whatsapp result in the use of acronyms and abbreviations in formal writing?

## **3. Limitations of the Study**

The study conducted is limited to the scope which it is designed to fulfill which are to identify the acronyms and abbreviations used in English language via Whatsapp. This study only gives focus on a certain group of students at only one tertiary institution, which does not resemble the entire population at other tertiary level institutions. As such, the study only focuses on the forms of acronyms and abbreviations and does not include punctuation, grammar and sentence structure. To consider all of these features would eventually be beyond the scope of this study and become more complex.

The number of respondents involved in the study is limited too as the study only involves 30 students from a single class of Diploma TESL students. The participants chosen for the study are believed to be more effective towards the problems investigated. This group of students is specifically chosen due to their good command in English and active participation in Whatsapp chat groups compared to other students. These students were only required to answer questionnaires and write simple essays using handwriting. The students were not given any specific assignment for submission which was related to abbreviations or acronyms and later assessed for the investigation of the study.

The rationale is that assignments or tasks which are completed using the computer (typed) are formal, and this would prevent from identifying the students' weakness in the area being studied. Moreover, the presence of spell checkers and grammar checkers automatically correct the students' errors.

## **4. Literature Review**

### *4.1 Language Change*

Over the decades, language has undergone changes in the society. Birner (2002) mentioned that language is constantly changing, evolving and adapting based on the needs of its speakers. Changes in language tend to provide a better context to users depending on the current situation. Birner (2002) further elaborated that if the needs of the language users change, the language will also change. It can be assumed that, language changes so as to fit the need of the community and society.

Change is inevitable and this process can be observed in the use of language. Hickey (2001) also claimed that the notion of drift is the most important contribution towards language change where the slow movement of language can show over centuries and display change in typology. Birner (2002) proposed language tend to undergo changes in order to fulfill the needs of the users and this is due to the introduction of new technology and products. Besnier (1990) also highlighted the same issue, since the introduction of e-mails in the 1980s; it has developed new forms of social and linguistic interaction, based on spoken and written contexts. He also stated that E-messages display a more "emotional" texture compared to the traditional writing methods.

Dansieh (2011) however had a different opinion regarding the change of language. He stated that this is without doubt that the process of text-messaging has effects on the speakers' manner of talking and writing. Some which are negative and others positive, depending on the context and situation it is being used. Regardless of the claims, change in language will eventually happen. CIM is not a new technology and it has been around for some time. Users have been using it for some time, and it can be assumed that they may have crafted a systematic written language in expressing ideas and opinions.

### *4.2 Digital Communication*

Since the start of the digital era, digital communication is becoming popular among users. Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) stated that digital communication among users especially between students has become popular over the last decade. Vosloo (2009) noted that texting is referred to the use of abbreviations and other creative craft in SMS (Short-Message-Service) and CIM (Cross-platform Instant Messaging). Vosloo (2009) also elaborated that texting is not in line with the traditional roots of English writing, grammar and usual word spellings. Digital communication consists of a crafted language which is understood among users in the same context. The norms of the language will be analyzed from text used in Whatsapp. The number of downloads for Whatsapp (especially androids) has exceeded more than one hundred million. Due to its popularity, Whatsapp is among the top five free communication applications by Google Play

Due to its versatility and being free, it has given access to users in communicating freely. In a paper by Mardziah (2003), she included that aspect of e-communication such as word choice and syntax are a part of cultural diversity in terms of written communication. Students are

engaging the usefulness of the application and it has become addictive. According to Prensky (2001), he noted that “students” in today’s technological era can be identified as Digital Natives due to the fact that they are “native speakers” of the digital language consisting of computer, mobiles and video games. In a research by Hamzah (2009), he discovered the following linguistic change in texting:

Single letters	Words	Frequency
R	Are	27
U	You	22
C	See	16
B	Be	7
Y	Why	2
Digits	Words	Frequency
2	Too, to, two, and today	33
4	For and words like forget	11
8	In words such as hate	1
Acronyms and abbreviations	Words	Frequency
PLZ	Please	18
TQ	Thank you	17
CU	See you	17
U2	You too	14
B4	Before	11
CUL	See you later	8
HRU	How are you	6
IC	I see	6
L8R	Later	5
RUOK	Are you ok?	5
IOU	I owe you	2
FC	Fingers crossed	1

Figure 1: Abbreviations in Texting

In the figure shown, Hamzah has displayed the changes in language made by students. He further noted that the language used was crafted due to natural reaction of space and limitations of word count. It could be said that language undergoes changes in the presence of digital communication. Hamzah again clarified that a new type of language had been developed in response to the evolving of technology and the increased used in electronic communication such as CIM and SMS. Students are not to be blamed for such an act in change of language because the change tends to happen sooner or later. Lauricella and Kay (2013) said that the popularity of mobile devices and how it performs among student population is great; it would be awkward for them to ignore it.

In the midst of such advancement in language, some still express concern with this issue. Lenhart (2008) clarified that young learner’s

communication device might damage the basic human ability of writing a complete sentence. Lenhart’s view shows concern in the use presence of technology especially towards writing. The freedom of writing among the young generation especially with the constant use of hand phones might create side effects to their formal writing.

#### 4.3 Whatsapp and Education

The implication of CIM language in writing is rather troublesome. It raises concern among educators to see such a form of writing done by students. Freudenberg (2009) stated that the majority of her respondents reported of using Mxit speak (CIM application) in their school work. She further concluded that the problem arises resulting from the constant access of Mxit in the students’ lifestyle. Whatsapp is considered to be the same platform as Mxit among technological applications.. In the scope of this study, prior focus is especially given to Diploma TESL students due to the fact that these students (optional) will eventually become educators themselves. If this dysfunctional manner of language use were not to be given priority, it could possibly have effects in the future.

Lauricella (2013) included that the presence of CIM (instant-messaging) in college or school enables to create bond among students especially in communication. However, this somehow reflects it the opposite. The constant use of Whatsapp in class would interrupt the lesson in an informal way. For example, the students focus would be shifted to texting instead of

the lesson (depends on the context and topic) and it might affect the learning process. Freudenberg (2009) concluded in her research that learners who are not able to switch between informal language and formal language (text language) could possibly be penalized as the students endure in the education system and into tertiary education. Especially in the scope of TESL, proper language is a must among students due to the fact that they themselves will be teaching the language in years to come. In assumption to the use of Whatsapp in education, it does have its benefits and disadvantages.

## **5. Methodology**

### *5.1 Whatsapp Chat Group*

In order to gather the data for this study, the researcher has identified several techniques for collecting data which mainly consist of Whatsapp messages (print screen), homework, assignments and essay. The researcher carried out several procedures in ensuring that suitable data is collected. In terms of collecting Whatsapp (CIM) writing from the respondents, the researcher (who is also a tutor teaching the respondents) had created a particular chat group through the use of Whatsapp's application and these respondents are later added into the group. This process is done as to reduce anxiety among respondents towards the researcher in the communication process. The researcher will then assign topics for the students to provide views or opinion regarding the matter. The replies gathered will then be printed (print screen) and the language used by the respondents will be analyzed for language such as shortenings, abbreviations or NetSpeak language.

### *5.2 Free writing test*

For this section, the respondents will be given a short test in class. The test will be conducted for 15 minutes and the respondents will be writing the same standardized topic. Hand writing is required in this test as means to create a relaxed and conducive environment for the respondents in expressing their ideas and thoughts. Once the test papers have been collected, the scripts will be analyzed to indentify the presence of abbreviations and acronyms. The topic chosen for the test will be in the students' range of interest as to encourage them to think creatively and express freely about the opinions about the subject. By doing so, it hoped that the Whatsapp language would appear in the writings produced by the learners.

### *5.3 Participant selection*

In choosing the participants for this study, the researcher mainly focuses on tertiary level students in a local university. The age group of these respondents would be in the range of 19 until 21. This age group is specifically chosen because the majority of this group posses their own personal hand phones (equipped with internet data plan). It is expected that this group of respondents would possibly have more experience with Whatsapp which later could provide an insight regarding the influence of Whatsapp on their written work.

A total of 30 respondents are selected for this study which consists of 15 male respondents and 15 female respondents. Respondents are randomly chosen from two different classes which are undergoing the same course. The respondents are not selected based on their academic results because the focus of the study is to look into the use of English in a controlled

and natural setting. The majority of these respondents are Malays and a minor group of Indians and Sabahans.

#### 5.4 The questionnaires

The questionnaires that will be distributed to the learners consist of five questions. The first two questions asked the learners regarding their frequency of using Whatsapp, and also the amount of time spent per day on Whatsapp. In the questionnaire, learners will also be asked the reasons behind their use of Whatsapp in order to confirm whether the use of Whatsapp is important for information transfer or for the purpose of entertainment (as a means to alleviate boredom). These questions would probably provide a general insight regarding the frequent use of Whatsapp for students. The result would also reflect the frequency of hand phone use among the learners on a daily basis.

The questionnaire further more asked the learners whether the constant use of Whatsapp had any effect on their writing in class or other formal situations. They were asked to clarify their answers if the answer was “yes”. This particular question was asked in order to collect learner’s perception about Whatsapp in their English written form. In the final section of the questionnaire, learners are asked to identify features of Whatsapp language used in their conversations among peers or lecturers.

## 6. Findings and Discussions

### 6.1 Frequency and number of hours of Whatsapp Usage

The data in Table 1 displays the frequency and number of hours spent for Whatsapp among the respondents. The figures show that the majority of the respondents (90%) use Whatsapp daily and a small number (10%) of them who do not use Whatsapp. It could be inferred that Whatsapp is an accepted application among the respondents and had become an essential part in their daily routine in exchanging information. The figures outlined in Table 2 also display the amount of time the respondents spent using Whatsapp. The majority of the respondents reported spending more than 4 hours (66.7%) on Whatsapp. Compared to the other variables, 20 of the respondents actively used Whatsapp. It could be indicated that Whatsapp is used not only for receiving information but also for communicating and chatting throughout the whole day. Overall, it can be observed that the respondents actively used Whatsapp and spend a huge amount of time using it.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency and number of hours for Whatsapp Usage*

Volume	Number	%
<i>Frequency</i>		
Daily	27	90
A few times a week	3	10
Seldom	0	0
Never	0	0
Total	30	100
<i>Numbers of Hours Per day</i>		
0-1 Hours	4	13.3
0-2 hours	1	3.3
0-3 hours	2	6.7
0-4 hours	3	10
More than 4 hours	20	66.7
Total	30	100

### 6.2 Abbreviations and Acronyms used in Whatsapp Chat Groups

The next finding to be discussed is the abbreviations and acronyms used in Whatsapp chat groups among these respondents. The chats retrieved from the group were collected over duration of time and 50 print screens of these chats were recorded. Examples of the use of abbreviations and acronyms can be reviewed in the appendix. In Table 2, it displays the forms of abbreviations and acronyms utilized by the respondents.

**Table 2**  
*Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in Chat Groups*

Abbreviations and Acronyms		Number	%
U	YOU	13	22
HV	HAVE	4	6.7
RN	RIGHT NOW	1	1.7
DOC	DOCUMENTS	1	1.7
UR	YOUR	3	5.1
TQVM	THANK YOU	3	5.1
	VERY MUCH		
GUD NITE	GOOD NIGHT	1	1.7
N	AND	1	1.7
TQ	THANK YOU	6	10.2
WC	WELCOME	1	1.7
WAN	WANT	1	1.7
NUM	NUMBER	1	1.7
BTW	BY THE WAY	2	3.4
BCOZ	BECAUSE	3	5.1
TMROW	TOMORROW	1	1.7
TAT	THAT	4	6.7
B4	BEFORE	1	1.7
WANA	WANT TO	1	1.7
TIZ	THIS	1	1.7
IDK	I DON'T KNOW	1	1.7
ABT	ABOUT	3	5.1
B	BE	1	1.7
CN	CAN	2	3.4
THX	THANKS	2	3.4
R	ARE	1	1.7
Total		59	100

In the results gathered, it can be seen that 25 abbreviations and acronyms were used by the respondents in the chat groups. These words are possibly used in order to provide a quicker response during chatting. Salemah (2013) reviewed the manner of using abbreviations and she mentioned that students used these words to get a quick and short message across. However, it resulted in grammatical errors and floppy make up words which might become destructive in the long run if not controlled. In contrast to Salemah's findings, respondents in this study were using abbreviations in chatting and it could be agreed that these respondents were using these words for faster response among users. In the results gathered, it can be seen that 25 abbreviations and acronyms were used by the respondents in the chat groups. These words are possibly used in order to provide a quicker response during chatting. Salemah (2013) reviewed the manner of using abbreviations and she mentioned that students used these words to get a quick and short message across. However, it resulted in grammatical errors and floppy make up words which might become destructive in the long run if not controlled. In contrast to Salemah's findings, respondents in this study were using abbreviations in chatting and it could be agreed that these respondents were using these words for faster response among users.

### 6.3 Frequency of Abbreviations and Acronyms in Short Essay

In this section, the abbreviations were gathered from the essays distributed to the respondents. The tables display the number of respondents using abbreviations and acronyms in the essay.

**Table 3**

*Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in Essays*

Volume	Number	%
<i>Frequency (students)</i>		
Using abbreviations and acronyms	8	26.7
Not using abbreviations and acronyms	22	73.3
Total	30	
<i>Abbreviations and acronyms</i>		
BCOZ (because)	8	22.7
HV (have)	5	14.2
N (and)	1	2.9
U (you)	5	14.2
UR (your)	2	5.6
ABT (about)	2	5.6
WANA (want to)	1	2.9
IDK ( I don't know)	1	2.9
KNW (know)	1	2.9
NVR (never)	1	2.9
WAT (what)	1	2.9
DEY (they)	1	2.9
2 (to)	1	2.9
BETTA (better)	1	2.9
DEN (then)	1	2.9
UZING (using)	1	2.9
COZ (because)	1	2.9
CN (can)	1	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

### 6.4 Comparison of Words in Chat Groups and Essay

In table 4, it shows the comparison of abbreviations and acronyms used in chat groups and essay. The table below shows that abbreviations and acronyms used in chat groups does appear in English formal writing. The numbers may seem small, but there is evidence showing respondents using the same set of abbreviations from the chat groups and in their formal writing.

**Table 4**

*Comparison of Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in Chat Groups and Essays*

Volumes	Chat Group	Essay	Number	%
<i>Acronyms and Abbreviation</i>				
	GUDNITE	BETTA	24	72.7
	TQ	KNW		
	WAN	WAT		
	NUM	DEY		
	BTW	2		
	TMROW	DEN		
	TAT	UZING		
	B4	COZ		
	TIZ			
	DOC			
	TQVM			
	B			
	THX			



R			
<i>Similar Acronyms and Abbreviations in Essay and Chat Groups</i>	U	9	27.3
	HV		
	IDK		
	WANA		
	UR		
	ABT		
	N		
	BECOZ		
	CN		
<b>Total</b>		<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table above, 9 (36%) of the abbreviations and acronyms used in the respondents' chat group appear in the essay. Other abbreviations and acronyms were used in the essay but these 9 abbreviations and acronyms are the main highlight of this study. As delineated in the above table, it can be seen that the abbreviations and acronyms used in the essays would have possibly appeared due to the use of Whatsapp among the respondents. The results shown do not resemble a big scale of the field. Nevertheless, to see such result does trigger curiosity.

### ***Conclusion***

Based on the data gathered and the preceding discussions, it would seem legitimate that Whatsapp has its implication on students. The majority of the respondents in this study have shown that Whatsapp is constantly used by them. It has provided them a means of communicating faster and quicker in delivering messages. Compared to Short-Messaging-Service (SMS); which costs money, Whatsapp has enabled them to communicate freely without the extra charges and word limitation. However, the act of continuously using Whatsapp on a daily basis and without proper control can result in the inappropriate use of language. The data gathered and analysed earlier in this study has shown the irrelevant use of acronyms and abbreviations by the respondents in formal writing.

Freudenberg (2009) discovered the use of SMS to be a factor in effecting the writing performance of the students. Even more, if Whatsapp is not used in the proper manner, it could also give a negative impact on related problems such as grammar and spelling in writing. The addiction and habit of constantly using technology in the respondents' lifestyle has affected their performance in writing. These researches have pointed out towards the habit of using technological tools and their effects. This study looks into a narrower perspective by looking at the mechanisms of writing which are literally acronyms and abbreviations (used in Whatsapp) and their usage in formal writing by the students. These two areas are given concern due to the reason that they have the potential to be used and manipulated by users in delivering information. The abbreviations and acronyms used in Whatsapp by these students are creatively crafted and represent its own meaning.

However, there would possibly be deficiencies which are apparent in the methodology of this study. The methods implemented and the data gathered for this study were only collected from a specific group of students. Besides that, the methodology was designed to suit this particular group of students (TESL); whose major are English, and is not carried out on other students of different fields. This study too only focused on the use of acronyms and abbreviations and did not cover all the tools necessary in writing. For the purpose of future research, better refinement could be done to the methodology in order to gain better results and data.

From this study, it has somehow shown the effects of using Whatsapp on the use of acronyms and abbreviations in formal writing. Even though the numbers seem small, it has given some light on the presence of such language in formal writing and is a matter to be concerned. Indeed, these students are not aware of the use of Whatsapp language in their writing. Even though the figures shown earlier does not represent the entire population, but nevertheless, it is still a serious problem. It is hoped that this study will enable future research in relating latest trends in technology and education in order to highlight further critical issues pertaining to such matter. For future research, it would be helpful to examine how a students' psychological state can influence their use of Whatsapp.

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